



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger. by Andrzej Warminski
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theory. To articulate two discourses or theoretical systems (together) is not only to harness their otherwise disparate purposes, but also to renovate and recondition what is specific to each in the context of a *new* conjuncture. In *Imaginary Relations*, Sprinker has succeeded, more cogently than anyone else, in showing, both in history and theory, how and why critical practices like those of De Man and Althusser are performing the same kind of work with similar results. A more precise sense of where they might actually work together remains to be seen, and, as such, marks the horizon of this book.

Less germane to Sprinker's aims, but more crucial to the current state of political criticism, is the fact that the term "culture" is one which rarely appears in *Imaginary Relations*. It is arguably one of the more disabling features of the long tradition of marxist aesthetics, and Althusser is no exception, that it has failed to question the institution of Art itself, preferring instead to accept classical (and high cultural) definitions of art which endow it with an authenticity and transcendent power denied to everyday cultural productions. Having accepted those definitions, the task of marxist aestheticians has largely been to explain, in materialist terms, the specificity of this or that peculiar capacity to transcend the everyday, history, ideology etc. A thoroughgoing cultural criticism today would have to say that this begs the question of culture, or at least culture defined in the larger sense in which Gramsci, alone among western marxists, sought to explain the workings of power. For the power to define what is "authentic" in culture, ideology and even science, is also the power to define certain social meanings as dominant, and others as illegitimate. To recognize that culture is the medium *through which* power is exercised, and popular consent is won or lost, is to move toward a new level of immediate critical and political struggle over the definitions of culture, and to leave behind the continuing attachment of marxists to the institutional and transcendent power of "art" and, by extension, their complicity with a history of fixed textual objects through which that power has maintained itself.

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Andrzej Warminski, *Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. 1xi + 225 pages.

Readings in Interpretation deserves our close readings—and continued patience—for a variety of reasons: first, for its cogent and highly concentrated exposition of the reach and significance of what, through the work of Paul de Man, has come to be known as "rhetorical or tropological readings." Furthermore, Warminski's study can be called exemplary for its concise analyses of the relation between this contemporary critical "approach" and its problematic theoretical antecedents (Hölderlin, Hegel,

Nietzsche, Heidegger and Blanchot). At the same time, Warminski's book invariably brings to the fore some of the intrinsic problems or blind-spots that obtain when basing one's reading (of interpretations) on an exclusively textual base. Comprised of four chapters on the interpretation of Hölderlin and another three on Hegel, and with the essays dating from as early as 1976, Warminski's study arrives at a comprehensive understanding of its theoretical agenda primarily in the more recent essays on Heidegger (chapter 6, esp. 150ff.) and in its "Prefatory Postscript." As the latter text makes clear, Warminski means to focus on the "supplementary, allegorical 'moment' of reinscription. Yet unlike some earlier deconstructionist studies of Holderlin and Hegel by Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida, Warminski's "rhetorical" approach proves considerably more rigid in its understanding of reinscription as a strictly textual or linguistic procedure.

As Warminski points out in his "Prefatory Postscript," any symmetrical opposition of the philosophical and literary idiom remains only a first, "merely strategic move" (xxxv), requiring as its next step the rewriting of the "philosophical negative . . . in linguistic terms." Warminski locates this "philosophical negative" almost exclusively in Hegel's concept of "determinate negation" (and in Szondi's Hegelian interpretation of Hölderlin), that is, in the inevitable (self-)negation of the text of natural consciousness for its own, symmetrical other, the philosophical "we." For Warminski, the rewriting of such a negative remains far from deliberate, for it merely "restores what the text [of interpretation], in order to constitute itself, had to cover up, suppress or exclude in the first place" (xxxiv). Thus a third step in the procedure of reading suggests that "not only does literary reading (and writing) come *before* the text of the interpretation (*Auslegung*, *Erläuterung*) as its condition of possibility, but it also always goes after the text of the interpretation as its condition of impossibility" (150).

The most convincing demonstration of this thesis may well be the micrological and very compelling reading in the "Postscript" of a complex figural passage from Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie*. Interpreters and translators alike construe the apparent analogy of Nietzsche's metaphor as the basis for a legitimate, chiasmic reversal, a remission of figurative signification into interpretive "sense." Yet in doing so, they inevitably obscure the originary, catachrestic status of Nietzsche's figures which ("always already") condition the possibility of that which now is extrapolated as (and reduced to) their meaning. "Less a matter of the relation between literal and figurative, proper and transferred senses" (1v), catachresis stands in asymmetrical relation to any attempt at recuperating the figurative for the *logos* itself. As Warminski points out, such insight "is not a negation of knowledge but rather outside, asymmetrical to, the opposition of knowing/not knowing" (1vii).

Clearly, it is from Hegel's *Phenomenology* that Warminski's thesis receives its ultimate challenge, for the systematic force of Hegel's speculation hinges on the ability to sublimate the inadequate articulations (texts) of "nat-

ural consciousness" into the self-explication of the absolute for the "philosophical we." Taking up some related considerations of Maurice Blanchot (cf. "Epilogue"), Warminski's reading of Hegel and of Heidegger's Hegel correctly focuses on the problematic status of this "we" in Hegel's text. Consistently erudite in both his scholarship and in his simultaneous handling of matters of translation, interpretation and reading, Warminski seeks to highlight a (textual) blindspot that obtains both for Hegel's philosophy of reflexive self-interpretation and for Heidegger's reinscription of Hegel's thesis within the (metaphysical) destiny of *Seinsvergessenheit*. In the course of rewriting the general problematic of the philosophical standpoint from an asymmetrical (neither speculative nor ontological) but textual "nonplace" (Blanchot's phrase, 184), Warminski shows convincingly how Heidegger surreptitiously substitutes the destined "forgetfulness of Being" (*Geschick der Seinsvergessenheit*) for the reflexive self-determination of Hegel's natural consciousness. To prevent this interpretation from reappearing as yet another stage in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Heidegger's text dissimulates its interpretive standpoint as the "issue of Being itself" (*die Sache des Seins selbst*).

Still, some rather substantial problems arise with Warminski's own readings of Hölderlin, starting perhaps with his claim that Hölderlin's text is "linguistically 'self-reflexive' enough, 'aware' enough of its own *textual* conditions, to . . . give lie to any interpretation whose negative would reduce Hölderlin's texts to extralinguistic, extratextual, conditions" (xxxii). While Szondi's interpretations of Hölderlin remain troublesome because of their unreflected transference of "the model of consciousness (i.e., in terms of self and other)" (33) onto Hölderlin's dialectics of the "proper" and the "foreign," such a "reduction" of Hölderlin's text to a reflective "mirror-symmetry" may not yet legitimate Warminski's substitution of "terms of signification (*Zeichen*) and figuration (*Metapher*) for the structure of consciousness altogether. For Hölderlin himself continued to reflect on the phenomenon of self-consciousness after realizing that the constitution of consciousness reaches beyond any theory of reflection; for reflection (*qua* self-representation) cannot produce both a figure for a self and, simultaneously, a figure that would identify the representing and represented self as the self-same (cf. Stuttgart Edition, IV, 1: 217, 253f.; VI,1: 155f.). Simply to substitute the phenomenon of (self-) consciousness with "terms of signification (*Zeichen*) and figuration (*Metapher*)" (33) remains unwarranted as long as Hölderlin's own, profoundly asymmetrical conception of this phenomenon is not addressed.

Thus the characterization of Hölderlin's texts as "linguistically 'self-reflexive,'" anticipates the involuntary reappearance of the phenomenon of self-consciousness in Warminski's readings of Hölderlin. One instance of such an involuntarily reappearance of a residual subject (no longer the "knowing" Hegelian subjectivity nor the "forgetful" Heideggerian *Dasein*) occurs in Warminski's reading of Hölderlin's *Empedocles*: to say that "at the

moment he reads himself best, he reads himself neither as a self nor as his own other but as a text" (15) suggests with its last "as" that there remains a difference between the *text* and the *act* of interpretation. This act, thus far an enigma both to philosophical thought and its linguistic reinscription, becomes yet more prominent as Warminski reflects on the catachrestic self-creation of Hölderlin's *Subjekt* through its *Stoff*: "what if the authority of such an analogy, such a metaphor, were only the authority of our will to power, which invents, which *must* invent . . ." (54). On such occasions, Warminski's work suggests another questioning of interpretation, aiming less at the exposure of the interpretive text's indisputable blindness than at the *functions* and *motives* behind the originary *act* of figuration itself, that catachrestic "imposition of sense" (1v) by which all interpretation remains parasitized. It remains a paradox of *Readings in Interpretation* that the same textual focus which permits its cogent rewriting of the "philosophical negative" in Hegel's and Heidegger's interpretations should prevent its author from inquiring into the constitution of a more originary (text-producing) subject, the one which "represents *itself* . . . as text" and "*must* invent." Still, any such inquiry would have to proceed from a careful (re)reading of *Readings in Interpretation*.

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Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions*.

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986. 331 pages.

Ruth Bernard Yeazell, ed. *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel; Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1983-84*, N.S., 10.

Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. xiv + 195 pages.

The defensive response of institutions to difference—to different ideas, different desires—is readily evident in the two books under review here, each of which illustrates a number of widely employed strategies for taming the powerful ideas unleashed in the past two decades and usually referred to as "theory." That taming process, undertaken in the interest of preserving the hegemony of the dominant ideology in intellectual and pedagogical circles, is currently producing what one might call the "renovated" academy, an academy that has been forced to acknowledge the presence of those different ideas but wants to guarantee that they do not disturb established power/knowledge relations (much as, in the wake of minority movements, our "renovated" society makes a show of tolerating other desires). As instances in the profession at large of these current strategies—which give the appearance of something "new" and "dif-