

BOOK REVIEWS

Irene E. Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy of Differance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

At first glance, Harvey's title seems misleading. The three terms—Derrida, economy, *differance*—suggest a work on textuality already associated with current trends in literary criticism. However, Harvey's interest (as her prefatory letters to literary critics and the philosophical community maintain) is to review Derrida's more traditional, "conservative," philosophical analyses. In short, she does not wish to place Derrida outside Continental philosophy's discussion of metaphysics, but to situate him firmly within it. Controversies among literary critics about deconstruction have rested mostly upon how Derrida's textual critiques dislodge or threaten traditional humanist assumptions. Harvey's book helps to alleviate some of the critical filibustering about Derrida. She argues that any claims that Derrida has radically departed from Continental philosophy are essentially misreadings of the function, rigor, and structure of deconstruction. Hers is not a study of influences upon Derrida, but an attempt to demonstrate his work

as an extension of philosophical movements already operating in the history of metaphysics. She often claims, and closely works out, ties between Derrida and philosophical speculations advanced by Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Freud, and Levinas.

The general reader should be warned from the outset that this book offers specialized consideration of both Derrida's and these thinker's projects. Her analysis is also well-informed, sophisticated, and filled with the kind of rigor one would expect from a philosopher. She begins with Kant's "Critique" as a strategy for investigating the origins and possibilities of, as well as the limits to, metaphysics. For instance, Kant admits that the concept of Reason remains essentially contradictory, because it is "on the one hand *closed*, in terms of its operating principles, yet on the other, given to *transgressing* its own legitimate bound.." (17). This fundamental schism, abyss, in Kant's system parallels Derrida's initial discussions of Western logic, logocentrism, and metaphysics. Like Kant, Derrida's deconstruction "participates" in the ongoing history of metaphysics and

remains "an observer" to it without necessarily prohibiting or exhausting that history. This is a shrewd insight into Derrida, one often neglected by literary critics and philosophers alike.

But, she does not simplify deconstruction to a formulaic outgrowth of other philosophical systems. She views it as not wholly condemned to metaphysics, nor detachable from it; instead, Derrida admits, to borrowing from the very metaphysics he deconstructs those tools which necessitate an attachment to a tradition of metaphysical language, Harvey defines "economy" in terms of apparent contradictions advanced by Derrida and by those texts he critiques. A "double-bind" within and beyond metaphysics characterizes "economy"—"as a play of presence and absence that, paradoxically to be sure, takes on a very definite, unfied, consistent, and indeed *repeating* and repeatable form" (67). *Differance*, then, operates within an economy, a movement, which unites and differentiates, includes and excludes. Metaphysics, as Harvey uses the term, is all of philosophy, the system of the sign, of language employed to designate and separate. Through very careful readings, she arrives at Derrida's indebtedness to Husserl's "internal time consciousness" for the notion of trace; to Levinas's depiction of

the Other for the movement of the trace; to Freud's psychanalytic models of memory and the unconscious for the imprinting, inscribing of the trace, to Heidegger's *Dasein*, for initiating causality without an origin; and to Nietzsche's imposed contradictions for the paradoxical character of *differance*, which makes possible the very object it forbids. Derrida does not disregard these essential contradictions in metaphysics, but proceeds from them. In a sense, he, as Harvey continually asserts, admits to his own entrapment within metaphysics.

One might well question Harvey's conclusion that Derrida's *differance* "admits to a certain structural identity" (213), because she seems to limit the very "economy," force and movement she grants his project. In fact, much of her analysis hinges upon Derrida's supposed structural hierarchical arrangement of metaphysics between paired oppositions—good/evil, outside/inside, presence/absence, origin/copy, nature/culture. This dominance, mastery, prescribes language for Derrida, who sees the representatives of hierarchical metaphysics, according to Harvey, as the very thinkers he relies upon. Here lies a problem with her text. To consider Derrida as inescapably aligned to these philosopher and simultaneously departing from them, a style of writing must inevitably

Produce contradictions in order to explicate this process.

Yet her analysis usually corrects its own stylistic deficiencies, by interjecting a series of questions anticipated by the reader about Derridean paradoxes, followed directly by systematic outlines of the movement and necessity of

these suppositions. And it is to her credit that she does not attempt the punning, jargonesque style so rampant among deconstructionists. Thanks to her efforts, the general reader of critical theory can now grasp not only Derrida's strategies and style, but also the fundamental, "metaphysical" quality of his thought.

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