

In this sense, *Fire and Roses* should be seen as a risk, delving into this aporia. And this risk results in what is perhaps the book's greatest strength and greatest weakness. The weakness of the book shows the nature of the risk taken, and that is that the book fails to produce a body. All the evidence is in place, pointing to the crime of neglect in western thought, but nothing materializes. 'The Body' is continually talked about, but nothing seems to come from such discourse. Relatedly, the strength of the book comes in Raschke's rereading of western philosophy and theology, and finding the subtle ways in which the body has always been a silent and neglected partner to western thought. Now is the time to 'bring the body to presence', moving away from an abstracted study of religion towards a dance of religion, intertwining body and spirit. 'To dance is to bring about the end of theology in the dance, in the enactment of desire, in manifestation of the "classic text" of the body' (184). Raschke's book takes some of the first steps in that direction.

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*Dante's Interpretive Journey*. By William Franke. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. xi + 250 pp. \$45.00 (\$16.95 pbk)/£35.95 (£13.50 pbk).

WHEN DOROTHY L. SAYERS decided to translate Dante's *Divine Comedy* for Penguin Books in the 1940s her intention was to make the poem accessible to as wide an audience as possible: to those who not only knew no Italian but who had no specialist interest in literature or history. To assist her translation she provided her readers with introductory essays, commentaries on the text and notes which were not merely replete with helpful information, but were masterpieces of vigorous and lucid prose. William Franke's book, unfortunately, will not be easily accessible to those people Sayers had in mind. One must be grateful that its prose is not impenetrable like so much contemporary criticism or strangled by fashionable modern jargon, but it is dense and weighty, laden with the technical vocabulary of both philosophy and literary theory. To be fair, this work is not intended, as Sayers' was, to be an introduction to the *Divine Comedy* for the ordinary reader; yet it does concern itself with what the ordinary reader is doing when the *Comedy* is read. *Dante's Interpretive Journey* is not simply about Dante: it is an attempt to analyse the act of interpreting a text and the way the reader relates that text to his or her experience of reality; and Franke embarks on this analysis by the study of one of the classic texts of Western culture. The book has, thus, a double theme skilfully woven by its author into a single subject. 'The mystery of transcendence and the challenge of truth are inherent in the experience of interpretation as such, and Dante perhaps more than any other writer shows this' (184)

Central to Franke's thesis is his account of Dante's 'Address to the Reader': the author speaking in the first person directly to his reader. On the surface it is so straightforward and conventional a device, one which has been used by innumerable writers down the centuries; but in Dante's hands, according to Franke, it becomes a

literary manoeuvre of great subtlety and power. Following Erich Auerbach, he argues that in the *Comedy* Dante's use of the 'address' is a profoundly original stroke. All previous apostrophes are rendered merely decorative in the light of what the medieval poet achieves. By thus inviting the reader into his world he involves him or her in a complex hermeneutical process. Questions like the relation of Being to Knowing and the possibility of discerning truth and transcendence arise as the reader becomes a participant in Dante's own journey of interpretation: '... Dante specifically draws a reader into his poem to participate as interpreter: reading becomes for Dante a dimension of interpretation in which the poem can happen as an event of truth'. (46) In the expected reciprocity of poet and reader in an act of understanding and the tense ambiguity of the narrative itself—is it fact or fiction?—Franke sees Dante anticipating some of the perceptions of modern critical theory. But we are not to be left with sheer textuality, Dante cannot be viewed as some kind of medieval prototype of Jacques Derrida. To escape the suffocating condition of mere textuality Franke turns to Heidegger for assistance: 'To the extent that a whole new ontological order is made possible in this event, it may be called, following Heidegger, an event of Being'. (47) Furthermore, this Being has a specifically theological character: it is the revelation of the Christian God that is the subject of the interpretation and made accessible by the hermeneutical process. The chapters that follow the exposition of the argument attempt the demonstration of this thesis by a close illuminating reading of certain cantos. Franke tries to show that the truth claims of the poem are not dependent, as many have maintained, upon the 'historicity' of the narrative, but belong to a larger conception of the nature of truth, a conception which includes, as a central feature, the act of interpretation itself.

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*Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book.* By Denise Nowakowski Baker. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994. xii + 215 pp. \$29.95/£24.95.

*Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought: Broken Dreams.* By M. B. Pranger. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994. xii + 375 pp.

WRITERS ON Julian tend to fall into one of two groups: either those interested in 'spirituality', whatever that is, or those concerned with Julian's work as a major prose text, which to date is by the first English woman identified as an author. Professor Baker manages to combine both of these interests in a refreshing as well as erudite way. The initial chapter on 'Affective Spirituality' gives us a judicious selection of texts to get us to focus on 'emotive concentration on the passion of the Redeemer, and the compassion of the redeemed'. The second chapter, 'From Visualization to Vision', could usefully send us off in the search for illustrations *other* than those of the passion for the other themes of the book. A constructive proposal in the interpretation of Julian begins to emerge in the chapter on Julian's theodicy (78) to be followed up in chapter five: it is in connection with her concept of Jesus as