

social complexity characterizing the contemporary world.” (6)

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Hiddenness and Alterity: Philosophical and Literary Sightings of the Unseen

James Richard Mensch

Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005; 270 pages.

James Mensch's *Hiddenness and Alterity* opens with the Delphic oracle's call: "know thyself." However, throughout the ages of human inquiry, obtaining such self-knowledge has proven troublesome, if not impossible. Mensch's question in this text is not how one can achieve self-knowledge, but rather "how our *lack* of knowledge can show itself as such." (2) How is it that we can find our motives obscure, our memories faded, and what we say unmeant? The main task of this book is to explore the way in which this lack reveals itself and what it reveals about our selfhood. The answer offered throughout is that "*the hidden is the other.*" (2) For Mensch, the other is the lack that I can see hidden from me "to the degree that the other is in me as *other* than me—that is, as *beyond* what I can grasp and know." (5) While the book's subtitle suggests that the examples for this investigation will come from the domains of philosophy and literature, the thirteen chapters actually fall into four sections: phenomenology, ethics of the other, literature and religion. As a whole, what this book adds to the discussion of hiddenness and alterity is a reading of a *virtuous* other to whom we are in debt for the alterity inside us that defines who we are.

The first three chapters seem to gather around issues of temporalisation explicit in phenomenology. According to Mensch, Kant's account of temporalisation, when closely read, "shows that temporalization is a self-concealing process." (18) What he means is that in order for two pieces of content to show themselves as different from each other, an element of "not-newness or pastness" needs to be added to one of them. "This modification is reproduction's generation of time" (22) and this generation, for Kant, "is the trace of the subject." (29) The paradox con-

tained here is that the subject is both what creates temporality and that which is created by temporalisation. In this sense we have something-that-is-not-ourselves inside ourselves, a concept Mensch develops in his thoughts on Husserl, which are undertaken through close readings of a number of unpublished documents from the Husserl Archives in Leuven. For Husserl, we are together with others because we all share in pre-egological [*unterichliche*] temporalisation. In this sense there is something in me that is with others; “within me, understood as a physical system, there is something transcending me, other than what I am.” (61) It is this other-within-the-self that opens the possibility for an ethics.

The second identifiable section, made up of chapters four through seven, concentrates on the ethics founded on the other that cannot be reduced to our expectations, for “freedom is a function of the excessive quality of our selfhood.” (98) Mensch illustrates this thought with an example. Imagine you see a figure in the distance and you approach it. If you expect a person and it turns out to be a mannequin, then what you encounter offers you less than you expected. If you expect a mannequin, and instead you encounter a person, what you encounter is more than what you expected. (78) In both instances, actually, the other is beyond expectations. This realisation is our entrance into ethics, for when confronting the other I cannot “see what she sees when she faces me. Because I cannot see myself, the content of her consciousness seems to form a private sphere.” (86) The realisation of a private sphere in ourselves thus begins outside of ourselves, in the realisation of the unreachability of the other: “[O]ur intentions transcend our private sphere because they begin outside of this sphere. Their starting point is our being in the world outside of ourselves. The selfhood we do transcend is, in this context, a hiddenness in the world we are in, a hiddenness that owes its origin to this world.” (88)

The third group of chapters, eight and nine, fall under the category of literature. Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno* (1856) and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) are read through a Freudian eye. Mensch uses Melville’s novel to ask who is in control in the id/ego/superego conglomerate. The answer he provides is *death*, for “[t]he identity of the self is not that of substance. It is rather that of a system and when that system is out of whack, when the Freudian parts will not work together, it is the undoing of the self and hence, death is at the lead.” (136) Conrad’s novella asks a slightly different question; Mensch

reads it as an effort “to describe the *non*recognition of evil.” (149) This question is then extended to what Mensch reads as the Holocaust’s defining characteristic, which “seems to be its inexplicability.” (151) *Heart of Darkness* provides an indirect approach to the representation of the unrepresentable: “Proceeding by indirection, literature is capable of unmasking the self-concealment of evil. In focusing on its surrounding circumstances, it describes evil in terms of such concealment” (158); “Evil, here, is recognised by what should be present but is not.” (159)

While the subtitle, *Philosophical and Literary Sightings of the Unseen*, prepares its readers for phenomenology, ethics, and literature, curiously absent from it is the language of religious belief, a definite element of Mensch’s work. Mensch functions under the assumption that his readers are believers in God and that they pray. Such axiomatic statements as, “All too often we pray for things, such as victory or gaining a desired position, and forget that there are losers in such competitions” (199) or “The most striking example of incarnation is, *of course*, Christ,” pervade these last chapters. (201, emphasis mine) However, these assumptions are made in the midst of powerful readings of the call of the face of the victim, which moves one to become a rescuer (of Jews in World War II Germany) as well as the need of Abraham to believe in the sacrifice of his son Isaac (otherwise he and God would be in a relationship of worldly exchange—of progeny in exchange for a race of believers—rather than a relationship to each other’s alterity). Perhaps the absence of “religion” from the subtitle points towards a fear of excluding an audience of non-believers from the book.

There are two guiding threads throughout these various facets of the text: firstly, as far as each of us is an individual, it is because of the not-us in us; secondly, this not-us is a call to ethics, for allowing something to exceed us opens a space for virtue. However, this respectful focus on alterity seems to take place in lieu of a reading of the alterities of more earthbound others, namely non-human animals and artificial intelligence. While the latter is never addressed, the former does make a quick appearance near the end: “Embodied, I experience [the world’s] immediate sensuous presence in much the way that other animals with similar senses do...Where we part company is in terms of the linguistic meanings that structure the human intelligibility of this sensuously present world.” (220) Alternatively, I think a reading of the non-human, earthbound other would be important in this text, which moves far too

quickly through this area of inquiry. Indeed, much of Mensch's work is centred on the Levinasian encounter with the face of the other which in itself precludes an interrogation of a relation to non-human animals. Levinas, in his 1975 essay "*Nom d'un chien ou le droit naturel*," denies a dog the ethical status of the other because there is no possibility of recognizing mortality, or logos, in its eyes. This becomes problematic when Mensch equates the face with Derrida's concept of the trace, which is done throughout the text but most explicitly in the subheading "The Face as the Trace of God." (170) While the question of the animal occupies much of Derrida's later thought, as early as in *Of Grammatology* (1967) he sets out the trace (as opposed to the logocentric sign) to include non-human animals. In this sense it is difficult to couple the human-only face with the more open trace. Even a later essay of Mensch's dealing specifically with the animal, "The Intertwining of Incommensurables: Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*" (2007), merely concludes that the animal, like the divine, is within us, and thus another example of the other-within. What is needed here is not so much a reading of the animal within, but rather of the animal without: the potentiality of accessing that which is not one's self may be found in an openness to the trace of the non-human animal. This trace could then rework the question that Mensch poses at the end of his book: "Who is the other that ultimately structures the world?" (225) Perhaps an alternative idea to consider would be *what* the other may be, rather than just who.

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Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman

Frances Nesbitt Opperl

Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005; 221 pages.

It is generally accepted in many circles that Nietzsche was a malignant misogynist who ferociously vituperated women. Frances Nesbitt Opperl attempts to exonerate Nietzsche from this charge in her book *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*. Opperl suggests that a close analysis of Nietzsche's writings will reveal that these misogynistic tendencies are merely attempts to dismantle humanity's "reliance on dichotomies,"