the temporary vehicles of their spiritual transit. To read *Wingless Chickens, Bayou Catholics, and Pilgrim Wayfarers* is to board the bus and take a conversable seat next to a highly conversant author.

Gary M. Ciuba
Kent State University

WORKS CITED

Gautreaux, Tim. "Idols." *The New Yorker.* 22 June 2009.

Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language.
William Franke
Stanford University Press, 2009. 211 pp. $60.00 cloth.

Suppose one were embarking on a new literary or theological project, requiring one to review the heritage of romanticism—whose poet-thinkers transformed tradition by disclosing the deep mutuality of spirit and nature—and the "cognitive claims crisis" in theology—when revelation was deemed a dead issue and some theologians responded via hermeneutics and phenomenology. Given those requirements, comparative-literature scholar William Franke's fresh engagements would prove worthy of sustained attention. In debate with ideology-critic Jürgen Habermas (whom I can but briefly mention here) and a-theologian Thomas Altizer (reading James Joyce), Franke returns to apocalypse's familiar meanings: the "end," inscribed in images of destruction, and "revelation." When truths appear, without any determinative predictability, we may say their novel emergence is apocalyptic. To the extent such revelations are unprecedented, they will be un-stateable; that is, the habits of discursive and even figurative language will prove inadequate. To say they are *true* may also imply a dimension of ultimacy prior to reasoning, making them still more profoundly ineffable. Even so, and apart from pyrotechnics, apocalyptic may qualify any genuine disclosure of truth.

As for fiery destruction, if such revealed novelty is to be expressed at all, then antecedent habits of discursive statement must be overcome. So metaphor and poetry can enflame and interrupt routines of knowing; they open up spaces where truth is encountered. However, Franke knows that apocalyptic traditions sound absolutist. Unlike prophecy (considered a more public discourse directed toward history) apocalypses envision what *God sees,* from some vantage apart from history (although Franke regards Jesus as conjoining prophecy and apocalypse). Furthermore, religious apocalypses ostensibly brook no dialogue. They convey little self-awareness that their totalizing utterances must fail to represent the absolute. Thus, given Franke's

high argument—that in pluralistic dialogue we must attend to others' and our own apocalyptic impulses—the import of scriptural apocalypses cannot be equated with their unyielding rhetoric and overt meanings.

Implicit in all of this is a negative dialectic of apocalyptic and *poiesis*. Franke associates apocalyptic with (1) the necessity of interpretation (apocalyptic language reveals by obscuring or "re-veiling" its referent) and (2) apophasis. Apocalypses disclose, finally, sheer *unsayable openness*, a possibility theology may approach only through an apophatic poetics of openness.

This concern is also one of ethics. Little time is spent with Emmanuel Levinas (Franke's ethical interlocutors are the Frankfurt school), but Part I of the book is framed by the priority of the ethical. Were we to ban apocalyptic discourse from non-coercive communication practices (Habermas), or fail to appreciate (as Theodor Adorno appreciated) that even secular reasoning rests on belief before logical necessity, our dialogues will be doomed to warfare, figurative or literal. Hope comes in accepting, self-critically, that we are always "at the mercy of others." Apocalyptic openness (neighbor to Derridean *différance*) can be a hermeneutic of peace. And while Franke only occasionally mentions love (see 44, 87), apocalyptic openness entails a logic of excess similar to love, forgiveness, and hospitality. This theme receives little programmatic development—he doubts it lends itself to programs—and may sound more edifying than argued. However, the priority of praxis *is* argued: in terms of how poetic language can give warrant to claims of apocalyptic, negative theology.

The book has two parts. First is a ninety-five page essay subtitled "A Critical Negative Theology of Poetic Language," in five sections, the longest being "An Apocalyptic Theology of Dialogue." Part II comprises three chapters on epic poetry and Joyce, whose *Finnegans Wake* is read by Altizer and others as the culmination of Christian apocalyptic. We might better grasp Franke's method by reversing this order. For only poetic prose as radical as Joyce's can provide finite reasons for speaking, *via negativa*, of the infinitely open, incarnate, disruptive God. There are poets in Part I (e.g., Paul Celan, Wallace Stevens), but that essay depends for its warrant structure on the literary praxis of Part II and prior studies, such as Franke's *Dante's Interpretive Journey* (1996). We might also compare his approach to Martha Nussbaum's in *Love's Knowledge* (1990), where not only is fiction required to specify certain ethical realities but so are specific fictions (e.g., Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*). Is Franke saying that we need to reflect on, or *through*, not only scripture and poetry and Joyce generally, but the *Wake* in particular?

He follows two features of epic language radicalized in *Finnegans Wake*: polyvalence and typology. Almost every word, phrase, and paragraph exfoliates endlessly into *e*lusive and *al*lusive, multilingual and multi-voiced,

neologistic and recursive—puns. And Joyce's typologies (from biblical, epic, and folk traditions) are ritual-like repetitions that create novelty rather than sameness. Franke combines these features as he rethinks certain theologoumena.

First, in Joyce, utterances (words, sentences, riffs, myths) escape the unities of authorial fabrication to mix across time and space into fragmentary wholeness, like the eschatological "all in all" (a move Altizer also makes). Second, typological figures (e.g., Finnegan's fall, Earwicker's death and resurrection, his marriage to Anna Livia Plurabelle, the rival brothers Shem and Shaun) recur in many guises, creating continuities *and* indeterminacies, mediating novel revelations of otherness too sublimely errant for fixed "statement." Here Franke (employing Vico more than Hegel) thinks Altizer reduces apocalyptic poetics to a proposition: Christian apocalypse *is* the death of God and fulfillment of human freedom. Whereas for Franke, the indeterminacies of language and repetition play on the edge of self-sufficient rationality; they intimate an un-stateable source prior to reason (and us). Third, many epic typologies, in Joyce as in Dante, echo ritual sacrifice. Franke discusses Italian critic Gian Balsamo, for whom liturgy and fiction *re*-present the numinous experiences of witnesses to sacrificial bloodletting. If Franke is trading on a sense of ultimacy that limns such sanguinary moments, some will find the move a bit dreadful. But sacrifice also acknowledges the pervasive violence of history. Franke is gesturing toward a *crucified language* that, in its breaks and repetitions, approximates reconciling atonement and figures the all-in-all.

This incarnational *via negativa* affirms that poetry discloses possibilities of divine transcendence—albeit transcendence none should compass with confident propositions. Nor should one put confidence in propositions that foreclose divine transcendence. On first reading, I found Franke's rare lapses into confident catechesis bothersome, as when, say, he makes the refusal of Habermas (who is found otherwise reliable) to acknowledge revelation (implicit in reason) sound dangerously unreasonable, liable to "an idolatry of the social" (58).

I also at first questioned the display of Joyce as an *example* after Part I, rather than exploring it as *praxis* before Part I. But to take the *Wake* beyond thematically apt verbal play (e.g., "The Gracehoper was always jigging ajog, hoppy on akkant of his joyicity...," "*I've a terrible errible lot todue todie todue tootorribeday*...," quoted on 111, 164, Joyce's italics) is difficult, given Franke's purposes. Moreover, my question warrants a rejoinder praising the disseminating fecundity of "the example." Poetic exemplars are neither canons nor icons. *Finnegans Wake* is less a *what* to read (few can "just read it") than a *where* wherein to gather; a rowdy pub for conversations, to return

to after long absences; an oddly meandering, secular ecclesia; a performed negative theology. At such wakes and festivals, it is the praxis of recursive *conversations*—*Poetry and Apocalypse* being an excellent example—that disclose, indirectly, possibilities of transcendent openness.

Larry D. Bouchard
University of Virginia

From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward A New Jewish Literary Thinking.
Dan Miron
Stanford University Press, 2010. xiv + 541pp. $65 cloth.

At the end of his magisterial volume *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking,* Dan Miron concludes a discussion of what he calls Sholem Ya'akov Abramovitsh's (1835-1917) "integral bilingualism," his practice of writing in both Hebrew and Yiddish for the same audience during the last decades of the nineteenth century. In modern Israel, Miron quips, "Abramovitch's stories, in order to stand a chance of becoming readable again, must be re-translated into Hebrew from their original Yiddish versions; for as different in every possible way as the contemporary Hebrew reading public is from the Yiddish reading public of a century ago, it is still much closer to that reading public than to its Hebrew historical counterpart" (498).

Miron's acute observations about the constellation of Hebrew and Yiddish in contemporary Israel as representations and mediations of each other were borne out in a recent factual error made in the popular American press. In a 2010 *New Yorker* profile of the contemporary Hebrew writer David Grossman, George Packer mistakenly identified the fictional Anshel Wasserman, a European-based Hebrew author of the 1880s and the great uncle of Grossman's young protagonist, Momik, in *See under: Love* (1986) as a Yiddish writer. Indeed, in English translation it is easy enough to make such a mistake, because Wasserman's "Children of the Heart" reads awkwardly and archaically, as does Yiddish in contemporary Israel. In the Hebrew original, however, Wasserman's "Children of the Heart" is unmistakably Hebrew, fashioned as a satire of a late Enlightenment Hebrew text, in its bombastic, pastiche-like idiom. Nevertheless, Packer's mistake is attuned to the general ethos of the novel because it is through Hebrew writings such as those produced by his great uncle Anshel Wasserman that Momik gets a sense of the Eastern European Yiddish-speaking world his family left behind. Yiddish, for Momik in *See Under: Love,* is a language embedded in