he therefore see what is familiar to him from liturgical experience? Or is his vision something entirely new? Tuschling's treatments (21) implicitly raise such questions, and readers can narrow them further: What are we to do with visions that diverge from an already existing orthodoxy? Are they even possible? What does it take to make them convincing? It is not Tuschling's job to deal with such inquiries, but her material surely invites them. It is also tempting to think about how clever Judaism and Christianity became in the task of concealing their polytheism, for the myriad angelic beings (and other categories of spirits) reveal what so-called monotheism tries to hide. Christian and Jewish angelologies ought to contribute more weightily to comparative studies of religious hierarchies. Tuschling states that while liturgies do not contain overtly theological contents, liturgy and theology underlie the praxis (205). Such a declaration belongs in the old priority debates: What came first, myths or rituals?

This highly recommended book is remarkably free of printing errors (although a consistent "Bibliographie" heads the verso pages 212–46, and there are confusing and incomplete references to sections in *Qumran Cave 1*, "Thanksgiving Hymn," on top of 85). Clearly and dispassionately written, Tuschling's work deserves a wide readership unrelated to any "orthodoxy."

JORUNN J. BUCKLEY, *Bowdoin College.*

FRANKE, WILLIAM. *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009. xiv+211 pp. $60.00 (cloth).

William Franke elucidates the theological nature of poetry and the poetic nature of theology. The range of reference is impressive and a challenge to any reviewer. Franke engages the tradition of Christian epic poetry—beginning with scripture, developing through Dante Alighieri, John Milton, and William Blake, and culminating with James Joyce—as well as the modernist poetry of Paul Celan, Wallace Stevens, and T. S. Eliot, and he does so in conversation with negative theology, philosophical hermeneutics, critical theory, and postmodernism. The book's stated objective is "a postmodern negative theology of poetic language" (ix) that is both theoretical and practical, contributing to both literary theory and theology and promoting peace through radical openness to dialogue, and it is to Franke's credit that the result is both challenging and accessible.

Part 1 develops a negative theology of poetic language in conversation with the communicative ethics of Jürgen Habermas. Franke accepts the intersubjectivity of reason, but contra Habermas, he insists that poetry and theology promote radical openness to dialogue through apocalyptic discourse. Part 2 interprets the poetic language of James Joyce as the culmination of Christian epic in secular form. Joyce is illustrative of the way that modernist literature—even in its rejection of traditional religion—remains theological, albeit in a negative sense. In this, Franke draws on Thomas J. J. Altizer's interpretation of Joyce, but he insists that modern literary apocalypse is not the death of God but radical openness to mystery. The book concludes by restating that such openness is the necessary precondition for self-transcendence and meaningful dialogue and the means for social transformation.

Franke first defines apocalyptic discourse as "the unveiling of an ultimate, absolute and transcendent destiny or dimension of existence" (3). As a legacy of the Enlightenment, traditionally understood, we have grown accustomed to

rejecting or avoiding such discourse as rationally intractable, and critical theory exposes absolutist discourse as idolatrous, exclusionary, and all too human. It is idolatrous to presume that we can represent the transcendent, and all too often absolutist discourse functions as a will to power that marginalizes or subjugates others in an imperialistic manner. However, Franke insists that apocalypse is not the problem but the solution to this dilemma because apocalyptic discourse paradoxically reveals a transcendent dimension that no language can ever express. Therefore, apocalypse is always both an unveiling and a reveiling that humbles us, deconstructs our idols, and opens us toward a new and different future. If we call this mystery God, then we first discover that we are not God, thereby enabling a self-transcendence that is the precondition of any meaningful dialogue with others.

Revelation of the transcendent is always apocalyptic, but apocalypse is not limited to religious discourse: "For in poetry, language is broken open to let the previously inconceivable appear" (24). The negative capability of poetry is a creative deconstruction akin to negative theology, and this is especially true of modernist poetry that reflects on the limits of its own representation. The result is deconstructive—a breaking down of the idols of thought and speech—but also openness to what we cannot conceive or represent. The deconstructive power of literature reveals and reveils grace or gift, but Franke insists that this openness to transcendent mystery has no positive or dogmatic content. However, to deny this openness as irrational repeats the dogmatism of absolutist belief, and here Franke parts company with Habermas and insists that such openness informs reason. None of us has a privileged vantage point to confirm or deny the transcendent, and reason itself requires an openness that questions the present in pursuit of new knowledge.

For the most part, Franke's theory of poetic language as negative theology is persuasive and helpful in illuminating the complex relationship between religion and literature. With apocalypse, the two converge: religion needs literary discourse to reveal and reveil the transcendent, and literature performs an apocalyptic function that opens us to new possibilities of speaking, knowing, and being. However, what Franke calls apocalyptic could just as well be identified as metaphorical or symbolic, and for this, greater attention to the allegorical tradition, Romantic literary theory, and the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur would be helpful. Franke is aware of these connections, but they remain undeveloped.

The claim that Joyce is the culmination of Christian epic is less persuasive, and part 2 relies too heavily on the work of Gian Balsamo and Altizer. Franke's contribution is to interpret linguistic repetition in *Finnegans Wake* (London, 1939) as a secular reformulation of negative theology and typology that cannot be definitively interpreted as the death of God. However, I suspect Franke accepts a historical trajectory in which secular literature displaces traditional religion as revelation. If anything, his theological interpretation of Celan, Stevens, and Joyce deconstructs our conventional notion of the secular and demonstrates that literature cannot escape theology. My concern is that we must be careful not to privilege such literature—as the fulfillment of literary or theological tradition—but recognize that Joyce speaks theologically as one voice among many. In short, Franke needs to clarify the role of Joyce in his theoretical argument about poetic language and his practical effort to promote meaningful dialogue. Presumably, Joyce illustrates the apocalyptic power of

literature, but does he do so in a way that is representative or superlative in literary or theological terms?

Franke's book has considerable merit, but I have a theoretical and a practical concern with his appropriation of negative theology. First, negative theology is never entirely negative, and while Franke recognizes that poetic language is both deconstructive and open, he nevertheless insists that our various theologies—literary or religious—finally have no positive content. Perhaps this is the postmodernism in his negative theology because this is not entirely consistent with the theological tradition. A good counterexample is Pseudo-Dionysius, whose mystical theology seeks finally to overcome the limitations of both positive and negative speaking. Dionysius insists that God is love in a way that is both negative and positive. On this, Franke should consider the work of Jean-Luc Marion and especially his response to Jacques Derrida on the subject of negative theology, and this omission is a considerable oversight. Second, many people of various faiths will never accept that their understanding of the transcendent has no positive content, and if this is a precondition for dialogue, then it is unlikely to occur. On this, the practical dimension of Franke's study needs more development, as well as more traditional examples of poetic and theological openness from contemporary religious life.

Joel Harter, *Spring Arbor University*.

Van Maas, Sander. *The Reinvention of Religious Music: Olivier Messiaen's Breakthrough toward the Beyond*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2009. 224 pp. $55.00 (cloth).

The contradictory nature of modern French composer Olivier Messiaen poses a challenge to analysts of his work. A master of the complex theories and techniques of twentieth-century music (indeed, the inventor of recondite systems of his own), Messiaen could also drop unembellished transcriptions of bird songs, verging on kitsch, into many of his pieces. A professor of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire, he was also a devout Catholic who served as organist at the Church of La Trinité for most of his adult life. An effective study of Messiaen needs to bring analytic rigor to both the musicological and theological aspects of the composer. In *The Reinvention of Religious Music*, Sander van Maas takes on this daunting task and brings to bear his own erudition in a number of fields to provide a compelling account of the man and his work.

Although the title of the book hints at the author's expansive regard for Messiaen as a paragon of all modern sacred music, the argument also focuses a great deal on a single statement made by the composer. Van Maas returns repeatedly to Messiaen's declaration from 1977 (which provides the book's subtitle): "Finally, there is that breakthrough toward the beyond, toward the invisible and unspeakable, which . . . is summed up in the sensation of dazzlement" (35). Messiaen's music repeatedly strives to achieve a theological version of the aesthetic undertaking expressed in the concept of the sublime: to create (or allow) within a cultural artifact some manifestation of that which exceeds culture itself. The problem is that the excessive thing always risks becoming merely the human figuration of it, and on this score the dangers may be even greater for theology than for aesthetics. Whereas the field of aesthetics can interest itself as much in the figuration of the sublime as in its excessive object, any analysis of a divinity that has become no more than the human