things that solicits a fitting response” (127). That response is elicited from a region beyond aesthetic and ethical economies. Schrag’s God-gift language speaks of a centrifugal loving/giving that seeks no return. Schrag’s fitting response, however, rescues the semantics of the gift from the aporias and impossibilities into which the likes of Derrida and Levinas have carried it. For Schrag, in the real world “self-sacrifice issues from motivations that are never wholly liberated from self-interest” (131).

There are some questions, however, that may continue to trouble the reader. Schrag’s emphasis on the centrifugality of the gifting of love, on no expectation of return, seems at odds with the Biblical view of God as expecting adherence from his people as well as holding them accountable for the gifts He had given them. This asymmetrical reciprocity human beings have with a God who has no need of the beloved also seems at odds with the Biblical God who has need of man, desires his love, even seduces his prophets. Can this aspect of God’s character be justifiably articulated in the vocabulary of Schrag’s God-talk? Or is a supplement required?

INGRID HARRIS

Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness
RICHARD KEARNEY
New York: Routledge, 2002; 256 pages.

In the middle of Strangers, Gods and Monsters, Richard Kearney reflects on September 11th. This is an apt case to test the discipline of teratology, “the study of monsters,” that Kearney seeks to recover from medieval thought for the sake of the postmodern interpretation of otherness. September 11th unleashed three monsters: the stranger as monster (the evil terrorists), God as monster (the ignorant deity who rules ultimate reality and allows so many innocent people to suffer so senselessly), and oneself as monster (the sanguinary aspect of ourselves that rationalizes its thirst for revenge by reducing strangers and God to evil or ignorant monsters). Strangers, Gods and Monsters thus revisits the topics of the two earlier volumes of Kearney’s now complete hermeneutical trilogy: On Stories, which understands individual identity in terms of narrative imagination, and The God Who May Be, which understands ultimate reality in terms of radical possibility. Ending his trilogy with the problem of discerning monsters (abroad, beyond, and within), Kearney reveals philosophy’s task as practical understanding and its hope as justice. “Practical understanding” Kearney defines—after biblical “wisdom,” Aristotle’s “practical wisdom” (phronesis), Kant’s “reflective judgment,” and Ricoeur’s “narrative understanding”—as “the limited capacity of the human mind to deliberate about the enigma of evil” (100). However limited this capacity is, Kearney argues, it is our best hope.
“A genuine struggle against evil presupposes a critical hermeneutics of suspicion” (101) which, however critical or suspicious, still means (after Gadamer) conversation. Kearney is himself a great conversationalist: see, for example, his *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*; witness his peace work in face-to-face talks with IRA members in Ireland. Kearney has staked his philosophical and political life on the wager that conversation is the wisest way of dealing with monsters, whether those monsters be actual terrorists or merely postmodern apostles of radical “alterity and immanence” (77). In the case of the latter, Kearney seeks to converse a “middle way” between the contemporary options of atheistic “religion without religion” (i.e., Derrida’s deconstruction) and “mystical authoritarianism” (i.e., Marion’s new phenomenology), between radical hermeneutics and romantic hermeneutics, toward what Kearney terms “diacritical hermeneutics.” “Dia-” is, of course, for “dialogue.”

The most memorable dialogues in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* are with postmodern thinkers (Caputo, Derrida, Girard, Kristeva, Levinas, Lyotard, and Zizek), with modern writers Shakespeare and Joyce, and contemporary filmmakers Francis Ford Coppola and Ridley Scott. One laments that Kearney does not go into deeper conversation with the medieval artists and thinkers from whom he recovers the discipline of teratology. Reading Kearney on the film *Apocalypse Now* whets one’s desire to know his more detailed reflections on the medieval mosaics of divine vengeance that amply illustrate *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*. One also wishes he would elaborate at greater length on the reconciliation of God and khora he sees rendered in Eastern Christian iconography of the Virgin Mary. In *The God Who May Be*, he read the late medieval theologian Nicholas of Cusa in order to recover a more radical concept of possibility. While here he effectively relates his vision of a God who makes justice possible by reading a middle way between Derrida on khora and Heidegger on the last gods, how intriguing would be Kearney’s own articulated postmodern cosmogony of the Blessed Mother!

But the essential focus of *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* is not the history of philosophy, but contemporary thought, not speculative theology, but practical understanding. As a hermeneutics of discernment, practical understanding allows us to distinguish gods (whom we had best respect) from strangers (to whom we ought to be hospitable) from monsters, both outside and inside ourselves, with whom we must reckon. Kearney shows that most postmodern ethical interpretations of the other fail to allow for such discernment. The inscrutable “face of the Other,” after Levinas’s influential phenomenology, functions as the foundation of an ethical imperative and the ultimate horizon of our understanding. Whether this face of the Other is described after deconstruction as ultimately undermining our understanding or after the new phenomenology as overwhelming our understanding, either way discernment is impossible and we are left vulnerable to monsters.

In contrast, Kearney offers a discernment that is “based on the practical wisdom conveyed by narratives and driven by moral justice” (101). (In terms of his trilogy, the assumptions of *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* are conveyed by
the conclusions of *On Stories* and driven by the promise of *The God Who May Be*.) Kearney’s *On Stories* distilled Ricoeur’s work in *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another* and his own work in *The Wake of the Imagination* and *The Poetics of Imagining* in order to allow him to go on to argue against a conception of radical otherness in favor of an analogical notion of oneself as another, a notion best expressed in narratives. It is this understanding of both the otherness of oneself and the otherness of others as a likeness-in-difference that motivates the ultimate horizon of action imagined by *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*.

When we discern that the story we tell ourselves in order to understand ourselves has become a horror story, a repetitious tale of dread and hatred, as it has for some after September 11th, then Kearney’s practical, narrative understanding becomes psychoanalytical. We must mourn and “work through” the monsters within us. Only if we allow ourselves to mourn can we understand our feelings and prevent otherwise understandable feelings from perverting into murderous melancholia.

Kearney asserts that we ought to “pardon” the monsters that harm us. *The God Who May Be* describes a God of justice, promise, and possibility revealed in the Bible. The God of promise and His call to pardon are never proven as such. Kearney takes it as his “eschaton”; he offers it as his “wager.” This is not natural theology. Nor is he arguing that his God trumps all other accounts of ultimate reality. His appreciation for Buddhist and Taoist accounts, peppering his footnotes, shows his wager does not preclude other wagers, unless they are formulated dogmatically. His faith in a God of justice, the God who may be, not only requires a reformulation and prioritization (an aprioritization) of the category of possibility, it calls for a practical policy of pluralism as well as an active practice of social justice, which for Kearney involves pardoning.

Kearney makes a strong case philosophically for practical understanding and mourning, but the imperative to pardon must remain a part of his Judeo-Christian wager of faith. Kearney believes that “Judeo-Christian revelation signals an ethical step beyond the old pagan rites of human blood sacrifice which sought to fuse with the immanent universe and propitiate mercurial gods” (28). This bias is shown at the end of his reflections on September 11th with a wishful reading of Plato’s *Crito* as a tract for nonviolence. He translates Socrates as professing: “Do not harm, no matter what the circumstances” (137). By most readings of Plato, however, Socrates, waiting for his own unjust execution, does rebuke an ethos of retribution, but his horizon of ethical understanding (at least in the *Crito*) is political, not eschatological. That Socrates refuses to take an eye for an eye does not mean that he turns the other cheek. Socrates is more accurately read to agree with Herakleitos (in Guy Davenport’s memorable translation): “Defend the law as you would the city wall,” or even with George W. Bush: “we seek not revenge, but justice.” *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* opens up the topic of otherness for serious reconsideration. It questions the most cherished conclusions of both radical and romantic hermeneutics. While the call to pardon monsters must remain open for philosophical argument, Kearney
pleasingly and provocatively continues the conversation started by Socrates in *The Republic* when he asked pious old Cephalus: What is justice?

CHRISTIAN SHEPPARD

*Heidegger Toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*

JAMES RISSE, Ed.


This volume displays the latest concerns in Heideggerian scholarship. Its editor, James Risser, provides a fluid introduction that succinctly summarizes each of the very diverse fifteen essays that comprise this work. Risser tracks Heidegger’s thinking toward the supposed “turn” in his thought from *Being and Time* to *Time and Being*. Heidegger’s interest turns toward a preoccupation with the question of language to escape the rhetoric of metaphysics that inhibited him in *Being and Time*. His newer focus concerns “the question of truth, an expansion of the task of the destruction of metaphysics, and an attempt to re-think the question of history out of the turmoil of the 1930s” (4). Increasingly, Heidegger’s thought turned from the meaning of being to the truth of being, to ask the forgotten question of being. Heidegger would remain with politics for only so long, as the events of 1933–34 suggest. Although Heidegger would come to see National Socialism as a “ruined revolution” (6), two books would come to sensationalize his involvement in the movement. Following this, “Heidegger turns his attention to art and poetry around this same time—a time that follows his distressing experience with politics” (5). We see a rough turning from the question of truth and politics to art, poetry, ethics, and meditations on the “Da” of Dasein.

John Sallis opens with his reflections on the problem of truth in Heidegger’s thought. It appears that there is always an interruption in truth that occurs, curtailing any easy essentialism. Modern epistemology characterized knowledge as representation; our ideas agree with the thing itself in a correspondence model. With Heidegger, what is meant agrees with the thing as perceived; knowledge arises out of self-disclosure. In Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy*, however, self-disclosure is arrived at using a different method from that in *Being and Time*. The appeal in the *Contributions* is made using common sense, popular definitions of what truth is; it is decidedly not phenomenological. The discontinuity is evident in Sallis’s account; the *Contributions* reveal that there is a subverted discourse being sublimated. There is untruth within truth, concealment within disclosure and nonessence within essence. The inherent instability within truth gives way to a discordant bivalence: