



The Extravagant: Crossings of Modern Poetry and Modern Philosophy

Robert Baker

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In *The Extravagant*, Robert Baker explores the interplay between poetry and philosophy in the modern period, engaging a broad range of writers: Kant, Wordsworth, and Lyotard in a chapter on the sublime; Rimbaud, Nietzsche, and Bataille in a chapter on visionary quest; and Kierkegaard, Dickinson, Mallarme, and Derrida in a chapter on apocalyptic negativity. His guiding concern is to illuminate adventures of extravagant or wandering language that, from the romantic period on, both poets and philosophers have undertaken in opposition to the dominant social and discursive frames of a pervasively instrumentalized world. The larger interpretative narrative shaping the book is that a dialectic of instrumental reason and creative negativity has been at work throughout modern culture. Baker argues that adventures of exploratory wandering emerge in the romantic period as displaced articulations of older religious discourses. Given the dominant trends of the modern world, however, these adventures repeatedly lead to severe collisions and crises, in response to which they are later revised or further displaced. Life, poetics and philosophies at odds with these structures are forced to criticize and surpass earlier voices in their traditions that seem to have lost a transformative power. Thus, Baker argues, these adventures gradually unfold into various discourses of the negative prominent in contemporary culture: discourses of decentering, dispersing, undoing, and erring. It is this dialectic that Baker traces and interprets in this ambitious study.

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