Nicholas Rennie, *Speculating on the Moment*: *The Poetics of Time and Recurrence in Goethe, Leopardi, and Nietzsche*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005. Paperback. €48.00

Reviewed by Paul Bishop, Glasgow

In his final *Untimely Meditation* (*Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung*) Nietzsche pairs Goethe with Leopardi as "the last great followers of the Italian philologist-poets" (*die letzten grossen Nachzügler der italienischen Philologen-Poeten*) (cited p. 166; "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," §10). According to Nicholas Rennie, in the preceding *Meditation*, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (*Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*), the thinking of Goethe and Leopardi "comes together in an exceptionally productive mutual engagement" and, in so doing, "forms the basis for Nietzsche's elaboration of his theory of time and recurrence" (p. 270). In order to understand how this "double engagement" with Goethe and Leopardi in the essay on history is "explicit and central" to Nietzsche's argument" (p. 14), we need first to examine the logic of Rennie's own study.

In his autobiographical notes, Goethe records his response to a visit in 1801 to Bad Pyrmont. It was, he says, like being caught "in a magic circle": one "identifies the past with the present," and has "the impression of having rendered the unfathomable [*das Unfaßlichste*] an object of direct intuition [*unmittelbaren Anschauung*]" (cited p. 79). References to such moments occur elsewhere in Goethe's writings (such as his recollection, in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* [Part III, Book 14], of "the sensation of past and present being one" when contemplating Cologne cathedral in 1774 [cited p. 80]), and the plot of his monumental work, *Faust*, turns on the relation between time and desire: "If ever to the moment I shall say:/Beautiful moment, do not pass away!" (ll. 1699-1700). Given all, it is appropriate that Rennie begins *Speculating on the Moment* with a discussion of the "Prologue in Heaven" which, as is well known, draws on motifs from the biblical Book of Job—a text which, in the twentieth century, aroused the interest of (among others) C.G. Jung, René Girard, and Hans Robert Jauss (pp. 17; 26-28). After examining the structural similarities between Goethe's drama and Job, Rennie turns to the notion of the moment (or *Augenblick*) in Goethe's thought as "a principle […] by which time appears to take on a particularly rich formal coherence" (p. 41). A footnote surveys some of the detailed work already undertaken in this area, and Rennie distinguishes

between a negative conception of the *Augenblick* (the temporary trivia of *la vie quotidienne*) and its much more positive sense, used to refer to what Goethe called *prägnante Pünkte* or *prägnante Momente*—"'pregnant' in the sense of being both germinal, and rich in significance" (p. 45).

The latter (superior) sense is comparable, Rennie suggests, to what Goethe called the symbol, in which (in the words of the *Maxims and Reflections*) "the particular represents the general, not as shadow and dream, but as the living-momentary revelation of the unfathomable [*lebendig-augenblickliche Offenbarung des Unerforschlichen*]" (cited p. 60). And, drawing attention to the second wager speech towards the end of *Faust II*—

I might entreat the fleeting minute:	*Zum Augenblicke dürft' ich sagen:*
Oh tarry yet, thou art so fair!	*Verweile doch, Du bist so schön!*
[…]	[…]
Foretasting such high happiness to come	*Im Vorgefühl von solchem hohen Glück*
I savor now my striving's crown and sum	*Genieß ich jetzt den höchsten Augenblick*

—Rennie highlights a further important distinction. The first *Augenblick* Faust addresses is, "as a temporal designation, the moment experienced as a presentiment or 'pre-feeling' (*Vorgefühl*)", for it bears "a symbolic function, representing in the here and now a superlative moment that might (*dürfte*) be more authentically experienced in the future"; the second *Augenblick* is or "a secondary, mediating moment" that "is itself the 'highest' one," although it, too, "anticipates another, more authentic moment" (pp. 60, 37). Thus, in Rennie's words, "the signifier achieves primacy over any referent," since this second moment "lends a diachronic structure to the semiotic divide between signifier and signified, where the latter can only ever be experienced by way of anticipation—by way of the signifier" (pp. 37, 60). And so, too, "the structure of the play invites us […] to recall the thematic parallels to the biblical story and read Faust's apostrophe to the *schöner Augenblick* as referring to Job's encounter" (p. 35; cf. p. 37).

More generally, it is argued, "the Goethean motif of the *Augenblick* recurrently presents itself in approximation to the divine *totum simul*, an all-encompassing gaze in which successive moments, temporally dispersed, appear simultaneously present";[1] yet, at the same time, "Goethe's writing just as

[1] Cf. Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1702-1703), preface (cited p. 82).

systematically problematizes this harmomizing aspiration" (pp. 61-62). Or in structuralist terms, "Goethe's 'moment,' inasmuch as it represents itself as always anticipating but never achieving such resolution," operates according to the principle of metonymy (p. 61). Rennie is insistent on this point: "the 'moment' foregrounds its own metonymic incompletion, its failure to achieve the ideal closure of symbolic representation" (p. 62; cf. p. 63).

In short, "the myth of the *Augenblick*" is defined by Rennie as "that of a reconciliation between time and eternity" (p. 68). Such a myth has consequences for Goethe's conception of history. Rennie notes that such poems as "Testament"' (*Vermächtnis*) and "The Godlike" (*Das Göttliche*) demonstrate a triadic conception of the present, similar to St Augustine's in his *Confessions*, Book 11 (pp. 68-71). In a brief historical overview, he highlights Goethe's contribution to the discussion about the "moment" in sculpture and the pictorial arts that goes back, via Karl Philipp Moritz and Frans Hemsterhuis, to Lessing, Shaftesbury, and, ultimately, Aristotle (pp. 72-74). Drawing on a variety of texts, including *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, "A Grave near Cumae," and the *Italian Journey*, Rennie shows how Goethe repeatedly uses a visual metaphor to highlight "the contrast between this world of historical incoherence and an aesthetic realm that promises to resolve the disorder of all time and space in the flash of a gaze" (p. 75).

This conception of the *prägnanter Moment* as "a principle of organization in the plastic arts" plays a role in Goethe's historical imagination, and does so "according to his definition of the symbol" (p. 85). In the case of *Faust*, however, the moment-as-symbol is, in Rennie's view, "crassly undermined by the absence of that 'revelation' that Goethe defines as constitutive of the symbolic mode" (p. 89), so that "not only does the play undercut what its structure anticipates as a religious epiphany", but "the *schöner Augenblick* also undermines itself as a substitutive aesthetic (or ideology) of self-presence" (p. 91). This "instability that doggedly haunts the *Augenblick*-motif through Goethe's writing" is explored further in a chapter entitled "The Aleatory Moment," through the model reflected in another central motif of *Faust*—that of gambling (p. 93). Here Rennie discusses the Witch's Kitchen in *Faust I* and Act 1 of *Faust II* in relation to Pascal's famous wager and the motif of the dice-throw in Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*, drawing on Karl Heinz Bohrer's category of "suddenness" (*Plötzlichkeit*) and Friedrich Kittler's description of "writing systems" (*Aufschreibesysteme*). In Goethe, Pascal, and Mallarmé alike, Rennie

claims, "the poetic sign calls attention to its fluid relation to any stable, extra-textual referent" (p. 124).

The second figure in Rennie's study, Giacomo Leopardi, has, at first sight, little in common with Goethe, beyond the coincidence that he completed his *Zibaldone* in 1832, the same year in which *Faust* was finished. Yet both writers respond, in differing ways, to historical crises: in the case of Goethe, to the French Revolution; in the case of Leopardi, one might say, to history itself. Leopardi's writing features two related concepts: *noia* ("tedium" or "boredom") and *fango* ("wretchedness," or just "mud"), reflected in such poems as "Infinity" (*L'infinito*) (1819) and "To Himself" (*A se stesso*) (1835). In "To Angelo Mai" (*Ad Angelo Mai*) (1820), Leopardi uses the westward journey of Christopher Columbus as a metaphor, Rennie suggests, for "the most unsettling—and most life-inhibiting—discovery we can make, namely that of the fundamental sameness of all existence" (p. 175).

Thus at first glance the contrast between Leopardi and Goethe could not be greater, for whereas the latter "celebrates the *prägnanter Augenblick*, the moment that, by its internal logic, sustains the idea of a universal theodicy," the former "protests instead the moment's indigence: the present, he suggests, is incapable of engendering life" (p. 195). Yet, Rennie believes, Goethe's and Leopardi's conceptions of the moment are marked by "a similar, if opposite, reversal," for as, in Goethe's case, "the conciliatory vision of the *schöner Augenblick* […] is consistently undermined by an opposite, 'tragic' insight," so conversely, in Leopardi's, "a tragic experience of time is sporadically illuminated by abrupt, eiphanic moments of visual synthesis" (p. 196).

Now, the conceptual background to such moments is Leopardi's theory of pleasure, summarized in such propositions as "pleasure is either past or future, but never present" (cited pp. 176, 198); "pleasure in its fulfilment does not exist" (cited p. 199); and "pleasure, in fact, is only an abandonment, a forgetfulness of life, and a kind of sleep and death" (cited p. 211). Indeed, on a number of occasions ("Dialogue of Malambruno and Farfarello" [1824], "Dialogue of an Almanac-Pedlar and a Passer-by," and *Zibaldone* [1817-1832]), Leopardi considers the thought that each instant, along with its inability to bring happiness, might be repeated indefinitely—an anticipation of the thought of eternal recurrence in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (*Die*

fröhliche Wissenschaft) and one that inspires an almost equal horror (pp. 218-19).[2] Anticipatory of Nietzsche's "heroic resignation" (p. 220), however, is the tone of *amor fati* in Leopardi's "The Dominant Thought" (*Il pensiero dominante*), with its apostrophe to love as this "terrible, but dear / Gift of the gods" (*Terribile, ma caro / Dono del ciel*). Over against Leopardi's notion of time as repetition, furthermore, one must set his conception of "the epiphanic (visual) moment" (p. 221).

In a note from 1820, Leopardi argues for a new kind of philosophy, an "ultra philosophy" or *ultrafilosofia* (cited p. 226). In contrast to previous (rational) philosophy, which is predominantly analytic in nature, *ultrafilosofia* is said to be essentially synthetic, grasping everything to be understood in "a blink of the eye" or *colpo d'occhio* (pp. 226-27; cf. 233, 253). Like Pascal's *esprit de finesse* or Vico's "eye of the *ingenium*", Leopardi's "intuitive thought […] has an eye-like facility for comprehension" (p. 228). Thus "the inspired poet, the philosopher of sublime speculation, the man of imagination […], or anyone in the grip of a strong passion," is capable of "discovering in a single glance many more things than he is used to seeing at one time, discerning and beholding in the flash of an eye a multiplicity of things [*d'un sol colpo d'occhio discernendo e mirando una moltitudine di oggetti*]" (cited p. 229).

Mediating between *fango* and the *colpo d'occhio*, between "the endlessness of […] featureless temporality" and "the suspension of time in moments of enthusiastic comprehension" (p. 234) is a third mode of perception, which Rennie calls "aesthetic doubling." According to Rennie, "Leopardi suggests that it is possible to affirm the present in the manner of an aesthetic representation, without thereby claiming that another moment has the status of an origin for this representation" (p. 236). In Leopardi's own words, "for the sensitive and imaginative man […] the world and all objects are in a peculiar way double" (*all'uomo sensibile e immaginoso ... il monde e gli oggetti sono in certo modo doppi*), and "in this second mode of perceiving objects resides all the beauty and pleasure of concrete things" (*in questo secondo genere di obbietti sta tutto il bllo e il piacevole delle cose*) (cited p. 243).

Such a mode of perception arises, in Rennie's view, from "an ironic temporality, but one that as such does not resolve itself into pure negativity" (p. 237).

[2] As Rennie points out, however, Nietzsche himself could not have known *Zibaldone* (published between 1898 and 1900) (p. 281).

Thus aesthetic doubling "mediates between an experience of pure successivity, and the illusion of temporal arrest," implying "an acknowledgement of the mind's engagement with itself, but a recognition as well that the medium of this activity—language—is perpetually unstable and surprising in its results" (p. 255). And, rightly, Rennie highlights the resonance of the thought that "the act of aesthetic representation itself bears an animating charge" (p. 245) in Nietzsche's idea of the importance of "what is nearest to us, what is around us and in us" (*das Nächste, das Um-uns und In-uns*) (p. 255; cf. pp.159, 161).

Finally, Rennie turns to Nietzsche, whose introduction to the works of Leopardi may have come via Schopenhauer (see *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, §46) or Hans von Bülow. Despite his allegedly poor knowledge of Italian, Nietzsche lists Leopardi among the four "prose masters" of the nineteenth century (*The Gay Science*, §90) and, for Rennie, Leopardi stands as "a key—although initially unnamed—presence" behind "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (p. 283). In Leopardi's "supra-historical" thinking, Rennie suggests, Nietzsche identifies "not just a series of varitions on an ancient *vanitas* motif, but rather a discourse of the 'moment' that has acquired particular urgency since early Romanticism" (p. 284). Not only does the "Night-Song of a Nomadic Shepherd of Asia" (*Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia*) (1829-1830) inform Nietzsche's allegorical image of the timeless existence of animals, he also cites Leopardi's "A se stesso" as an example of what he calls "historical sickness"—an instance of the attitude of "supra-historical men" whom he leaves to "their nausea and their wisdom" (cited pp. 279, 277; "On the Uses," §1). And in contrast to the Leopardian abandonment of the individual to the infinite in which he must drown, Nietzsche calls for a return to land (cited p. 288; "On the Uses," §10).

As far as Nietzsche's comments on Goethe are concerned, Rennie detects in them a "double strategy," according to which Nietzsche "generally ignores that part of the poet's life and work that does not belong to the highly circumscribed world of Eckermann's *Conversations*"; and, where he disagrees with Goethe, does so mainly in unpublished notes (p. 271). More precisely, there is "a life-long ambivalence" on Nietzsche's part towards Goethe, that "only effaces itself when—and to the degree that—Nietzsche succeeds in making Goethe a wholly 'classical', anti-Romantic figure" (p. 290). On this account, Nietzsche thus "willingly adopts a notion, promulgated by Goethe, of the individual (and Goethe himself in particular) as a

principle of redemptive historical synthesis" (p. 293). When, in his essay on history, Nietzsche expresses the hope that the value of history will lie in "its taking a familiar, perhaps commonplace theme, an everyday melody, and composing inspired variations on it" (cited p. 298; "On the Uses," §6), Rennie detects an "emphatically Goethean motif: that the present, by a process of aesthetic heightening (*Steigerung*), might become a 'comprehensive symbol' [*umfassendes Symbol*] of existence, and that it might thereby come to embrace what Nietzsche calls 'a whole world of profundity, power and beauty' [*eine ganze Welt von Tiefsinn, Macht und Schönheit*]" (p. 298; "On the Uses," §6; cf. *Dawn*, §44). Moreover, whereas Nietzsche elsewhere "seems to cite Goethe's writings almost as an unconscious reflex", here he focuses on "a Goethean motif as a central problem—and a central hope—of his text" (p. 299).

Nietzsche's understanding (via Creuzer) of symbols as "heightened, concentrated forms of expression antithetical to the successivity of conceptual thought" (p. 299) is, in Rennie's view, nevertheless problematic, inasmuch as it leads to the "central paradox" of the essay on history. How can one distinguish between "a life-affirming conception of history as organized within 'comprehensive symbols'" and "a conception of history that reveals only the futility of life and the fictionality of all life-giving forms (or illusions)" (p. 303)? Likewise, Rennie thinks there is a "seeming contradiction" in Nietzsche's use(s) of the term "supra-historical" at the beginning and at the end of his essay.

Behind all these tensions and contradictions lies a conflict between, on the one hand, Leopardi's "moment of annihilation" (which would represent "a victory of Dionysian formlessness"), "a moment of Leopardian self-loss," or "experience of sublime dissolution"; and, on the other, Goethe's "comprehensive symbol" (representing "an Apollinian victory of form"), "a Goethean moment of self-affirmation," or "yearning for symbolic form" (pp. 310, 312). Because such a conflict, in Rennie's view, "never attains resolution," it corresponds to the "structure of the sublime," and his argument is, ultimately, that Nietzsche's essay imagines "the moment of lived presence" as "the site of an experience of the sublime" (p. 310).

If a note (*KSA* 7, 34[24] 799) from Nietzsche's *Nachlass* for Spring-Summer 1874 has "Goethean overtones" in its echo of a conversation with Eckermann (3 November 1823), it indicates by the same token "the point where his conception of the historical moment diverges from Goethe's" (p. 315). So what "sets Nietzsche's *Augenblick* apart from Goethe's", and marks "Nietzsche's distance from the classical

Goethe" and "the neo-classical Goethean aesthetic that he repeatedly invokes," is the former's "fascination" with the *Augenblick* "as the potential site of a profoundly unsettling insight—and challenge" (p. 315; cf. pp. 316, 334). "If," as Rennie puts it, "Nietzsche's aesthetic of failed wholeness recurrently constitutes structures of the sublime, this is an aesthetic of which only the redemptive moment of self-reconstitution can be represented by Nietzsche's stylized version of Goethe" (p. 334). Instead, it is Leopardi who "represents" or "signals" the joy *and* horror of self-loss, emotions "tied to" the thought of eternal recurrence introduced in the essay's discussion of "monumental history" (p. 302; cf. "On the Uses," §2), and turns it into "a gamble that provides the basis for Nietzsche's aesthetic"—namely, "that the individual can summon the courage to make his own self and the present moment of his life a pure origin for all existence" (p. 335). What remains "at issue," then, is "an experience constituted both by a moment in which the imagination comes to encompass an infinite totality, and by a moment in which this effort fails" (p. 336).

As this summary reveals, Rennie's work is rich in detail, and full of fascinating connections. Its argument is constructed around the link between various senses of "speculation," the term suggesting "the intersection of the visual and temporal connotations of the word *Augenblick* with its additional ventures of venture and risk" (p. 110). Indeed, the book could almost have been entitled *The Speculative Moment* in homage to David Wellbery, to whose *Specular Moment* Rennie is, as he acknowledges, theoretically indebted (cf. p. 110). But, as Rennie himself asks, how can we best understand the actual relation […] between wagering and the experience of the visual moment?" (p. 319). To put it another way: does Rennie's own gamble come off?

Anyone interested in the intellectual sources of Nietzsche's thought will want to read this study, in which Nietzsche's relation to a number of figures (including Hume, Pascal, and Rousseau) is examined, often helpfully and illuminatingly. Yet Rennie's account is not without its challenges. "Structural and post-structural linguistics help illuminate the issue at hand" (p. 61), he says, before drawing on Lacan's distinction (borrowed from Jakobson) between metonymy and metaphor: but the structuralist jargon obscures, rather than clarifies, what Rennie wants to explain. He tends to rely on secondary criticism to advance parts of his argument at the crucial juncture: Giovanni Vattimo (pp. 158-60) and Hayden White (pp. 301-02) in the case of Nietzsche, for example, or Michel Chaouli (on Schlegel) in the case of Leopardi

(pp. 251-54). If one does not accept these critics' interpretations of the primary authors, or if one reads them differently, Rennie's objections to alleged difficulties in those primary texts fall away.

Together with a tendency to argue a general case from a particular textual detail, another of Rennie's main argumentative strategies is the use of paradox. Time and again one encounters this rhetorical gesture: "to affirm 'the beautiful moment' […] is at once to gamble on, and repudiate, a Romantic aesthetic of unmediated intuition" (p. 9); "the ocular moment […] is an event that may both reinforce *and* undermine the metaphysics of presence" (p. 10); "a poetic in which the moment is both an inherently worthless token, but as such also […] something of inestimable worth" (p. 11); "a paradigmatic instance […] [and] failure of this ideal" (p. 12); "both promises and withholds" (p. 89); "anticipates and cancels" (p. 92); and so on. Sometimes Rennie skates on logically thin ice: for example, when he argues that "the similarities between [Goethe and Leopardi] enable Nietzsche to adopt them […] as the representatives of two opposite attitudes towards time" (p. 196; cf. pp. 166, 310, 312); or when his determination to drive a wedge between Goethe and Nietzsche leads him to write that "even where this experience [of the *Augenblick*] is turned into one of affirmation, the positive turn derives its energy from the fear of a negative alternative" (p. 316).

Although Rennie uses Georges Poulet to "situate Goethe's *Augenblick* historically" (p. 52), his work lacks a larger sense of historical dimensions. No mention is made of, say, ancient Greek conceptions of time (apart from a passing reference to Parmenides in Hermann Schmitz's study of Goethe's late writings); in this respect, the work of Pierre Hadot would have proved especially useful. Likewise, the specific context of German classical aesthetics is repeatedly overlooked. In particular, Rennie ignores Schiller, whose notions of *Spiel* (p. 324) and aesthetic (as opposed to logical) illusion (*schöner Schein*) (p. 306; cf. "illusion" [p. 38], *illusione* [p. 235], "unsustainable illusions" [p. 254], *Schein* [p. 320], "aesthetic illusion" [p. 332]) are directly relevant to the debate under consideration. This historical deficit is a serious one: it is as if Nietzsche had never heard of Heraclitus when developing the idea of eternal recurrence; it is as if Goethe had not realized that, even in the eighteenth century, "desire" was a fashionable concept,[3] nor been all too aware of the

[3] See Goethe's review (1826) of Ludwig Tieck's *Dramaturgische Blätter*.

limitations of metaphor;[4] as if Goethe had not explored the dialectic of time and necessity in *Urworte Orphisch*,[5] nor drawn attention to the impossibility of reconciling intellection with the successivity of experience.[6] On occasion, Rennie's approach evinces a curious lack of differentiation: Goethe, Pascal, and Mallarmé (p. 124), or Leopardi, Goethe, Pascal, and Vico (p. 227) are presented as if they are all saying the same thing; conversely, however, Goethe, Leopardi, and Nietzsche are presented as inherently self-contradictory and riddled with inconsistency.

With respect to Goethe, Rennie is clearly right to recognize the importance of the concept of *Augenblick*, but arguably he pays insufficient attention to another key-term of Goethean vocabulary, *Gegenwart* ("the present," "presence"). Goethe's use of this term illustrates well his classical disposition, and an appreciation of what is at stake in it would prevent any simplistic equation of German classicism and German Romanticism, as occurs when "the aesthetic and semiotic ideal" of "unvarying universal harmony" is attributed to both (p. 96). Likewise, the value of the "moment" in relation precisely to its temporality or transitoriness (*Vergänglichkeit*, to use the term that serves as the title of a famous short essay by Freud)[7] forms part of a related historical debate, reaching back to Anaximander, to which Rennie makes scant reference.

"By relating the *schöner Augenblick* proclaimed by Faust to other forms of the affirmative moment in Goethe's work," Rennie writes, "I wish to suggest that the *Augenblick* is itself a principle of structural and semiotic instability in Goethe's writing" (p. 63), but, despite his recognition of the positive and negative connotations of *Augenblick* in Goethe's writing, he assimilates *schöner* and *prägnanter* and *ewiger Augenblick* without any distinction, just as he erases the difference between the dramatic fiction of *Faust* and Goethe's autobiographical or scientific writings. Furthermore, an aphorism such as "the day belongs to error and mistake, the sequence of time to success and triumph" (*der Tag gehört dem Irrtum und dem Fehler, die*

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[4] Goethe, "Intentional Colours," in *History of the Doctrine of Colours*; in *Werke* [Hamburger Ausgabe], vol. 14, pp. 105-06.

[5] See his letter, believed to be to Zelter, of 31 March 1818.

[6] See "Doubt and Resignation" (*Bedenken und Ergebung*) (written 1817, published 1820).

[7] See Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, pp. 303-07.

Zeitreihe dem Erfolg und dem Gelingen)[8] leads one to question Rennie's assertions concerning the metonymic nature of Goethe's conception of time. And sometimes Rennie displays a surprising insensitivity to the context of the passages he cites. Given that, as he acknowledges, the relationship between the *Rahmenhandlung* ("frame") and *Binnenhandlung* ("plot") is a longstanding problem in *Faust* criticism, one is taken aback to encounter the statement that "Goethe's play endorses a spatiotemporal vision of cosmic dimensions" in the opening "Prologue in Heaven" (p. 96); and, similarly, verses written during the period in Leipzig surely say less about Goethe's own "temporal consciousness" than they do about the conventions of Anacreontic verse itself (p. 46).

With respect to Leopardi, it is a pity that Rennie does not "enter into a discussion of Leopardi's affirmation of the body" (p. 158), since consideration of his "anti-Platonic defense of the body and the senses" (p. 158) could have clarified the suggestion (attributed to Ernesto Grassi) that Leopardi "repeats a Platonic conception of desire" (p. 198; cf. p. 239). Nor is Rennie's account of the relation between *colpo d'occhio* and "aesthetic doubling" entirely transparent, although it is central to his argument. As he points out, Carlo Ferrucci interprets *ultrafilosofia* as an "*aesthetic* experience of truth" (p. 226), to which Rennie subsequently wishes to oppose "the ability to linger in the vicinity of an everyday reality aesthetically transfigured" through "aesthetic doubling" (p. 237). As it stands, the basis of this distinction is presented in a remarkably compressed form, and it would have benefited from further elucidation: it is an intriguing point.

Finally, with respect to Nietzsche, Rennie's consideration of the second *Untimely Meditation* is scrupulously thorough. Yet his account of Nietzsche's reception of Leopardi (pp. 271, 277), like his account of Nietzsche's view of Goethe (pp. 290, 292), is not without its confusions. Rennie is keen to emphasize the discontinuities between Goethe and Nietzsche, at the price of playing down some of their more fundamental affinities. For instance, Nietzsche's motif of the "nearest things" (a theme foregrounded at some length, incidentally, by Ludwig Klages)[9]

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[8] *Maxims and Reflections*, ed. Hecker, #911.

[9] See Ludwig Klages, *Die psychologischen Errungenschaften Nietzsches*, Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1926, pp. 69-84.

recalls Goethe's own insistence on the importance of "lesser things;"[10] and several of Goethe's formulations anticipate Nietzsche's later Dionysian world of eternal recurrence.[11] And Rennie's argument would have benefited from being more closely related to Nietzsche's claim in *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*) that "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence […] justified" (p. 322; cf. p. 320). Likewise, his discussion of *Zarathustra* is extremely brief indeed (p. 321), despite the prominence in that work of the imagery of gambling,[12] and Zarathustra's own proclamation that "Lord Chance" (*Von Ohngefähr*) is "the world's oldest nobility, which I have given back to all things: I have released them from servitude under his purpose."[13]

Aside from occasional minor, if irritating, inaccuracies (for example, 1 Corinthians 15:52 surely refers to the future resurrection, not the moment of conversion), one cannot overlook the irony that Rennie himself has recourse to the terminology he would disparage, when he writes that "Nietzsche's conception of a symbolic mode of historical contemplation constitutes, I think, the most clearly Goethean moment [!] in an essay inhabited throughout by Goethe's thought" (p. 299; cf. pp. 300, 308). Yet, despite its weaknesses of argumentation, this book brings together a large amount of primary material, and its chief value lies in its demonstration of the perennial nature of certain philosophical themes. As such, it makes a welcome contribution to recent work that seeks to recover a neglected undercurrent in Western thinking of which Nietzsche forms a part, and to answer the question, "whatever happened to Weimar classicism?"[14]

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[10] See Goethe's review, "Ernst Stiedenroth: *A Psychology in Clarification of Phenomena from the Soul* (Part One, Berlin: 1824) (*Ernst Stiedenroth, Psychologie zur Erklärung der Seelenerscheinungen, Erster Teil. Berlin 1824*) (*Werke* [Hamburger Ausgabe], vol. 13, p. 42).

[11] See his entry in his *Italian Journey* (*Italienische Reise*) for 17 March 1787, his letter to Schiller of 24 January 1798, and his conversation with Eckermann of 17 January 1827.

[12] See "Before Sunrise" (*Vor Sonnen-Aufgang*); "The Seven Seals" (*Die sieben Siegel*), §3; "Of the Higher Man" (*Vom höheren Menschen*), §15.

[13] "Before Sunrise" (*Vor Sonnen-Aufgang*); translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p.186).

[14] See Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, "Missing Links or Whatever Happened to Weimar Classicism?" in Heinrich Siefken and Alan Robinson (eds), *'Erfahrung und Überlieferung': Festschrift für C.P. Magill*, Cardiff: Trivium Special Publications, 1974, pp. 57-74.