

Patrick Greaney, *Untimely Beggar. Poverty and Power from Baudelaire to Benjamin*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008. xxiii + 227 pp.

The potential productive and destructive powers of the poor are what Patrick Greaney claims gave these literary figures such a prominent position in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French and German literature. In his meticulous study, which analyzes how poverty and representing potential unite a seemingly diverse group of authors including Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke and Walter Benjamin, Greaney argues that the untimely character of the beggar appears “both as remnant of the past and as an omen for a possible future” (xix). He not only considers socioeconomic poverty and its ties to modernism, but links this paucity to linguistic poverty in the form of impoverished language, i.e. voiceless beggars.

This study begins with an outline of Heidegger’s lecture course on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, in order to demonstrate that power also involves a component of “nonenactment,” because it helps explain the “incapacity” of beggars (5). Greaney then turns to Marx’s use of pauperism, which describes those who are not members of the working class, yet who remain essential to the production process. He then ties nonproductivity to Foucault’s understanding of biopower. Though the connection may not seem obvious initially, Greaney uses these three theorists to lay the foundation for his discussion of beggars as possessors of power, because it does not usually come through active actions as one might expect.

The first literary beggars stem from Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal* and Greaney suggests that the poor serve a double function by simultaneously giving and taking sustenance, and this position consequently opens a common space for the speaker and the reader, the possibility of forming community. In the penultimate poem of *Le spleen de Paris*, “Let’s Beat Up the Poor!”, Greaney finds a similar situation, in which the beggar poses power by not acting, and by becoming poor, the narrator gains authority. Greaney next considers beggars in numerous poems by Mallarmé, which offer an opportunity to explore impoverished language through their virtual absence. Drawing on Paul Valéry’s interpretation of asceticism, Greaney argues that poverty allows a gesture toward poetic language’s deficiency. The figure of the beggar enables Mallarmé to give him a voice and create a face. This virtual environment provided by associating asceticism with power opens a space to suggest a different kind of poetic language.

Greaney next outlines Nietzsche’s critique of the ascetic ideal, a component of which is poverty, because he suggests that for Nietzsche poverty can

both "belong to and undo" this ideal (74). He begins with a thorough analysis of this theme in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and demonstrates how poverty allows Zarathustra to adapt voices, including that of Truth, which he ties to Nietzsche's critique of Christianity. Then through a close reading of form and poetic devices in *Dionysus Dithyramb*, he shows how a "linguistic self-estrangement" emerges (86). These readings together lead Greaney to claim that Nietzsche turns Truth into a mask through poverty. "The new virtue of poverty would not depend on an identity that must be assumed before being surrendered; instead, it would be the virtue that allows for everything, including truth, to be 'taken,' in every sense of the word, and transformed" (94).

After establishing Rilke's relationship to Nietzsche and Mallarmé, Greaney demonstrates that the traditional understanding of poverty in "The Book of Poverty and Death," the final cycle in *The Book of Hours*, namely that Rilke glorifies poverty, is false. Instead, he argues that the poor appear "as a series of similes" (107) and provide an interruption. The cycle is unable to speak about poverty and attests instead to the difficulty of representing it. Employing Gottfried Benn and Robert Musil's interpretations, Greaney suggests that Rilke uses the poor to reflect a poverty that does not belong to them, to demonstrate "the difficulty of representing poverty at all" (115). Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* is the next object of study, and Greaney again calls into question existing readings. Scholars such as Andreas Huyssen and Ernst Fedor Hoffmann suggest that the outcasts represent a larger theme of fragmentation, but Greaney argues that Malte's similarities with the beggars in fact demonstrate a sense of community without an identity. Malte turns their inability into something positive: "the ability not to have a face, not to be formed, and to acknowledge a relation based on impropriety and not on identity" (135).

The final analyses are of Benjamin and Brecht, and Greaney outlines an evolution in the use of poverty after the First World War (143). Benjamin, following Brecht, refers to the "poverty of experience" in the 1930s, and Greaney argues that this is what replaces the figure of the beggar. This is not something unique to Benjamin, rather it follows a trend that has already been outlined, namely a resistance to give poverty a face and its linguistic nature. Through a reading of Benjamin's analysis of glass architecture and Brecht's "reduction of the dramatic and poetic subject" (147), he goes on to demonstrate that with modernity and urbanization came an attempt to free oneself and redefine humanity and culture. By marking the poor with "unwritten" figures and absences, practices already seen in authors such as Heidegger and Rilke, new potentials emerge through the poor. Their disintegration reveals new possibilities.

Greaney leads the reader through a series of seemingly disparate texts and theories, providing wonderfully detailed readings, which often contradict existing understandings and interpretations. He patiently outlines necessary background, whether biographical, thematic, or theoretical, and consistently

reminds us of the continuities as well as evolutions in the use of the theme of poverty. Greaney takes a popular theme of modernity, but provides a new interpretation, and demonstrates how these authors sought to create something new from it, to show its potential for the future, though in an altered form.

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Philip Payne, Graham Bartram, and Galin Tihanov, eds. *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2007. xx + 448 pp.

This important addition to Camden House's "Companion" series intends to "be of help both to those who are already familiar with Robert Musil's work and also to those who have little or no knowledge of the author" (47). Many introductory books make this claim, but this one delivers on it, especially if the Musil novice is ready for dense (but lucidly written) treatments of Musil's biography, themes, method, and critical and literary reception. The collection is divided into three sections of roughly equal length, treating respectively: 1) biography, diaries, and the public intellectual; 2) works besides *The Man without Qualities*; and 3) *The Man without Qualities*, its genesis, editions, themes, and influence.

Philip Payne's introduction combines a biographical sketch and an overview of literary production, avoiding facile biographical or psychological explanations while showing how life and works illuminate but also problematize each other. Payne usefully—and originally—clarifies Musil's treatments of anti-Semitism and deviant behavior and thought.

Klaus Amann deftly combines historical context and close reading to analyze Musil's major political statements, chiefly the 1935 Paris speech to the International Writers' Congress. Reading the speech in terms of Musil's diaries and *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* 'The Man Without Qualities,' Amann shows that Musil presented a "complex view of the essential questions, one that eschewed half-baked certainties" (62). Skeptical of what he called the *Kulturpolitikskultur* 'Culture of culture politics' of both fascism and the pro-Soviet ideology that the Writer's Congress leaned toward, Musil was branded a reactionary by many.

While many studies of *The Man without Qualities* use passages from Musil's diaries to support their arguments, Payne's discussion of the notebooks treats them as a "medium between life and literature" and as a record of the novel's progress. This chapter is thus equally a guide to the diaries and an account of the novel's genesis.