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A SYMPOSIUM on LAURENT STERN'S *INTERPRETIVE REASONING*

Key Words

Ashbery, deep interpretation, Freudianism, Kant, Marxism, Nietzscheanism, Racine, Restrictive Principle, self-deception, sincerity, Universalizability Principle, Verlaine.

Introduction

by John Gibson

The philosophy of interpretation, at least in the analytic tradition, has produced an extraordinary amount of work on a surprisingly narrow range of issues. This is not to dismiss its importance, but it is to say that we should be thankful for a book that moves the debate beyond just wondering whether authorial intentions can determine meaning or whether there is a single right interpretation of an artwork, questions to which most players in the debate now respond with a provocative "sometimes" and "no," respectively. When we find ourselves at this point, it is a good thing to have new ideas arrive on the scene, and this is what Laurent Stern has offered the philosophy of interpretation with his fascinating and challenging book, *Interpretive Reasoning*, the subject of this symposium.^[1]

Paul Guyer and Mary Wiseman will join me in discussing Stern's book. While we will naturally busy ourselves with interpreting Stern's theory of interpretation, we hope to show that a discussion of the book brings to view a number of issues that should be of general interest to philosophers of art. For Stern's account of interpretation is general, concerned with much more than the interpretation of art, and this is for the good. It is important to see the continuity (and, at times, the discontinuity) of our various interpretive practices, whether they concern the language of poems, the meaning of paintings, or the behavior of persons, and it is our hope that this symposium will shed light on this.

Three aspects of Stern's theory will receive the lion's share of attention here: the striking notion of *voice* that Stern makes central to his account of interpretation, his use of Kant to explain the workings of this voice, and Stern's provocative idea of interpretative sincerity that he elicits from his Kantian account of interpretation. Kant is hardly a stranger to aesthetics, and one does on occasion hear about voice and sincerity, at least in those rare moments when a philosopher of art discusses poetry. But neither has had a role to play in contemporary debates on interpretation, and it is the prospect of putting them to work here that we shall examine most closely. While all of the symposiasts have something to say about these three features of Stern's account, Paul Guyer goes the furthest in exploring Stern's appropriation of Kant and Mary Wiseman in exploring voice. I shall play special attention to the notion of sincerity. The symposium concludes, of course, with a response from the author.

The papers grew out of a symposium on Stern's book held in Philadelphia at the 2008 Eastern Division meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics. We would like to thank Bill Seeley and David Clowney, the conference organizers, for generously including the symposium in the program. We would also like to thank Arnold Berleant and *Contemporary Aesthetics* for doing much to make it possible for the symposium to migrate from panel to print. Needless to say, our papers and ideas have been much refined since Philadelphia. But we hope that the same excitement about Stern's book that was in full display at the conference will also come through here.

Endnotes

[1] Stern, Laurent, *Interpretive Reasoning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 2005.