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*Book reviews*

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Rose, Gillian *The Broken Middle* Blackwell 1992 336pp £45.00 (£14.95 paper)

This is the fourth book in which Gillian Rose seeks to focus our attention on the forgetfulness of modernity and the promiscuity of postmodernism. Central to this project has been the recovery of purer interpretations of Hegel and Marx, and the principal novelty of this version of her project is that these are framed here by opening with a discussion, which echoes throughout the book, of Kierkegaard on anxiety. As always, the range of Rose's reading is daunting for a critic, and the acerbity of her scholarship intimating. (Many notes to quotations in her previous book *Dialectic of Nihilism* ended with 'translation modified'; now we find simply 'corrected'.) As before, prosaic exposition is eschewed in favour of

symptomatic readings which are concerned with the deep structures of the texts Rose analyses, and this provides the opportunity, which is frequently taken, to make sharp juxtapositions and unexpected connexions. Rose retains the ability to be provocative, original and resolute. Many readers may be surprised to find more extended explicit discussion of theology than of 'sociology' in the severe style as she calls it (for which she reads Giddens), though, in doing so, she can perhaps be seen as tracking the increasingly salient theological preoccupations of the *doyens* of postmodernism. In any event, it is entirely appropriate that Arendt is discussed here, in a very stimulating way, at much greater length than either Giddens or the new theology (though even here much is made of the way Arendt's early immersion in Augustine affects her later, more influential work).

But what is the book about? A reviewer with few words at his disposal might be expected to begin with an answer to that question. But this is not so easy with a book which 'ends' with a 'Preface' and which declares itself to be preoccupied with the problem of beginning and with the middle which links and separates antinomies in an equivocal structure. Where should a discussion of law and ethics begin? With what? And with what consequences? And, within our securely labelled departments of sociology, political science, law and philosophy, when do we – how do we – succeed in leaving this question behind or on one side? The book is then a meditation on the question of this question – how we cannot be done with the question, but also, and at the same time, how difficult it is to begin with the question. The colour and flair of the book perhaps compensate for its indirectness, even obscurity, in approach. Even so, one cannot but wish that next time Rose runs all the risks involved in gathering up the insights she has drawn from her intellectual voyage of the last fifteen years and presents them a little less severely and a lot less obliquely to a wider potential readership. Even erudition and provocation can begin to pall.

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