

great books, great countries and great heroes before they start reading—and how and where they get their reading and what they read as they move on—but she insists on the role played by books in the lives of parents and children.

Rowling's *Harry Potter* is a great vehicle for transmitting narratives of imagined communities and national cultures. The Potter project is as much about national concerns as about the consumption culture of children. That, of course, brings us to the life-world of children, the world that they inherit, the world that they inhabit, and the world that they leave behind as they grow out of their childhood. These novels, therefore, can be said to play out the cultural logic of a world where, one would assume, children are more interested in watching films or playing digital games—not discounting the fact that the participation of children in digital productions has an air of malevolence about it—rather than reading books.

While any kind of conclusion pertaining to what children like—or do not—requires more evidence than literary criticism tends to offer or use, I see what kind of role parents and parenting plays in such a scenario. Books play the role of surrogate parents. The fact that Rowling has repeatedly mentioned the huge role played by books in her formative years sometimes occludes the fact that she is a voracious reader of books, and that she is drawn to books of all kinds as if by instinct. Yet, to think of her encounter with books as fortuitous happenings—as a series of happy accidents in the life of a successful writer—would be to ignore the essence of Rowling's basic understanding of a writer's calling.

To Rowling, the writer reads—and reads more than every other—so she can write, entertain and instruct. I cannot decide on a pecking order for Rowling's preferences for the ideal artist, if one were hard-pressed to choose between artists of pleasure and of persuasion. But whatever path the writer chooses, the presence of books—and that is where allusions become conditions and consequences of reading—is a fundamental principle in their expressive universe. So we are back to where we began: there are other books in the books we read. We needed Beatrice Groves to say *that* with such beauty and clarity. This is a rare book of literary criticism that one is happy to read, and recommend to other people, including Harry Potter readers.

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LITTÉRATURE ET POLITIQUE EN OCÉANIE. (Literature and Politics in Oceania). Special Volume of *New Zealand Journal of French Studies*. Eds. Andréas Pfersmann and Titaua Porcher. Wellington, NZ: Victoria University of Wellington, 2019. 266 p.

Most books, and this is especially true of academic research, are meant to be consumed by like-minded readers living in the time and place of their writing. Yet it occurred to me while reading *Littérature et politique en Océanie*, edited by Andréas Pfersmann and Titaua Porcher, that putting as wide a historical distance between ourselves and the volume could enhance our understanding—that to contemplate from afar what exercised the Western academic mind circa 2020 might allow the impartial curiosity needed when, as the title informs us, politics is at play.

*Littérature et politique en Océanie* is a collection of essays in both French and English on the topic of the Pacific and the peoples of Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia and Australasia in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Among all the hopes and affections and disaffections of Pacific islanders, one seems to matter most to the academic mind of the twenty-first century: the exploration and appropriation of the Pacific archipelagoes by European powers in the era of sail and steam ships, and the post-colonial scars it left behind. It is the historical catastrophe with respect to almost all that is said and denounced and regretted in the volume draws impetus. Far from this reviewer to deny its significance. The lives of Pacific islanders have been forever altered by the encounter. And as always since time immemorial, the more organized and technologically advanced group prevailed over the unprepared. Oceania is now a region of the world half-way Europeanized, ruefully, grudgingly, fatalistically, or stoically as the case may be.

Morality regrets the cultural contagion universally effected by the strong and the restless over the tranquil. In practice, however, it is not clear what alternative there is for it. Suffice to say that when one group of human beings devised fast-sailing high-tonnage vessels, fire arms, and a taste for knowledge and enterprise, it was a matter of time before adventuring and voracity led them to come in contact with a happily less restive people. It is also a matter of course that this contact would alter the knowledge, self-understanding, and practical reality of those who did not ask for the visit.

The outcome was catastrophic on ancestral ways of living—so the professoriate of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries religiously remembers, and asks the European soul to contemplate and repent. Still, if repentance is the object, it probably behooves the moralist to describe a viable alternative scenario. Suppose that, equipped with the foreknowledge of future post-colonial theories, explorers of the eighteenth century had decided to give native islanders a wide berth, and that, in the name of cultural sovereignty, they vowed to keep Pacific islands untouched; and suppose also that this resolve would have been honored down the generations, and enforced against privateering and commercial navigation and evangelical missions by a ring of gunboats and tough international laws drawn into an invisible cordon around the Oceanic archipelagos. How unlikely is it that the academic discussion of choice today would be about the evil of isolationism—in the implausible case that the isolation would successfully prevent the notoriously highseas-faring Pacific islanders from sailing outside their protected bubble, lest they meet the West? Post-isolationist studies would nowadays thunder against the callous moral egotism and dereliction of humanity of Europeans who, to appease their conscience, locked native populations in cultural isolation—there to practice slavery, cannibalism, human sacrifice, chieftain rule, the subjugation of females, and the destruction of the malformed well into the twenty-first century. One would be tempted to agree with the post-isolationist scholar that all these are a hefty price to ask others to pay so as to keep one's conscience in pristine condition. And the post-isolationist scholar would be right to suggest that at the very least we might have asked the natives what course of action *they* wanted to take. But of course to ask such a question is to tell them about our existence, which is the first step towards changing them.

The change that occurs when two alien peoples meet is the Fall of Man of today's academic literature: unavoidable, yet inexhaustibly repentable. In the pulpit of reprobation is where we find the twenty-first century scholar ensconced for now and the foreseeable future. Clerical habits seem to die hard among the intelligentsia, especially when the demand for guilt runs so high in our supposedly post-Christian sensibility (Nietzsche sobs in his grave).

This, of course, is not to say that the essayists of *Littérature et politique en Océanie* aren't correct about the facts of colonialism. There is no defensible reason why a people self-endowed with a *civilizing* mission, let alone one that touts the universal rights of man, should have so debased the meaning of civilization as to intimidate, expropriate, forcibly acculturate, and infantilize other nations. This, surely, is a blot on the European bill of health. At the same time, it should be admitted that if Europe accepts the blame, it surely credits its desire for moral improvement. Even a casual knowledge of world history tells us that whenever the war-like descended on the meek in the past, it was with the intoxicating sense of doing what was right. Not to trample the weak, who had ever heard of such a thing?

Well, that it is such a thing is a notion of the modern Christian-humanistic West, which, if it has failed to live up to its moral ideals, also salaries an intellectual class to prosecute this failure in the public square. This should speak rather in its favor.

Europe's colonization of half the globe in the nineteenth century is the unsurmountable event through which most contributors to *Littérature et politique en Océanie*, many of them literary critics, sieve all artistic and cultural expressions. The reading of literature once fostered an appreciation of the myriad shades of the human psyche. No more. It is now almost singly focused on the machinations of power. Never quite defined, always shadowy, omnipresent, insidious and all-mighty, "power" like Lucifer of yesterday lurks in every human interaction no matter how intimate or banal or benign in appearance. History is the history of domination, and literature is the stage of a drama between those oppressing and those being oppressed, between those who do and who those who are being done to. Love, loyalty, forgiveness, patience, courage, sacrifice, kindness, understanding, even indifference, even the individual will—all these wither under the sun of power. And because power is everywhere, then of course politics, which is the theoretic and institutional arm of power, is in everything. It is in fact everything, including literature. Entitled "Literature and politics," the volume may well have said that literature *is* politics for that is what many of its contributors mean. And politics here means, not what the Greeks in the age of Pericles understood, i.e., a place where the *polis* comes to debate and settle divergent interests, but descanting on the wrongs committed on the rightful, and the rights hogged by the wrongful. It is the politics of recrimination.

Not that recrimination is not due. But recrimination by nature is subordinate. It holds the hand it professes to bite. Thus, for example, the interminable cavils about the dying of native languages, the silencing of original tongues, the imposing of the conqueror's idiom. That criticism is bizarrely all written in French or English about novels and plays and poems written in French or English. If the poet really hates writing in French, there is really a very simple solution. Since it is never taken, we may suppose that, gone the recrimination, that poetry would lose its sole reason for being. Other contradictions: the language of political emancipation is, by its own description, "anticolonial, sovereigntist and Marxist" (p. 90). How one can be anticolonial and sovereigntist *and* Marxist is a mystery, given that Marxism is a colonial import, and an ideology committed to the destruction of sovereign independent ethnic nations. It is also a paradox to be anti-colonial and a cultural particularist on the basis of universal human rights (p.142)—given that universal human rights are also a colonial import and, as the name implies, universalist.

On the topic of art and literature, one may feel a certain pinch of the soul to see that something of the expansive human spirit shrinks when literature becomes the footman of politics. Few fictional characters or storylines are we told about which do not amalgamate a collective destiny or press a communitarian point. Yet we hear much about

the harm of stereotyping. At least one essay admits that stereotyping is wrong only when non-indigenous authors do it; when hammered by indigenous novelists and storytellers, it is empowering and liberating. Wooden characterization is a small price to pay for the de-colonizing cause, and literature must be sacrificed to reason of state. This is why pronouncements such as the following are a fable. "Poetry is a necessary response to systems of power... It is through interweaving our poetry with our activism that we speak truth to power, ... and enact our path to freedom," we read somewhere (p.62). In this fable, poetry and truth gallantly stand at one end of the field, facing grim "power" at the other end. Notice, however, that the said poetry is interwoven with "our activism." It is therefore activist poetry—hence politics. So the battle is really between politics and politics, or one form of power and another. This means that truth does not side with political poetry (politics being the business of strategy, not truth-seeking), and a poetry steeped in politics isn't a "response to systems of power." It is merely power speaking to power in the language of, regrettably, power.

Regrettably enough to arouse the qualms of a couple of contributors who reassure the reader that somehow, even in the heat of its political mobilization, literature can hang on to the "autonomy of art." The autonomy of art, if one had asked Michelangelo or Milton, is the freedom of one individual to re-imagine reality as he sees fit. It is unclear how this work of re-imagination is to fare under the regime of politics. First because the critic gives no guideline or example to show how this alleged freedom will endure; second, because all the novels or poems discussed in the volume are praised or condemned according to their adherence, or not, to anti-colonial politics.

If there is a novelist who ranks high in aesthetic experimental freedom but low in commitment to post-colonial discourse, we shall not know of his or her existence from this volume. And if he is not welcome at the table, then we must wonder how much the critic really wants the artist to be free. Our hunch is, not very much. And what goes for the artist also befalls the audience. On the evidence that race- and ethnicity-focused plays suffer from low public theater-going in Australia, one author cites the need for "public investment." The government should do everything to nudge Australians into seeing what they, acting on their own volition, tend to pass up. Will commercial theatres have to book a quota of Aboriginal-themed plays? Yet what if the public still doesn't buy tickets? Will Australians have to attend the said plays in exchange for, say, points on their social credit scores, the way it's done in China?

If post-colonial, anti-colonial, and de-colonized art doesn't sell well—this is where at least two articles actually speak to matters of aesthetic concern—it may be because those plays and books are simply not very good, and that there is after all a limited demand for broad sentimental generalizations sausaged into predictable storylines. Kudos to the couple of critics who remind the reader that the correct political intention does not necessarily make for good art. In the long run, weak art becomes an object more of mercy than reverence.

*Littérature et politique en Océanie* further reminds us that the activist's organizing passion often ends up imagining communities with little contact with social reality. Here are novels and poems full of communal ethos, of persons who "belong" to a community. But does this bear close scrutiny? Just like you and me, so Tahitians also live life in the first person. As a close and lasting acquaintance has taught one anthropologist in the volume, Tahitians tend to be live-and-let-live libertarians by inclination (p. 100). The group is your identity and your salvation, the pundit tells them; they, given the choice, prefer to carry on as individuals responsible for their own choices.

Such glimpses of lived experience appear now and then in the pages of *Littérature et politique en Océanie*. To the observer of the future, they suggest an intellectual class of the twenty-first century which, having created the envelop of an orthodoxy, let's call it the post-colonial consensus, now chafes at its authority. It is seldom in the imagination of those professing an emancipatory discourse that successful emancipatory discourse someday transitions into an orthodoxy that hates emancipation. How it bridles this hate tells us everything about how emancipatory any such discourse ever was.

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A COMPANION TO ADORNO (*Blackwell Companions to Philosophy*). By Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer and Max Pensky (Eds.). Hoboken NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020. 660 pp.

Noting the half-century that has now passed since Theodor Adorno's untimely death in August 1969, the editors of Blackwell's mighty new symposium on all aspects of the Frankfurt thinker's theoretical legacy announce that, in the intervening years, 'the landscape of his critical reception has transformed and diversified in manifold ways' (xv). The narrative of Adorno's trajectory was for many years of a return from transatlantic exile to a postwar Germany, in the western half of which he played a conscientious, if agonised, role as a public intellectual, displaying an ever more fastidious refusal of accommodation either with the currents of official culture or the oppositional politics that would coalesce in the militant students' movement of the late 1960s. On this account, his erstwhile Marxist commitments congealed into a mannered distaste for engagement, his philosophical work ascending into a neo-metaphysical airless ether, until aesthetic themes alone were finally all that preoccupied him. As the Blackwell editors put it, however, 'By the turn of the millennium, Adorno had reemerged in scholarship in a rather new guise, as a thinker whose works were best understood in their full independence as contributions to defining questions of the philosophical canon' (xv). Since then, there has scarcely been a time that has failed to seem right for another compendious collection of essays on Adorno, but the present volume proves to be one of the more signal achievements of recent years.

Bertolt Brecht, who scarcely took the first generation of Frankfurt thinkers seriously, once remarked that nobody who lacked a sense of humour would stand a chance of understanding dialectics. By much the same token, nobody who lacks a gigantic range of cultural and philosophical reference, and one that is ever vigilant for the first trace of oxidation into ideology in any of its component parts, will find themselves equipped to take on the entirety of Adorno's thought. Blackwell's volume has been neatly classified into seven overarching sections: Intellectual Foundations; Cultural Analysis; History and Domination; Social Theory and Empirical Inquiry; Aesthetics; Negative Dialectics; and Ethics and Politics. These parameters enable the contributors, drawn from the global mandarinat of commentators on Adorno and the Frankfurt School with very few obvious omissions, to address very nearly the full scope of Adorno's published output, as well as certain of his academic lectures, radio talks and interviews. Nobody has felt much inclined