

REVIEW

Rancière and Literature. Edited by GRACE HELLYER and JULIAN MURPHET. (Critical Connections.) Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. xi + 272 pp.

This edited volume is a critical exploration both of Jacques Rancière's direct engagement with various literary works and the potential of a Rancièrian approach to literature. It opens with an original contribution by Rancière, which examines fiction as 'a structure of rationality that is required whenever a sense of reality must be produced' (p. 25). Not only novelists but also politicians, journalists, and social scientists must use fictions in order to identify a situation and its constituting elements, as well as their causal interconnections. Rancière turns to Erich Auerbach, Georg Lukács, Virginia Woolf, and Dziga Vertov to explore the idea of modern fiction as a contradiction in terms. The volume is structured around three themes: Rancière's theoretical positions, nineteenth-century literary realism, and contemporary works of fiction. The chapters analyse on a case-by-case basis what exactly a new distribution of the sensible means in concrete fictional worlds. In the first section, contributors examine the robustness of Rancière's theory and 'seek to establish the broad parameters of his philosophical estimation of literary practice' (p. 16). They take up questions of verification, translation, and political indiscipline (Éric Méchoulan); explore Rancière's missed encounters with tragedy (Oliver Feltham); analyse an alternative transversal regime through a reading of John Milton's work (Justin Clemens); and examine Rancière's critical attitude towards the concept of modernity (Andrew Gibson). In the second set of contributions, on nineteenth-century realism in Rancière's thought, his democratic vision of the literary is verified through narratological analyses of the poor in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (Elaine Freedgood), the phantasmatic representation of the whale in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (Grace Hellyer), and the death of Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (Emily Steinlight). Finally, the question of discarded refuse ('anything whatever'), and its potential to communicate meanings, is considered through a confrontation of Rancière with Walter Benjamin (Alison Ross). James Joyce, Michel Houellebecq, and Eli Yaakunah serve as sparring partners on questions of literature and politics (in the chapters by Julian Murphet, Arne De Boever, and Bert Olivier respectively). What is particularly noteworthy is that contributors explore problematic tensions between Rancière's politics of literature and his other theorizations of politics. The former is radically open to non-human entities whereas the latter contains a strong human focus. This points towards a possible opening-up of Rancière's work to explorations from various non-anthropocentric perspectives in current scholarship around the question of non-humans and politics. This volume is a welcome addition to current scholarship on Rancière. It both confronts Rancière's ideas with a wider scope of literary material and gestures towards new areas to which Rancière's philosophy could potentially be transplanted.

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