

7-3-2018

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Recommended Citation

Khamo, Nanar (2018) "Oana Panaité. *The Colonial Fortune in Contemporary Fiction in French*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2017.," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 42: Iss. 2, Article 34. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.2019>

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Oana Panaïté. *The Colonial Fortune in Contemporary Fiction in French*.
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Abstract

Review of Oana Panaïté. *The Colonial Fortune in Contemporary Fiction in French*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2017. 206 pp.

Keywords

colonialism, postcolonialism, French fiction

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Oana Panaïté's monograph seeks to analyze the colonial tropes that characterize contemporary novels in French. One of the defining features of this study is the way that the author develops a new vocabulary to discuss her chosen texts. Her work operates under the framework of "colonial fortune," which assumes a link between chance, luck, destiny, and wealth among the texts she chooses for her corpus. Rather than focusing on colonial themes, the author analyzes "colonial tropes that draw on the lexicon and semantics of fate (destiny, adventure, vocation, happiness or vicissitude), economics (wealth accumulated or lost, inherited or self-made), legacy (built, squandered, ignored or ill-honored) and debt (claimed or owed, payable or inestimable)" (3). Moving beyond the "colonial" and "postcolonial" temporal binary, Panaïté proposes a "paracolonial" paradigm, which embraces the paradoxes and complexities intrinsic to literature that challenges the tenets of colonialism while simultaneously being a part of the system. In other words, a paracolonial perspective allows Panaïté to engage with a transversal analysis of the texts and move beyond the limits set by national boundaries, genres, or temporalities (i.e. the colonial and postcolonial periods). This is a particularly useful strategy in analyzing works by authors who interweave between past and present in their novels.

In the first part of this three-part work, the author examines scenes of departure from France and arrival in Africa and the Americas. She contends that these texts depict contemporary protagonists who grapple with the past and offer their interpretation of change over time through the prism of their personal memories. Comparing works by Paule Constant, Pierre Michon, Claude Simon, and Tierno Monénembo permits the author to develop the idea of colonial fortune through her analysis of their vocabulary and rhetorical devices. Panaïté's assessment of Michon's diction, for example, demonstrates how he develops tropes of possession (whether of people, land, or finances), which contrasts with Constant's imagery of assimilation (related to the body and to the French language).

The second chapter explores representations of space through landscape descriptions that interrogate the link between colonial land cultivation and postcolonial collective memory creation. Panaïté applies theories of ecocriticism to argue that Edouard Glissant and J. M. G. Le Clézio both create a plural, polyphonic space that challenges notions of history and memory. For example, the shortcomings and lacunae in the first-person narrative of Kiambé, an enslaved figure in Le Clézio's *Révolutions* (2003), become contextualized and illuminated when read alongside Glissant's *Ormerod* (2003) and its account of a slave's transformation. Comparing the two narratives reveals the limits of Le Clézio's approach to the historically marginalized while valorizing Glissant's portrayal of

such figures. The framework of colonial fortune permits the author to offer new insights into texts such as Le Clézio's, on which much has been written. This first section would be particularly useful for scholars in (post)colonial studies who work on questions of space.

The second part as a whole analyzes literature by European authors representing "African" voices and examines notions of empathy. Panaïté, for instance, devotes a section to Le Clézio's autobiography *L'Africain* (2004), focusing on the rhetorical strategies the author uses to distance himself from stereotypical colonial discourses on Africa, such as explicative digression and hyperbolic refutation. Panaïté also highlights themes of ambiguity and empathy in Le Clézio's other novels that represent colonialism.

In the third part, the author interrogates the "mortified" memory of Algeria through literature written by Harkis (Muslim Algerians serving in the French army) and Pied-noirs (Algerians of French descent) that demonstrates a certain nostalgia for the French presence in Algeria. The authors express this nostalgia by describing France's right to develop Algeria, the peaceful "coexistence within the French-Algerian melting pot" (153), the suspicion of an international conspiracy from the Communist bloc and the United States, and the idea of the decline of Algerian culture since gaining independence. Panaïté's close readings emphasize the strategies that the authors use, such as anecdotes, to create an atmosphere of colonial nostalgia.

The author concludes with an assessment of the paracolonial framework by historicizing the idea of "colonial debt" and linking it to contemporary demands for reparations. Given the complexity of the analysis, it is useful for the reader to revisit the monograph's main threads in relation to contemporary society. In this conclusion, Panaïté reinforces the role of literature, ending eloquently on the note that fiction permits a way to understand "sensorially and sensibly" (186) our current engagement with issues related to economics and debt. The study as a whole weaves together arguments in favor of the literary, particularly through its emphasis on aesthetics and rhetoric, to illustrate a continued fictional engagement with colonial tropes, which underscores the importance of using the term "paracolonial." This emphasis on literature suggests to the reader that paracolonial aesthetics operate within a specifically literary framework, rather than one of cultural studies.

This monograph will be of interest to any scholar working on contemporary French and Francophone literature, given the variety of disciplines the author draws from and insights that she offers to the reader. It bridges the gap between scholars focusing on metropolitan France and those working on francophone countries, as Panaïté points out a new disciplinary way forward.

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