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Helena Chadderton and Angela Kimyongür, eds., *Engagement in Twenty-First-Century French and Francophone Culture: Countering Crises*. Cardiff, UK: The University of Wales Press, 2017. 232 pp. \$140.00 US. ISBN 978-1786831187.

Review by Kathryn Kleppinger, The George Washington University.

Helena Chadderton and Angela Kimyongür's fascinating edited volume begins with a thorough introduction to the concept of artistic *engagement* in social and political debates.^[1] While they devote significant attention to Jean-Paul Sartre's well-known theorizing of engagement in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*,^[2] they convincingly argue that earlier thinkers such as Henri Barbusse^[3] and Romain Rolland^[4] deserve serious attention for their theoretical contributions to the concept as well. They also open their framework to wider definitions of literary engagement to include overviews of the aims of the *nouveau roman* and Roland Barthes's emphasis on the "poetic of language as the starting point for *engagement*" (p. 3) in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*.^[5] This wide-ranging introduction serves contributors well, as the editors cover material as diverse as fiction, song, television, print media, and social projects such as Michel Onfray's *Université Populaire*. To tie together the contributions, Chadderton and Kimyongür argue that their collection "demonstrates that French and Francophone writers, artists, intellectuals and film-makers are using their work in order to confront unforeseen and unprecedented challenges, campaigns and causes in a politically uncertain post-9/11 world" (p. 4).

The book is organized in two parts, with the first focused on "evolving cultural forms" (p. 11) and the second on "new responses to new crises" (p. 127). In part one, essays cover two types of genre fiction (*fiction d'affaires* and crime writing) as well as radical independent presses in France, French chanson artist Renaud, and the use of media by *Les Restos du Cœur/Les Enfoirés* and by political cartoonist Plantu. Despite the eclectic nature of this source material, several key themes emerge: many of these artists and intellectuals engage profoundly with the neoliberal economic order and the stratification of French society today, and they reveal fault lines between artistic and commercial success. In each of the cases discussed, artists or activists seek to influence their respective audiences with subtle portrayals of difficult everyday situations and use this material to advance an argument in favor of social and/or political change.

In this section, Helena Chadderton's essay on *fiction d'affaires*, for example, explores how authors François Bon and Thierry Beinstingel link language to "situations of alienation and insecurity surrounding work" (p. 15). Rachel Haworth considers Renaud's song writing and public persona to determine how he discusses and portrays the world around him, particularly in the context of his status as a commercially successful singer. Sophie Noël's essay on radical independent presses explains how these publishers have managed to remain relevant today and argues that they "represent pockets of resistance to the economic rationale that has become dominant in the cultural industries" (p. 49). Chris Tinker's study of television coverage of the *Les Enfoirés* concerts in support of *Les Restos du Cœur* focuses on the discussion of the social and political stakes of the programs as presented during televised discussions before and after the annual concert. In these discussions, guests emphasize the importance of

donating to the *Restos du Cœur* to support well-deserving beneficiaries throughout France. Samuel Wilkinson's essay on Plantu's drawings during the 2012 presidential campaign show how Plantu employed a subtle homogenization of Sarkozy's and Hollande's programs as a way to illustrate disenchantment with the mainstream political status quo. Finally, Angela Kimyongür's essay on Dominique Manotti's crime writing explores how Manotti, both in her novels and on her personal website, "lay[s] bare for the reader what she sees as the disorders of contemporary society" (p. 119).

The second part of the book, on new responses to new crises, covers literary and political projects that have arisen over the past two decades. Andrea Hynynen's essay on Dominique Sylvain's crime writing after 9/11 focuses on how Sylvain created a humorous duo of investigators in order to bring comfort to readers in an uncertain era. As Hynynen argues, Sylvain "invented a singular kind of crime fiction comedy that takes a stand while following a very different course from what is traditionally perceived as engaged French crime fiction" (p. 131). Clive Hunter covers ground more familiar to literary scholars with his essay on Michel Houellebecq's discourses of masculinity in decline, but he adds a new dimension to the discussion by arguing that this presentation is in fact a "strategic response to forces that would seek to precipitate the destabilization of dominant masculinity" (p. 153). Sophie Watt's essay on Mathieu Pernot's *Les Migrants* shifts to photography to examine how a collection of photographs of two migrants in Paris published along with their personal narratives represents a critique of French foreign policy and military interventions abroad. Jean-Frédéric Hennuy studies Michel Onfray's Université Populaire project and how it emphasizes "collective education" (p. 196) that is as removed from the master-disciple dynamic as possible. This project is an act of engagement, Hennuy argues, because it "seeks to bring the general population out of political ignorance and to oppose pervasive neo-liberal capitalism" (p. 197). Finally, Charlotte Baker closes out the volume with a study of Fatou Diome's novel *Kétala*, which "points to the very real concerns at issue in contemporary Senegal that previous generations of migrant writers have sidelined" (p. 215).

In this second section, additional themes emerge that complement those covered in the first half of the book. In particular, these essays cover very recent writings and projects and seek to engage with current political and social trends. They also tackle material that has either been previously understudied (such as Sylvain's fiction, Pernot's photography, or Onfray's Université Populaire) or examine writers who have received significant attention previously but with different frames of focus. This is the case in particular for Hunter and Baker, who discuss authors who have been the subject of many previous articles, but who are presented here in a new and original light.

These essays are remarkably consistent in their high quality and unusual (and unusually interesting, even for non-specialists!) subject matter. Each features nuanced close readings of source material and convincingly argues for the relevance of engagement as a frame of analysis. I, for one, learned quite a bit about several artistic and social/political projects in the course of reading these articles, and the book as a whole paints a compelling portrait of contemporary French society. I would, however, have appreciated an afterword to synthesize the common questions and themes among the essays. The introduction posits that the collection "will map and analyze some of the ways in which cultural texts of all kinds are being used to respond to, engage with, and challenge crises in the contemporary Francophone world" (p. 7). While this is certainly true, it would have been helpful to identify more specifically some of the broader themes and trends arising from the analyses, as I have attempted to do here. And while the introductory material on the history of engagement is useful, I would have appreciated a stronger statement on the unique relevance of this framework today: could we not argue that artistic and sociopolitical activism always stems from disenchantment with the contemporary social order? The use of the word "Francophone" to define the scope of the project is also arguably somewhat generous, in that only one essay touches upon material outside of metropolitan France, and the one article that does so (Baker's on Fatou Diome) nevertheless studies an author based in France. One could, of course, argue that French society nevertheless falls within the umbrella of the "Francophone" label, but it is worth noting that the scope of the volume is primarily centered on contemporary French society. These are, however, minor quibbles in the grand scheme of a highly successful project. Finally,

it is also worth noting that any of the essays would easily stand alone for research or classroom use, and undergraduate and graduate students alike would likely appreciate and benefit from exposure to the wide range of source material employed here.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Helena Chadderton and Angela Kimyongür, "Introduction: *Engagement* in Twenty-first-century French and Francophone Culture: Countering Crises"

Part one. Culture in Crisis? Evolving Cultural Forms in the Twenty-first Century

Helena Chadderton, "*Engagement in la fiction d'affaires*: François Bon and Thierry Beinstingel"

Rachel Haworth, "Evolutions in *engagement*: Renaud and *la chanson engagée* in Twenty-first-century France"

Sophie Noël, "'Radical' Independent Presses in France at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century: A New Form of Political and Intellectual *engagement*?"

Chris Tinker, "Charity Engagements: Television Coverage of *Les Restos du Cœur* and *Les Enfoirés*"

Samuel Wilkinson, "Plantu and the 2012 presidential election: *un caricaturiste engagé*?"

Angela Kimyongür, "Dominique Manottie and the Politics of Crime Writing"

Part two. New Responses to New Crises: France and the Francophone World in the Twenty-first Century

Andrea Hynynen, "Crime and Comedy: Dominique Sylvain's Ingrid Diesel and Lola Jost Series Post-9/11"

Clive Hunter, "Michel Houellebecq, Masculinity and the Manipulation of Crisis"

Sophie Watt, "Voicing the Silence: Exposing French Neo-colonial History and Practices in Mathieu Pernot's *Les Migrants*"

Jean-Frédéric Hennuy, "*Engagement au marteau*: Michel Onfray's Université Populaire"

Charlotte Baker, "New Aesthetics of *Engagement*: Fatou Diome's *Kétala*"

NOTES

[1] They italicize the term *engagement* throughout the volume, presumably to draw attention to the specifically French use of the word to describe the social and political responsibility promoted by several prominent public intellectuals. For the purpose of this review, however, I will proceed without italics, with the understanding that our focus remains on the French context in which it is used.

[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985 [1948]).

[3] Henri Barbusse, *Le feu: journal d'une escouade* (Paris: Folio, 2007 [1916]).

[4] Romain Rolland, *Au-dessus de la mêlée* (Paris: Payot, 2013 [1914]).

[5] Roland Barthes, *Le degré zero de l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1953).

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