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Edward J. Hughes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 248 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0521549783.

Review by Amanda Crawley Jackson, University of Sheffield, UK.

The fourteen articles in this edited volume provide a timely reflection on Camus' importance and relevance, not only in the twentieth century but also in the literary, historical and political context of today. Containing a comprehensive chronology and an up-to-date bibliography of recent and classic scholarship on Camus, the volume serves both as a general introduction to the work of one of the twentieth-century's most important writers and also as a critical *mise à jour* for the student and specialist. The essays cover many of Camus' most famous works in detail, but also provide a satisfying overview of salient themes and genres in the corpus. The titles of and quotations from Camus' texts are provided in the original French and also in English translation.

The book is divided into three sections, the first of which deals with the intersections between Camus' life experience, thought and writing. Ieme Van der Poel is charged with the difficult task of representing a well-known life text (which was only recently—and usefully—retold by Olivier Todd in his influential 1996 biography of Camus). The result is a solid, chronological essay that addresses key political, philosophical and literary concerns and tropes, often by referring to lesser known and recently discovered texts such as “L'Artiste et son temps” (1954).

The next essay, by Toby Garfitt, focuses on the catalytic and lifelong influence of Jean Grenier (author of *Les Iles* [1933] and *L'Existence malheureuse* [1957] and Camus' friend and teacher in Algiers) on Camus' political, philosophical and literary formation. Garfitt's comprehensive yet focused account of Grenier's thought, and his analysis of the ways in which he shaped and mediated Camus' encounters with Malraux, Gide and Nietzsche, provides the foundation for a rigorous comparative analysis that carefully reinvents what has often been too simplistically described as a “teacher-pupil” relation.

Edward Hughes chooses a collection of short stories dedicated to Grenier—*L'Envers et l'endroit* (1937)—in order to show how the complex sources of the ambivalence that lies at the heart of the Camusian absurd can be found in the writer's early life. He also makes the interesting observation that this ambivalence may explain also why Camus was such “a complex and reluctant autobiographer.”

The ambivalence which constitutes Hughes' object of analysis provides a useful link to the next section of the volume, “Themes, Preoccupations and Genres,” and the first essay, by David Carroll. This is a rigorous and comprehensive account of one of Camus' most famous and also most contested works, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). Carroll makes a compelling argument against the kind of philosophical reading that has typically framed this text, favouring instead a reading that is sensitive (like Camus himself) to the very limits of philosophy as discursive discipline. Like Van der Poel, who notes in her essay that the Second World War marked a turning point in Camus' thinking and provided the historical context for his work on the concept of the absurd, Carroll argues that *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, rather than claiming to be a universal, timeless account of the human condition, is very much of its time (both historically and personally for Camus). By 1955, in fact, Camus would argue that he had gone beyond the absurdity described in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. However, it is Carroll's clearly argued assertion that if absurdity, for Camus, has a limited historical lifespan in his work, the “exigency” of the will to resist the absurd

(actively, and collectively) nonetheless remains and can, as such, be traced throughout much of Camus' later writing.

Christine Margerrison picks up on the theme of the collective in her essay on Camus' theatre, arguing that his enjoyment of the collaborative aspect of theatrical production did not translate well into his conceptualisation of the playwright/spectator relation. The "complicity" eulogised by Camus in his early writings sits uncomfortably, Margerrison contends, with his vision of a quasi-Nietzschean, controlling author-god, who is didactic and even dismissive of his audience. This insightful contribution, which remains largely critical of Camus' dramaturgical output, draws a useful and novel connecting line between the lack of interpretive space allowed to the spectator of Camus' plays and "the atrophy of the Other" more generally in Camus' work.

The sixth essay, by Jeanyves Guerrin, deals with Camus' journalistic output and the importance of bearing witness, a theme expanded upon by Debra Kelly in the final essay in this volume. Guerrin shows how journalistic prose, for Camus, was to have a crucially critical, rather than ideological function, and how, also, journalism always came second for Camus to the writing of literature and plays. Some time (although not enough, perhaps) is given over in this essay to the sometimes unfavourable description of journalists and the written press in Camus' fictional corpus—most notably, *La Peste*. The essay is, unfortunately, marred by the occasional clumsiness of expression/translation (for example, "New times need, if not new words, at least using words in new ways").

The next two essays in this volume each deal with the theme of violence in the Camusian corpus. Martin Crowley's essay focuses on the practical and structural tensions which inhere in Camus' thinking on social justice and the ways in which it may or may not be achieved through the means of violence. The essay, which engages with a broad range of texts and which is sensitive to the development, complexity and sometimes contradictory nature of Camus' evolving ideas, is both informative and sophisticated, aiming less, perhaps, at the general reader than those who are already familiar with Camus' work. While suggesting that Camus' confused and confusing exposition of the question of justice and the legitimate uses of violence has little practical application, Crowley, like Colin Davis in the next essay, finds in Camus a kind of embryonic post-modern awareness of the difficulty (or even impossibility) of justice. However, rather than consigning Camus to an aporetic wasteland of inaction, Crowley suggests rather, that by rendering the problem of justice in all its complexity, Camus raises awareness of that problem and therefore inhibits, perhaps, the development of further injustice.

In his essay, Colin Davis makes illuminating and critical use of the work of Levinas and Blanchot to draw the discussion of violence in Camus' work away from the reductive, dichotomous debate that pits Sartre against Camus, ends against means. Davis' analysis of Camus' account of relations with the Other chimes with Margerrison's, although his tone is more acerbic, describing the Camusian project as "altericidal," for example. Again, like Margerrison, Davis aligns self-Other relations with the project of writing, arguing in the first instance that Camus could be seen to construe writing as a form of control; as a means of "killing" the Other who stands in the way of the subject's being able to possess fully the world; a desire "to achieve an aphoristic self-evidence" that leaves little room for dissent or interpretation and which leaves the reader "battered." However, whereas Margerrison finds little to redeem the theatrical corpus, Davis goes on to argue that such prose texts as *La Chute*, *La Peste*, and others with deliberately ambiguous titles, like "L'Ironie" and "Entre oui et non," create a hermeneutic instability that discloses Camus' awareness that the ambiguity his altericidal project seeks to eliminate is in fact the very condition of the world we inhabit with others.

Charles Forsdick's essay brings us back to the famous Sartre-Camus argument, but he frames his discussion in terms not so much of the Cold War politics which are typically used to contextualise and explain the end of Sartre and Camus' friendship, but rather in terms of the two writers' pre-war politics and their very different stances on the Algerian War and decolonisation. If Sartre, like Fanon, advocated

“violent anti-colonial struggle,” Camus sought to articulate a “truce” and thereby stem Algerian nationalism. Forsdick writes an admirably clear account of this “great quarrel” but concludes by noting that in recent years, Camus—who, for many years was demonised for his views on Algerian independence—has been woven back into the “unruly pageant of colonial and postcolonial Algeria” (p. 129). The idea that this change in perception might imply a refreshed awareness of the complexity of the period and its politics, and a move away from the illusions and “stalemate” of the “partisan” affiliations produced by this very public disagreement is a topic again explored by Debra Kelly in the final essay in this volume.

The essay by Danielle Marx-Scouras foregrounds the role played by women in certain of Camus’ works. While the author draws the interesting conclusion that Dora in *Les Justes* is *both* woman and revolutionary (an ambivalence often erased by a critical politics of *either/or*), the full potential of this conclusion to shed further light on the ethical blindspot (“justice is not enough”) described also by Crowley and Davis remains to be achieved. In the second and equally incisive part of the essay, Marx-Scouras argues that the solitary ecstasy of Janine, the protagonist of “La Femme adultère,” “anticipates the impossible dialogue” which Camus hoped in vain might come to exist between the Algerians and the *pièdes noirs*. The essay is a necessary and rich—although perhaps not wholly realised—response to the absent-present women in the Camusian text.

The third and final section of the book, “Texts and Contexts,” is concerned with close readings of key fictional and autobiographical narratives. In the first essay in this section, Peter Dunwoodie makes an important contribution to the vast body of scholarship concerned with what is arguably Camus’ most famous text, *L’Etranger* (1942). Dunwoodie’s point is valuable and well made; with reference to the Camusian paratext, he shows how Meursault might be understood as a symbol that resists closed readings and can be appropriated by different cultures at different times. He demonstrates how the novel can be set against the early twentieth-century theory of “mediterraneity” described by Camus in *Les Noces* (1939), before showing how Meursault specifically challenges the ideal of the settler-hero produced by French conservative, colonial, “Algerianist” discourse in the early twentieth century.

David Ellison’s essay addresses the complex temporalities and hermeneutic layers of *La Chute*. This is a solid, rather than paradigm-shaking contribution (as the subheadings, for example, “Plot, Structure, Themes,” “Religion,” “Narration,” “The Setting and its connotations” perhaps indicate). Margaret Gray, in her essay on *La Peste*, foregrounds the importance of language as a response to the plague, arguing for a reading of the novel that pits solidarity against pestiferous solitude. Students will find in these two essays useful and clear accounts of the most salient aspects of key prose texts.

Finally, Debra Kelly’s essay focuses on *Le Premier homme* as a site in which Camus seeks, through the process of writing, to work through the mourning, loss and effacement produced by decolonisation. She argues that Camus does not seek to produce an historical document, but rather, to elaborate a collective memory which, because it defines a community with no future, must also be a work of mourning for that community. In the second part of her essay, Kelly describes the “return of Camus,” ghost-like, to writing from and about Algeria, suggesting that in the case of writing by North African women in particular, his meditations on loss have a particular resonance; a reminder, perhaps, that “the consequences of violence in Algeria continue to haunt.” The evidence put forward in this bold essay is persuasive, and Kelly’s thesis that a multiplicity of voices is required in order to render the complexities of decolonisation is equally convincing.

The Cambridge Companion to Camus does an excellent job of both providing a solid introduction to Camus and also situating his work in a contemporary context. As well as creating a useful tool for understanding the tenets of Camus’s work and the critical context to date, the authors refer also to recent and contemporary writers and critics (Assia Djebar, Jaques Derrida, among others) in order to bring fresh insights to a canonical, if contentious figure in twentieth-century cultural history. They

refer also to events such as the civil war in Algeria in the 1990s, globalisation and 9/11, and phenomena such as globalisation, homelessness and displacement, in order to demonstrate—for the most part very convincingly—the relevance of Camus’ thinking (or, at times, the appositeness of his confusion or irresolution) today. In a volume with so comprehensive a scope, it is not surprising that there are some internal disagreements: for example, Davis challenges Blanchot’s Levinassian reading of *Les Justes*, while Marx-Scouras mobilises it in her analysis. Far from being a sign of inconsistency, this is, on the contrary, an indication of the healthy multiplicity of approaches articulated in this collection. Equally, there is a refreshing criticality at play in this book: as the introduction suggested, the essays do not eulogise but address rather the “unevenness” and sometimes self-contradictory complexities of Camus’s work. What *is* surprising, and rather disappointing, however, that there are no Algerian voices in this volume, especially given the importance of Algeria in the essays and the acknowledged recent interest in Camus by Algerian writers and critics. Overall, however, the volume is a welcome and timely consolidation and updating of scholarship on Camus, and one which will appeal—without being diluted as a consequence—to a very diverse audience.

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