
In this latest addition to the growing number of titles treating theological themes in Badiou’s work, Hollis Phelps seeks to establish that ‘the question of the role of theology in Badiou’s philosophy is more complicated than often assumed’ (p. 50). The book has four main chapters, of which the fourth, ‘Badiou’s Theology’, presents the main arguments. The first three chapters take the reader through the philosopher’s mathematical ontology, the void, and the infinite (Chapter 1), the event, truth, and the subject (Chapter 2), and the four conditions for philosophy: politics, science, art, and love (Chapter 3). Direct engagement with theology in these chapters is intermittent, and readers familiar with the Badiouian system may be inclined to skim over some of the explanations of familiar themes. These first chapters also stage helpful engagements with much of the extant work on Badiou and theology, notably challenging Frederiek Depoortere’s appeal to Georg Cantor’s distinction between the transfinite and the absolute infinite, and nuancing Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s contention that Badiou’s fidelity is a figure of Christian faith.

In the fourth chapter Phelps’s own argument comes to rest on two principal points. First, and following a familiar line of criticism, Badiou’s event bears a strong resemblance to Carl Schmitt’s notion of the exception, which Schmitt likens to a miracle. Secondly — and here Phelps is less reliant on previous criticism — the structure of Badiou’s thought is ‘eschatological’, though not in terms of a totalized history with a climactic parousia. It is eschatological first because the ‘resurrection’ of truths at different historical moments is in conformity with ‘a teleological form of thought that finds the truth of the present in its relationship to the past and its confirmation in the future’ (p. 165), and secondly because of the necessity of a future anterior ‘confidence’ that an event will have taken place. Badiou’s thought is ‘between’ theology and anti-theology because it is between philosophy and what Badiou calls ‘anti-philosophy’, relying as it does on a close proximity with, and borrowings from, a range of anti-philosophers, most notably Pascal and Kierkegaard. In combination with the premise that anti-philosophy is itself theological, Phelps can conclude that Badiou’s philosophy ‘contains an anti-philosophical core that coincides with theology’ (p. 85). While Phelps reflects on the extent to which Badiou ‘relies on’ Christian theology, if there is an assumption underlying his approach it is that theology ‘owns’ the structures it deploys to the exclusion of the possibility that ‘theology’ itself may not always be irreducibly theological. Phelps comes close to engaging this assumption in his discussion of the event of the Fall in relation to redemption and when he asks ‘to what extent this notion of the remainder, whose theological name is grace, informs Badiou’s philosophy’ (p. 120). If grace is the theological name for a remainder that has other names, is the remainder always theological? Whatever the answer to this question, this book provides us with a concise summation of, and important contribution to, the ongoing challenge to Badiou’s avowed rejection of the theological.


As Nick Nesbitt notes, approaches to Caribbean writing in French to date have tended to follow a few familiar modes: writing as poetics, as literature, or as history. The great originality of Nesbitt’s book is to propose a new mode: to conceptualize all such writing as ‘critique’, a model that, he says, permits the reader to grasp the essential characteristic of a diverse range of works; that is, the way in which they ‘cry out in insubordination and
aversion to the state of the world’ and ‘seek to articulate the promise that another world is possible’ (p. xi). As such, the book fills an important gap in francophone Caribbean studies, which has always had a strong theoretical component but, arguably, has not previously been subject to such a rigorously philosophical critical treatment. What drives Caribbean Critique, and indeed Nesbitt’s own critical engagement, is an enduring sense of outrage at Caribbean plantation slavery and colonialism, the lingering effects of which render this project all the more significant and timely. Much of the righteous energy of Nesbitt’s own critique derives from his reading of the Haitian Revolution, which is seen rightly as a foundational event in the history of Caribbean anti-colonialism, and also as a seminal moment for Caribbean Critique, in that it marked the beginnings of written responses to colonialism and slavery. For Nesbitt, such written responses — letters, memoirs, essays — demonstrate that from its beginnings Caribbean Critique was concerned less with the fate of particular human groups than with that of humankind more generally, and with the universal concepts of rights, freedom, equality, and justice. In Nesbitt’s reading, subsequent French Caribbean writing has remained attached to these principles, even as postcolonial history has complicated the idea of resistance and has perpetuated certain colonial modes of being and thinking, most notably those related to colour and class divisions. The further definition of critique as a mode that refuses the abstract separation of theory and practice leads to a particularly committed form of analysis and a singularly energetic engagement with the dizzying array of works and thinkers addressed in the various chapters: Nesbitt weaves a particularly rich set of references, from Victor Schœlcher and Tocqueville through Aimé Césaire, Maryse Condé, Édouard Glissant, Frantz Fanon, René Ménil, Baron de Vastey, and Jean-Bertrand Aristide. To his credit, Nesbitt does not shy away from controversial topics or figures, such as the role of violence in the colonial and postcolonial history of the region, or the complex figure of former Haitian president J.-B. Aristide. Certainly, some of his arguments are contentious, but they are the signs of a particularly engaged and erudite critic whose latest study will prove to be a landmark, indeed seminal, work in Caribbean Critique.


This thought-provoking account of four key twentieth-century autobiographers attempts to relate them to their historical situations with a view to answering the question posed by the title, whose ‘full’ version, indeed, should have been ‘Comment devient-on écrivain au vingtième siècle?’ Choosing her four authors from different parts of the century, Mireille Hilsum explores in each case the autobiographical work in the context of the œuvre, its relation to previous autobiographies, and its effects on the genre itself. For Aragon, Pèler, and Modiano, Sartre is a precursor. In Chapter 1 Hilsum analyses his text Les Mots (1964) in conjunction with Aragon’s autobiographical writings, all of which she considers to be ‘indirectement politique’; in the case of both authors they are responses to the communist ideal and, for Aragon, to its destruction after the Prague Spring. But she also compares and contrasts the two authors’ attitudes to the possibility of recovering the child’s point of view in an adult text; she concludes that Aragon, in ‘Le Mentir-vrai’ (1964), accepts that this cannot be done, and that he takes it upon himself to invent such a voice. Hilsum is an Aragon specialist and her readings of ‘Le Mentir-vrai’ and Je n’ai jamais appris à écrire, ou, Les incipit (1969) are particularly instructive, especially in their discussion of André Breton as the absent addressee of Les incipit. The journey through the twentieth century continues with a chapter on Pèler. Much has already been written on