

Adam Piette, *The Literary Cold War: 1945 to Vietnam* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2009), ISBN: 97800748635276.

Adam Piette's recent monograph is a prime example of how interdisciplinary analysis is at the forefront of contemporary Cold War criticism. Taking his lead from trends identified in sociological and historical fields, Piette contends that literary theory has largely attempted to remain indifferent to the ineluctable effects of the Cold War. For Piette and the selection of preceding authors he acknowledges, the lasting historical impact of the Cold War is to be found in the cultural realities created in its name and their effects upon society at large.

Piette perceives an intersection between the literature and history of the period that is co-productive. He posits a moral complicity on the part of authors that can only be sufficiently analysed from a position of modern historical distance. Piette structures his examination of literary history selectively, choosing to focus on authors related to Cold War phenomena if not subject. He details precisely how cultural realities are made manifest in literature through forms of adversary-otherness, anxiety over nuclear self-destruction and species preservation, the psychology of mass terror and the drive against neutrality in global thinking. In doing so, his work deftly balances extremes of extrinsic and intrinsic political influence, alternately addressing the shady fringe of political allegory and aesthetic exercise of an author like Graham Greene, whilst also remaining able to explore the inner psychodrama and maternal fears of Sylvia Plath's tumultuous poetry.

Piette's reflective style makes for an engrossing read, and one free from the often irritatingly dry prose found in some studies of such a crucial period of modern history. The chapter concerning Greene's *The Quiet American* (1954), in relation to what Piette terms 'the sacrificial logic of the Asian Cold War' (p. 152), is particularly noteworthy for its original and well-informed analysis transposing factual and fictional publications by both Greene and his brother Hugh Carleton Greene, propagandist and head of the Emergency Information Services (EIS) in British Malaya during the 1950s. Piette weaves together a wealth of information gleaned from the EIS and British colonial actions in exposing Greene's guilt at aligning his own writing, albeit momentarily, with that of his brother's. The recurrence of guilt appears throughout Piette's book, from Allen

Ginsberg's meditations on missing his Mother's funeral due to his US Naval service, through to US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara's reaction to the self-immolation of peace-protesters opposed to the Vietnam War. Guilt appears as a unifying leitmotif of the era, appearing repeatedly throughout the cases of engagement and resistance that Piette examines.

Although this is not to say that the work is without its limitations, when Piette's interdisciplinary approach works, as with the chapter on Asia mentioned above, the results can be fascinating. As with many interdisciplinary studies, however, the reader is occasionally left frustrated by analysis that never quite satisfies either of its chosen fields. Piette's work suffers intermittently from literary analysis that is insufficiently historical, or historical criticism that seems needlessly literary. Moreover, the difficulties in choosing such a broad period of literary history are sometimes glaringly obvious. The format of his work forces Piette to be selective and in so doing it prevents him from exploring crucial areas of literary history or historical literature. For instance, key events in the history of nuclear anxiety or Cold War paranoia, such as the Cuban missile crisis or the Cambridge spy ring, go unexamined; the global franchise that was Ian Fleming's Bond novels do not get a mention. Piette is aware of these omissions, stating as such in his conclusion, but it still lends the work an air of unfinished business. Despite these criticisms, Piette's work remains an analytically astute account of certain key Cold War concerns and, in many places, an excellent example of the value of interdisciplinary approaches to contemporary history. As a result, it could be hoped that this merely represents Piette's first publication in what may grow to become an essential compendium of Cold War studies.

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