

# ANGLO-AMERICAN REVIEWS

CARREIRA DA SILVA, Filipe, and Mónica BRITO VIEIRA. 2019. *The Politics of the Book: A Study of the Materiality of Ideas*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. Pp. 272. ISBN 9780271083421, Hardback \$89.00.

*The Politics of the Book: A Study of the Materiality of Ideas* is, well, “a book about books” (1). It seeks to explore the dialectical dynamics between material form and the production of meaning in the biography of major classics of social thought. Rather than serving as neutral repositories for abstract ideas, books, concrete artifacts, and the process of their making and remaking, affect the authority, conception, interpretation, and uses of texts. In the modern history of theorizing society and politics, pitched battles over ideas, within disciplines and among them, often have been staged over and through the republication of iconic texts and their physical embodiment. A different title, a new translation, choices pertaining to design and outlay or concerning language and length, can transform the identity and status of books. While covering their tracks, publishers and editors of canonical texts habitually commit acts of omission — excising passages, chapters and other abridgments — as well as acts of commission — revising or adding what Gérard Genette termed paratexts, the rich material that envelops the original text: introductions, prefaces, afterthoughts, frontispieces, illustrations, binding, and blurbs on the book’s jacket. Translations frequently offer the most radical refashioning of both content and form. Moreover, canonical social theory is remarkably fecund in generating additional embodied texts, a comet’s tail of biographies, interviews, commentaries, and reviews that serve to mediate the book to its readers and, arguably, to non-readers as well.

Filipe Carreira da Silva and Mónica Brito Vieira therefore regard the form a text is given as having “agentic qualities” (1) but, ultimately, they follow the labor and aspirations of a panoply of human actors, from authors to editors, translators, commentators, designers, enterprising canon-builders, and ambitious gate-keepers, keeping in mind that the history of publishing is also determined by larger institutional, commercial, and cultural forces. Even prior to their materialization in print, texts are “the products of an embodied mind — a mind that makes sense of itself and the world

through association with the body, notably in the very physical and sensuous act of writing” (2).

Each of the six substantive chapters is dedicated to a classic work, including Émile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, G. H. Mead’s *Mind, Self, and Society*, Karl Marx’s *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. The mode of organization is episodic or genealogical rather than strictly historical and the focus is the engineering of American sociology’s canon during the second half of the 20th century. The politics alluded to in the somewhat over-reaching main title refers both to rival political interpretations of theoretical literature as well as to disciplinary politics evolving around the makeup of the canon and its constantly shifting pecking order. Importantly, by the end of the 20th century two of the classics explored, *Souls of Black Folks* and *Democracy in America* drift away from the canon of sociology. The former finds a safe place in the canon of African American Studies and literature, the latter in political theory.

*The Politics of the Book* borrows liberally and productively from the toolkit and strategies of the “history of the book”, a field that has recognized the inherent instability of books (an effect of their materiality and the ideological webs that sustain their cultural weight), the plurality or distribution of authorship, and the meaning-making capacity of form. More than other genres, however, canonical theory resists notions of embodiment. It is widely perceived to be affording readers a direct, unmediated encounter with the ethereal abstractions of genius-authors. It is therefore astounding how reliant the canon is on the book form, which in several incidents was aggressively imposed on texts.

A famous case in point is Mead’s posthumously published *Mind, Self, and Society*. Editor Charles Morris stitched together the manuscript out of different, occasionally contradictory, lecture notes of Mead’s course on social psychology taken in different times by students and a stenographer. The *1844 Manuscripts* rests on Marx’s fragmentary and tentative reflections found in his unpublished notebooks. In a feat of Promethean editorship, a segment of handwritten notes was extracted to graft an author’s “Preface”, that presumably authenticate the text as a book. Similarly, the English iteration of Weber’s *Protestant Ethics* features an introduction Weber wrote for a different book — *Sociology of Religion* — some fifteen years later. *Souls of Black Folks* was initiated by an editor. Du Bois remained deeply skeptical about the project. Yet he was able to give disparate articles, several of which had been already published, coherence through multiple framing devices,

such as an author's "Forethought" and an "Afterthought", an evocative title, and the quotations at the beginning of each chapter coupling a line from western poetry with a musical bar from Black spirituals.

*The Politics of the Book* makes three major contributions. First, it plots new trajectories and highlights hitherto under-studied junctures in the life span of canonical social theory. Discussions often focus on a new edition or a republication as a transformative event that either signifies the culmination of, or actually occasions, a paradigmatic shift in the perception of a book by a specific interpretative community and beyond. Ideological skirmishes are often conducted through warring editions, for example the competing versions of *Democracy in America* published in the aftermath of the Second World War at the outset of a de Tocqueville revival. Phillips Bradley's glossy edition for Knopf (1945) modernized and rendered more accessible an earlier translation. It was couched through Harold Laski's "Forward" as a progressive text. In contrast, Oxford University Press issued (1946) an abridged and sanitized version, removing among other parts passages on racial exclusion in Jacksonian America. In his introduction, historian Henry Steele Commager deemed the book a strongly anti-Marxist document (177). Later decades would witness another duel. The 1966 Harper and Rowe edition edited by J.-P. Mayer and Max Lerner and translated by George Lawrence further democratized de Tocqueville's prose and entrenched his status as a political sociologist. It was later challenged by a Chicago University Press iteration (2000) translated and edited by Harvey Mansfield, Jr. and Delba Winthrop and sponsored by the conservative Bradley and Olin foundations. It restored de Tocqueville's rather aristocratic and less accessible writing style and signaled the ascendance of a decidedly conservative, Straussian reading of the text for the benefit of the "philosopher-interpreter" (197). *The Politics of the Book* is replete with similar tales of "secondary authoring" (200), of radical appropriations reminiscent of Poe's "Purloined Letter", albeit with less suspense and a lot more by way of physical evidence.

A second contribution is the sustained and sophisticated examination of paratexts, especially prefaces and introductory essays. Some republications of classical texts grow onion-like with layers of old and new prefatory commentary. More bluntly than other instruments, these remarks are often deployed to commandeer a book, priming both the text for appropriation and the readers for accepting a concrete interpretation of the book, sometimes against previous conceptions. Paratexts therefore occupy a liminal and rather ambiguous place both spatially and discursively, which Carreira da Silva and Brito Vieira compare to a boundary, a threshold, or a window

frame. Written in an idiom adjusted to new generations of perusers they offer rich context and easier access, but at the same time they serve as a buffer, mediating and controlling that very access.

Third, and relatedly, is the dominant role taken by a set of academic actors in plotting these classics' paths, in some cases by holding hybrid tasks as editor-cum-commentator or translator-cum-commentator. A paradigmatic case is that of Talcott Parsons, who while in his early twenties was entrusted with translating Weber's *The Protestant Ethic*, a task he would regard, despite an illustrious career, as his chief contribution to sociology. Parsons's work on the translation while he was also teaching Weber at Amherst College had a profound effect on his own theoretical approach as manifested in the substantial alterations to which he concurrently subjected the English-language iteration of his PhD dissertation. (The German version had been already submitted to Heidelberg University.) This in turn shaped Parsons's "Translator's Preface" as well as specific translational choices of Weber's text, for instance the removal of most of the original references to Nietzsche (154).

Herbert Blumer who succeeded Mead in the classroom canonized *Mind, Self, and Society*, celebrated its nominal author, and marshaled both author and book to promote his symbolic interactionism against the reigning Parsonian structural functionalism. Decades later it was Jürgen Habermas who drew heavily on the book in substantiating his theory of communicative action. Both Blumer and Habermas took *Mind, Self, and Society's* book form for granted, ignoring or misunderstanding its dubious "authorial status" (56). This kind of engagement, however, likely owes more to the dynamics of canon-building and the organizational modalities of a discipline rather than the materiality of books. The canon shifts but canonicity endures. Aligning their work with the urtexts of the disciplines, academic actors negotiate in the process the status of those classics, at times pulling them back from oblivion. This impulse is present in *The Politics of the Book* as well. At the conclusion of their discussion of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms*, the authors underscore *The Politics of the Book's* affinity with the so-called "cultural Durkheim" and, concretely, with his "semiotics of the sacred-profane" (42). Carreira da Silva and Brito Vieira do not resist the temptation to intervene in other corners of the canon, most notably by casting aspersions on the persistence of the association of *Mind, Self, and Society* with Mead, which they condemn as an obfuscation of Mead's true legacy as manifested in the publications he authored during his lifetime (59).

The insistence on separating the "authentic" Mead from "Mead", the effigy-writer of *Mind, Self, and Society*, harks back to medieval canon-

establishing practices. Moreover, it seems that the splitting or doubling of authors is inherent to the modern canon as well. The early 1930s publication of Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* introduced "alienation" as a central term in the Marxist vocabulary and, in addition, gave birth to the figure of the "young Marx", the originator of humanistic Marxism against the late, materialistic "Soviet Marxism" (78). The relationship between the two Marxes would feed perennial controversies.

While the authors repeatedly underscore the interplay of form and content their prose often veers toward content, namely the textual additions and alterations to which scores of commentators, translators, and editors have subjected these six books. Although insightful and well-articulated, these discussions constitute a more conventional form of the history of ideas. Hopefully, the book will inspire additional work on the material dimensions of these and other classics of social and political thought, whether on aspects of their corporality that receive rather cursory attention here such as covers, outlay, and other design matters, or their circulation and reception by different audiences, as well as their pedagogical use. And by the 21st century the question arises how the migration to screens impacts the meaning of books. Nevertheless, *The Politics of the Book* injects new energy into, and furnishes fresh perspectives for, the study of sociology's canon. This lively, engagingly written, often fascinating, and if I may, handsomely-produced book, or individual chapters thereof, ought to become recommended reading material for college and graduate courses on social thought.

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DiCUIRCI, Lindsay. 2018. *Colonial Revivals: The Nineteenth-Century Lives of Early American Books*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp. 288. ISBN 9780812250626, Hardback \$69.95.

Perhaps the greatest of the many strengths of Lindsay DiCuirci's excellent *Colonial Revivals: The Nineteenth-Century Lives of Early American Books* is how it expertly integrates strategies of book history with literary analysis to generate a reinterpretation of the development of American culture in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Following in the footsteps of Americanists such as Meredith McGill, Leah Price, Joe Rezek, and Maurice Lee, DiCuirci focuses in particular on what we might think of as a combi-