

CARANTES NEWSLETTER

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Dear Friends,

Welcome to the ninth Carantes newsletter. An auspicious one to be sure, sitting at three by three! We hope that you all have had a lovely start to your year and that those of you who were able to attend our Imbolc meeting at the start of the month enjoyed yourselves and found the discussion both informative and stimulating.

As with every month following one of the quarterly meetings, we have dedicated the Newsletter to summarize the discussions of the most recent meeting, going over various interesting subjects of discussion that came up for people who were unable to attend for whatever reason. We have been so encouraged by the steady increase in attendance from members all across the globe, so if you are interested, please feel free to come along to the next meeting at Beltane.

From all of us here at Carantes, as winter comes to a close, remember to be kind to yourselves.

LOGISTICS & NEWS

 For those of you who are interested in an online space to discuss material from Carantes, we invite you to join the **Discord server**. The following link to join the server will be active until the **26th** of February. If you are reading this email at a later point and would like to join, please feel free to email us and we will send you a new link.

<https://discord.gg/ta283F9J>

MEETING MINUTES

We started the meeting by introducing ourselves to everybody, so that people who had never been there before knew who we are, where we work and what got us interested in CARANTES.

Then, Fay outlined some of the ground rules for the meeting and invited people to share their ideas for the working group or anything else related to CARANTES. We proceeded with the news that we wanted to share with the group: this is generally the first thing we do in our private meetings, we share important news or things that we would like to discuss in relation to our work as anti-fascist scholars.

In this context, Emmet brought up a book entitled *Gods Don't Cry. Unsung Stories of Ireland's Forgotten Immortals* which poses a certain amount of problems: firstly, the introduction does not define the book as retellings of medieval Irish material but as actual medieval stories. As such, it is reminiscent of what we were looking at at the Samhain meeting (Dr Vanessa Iacocca's lecture titled 'Medievalism and Myths of Essentialism: Deconstructing a Legacy from Romanticism to White Nationalism'). Overall, the book cover looks very gendered but the text itself presents modern ideas on gender expression and conceptualized masculinity, which more or less differs from what is contained in the actual medieval stories. The author, Ellen Ryan, has also published *Girls Who Slay Monsters: Daring Tales of Ireland's Forgotten Goddesses*, which presents the same problems.

What emerges from these two examples is the necessity, as a group, **to engage with the wider public and point out the lack of authenticity of this type of books**. One member then brought our attention on the audience targeted by *Gods Don't Cry*: they argue that it feels like the introduction of the book is trying to set up an opposition between real Irish people and others. Does that mean that only Irish people can read the book? It seems that there is a sense of ethnocentricity and white supremacy in between those lines. Another member drew our attention on the marketing decisions made by the editorial board: for instance, the book cover signals a non-academic work, at the same time it catches the eye and attracts potential buyers.

READING DISCUSSION

George Bataille's article 'Psychological Structure of Facism'.

Fay reminded us of the main points we need to keep in mind while studying Bataille: he was never really an academic even if he was trained as a medievalist. He worked as a librarian and was involved in academic circles. Bataille was rather peripheral in his movements: he was temporarily involved in the surrealism movement, he had a fascination for mysticism and eroticism, etc. In the 1930's, he founded a secret society called 'Acéphale' whose activities circled around a fundamental and absolute questioning of authority. Bataille was deeply committed to his principles.

He writes '**Psychological Structure of Facism**' in the early 30's, before devoting 10 years of his life to working on a text called 'The Accursed Share' in which he defends the idea that everything that exists exists not for the principle of production but in order to expend energy (production is the result of energy expenditure). A main feature that comes in regularly in Bataille's work and article is the opposition of homogeneity and heterogeneity, Fay defined them and did a little recap of our last newsletter, defining the notion of infrastructure and superstructure that are recurrent in the article and in Bataille's work. Infrastructure relates to everything that directly goes into production (means of production, the places where production happens, the people doing the producing and the relationships that unite them, etc). Then, superstructure is what indirectly feeds into the infrastructure (law, school, state, etc). In this article, Bataille examines the position of fascism in relation to infrastructure and superstructure.

We then delved into the article. The third paragraph on page 66 was a good starting point: the terms 'sovereign agencies' and 'state' were brought up and discussed. **We noted that the article has its limits because it is very much concerned with the state whereas the kind of fascism that we encounter today is more centered around networks and groups**. Some sections of the article do feel weird, in the sense that we can feel they were written in the 30's.

We jumped to pages 80-21 where Bataille uses words that are strongly connotated for us, readers of the 21st century. We later discussed the fact that fascist groups tend to target young people trying to find their right place in the world: they're offered a safe space and something to blame. The notion of alienation appears to be at the source of a capitalist system: because of the homogeneity that we are forced into, we are de facto alienated from our own humanity. The notion of effervescence then comes into effect as we are looking for meaning in heterogeneity.

On page 82, Bataille explains that fascism ends up organizing itself on promoting things based on the homogeneity and their preservation. This might be an explanation for the strong patriarchal models and the traditional ideas that are generally promoted in fascist groups. In order words, they make heterogeneity... homogenous. Fascist groups give people a structure to follow, a place to expend their non-work-related productivity. **Cassandra used a metaphor which perfectly illustrates this idea: 'instead of being given a blank canvas, they are given a paint by numbers piece whose end result is a swastika'**. Bataille's article analyzes the way in which fascist groups are able to channel the particular energy that is the result of alienation and disenfranchisement under capitalism in such a way that that energy is expended but the *status quo* is maintained. We then opened up the subject by discussing inherent violence (and its different states), related to pacifism specifically.

Lastly, we looked into page 68 of the article, to bring it back to what we do as academics and activists. Bataille discusses epistemology and how there is something inherently homogenous about the way we do science. In the context of fascism serving to maintain the *status quo*, a quote comes to mind: 'there are only two kinds of education, there is education that maintains the *status quo* and education that questions the *status quo*'. This quote is really interesting, because as antifascist scholars, our role is to fundamentally question that *status quo*. We concluded on this thought: the language that we get from Bataille in this article makes many more conversations easier but it also explains a lot of things, especially when reading other theoretical articles. It would be interesting to look at Bataille and think what his opinions would have been on communism for instance.

We, or at least, I, the nameless hand writing this section, feel as though our meeting was an excellent one. Those who attended not only spanned a wide geographic area, but we had a range of persons from professional scholars, graduate students, undergraduates, people who have completed degrees in the field, and members of the public who are interested in the topic for a range of reasons. While we tackled a very difficult reading, I think this meeting and the discussions you can read about it above show the strength of CARANTES as an organization capable of bringing a wide range of people together, breaking the traditional boundaries that divide those of us who are passionate about the topics we discuss.

That is all for us now at the CARANTES steering committee. Please feel free to contact us if you have any reactions, thoughts or concerns, or if you would rather not get any more emails. We'd love to hear from you on the discord server or by email.

Until next time, keep well and safe,
And thank you for doing this work with us,
Your friends at

CARANTESWG@PROTON.ME

@CARANTESWG ON TWITTER



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