View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by University of Calgary Journal Hosting

Sarah Brouillette. *Literature and the Creative Economy*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2014. Pp. x, 238. US$45.

For all its problems as a descriptive term, "neoliberalism" can usefully point to a historically unprecedented convergence of culture, capital, and state governance arguably articulated most comprehensively in the creative economy. According to Sarah Brouillette's *Literature and the Creative Economy*, literature has been central to the implementation of creative economy frameworks, both because ideas about the literary and the author figure inform discourses of the creative economy and because authors express a characteristic ambivalence towards art's instrumentalization in their work, lending an air of authenticity to creative economy policies. Brouillette argues that, while literature can critique the detrimental effects of the neoliberal turn and expose the negative affects experienced by cultural workers, "in its criticality, literature can also exemplify and internalize some of the most foundational aspects of the creative-economy turn" (13). Her book considers the role that the literary arts have come to play in neoliberal governance, from gentrification and multiculturalism to the fostering of a society of self-managing cultural workers, as well as the impact of creative economy policies on literary treatments of pathology, authenticity, and autonomy.

Literature and the Creative Economy traces the discursive histories that inform the creative economy and the figure of the creative subject at its centre,

beginning with an analysis of Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). Following dwindling levels of agricultural and industrial production, a new group of workers has, according to Florida, moved to the forefront of the economy—the "creative class." As entrepreneurial bearers of human capital, Florida claims, members of the creative class prefer flexibility and diversity to stability and tradition, which he argues policymakers and urban planners should take into account. This leads Brouillette to draw compelling parallels between the figure of the culture worker at the centre of creative economy discourse and the subject of Italian autonomist Marxism. For both Florida and the autonomists, creative self-expression undergirds contemporary labour, and although their perspectives diverge drastically in terms of what this means for human freedom they nevertheless agree that freedom and creativity are fundamentally linked. While autonomists like Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Antonio Negri decry rather than celebrate the convergence of human creativity and capital, their theories of immaterial labour take for granted the idea of a naturally creative subject whose capacity for innovation provides the means for realizing their autonomy from restrictive social forces.

Building on her critique of Florida, Brouillette discusses how, in the discourse of the creative economy, the social comes to figure as a constraining force against which the creative spirit struggles to express itself, echoing the foundational gesture of neoliberalism. Informed by psychologists like Abraham Maslow, whose work underlies the neoliberal turn to self-management, creative economy discourse picks up the idea of authentic self-realization through creative labour. For Maslow and the many management theorists for whom his work has been influential, the figure of the artist—here understood as spontaneous, driven by intrinsic passions, thriving amidst insecurity, and balking at tradition—provides the model subject for the creative economy, since Maslow sees self-expression as the means to produce a society of dedicated workers able to effectively navigate the chaotic instabilities of late capitalism.

Shifting her focus in the second part of the book to relationships between the creative economy and the literary arts, Brouillette argues that Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* (2009) include protagonists for whom social and political adversities arising from their racialized positions within neoliberal capitalism figure as temporary problems of the psyche that they might remedy through a renewed commitment to work. While these novels critique entrepreneurial pathologies, both authors self-consciously address their complicated relationships to the creative

economy in their work: Adiga, formerly a successful finance journalist, characterizes *The White Tiger* in extensive promotional material as an amalgamation of tales of precarious service labour endemic to India's new economy, positioning his creative work as a critical response to the image of the creative economy that he celebrated in his previous vocation. Ali, whose 2003 novel *Brick Lane* incited criticism for "selling stories about Brick Lane's underprivileged minority population to delighted metropolitan consumers" (Brouillette 101), responds to such complaints in her more recent novel by presenting the offenses of the creative elite as significant incidents worthy of literary treatment. As Brouillette notes, Daljit Nagra's poetry collection *Look We Have Coming to Dover!* (2007) and Gautam Malkani's novel *Londonstani* (2006) similarly navigate complex relationships between the author and the creative economy, as both "minority writers" anticipate charges against their authority to translate minority experiences precisely by raising questions about conventional conceptions of authentic cultural representation in their work.

Brouillette then considers what she calls "the strange case of the writer-consultant" (154)—those authors who, for example, work with property developers on urban renewal projects. She argues that these writers maintain an investment in their autonomy not by influencing public policy but simply by offering a sympathetic voice for those excluded from the decision making process of such projects. The question of art's instrumentalization is of central concern in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), a novel that, according to Brouillette, suggests that "in an era in which art is asked to do much but appears to change little, the writer's task is to enumerate and scrutinize the substantial barriers to his medium's own effectiveness" (12). *Literature and the Creative Economy* finishes with a discussion of aesthetic autonomy through a brief reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, concluding that aesthetic autonomy remains of primary concern for contemporary writers, even as they are complicit in their work's increasing instrumentalization.

The importance of Brouillette's methodological commitment to sociological context is apparent throughout the book, as she highlights the ways in which the literature under study is influenced by the writers' positions vis-à-vis the creative economy. Given recent academic calls for a return to the literary, which critics such as Carolyn Lesjak have insightfully characterized as conservative tendencies in English departments to devalue sociological approaches to literature, *Literature and the Creative Economy* is an important reminder that texts do not exist outside of their cultural contexts. In short, Brouillette's analyses evidence the claim made in her introduction that we should read literary texts in dialectical relation to the culture industry in

which they are produced and circulated. This is increasingly urgent when many literary critiques of art's instrumentalization continue to operate in the service of marketability.

Sean O'Brien

Works Cited

Lesjak, Carolyn. "Reading Dialectically." *Literary Materialisms*. Ed. Mathias Nilges and Emilio Sauri. New York: Palgrave, 2013. 17–48. Print.