

All in all, Engélibert's attention to these many themes and approaches result in a well-rounded, rich, and insightful new contribution to the ongoing discussion of how (post-)apocalyptic fiction relates to the nonfictional "pre-dicament of mankind," as the prescient Meadows' report on "the limits to growth" (1972) called it.⁴ Engélibert proves, once again, a skillful and valuable voice in that discussion.

Notes

1. [Editor's note: The "start date" of "the Anthropocene" has been a matter of debate for well over a decade. The 1950s is another popular start date.]
2. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *Abridged Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (1909; London: Simon Wallenberg Press, 2007), 341, 790.
3. Merriam-Webster, "Imminent," last modified December 26, 2022, accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imminent>.
4. See Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth* (1972; London: Pan Books, 1978).



Jean-Michel Racault, ed. *Trois récits utopiques classiques*: Gabriel de Foigny, *La Terre Australe connue*; Denis Veiras, *Histoire des Sévarambes*; Bernard de Fontenelle, *Histoire des Ajaouiens*.

Saint-Denis (La Réunion): Presses Universitaires Indianocéaniques. 2020. 539 pp., illus. Paperback, €16. ISBN: 978 2 490596 24 9.

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<https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.34.1.0168>

M. Jean-Michel Racault, Emeritus Professor of the University of La Réunion and general editor of the *Œuvres complètes* of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre in progress under the Classiques Garnier imprint, is an acknowledged expert in utopian studies, and works edited and presented by him in this field will be justly welcomed with keen interest and appreciation. It inspires confidence

that this edition should be the fruit of many years' study and find its origins in his two theses of 1981 and 1987 and articles of 1991, 2003, and 2010 (21 n. 21). The blurb announces this volume as bringing together "three major works of political thought of the end of the seventeenth century representative of 'Louis XIV utopias,'" a label that could be supposed to imply an anti-absolutist outlook in the three writers. But Racault argues that the idea, as put forward by the late Myriam Yardeni in her 1980 study *Utopie et révolte sous Louis XIV*, that these classical utopias express revolt against the monarchy of Louis XIV should be treated in a nuanced way, even with serious reservations (7, 217–18).

Racault writes with impressive depth and clarity and makes a superb guide, yet it by no means follows that these works are easy to interpret. Indeed, part of his achievement is to show they may not be so and to offer evidence to suggest that they may invite "multiple possible readings." The blurb gives fair warning of irony, ambiguity, and contradictoriness, and states that the utopia of these experimental fictions can be inverted to become an "anti-utopia." As Racault observes with admirable honesty in his preface, "Ambivalence, uncertainty, and a sense of complexity are in fact characteristics of these utopias, in which one sometimes has the impression that the author develops lines of thought that are ideologically incompatible and does not know himself on which side he stands" (19). Racault exemplifies this paradox by reference to Foigny's hero, "a Pascalian *libertin* as well as a Christian deist" (19–20). One might be allowed to object that this is to offer the reader who seeks it no clear utopian vision, and that such ambiguity leads to confusion worse confounded; indeed, I am tempted to wonder if ambiguity here reveals subtlety of thought less than a mere lack of perspicuity. Racault makes the highly important point that a similar duality "penetrates the accounts of Veiras and Fontenelle and prevents one from seeing them as simple preludes to Enlightenment thought" (20). Two more vigorous quotations may suffice to convey the flavor of this argument of duality: "the deism of *La Terre Australe connue* can also be read as a critique of deism, the [. . .] democratic humanism of the *Histoire des Ajaoïens* includes a utilitarian system of colonial domination" (21). Again, "the 'heliocratic' Sevarambian system inspired by the empire of the Incas after Garcilaso de la Vega [?1501–36] is essentially a theocratic absolutism in the end not much different from the monarchy of Louis XIV. Ajao, on the other hand, has no monarchy, and no ministers" (460). As to this variety between the texts, another indication is that Foigny's land is anarchical (but

well ordered!), whereas Veiras's can be understood as embracing certain policies of Colbert (236 and n. 14, 292 and n. 46), to whose protégé Pierre-Paul Riquet, baron de Bonrepos (1609–80), Veiras's account is dedicated (231–34, 306–7).

This substantial but not overlong volume is tastefully adorned with attractive covers and five splendid and richly annotated plates of maps illustrating the subject of the “Imaginary Voyage” or “Extraordinary Voyage,” a term used in a 1920 Columbia study by Geoffroy Atkinson, *The Extraordinary Voyage in French Literature before 1700*, and apparently coined by Lanson. The preface sheds light on this subject under the title “Imaginary Voyages to the Antipodes and Theologico-political Fictions of the Classical Age.” These contain purportedly true first-person accounts of adventurous voyages to the island or continent of the remote Austral (southern) Land, replete with descriptions of the Australians, their physiology, language, and—at times subversive—social, political, and religious creeds and practices, which exhibit, as mentioned above, not only radical differences from but also similarities to those of the France of Louis XIV or the contemporary Europe to which the traveler returns to tell his remarkable tale or, in Foigny's case, tall story, and that is why the question of authorial perspective naturally poses itself. An avowedly select though in fact extensive and up-to-date bibliography (31–39) in four parts comprises: various dictionaries and other works of reference; historical and modern critical editions of the three works, along with careful editorial elucidations; works and articles before 1800; and the same after that date. Three serviceable indexes, each full and accurate, list actual persons before 1800, actual places, and titles of works before 1800, More's *Utopia* (1516)—which gave that genre of fiction its name of “no place,” or perhaps “good place” (17), and in certain respects inspired these writings (8)—being by some margin the one most often cited.

The three narratives differ greatly in length: Veiras's novel, at just over 200 pages with generous footnotes, runs to twice the length of Foigny's narrative, which is more than twice that of Fontenelle's. Each is supplemented by a closely argued scholarly introduction—the third an enlarged reworking of the editor's 2010 article in the *Revue Fontenelle*—ranging widely over agreed and controverted questions of biography, those regarding Foigny drawn from Emanuel von der Mühl's 1938 study; questions of dating; attribution, for in all three cases the fiction of veracity is upheld all along the line; publication history (it is important to remember the third work, though composed “between 1680 and 1700” [452], was to come out posthumously in

1768); reception, Leibniz and Kant being named among Veiras's readers and Fontenelle's piece recorded as severely censured by Arthur von Kirckenheim, who called it "one of the most lamentable works in the genre" (467 and n. 36); editorial choices, including those of text (the second is that of the complete French edition of 1677–79); and interpretation.

Spelling and punctuation have been modernized throughout and editorial interventions marked by square brackets. Informative, well-arranged, and apposite footnotes take up, for example, matters textual, bibliographical, linguistic, literary, interpretative, geographical and cartographical, historical, political, scriptural and theological, or, where Fontenelle is concerned, atheological: he makes no scruple of calling his utopia "Ajao," a name in which *a* is a privative prefix, and Jao, "a Greek transcription in the patristic tradition of the Hebrew name Jehovah or Jahweh" (479). The people of Ajao are said to have no religion (*Avertissement*, 479); but it turns out, as we find in chapter 3, entitled "De la religion des Ajaoïens," the second guiding principle of the religion of this people who "have no religion" is Christ's saying of Matthew 7:12 from the Sermon on the Mount: "Do as you would be done by" (there is of course no reference to the Law and the prophets). Racault's important hypothesis is that the utopian genre is being used here to *reflect on* "the philosophy of erudite freethinking" rather than to formulate political propositions (453–54) (emphasis added). But in any case we are brought back to his insight about self-contradiction.

The notes frequently draw the reader's attention to enlightening points of comparison and contrast with other utopian writings, both French and in French translation, such as—after those of Plato, an ancient forerunner with his *Republic*, and More—of Bacon, Campanella, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Fénelon, and between the three narratives themselves. These Racault finds closely interrelated, to the extent that he can view Fontenelle's work as an oblique recast, in a critical vein, of Veiras's, as even the similarity of title indicates (458ff.). Particular reference is made to the late Hans-Günther Funke's 1982 and 1998 editions of the *Histoire des Ajaoïens* and to another in preparation as part of a later volume of the *Œuvres complètes* that Champion is bringing out under the general editorship of Mme Claudine Poulouin; so far three of eight volumes have been issued. An article on *La Terre Australe connue* by Daniel J. Worden appeared in *Cahiers du dix-septième* shortly after publication.

In sum, I leave aside my personal response to these variously judged fictions when I say it is clear that Racault has made a first-rate contribution to the literature of early modern French utopian writing.