

*The French Atlantic: Travels in Culture and History*  
by Bill Marshall

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Bill Marshall's book *The French Atlantic: Travels in Culture and History* is an exploration of the legacy of French colonialism within the specific framework of Atlantic studies. A professor in the French department at the University of Stirling, Bill Marshall convenes courses on Quebec, Cinema and the French Atlantic. His research interests lie in the exploration of the interaction of culture and politics via theory. His book *Quebec National Cinema* and the encyclopaedia he edited, *France and the Americas*, are essential texts in the study of the French postcolonial legacy and culture within North America.

Marshall divides this book into seven chapters, each of which is site-specific. He begins with the French cities of Nantes and La Rochelle, key sites within metropolitan France's (often referred to as 'the Hexagon' due to its roughly six-sided form) history of transatlantic trade and enterprise. He then moves west to address St Pierre et Miquelon and Quebec City, before moving south to discuss New Orleans, Cayenne, Guyane, and in the final chapter, Montevideo. By comprising historical, cultural and economic analyses within this study of 'differences and hybridities' (p.19) Marshall manages to create not only an effective exploration of the French Atlantic and the enduring legacy of French colonial history

but also an extensive demonstration of the potential of this category to enhance scholarship relating to France, the French language and the Francophone world.

Marshall deliberately adopts a narrow interpretation of the term 'Transatlantic' in order to distinguish between French links with North and South America and those links that exist between France and Africa. In the introduction to the text, Marshall sets out three distinct types of Atlantic history established by David Armitage and defines how his work will relate to these definitions. The first of these is circum-Atlantic history, one that incorporates the whole Atlantic shoreline and movements that occur within it. The second type is trans-Atlantic history, a form made possible by the first category; this looks at the links between sites within the Atlantic world that were previously held to be distinct. Finally, there is the category of cis-Atlantic, a history that is site-specific and concentrates on the ways in which places are characterized not only by their local conditions, but also by the part they played in Atlantic history. Marshall hopes to situate his work between each of these categories, creating an Atlantic analysis that is site-specific, yet conscious of the whole Atlantic, opening up connecting pathways between the different sites.

To Marshall the concept of a French Atlantic is not one that is acceptable to France's unquestioned, centralized vision of itself. The dispersal of 'Frenchness' from the Hexagon and movements between these sites, for example the removal of Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755, are therefore rarely examined within French institutions. He posits what is needed is a 'counter narrative of the French nation, of which the French Atlantic might be an example or a part' (p.8). He also establishes a specific need to question the category of France and

that of the French language within the academic discourse of the Anglo-Saxon world.

Marshall incorporates the work of several different theorists, such as Édouard Glissant and Gilles Deleuze, into his analysis. However, he sees a failure in Glissant to fully acknowledge the French experience outside the Caribbean. Marshall's *French Atlantic* extends Glissant's concerns by including within it the territory of France itself. Marshall also proposes a return to the writings Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari that so deeply influenced Glissant. For them "minor" languages and cultures are to be understood in terms not of numbers but of the relationship between becoming and process of territorialisation and deterritorialisation' (p.17).

Where this study is at its most effective is in the way it combines cultural and economic analysis. Such is the case in the chapter on St Pierre et Miquelon which takes the fishing industry and examines how this material factor, and the enduring influence of French policy, have impacted on the development of the archipelago. Similarly, the section addressing Nantes, and specifically the role of the passage Pommeraye in the city's economic and cultural history, is highly effective.

The chapters addressing the North American sites, Quebec, St Pierre et Miquelon and New Orleans, are those in which his argument gains real momentum and strength. The geographical and historical links between these three sites create a network for the analysis of these 'minimal particles of Frenchness' (p.23) and the ways in which they move across and influence the French Atlantic. However, the chapters on Montevideo and Cayenne are also crucial additions to this analysis and the wider study of the French Atlantic,

moving the emphasis away from sites in the Mediterranean, Caribbean and North America.

Marshall draws the seven chapters together to an even conclusion that presents this analysis of the French Atlantic as an essential counterpoint to the essential mythmaking of the French mainland. He posits Quebec and New Orleans as the central hubs of the French Atlantic before suggesting several ways forward for the study of this area. His first plea is for an awareness of *place*. Marshall's use and awareness of geography within this study is, indeed, one of its strongest points. His second plea is twofold, for both a 'reversal of the gaze' and a 'multiplication of centres' (p.304). This final echo of his call for awareness within contemporary France of the 'Frenchness' that exists elsewhere is cemented here, as he claims it would enhance debates on topics such as national identity. Finally, he calls for greater attention to be paid to comparative work, to bring French studies alongside other subject areas so that interdisciplinary work on the French Atlantic can be better facilitated. Marshall has created a vision of the 'Frenchness' that exists outside the centralised ideal of France. He effectively shows the potential of French Atlantic studies, if at times the sheer breadth of the material used prevents his argument from developing to its full extent. *The French Atlantic: Travels in Culture and History* is nonetheless a fascinating and thorough exploration of key identities and spaces within the French Atlantic.