



Penguin Island

Anatole France

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Penguin Island is a satirical novel by Anatole France first published in 1908. The book details the history of the penguins and is written as a critique of human nature, and is also a satire on France's political history, including the Dreyfus affair. Morals, customs and laws are satirised within the context of the fictional land of Penguinia, where the animals were baptised erroneously by the myopic Abbot Maël. The book is ultimately concerned with the perfectibility of mankind. As soon as the Penguins are transformed into humans, they begin robbing and murdering each other. By the end of the book, a thriving civilization is destroyed by terrorist bombs.

Penguin Island Details

Date : Published October 11th 2007 by BiblioLife (first published 1908)

ISBN : 9781426404054

Author : Anatole France

Format : Paperback 284 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Cultural, France, Literature, European Literature, French Literature

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Auks, a cause of great confusion in my elementary school days as penguins are actually *manchots* - this is hilariously mentioned in the introduction).

Being blind and deaf and maybe mad, but very pious, he blesses and baptizes this strange race of what he thinks to be "men." A great confusion occurs in heaven, basically the movie *Dogma*; wherein the Angels and God are in a conundrum because the baptism is technically valid but baptism can only be given to things with souls; eg humans.

So, the decision is finally made to make them human. What follows is their annals of history of Penguinia; curiously incredibly similar to the history of France.

France (the author, I mean) skewers everything, religion, capitalism, socialism, revolution, racism, romance, progress, conservatism, everything. I thought, going into this, hein, maybe it will be a bit funny but seriously, the number of times I laughed out loud reading this 110 year old book is stunning.

And so en point. Even today, France's criticism of society and maybe just the banality of being still rings true.

But. It does run a bit dry after the Dreyfus-Affair-proxy. I don't know what was going on with the president and wife and cabinet members and I really don't care to know. This was probably a contemporary issue in France's France but I'm ignorant of the facts.

Also props to this book for teaching me a new word that very much is real: "**dynamitard**": an anarchist who uses dynamite for violence.

The houses were never high enough to satisfy them; they kept on making them still higher and built them of thirty or forty storeys, with offices, shops, banks, societies one above another they dug cellars and tunnels ever deeper downwards.

Jerry says

Anatole France is proving to be one of my favorite authors. In *Penguin Island*, he pokes fun at human civilization through satirically inventing a new race of people out of penguins baptized by a blind priest. As he traces their history, I was quite taken with how prophetic France was; many of his clever teases still hold true today. And France knows how to end a book. This is the second time my overall opinion of the entirety was increased upon reading the last few sentences (just like *The Revolt of the Angels*). France is an unfortunately forgotten master of satire that really needs to be re-introduced. His work is just splendid.

Jamie Elliott says

When a bumbling priest accidentally baptizes a population of penguins, God is left with a cosmic problem. The solution results in the creation of the Penguin race, and is the beginning of the long history of Penguinia.

Anatole France has essentially written an entire farcical history book, satirizing various stages of human civilization. First he mocks early religion and mythology, prominently featuring the exploits of a saucy and quick-witted young woman, who in later Penguin history will be known as Saint Orberosia, despite her history of infidelity and opportunistic lies. He follows this up with lampoons of the middle age and modern

de?ilse onu hata yapmaya sürüklemi?tir.

Ard?ndan özel mülkiyet ile daha çok mala sahip olan?n güçlü olmas? ve di?erlerini domine etmesinden, ilk verginin ç?k?? kayna??ndan bahsetmi? yazar. Bu noktada da soylu oldu?u için, vergi ödemeyi a?a??l?k bir hareket gördü?ü için, vergi ödemekten kaç?nan soylulardan bahsetmi?. Tabii, bu olay zamanla kapitalizme evriliyor kitapta.

Ça?lar günümüze yakla?t?kça, olaylar hepimize daha tan?d?k bir hale bürünmü? ama dedi?im gibi yazar, belli bir k?s?mdan sonra çok istekli yazmam?? gibi. O yüzden ilk bölümlerde ald??m tad? ya da yine ba?lardaki de?i?ik bak?? aç?s?n? bu k?s?mlarda pek göremedim.

Yak?nça?dan itibaren olan k?s?mlarda dikkatimi çeken çok bir ?ey olmad? ama bir cümle var ki akl?ma direk Rudolf Arnheim'in Tersine Dünya's?n? getirdi:

"Ku?ku duymad?lar, çünkü her yerde yineleniyordu ve bir ?eyin sürekli yinelenmesi halka göre do?ru oldu?unu gösterir."

Asl?nda kitapta bu tarz distopik kitap havas? yaratan çok fazla cümle var. Ama bunlar Penguenler Adas?n? distopik yapmaya yetmiyor bana kal?rsa.

Kitapta beni rahats?z eden ?eylerden biri, belli bir ana karakterin olmamas? ve bu yüzden çok fazla karakterin ad?n?n geçmesi oldu. Agatha Christie kitaplar?nda oldu?u gibi daha karakterleri çözemeden bir bakm??m her ?ey bitmi?. Gerçi, kronolojik bir s?ra takip edildi?i için kitapta, belli bir ana karakterin olmas?n? bekleyemedim ama ilk bölümde kullan?lan Tanr? figürü aç?s?ndan olaylar? izlemek, karakter karma?as?n? bir nebze çözebilirdi.

Bir di?er rahats?z oldu?um ?ey ise, yay?nevinin sorumsuzlu?u oldu. Çok fazla yaz?m hatas?, noktalama hatas? vard?. Üstüne bir de, TDK'nin zorlama kelimelerinin bolca kullan?lmas? (bknz: tans?k, izlek) kitab?n ak?c?l??na darbe indiriyordu. Latince k?s?mlar?n hiçbirinin çevrilmemi? olmas? bir ba?ka eksiydi.

Genel olarak, güzel ba?lay?p zamanla temposu ve kalitesi dü?en ama yine de kötü denilebilecek kadar dü?meyen, yer yer Saramago'yu an?msatan, yer yer distopik gibi gelen, baz? bölümlerde ise sanki dün tarihli bir gazete haberi okuyormu?um gibi hissettiren bir kitapt?.

Sean says

Not acually about penguins. The French are crafty like that.

Mike Ceballos says

Criticar a la sociedad francesa desde un punto de vista satírico no es nada fácil, y muchos menos lo es hacerlo mismo con su historia, llena de encuentros que pudieran parecer cómicos o simplemente absurdos. Esto es lo que logra Anatole France con su novela "La Isla de los Pingüinos"; donde el autor nos lleva a través de la historia y una revisión un tanto polémica del pensamiento francés. Desde la fundación del país mismo y su sentimiento nacionalista hasta los albores del siglo XX, Anatole logra llevarnos por esos pasajes clásicos de la historia, incluyendo algunos grandes debates sobre la existencia del alma en cualquier animal, y más aún, en el pingüino.

Conforme llego a los capítulos finales, encontramos una crítica más especializada, y que de manera personal, escapa a mi conocimiento de la historia francesa; sin embargo, logra entrever aquellas grandes verdades de la

política mundial: al momento de culpar al chivo expiatorio, el gobierno declara: “la mejor prueba de culpabilidad, es la ausencia de prueba”. O inclusive, que un gobierno y decisiones diplomáticas se den por el simple hecho del deseo a la mujer ajena.

No es libro fácil, no es tampoco para aquellos que van iniciándose en la lectura: nivel intermedio con mucho enfoque “político”.

Zaphirenia says

3,5/5

Σε μια απ? τις ιεραποστολικ?ς του περιπλαν?σεις, ο ?γιος Μά?λ καταλ?γει στο β?ρειο Ατλαντικ? ?που απ? λ?θος βαπτ?ζει Χριστιανο?ς μια φυλ? πιγκου?νων. Τα πουλι? αυτ?, που εισ?ρχονται με αυτ?ν τον τρ?πο στην εκκλησ?α του θεο?, δημιουργο?ν σ?γχυση στον αι?νιο πατ?ρα και τους σοφο?ς αυλικο?ς του στον παρ?δεισο. Τι πρ?πει να γ?νει τ?ρα; Τα πουλι? δεν είναι δυνατ?ν να βαπτ?ζονται γιατί δεν ?χουν αθ?νατη ψυχ?. Αυτο? οι πιγκου?νοι ?μως βαπτ?στηκαν, ?ρα ?γιναν μ?λη της εκκλησ?ας. Και τι θα γ?νει ?ταν θα πεθ?νουν; Η λ?ση, μετ? απ? μακρ?ς διαπραγματε?σεις και ?ντονες αντιπαραθ?σεις, βρ?σκεται: οι πιγκου?νοι πρ?πει να γ?νουν ?νθρωποι. Κι ?τσι γ?νεται, εν? το νησ? τους μεταφ?ρεται κοντ? στις ακτ?ς της Βρετ?νης, ?που και αναπτ?σσεται σιγ? σιγ? ο πολιτισμ?ς και η ιστορ?α του λαο? των Πιγκου?νων.

Οι Πιγκου?νοι περνο?ν απ? ?λα τα στ?δια μιας κοινων?ας: πρωτ?γονες κοιν?τητες, θρησκευτικ?ς φανατισμ?ς, μεσα?ωνας, αναγ?ννηση, σ?γχρονη εποχ? και εκδημοκρατισμ?ς, βιομηχανοπο?ηση και καπιταλιστικ? αν?πτυξη, σοσιαλιστικ? επαν?σταση και ο?τω καθεξ?ς.

Ο Ανατ?λ Φρανς ?γραψε μια πολ? χαριτωμ?νη σ?τιρα της ανθρ?πινης ιστορ?ας (και πιο συγκεκριμ?να της ιστορ?ας του δυτικο? ανθρ?που) με πολ? εμφανε?ς αναλογ?ες και απλ? σημειωτικ?. Η γραφ? του ε?ναι πολ? καλ? και η ιστορ?α, παρ?τι απ? ?να σημε?ο και μετ? ενδ?χεται να κουρ?ζει λ?γο, δεδομ?νου ?τι ε?ναι κ?πως αναμεν?μενη, ε?ναι ενδιαφ?ρουσα και ρ?ει ε?κολα. Διακωμωδο?νται σχεδ?ν ?λοι οι αρχα?οι και σ?γχρονοι θεσμο? (εκκλησ?α, κυβερνητικ? εξουσ?α, δικαιοδοτικ? σ?στημα, κλπ.) με χιο?μορ και διορατικ?τητα και η Πιγκουιν?α, αυτ? το ασυν?θιστο νησ?, καθρεφτ?ζει σ?γουρα κ?τι απ? καθ?ναν απ? εμ?ς.

Nazanin says

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the sake of arriving at a decision, to turn the Penguins into humans. ***“The sacrament of baptism,” answered St. Patrick, “is void when it is given to birds, just as the sacrament of marriage is void when it is given to a eunuch.”***(44) Hence, a new line of humans were henceforth born into the world. They came to be known as the Penguins and this is their history.

France chose certain points in human history to emulate. He starts off with the Ancient Times, where the concept of private property was to be brutally established. He brings us next to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, followed by the Modern Times and ends with the Future Times. The story is infused with fictional aspects like the inclusion of the histories of dragons and other notable mythical creatures. The following are the recurring and prevalent points in the eras France chose to write with.

The penguin people were transformed by the power of God. But he cannot fill them with the knowledge and moralities needed in life; these were to be their test. They were but suckling infants in these aspects. France plays this aspect out with the recurring theme of corruption of the penguin (human) soul in its pursuit of knowledge, readily stating at times that man is no different from the common animal. ***“The separation between man and animal is not complete since there are monsters who proceed from both.”***(68) That the penguins were purer, unadulterated, untarnished until they were turned humans was how France sought to impart the point that what we have gained, made us lose the things that were worth keeping. ***“I notice with sadness, my son, that since they became men the inhabitants of this island act with less wisdom than formerly.”*** (90) Hence, the annals of Penguin history were peppered with the undulating momentum of the decadence of their pure souls.

The church sought to rectify this dilemma. The didactic needs were exclusively satisfied by the monks of the order of Mael. From this relationship stems an age long conundrum the real world is no stranger to. France incorporated this idea when he extensively wrote on the politics, further leading to the excessive entanglement of the church and the state that screwed us many times over. ***“The splendour of the truth in those times illumined all souls that had not been corrupted by sophisms. This is the explanation of the unity of belief. A constant practice of the Church doubtless contributed also to maintain this happy communion of the faithful—every Penguin who thought differently from the others was immediately burned at the stake.”***(108) In the real world, kings appointed bishops, the priest approved the rule of the ruling king by preaching hell and purgatory to dissidents, the pope calls the people to arms, labeling wars holy in an attempt to conscript the people, farmers and kings alike.

France’s thoughts on the development of the state and the establishment of regimes from the monarchy to the republic are highly intuitive. ***“Every system of government produces people who are dissatisfied.”*** (153) We have to remember that this was first published in 1908. His political insights carry incomparable probative value and relevance to our times. ***“The life of a people is but a succession of miseries, crimes, and follies. This is true of the Penguin nation, as of all other nations.”***(139) Thus, he moves on, even discussing capitalism, the necessity of war, and its profitability. ***“The number of wars necessarily increases with our productive activity. As soon as one of our industries fails to find a market for its products a war is necessary to open new outlets.”***(150) The forethought France was armed when he wrote this is outstanding, in a time when capitalism has yet to meet the progenitor of its existing unrelenting critiques, the Great Depression in the 1930’s, and where America has yet to be seen as a perpetuator of capitalism and neo-colonialism, we could already read this ***“Alca (penguin homeland) is becoming Americanised. Everywhere we are destroying all that is free, unexpected, measured, restrained, human, or traditional among the things that are left us.”***(268)

It would seem that France subtly wrote that women controlled the world. ***“Since the coming of these nuns the innocence and peace of the monks are at an end.” “I readily believe it,” answered the blessed Mael. “For woman is a cleverly constructed snare by which we are taken even before we suspect the trap. Alas! the delightful attraction of these creatures is exerted with even greater force from a distance than when***

they are close at hand. The less they satisfy desire the more they inspire it.”(13) It is both interesting and curious to me. Whether I would place it as a genuine attempt of his at unraveling this interesting idea, which is no less real than it really is as of today, or an objectification of the female sexuality confounds me (Anatole France was himself a womanizer). *“Woman attracts a civilized man in proportion as her feet make an angle with the ground. If this angle is as much as thirty-five degrees, the attraction becomes acute”.*(269) I however am inclined to argue for the former. The Penguin Island is riddled with cunning decisive and witty women, the patron saint of Alca, the woman who saved them from an alleged dragon was a woman, a woman toppled a regime, a woman defined the minister of the republic which led to vicissitudes sought by socialists. This I guess would by necessity imply the exaltation men in this book curry to these women, to which they were led to ruin, sadness, manipulation and a relationship of convenience.

France is subtle but as vicious as can be. In all instances, when men of acclaimed holy stature are tempted, they are tempted unbeknownst to them by the devil himself clothe in holy robes. The act that sets this history in motion is of such kind, and many more instances can be read in the book. This to me may perhaps stand as a representation of the evils within the institutional church that haunted(haunts?) human history, or it could also be my fatal misreading of this novel.

Other Books by Anatole France:
Revolt of the Angels(4 Stars)

This book forms part of my remarkably extensive reading list on Nobel Prize for Literature Awardees

This review has been cross-posted at imbookedindefinitely

Dergrossest says

As I read this 100+ year old book, I was amazed at how all the current arguments regarding politics, society and wealth inequality are simply the recycled dreck of yesteryear. The book itself is an allegory of mankind’s history told through the story of certain penguins inadvertently baptized by a bumbling monk and thereafter turned into humans by a God who has grown somewhat soft in his old age. The author is clearly an atheist, but he is not as mean spirited as most modern adherents to the Cult of Non-Believers.

Anyway, from this inauspicious and comical start, the author traces the history of the penguins as they learn to be religiously fanatic, materialistic, jingoistic, and all the other “tic’s” which lead to no good end. The rich stay rich by allying themselves with the instruments of church and state, and the poor and minorities pay the price for the advancement of their civilization. The arguments of the rich against their increased taxation could have been written by Karl Rove and it is somewhat disheartening to realize how long the oppressed have been drinking this swill. The only place where the author’s prophetic abilities fail is in his description of the penguin future where the super-rich have become ascetic figures completely dedicated to the accumulation of wealth without ostentation or enjoyment. The author could not apparently contemplate a future where conspicuous consumption is a virtue and the Kardashians, Housewives of New Jersey and Trumps reign supreme in the public consciousness.

The book suffers slightly from the fact that it is a translation of political events in France involving French historical figures who are long dead. Accordingly, unless you are an erudite Francophile, much of the subtlety of this work will be lost on you. Still, the book is definitely worth reading for the uncanny parallels to our modern times and the clever deconstruction of Dante’s Inferno which rehabilitates Virgil and puts that over-rated work in its place.

P.S. I own a 1950's-vintage American Heritage version which is worth getting for the artwork alone.

Baylee says

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Davanti all'Affare Dreyfus, nel quale si accusava un innocente, non tutti rimasero a guardare ed è ormai proverbiale il *J'Accuse...!* che Émile Zola scagliò dalle pagine de *L'Aurore* contro coloro che misero in piedi l'intera vicenda. Non solo: l'indomani, sul medesimo giornale, comparve la Petizione degli intellettuali, firmata tra gli altri anche da Anatole France.

Lo scrittore, oltre a essere molto colpito dall'Affare (probabilmente obbligatorio nella France di fine XIX secolo), ne intuì la grande importanza, dato che finì per parlarne nell'ultimo volume della tetralogia *Storia contemporanea* e ne *L'isola dei pinguini*, satira sfacciata della società occidentale e del suo tetro futuro.

Così sfacciata che fece incazzare di brutto la Chiesa cattolica, che in effetti nel romanzo non fa una gran bella figura (come è successo nella storia, comunque, France non si inventa nulla). Ovviamente per punirlo per la sua satira irriuardosa e per la sua irreligiosità blasfema, nel 1920 la Chiesa pensò bene di mettere all'Indice tutte le sue opere.

Chissà come si sarebbero sfregati le mani nel sapere che nel 2016 Anatole France avrebbe continuato a essere bellamente ignorato e dimenticato, nonostante il valore letterario delle sue opere, il suo essere uno dei grandi del Novecento (uno che ispirò Proust, ragazz*), l'aver vinto il Nobel per la letteratura nel 1921 e aver avuto dei funerali di Stato grandiosi (avete presenti quelle cose in grande stile tipiche dei francesi? Ecco).

Mi rendo conto di non aver detto sostanzialmente nulla di questo romanzo: leggete *L'isola dei pinguini* e lasciatevi dire tutto da France. Lasciate che la sua satira vi diverta, vi faccia riflettere e vi intristisca, oggi come allora: France è uno dei grandi, uno degli autori sempre attuali.
