

**Jessica Gildersleeve. *Christos Tsiolkas: The Utopian Vision*.  
Amherst, New York: Cambria, 2017. 208pp  
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I have always read Christos Tsiolkas as a writer whose grand vision is of the failure of all political utopias. In particular, I have considered Tsiolkas in relation to the anti-social strand of queer theory and the perceived failure of queer politics. However, in Jessica Gildersleeve's *Christos Tsiolkas: The Utopian Vision*, she positions his body of work as offering a politics of hope through negative affect. In this way, her focus is not descriptive but is engaged with asking larger political questions about writers, readers and reading. Gildersleeve uses deconstructive and psychoanalytic strategies to reveal the ethical and affective capacities of Tsiolkas's work. She reads Tsiolkas in relation to the social and ethical capacity of literature to produce a reader who is a 'responsible, ethical, affective, and effective citizen' (4). Using Sara Ahmed's critique of happiness as an emotion that is used to cover over oppression, Gildersleeve positions negative affect as a form of resistance to normativity and positions it as a textual strategy that can elicit political change. This is particularly pertinent in relation to migrant or refugee narratives, like the ones that appear throughout Tsiolkas's work, where there is a perceived duty of happiness and gratitude. It is also central to Tsiolkas's positioning as an Australian writer and his unrelenting critique of the 'lucky country.'

*Christos Tsiolkas: The Utopian Vision* is thematically organised, working through a range of affects such as desire, grief, shame, forgiveness, fortune, and tolerance in relation to Tsiolkas's major works. Gildersleeve offers detailed and convincing close readings of *Loaded* (1995), *The Jesus Man* (1999), *Dead Europe* (2005), *The Slap* (2008), *Barracuda* (2013), and *Merciless Gods* (2014). In dealing with Tsiolkas's work in separate chapters, this book provides a neat set of chapter readings for use in the undergraduate classroom. However, this does also mean that the book does not devote much space to the thematic coherence between Tsiolkas's works. I was left feeling that the emotion that Gildersleeve attaches to each particular work could just as easily be attached to any of the others. This could have been more fully realised in a more significant conclusion, which could have drawn out the significant thematic resonances between Tsiolkas's work and considered the development of these themes in his writing over two decades. The book takes a slightly unexpected turn in chapter 7, which deals with the adaptations of *Loaded* (1998's *Head On*), *The Slap* (adapted for television in 2011), *Dead Europe* (adapted as a film in 2012), and *Barracuda* (adapted for television in 2016). Although this material is interesting and could have been tied more convincingly to Tsiolkas's cultural influence in Australian beyond the literary reading public, I found it a slightly awkward fit in the larger author study.

The book positions itself as amongst the 'first wave' of critical volumes on Tsiolkas, with John Vasilakakos's *Christos Tsiolkas: The Untold Story* (2013) and Andrew McCann's *Christos Tsiolkas and the Fiction of Critique: Politics, Obscenity, Celebrity* (2015). Gildersleeve breaks new ground in the study of Tsiolkas with her focus on affect, rather than on Tsiolkas's biography (Vasilakakos) or on how his work deals with its central themes of class and politics (McCann). Tsiolkas is a writer who makes us question the mediocrity of the aspirations of middle Australia and who interrogates the shallowness of 'mateship' as a cultural ideal and myth of cultural harmony. He is very much concerned with offering a critical perspective on national identity and cultural myths. Gildersleeve's work is attentive to these currents in Tsiolkas's body of work and his status as a postcolonial writer. She authoritatively positions

his work in relation to the critical canon of Australian literary studies and this provides a secure touchstone throughout the volume. Gildersleeve's critical focus on trauma, ethics and affect enables her to bring Tsiolkas's work to bear on major theoretical conversations in literary studies about the social good of reading. She is concerned with the responsibility of literature to do cultural and political work, and the affective tools that make this possible.

Gildersleeve's book is also full of hope—for readers, writers and Australian culture. She reads Tsiolkas with a commitment to social justice and a sense that Tsiolkas's work 'can offer a new perspective on trauma and reparation in Australia' (17). This is a very readable book and will be useful to students and scholars interested in Tsiolkas's work, Australian and postcolonial literary studies and those interested in affect, trauma, and the politics of hope. It is also the perfect time to read a critical work on Tsiolkas's *oeuvre*, with his new and ambitious work *Damascus* recently arriving in bookshops.

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