

BOOK REVIEWS

Uncommon Enemy John Reynolds

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Reviewed by Dr. Cathie Dunsford

Uncommon Enemy

Equally enthralling is John Reynold's first novel, *Uncommon Enemy*, the writing of which inspired the manual on how to write your first novel. Reynolds imagines what it might be like to live in Aotearoa/New Zealand had it been occupied by Nazi Germany after the war. Reynolds has travelled extensively and consulted many books in his research for this novel and it shows in the final product. This is a well thought out concept which asks the crucial question of whether we [or any other race for that matter] would have collaborated or resisted the Nazi movement. This is a question that has been asked throughout the decades and it is seldom an easy one to answer. While most argue they did or would have resisted, we know from history that the facts are often much more complex. Reynold's shows the power of the resistance movement but the difficulties also.

One scene really stands out in my mind and that is when some New Zealanders meet German speaking resistance workers in a very idyllic and familiar place – the rocks near Thornes Bay on Auckland's North Shore, looking out to the twin peaks of Rangitoto Island, depicted on the book's cover, with a gun erupting from the volcano. The subtle interactions and necessity to not be heard speaking German simmer below the surface of this scene and are beautifully portrayed, showing that this is a novelist who pays deep care to his craft.

Uncommon Enemy is a fast-paced, action-filled, suspense-ridden novel which will have the reader not wanting to stop except for a cappuccino to keep the energy going to reach the end. But it is more than this. It is a well researched, deeply provocative and makes the reader truly consider the issues raised. Would he or she have collaborated under such circumstances? What does collaboration mean? Can you sit on one side of the fence and the other at once? All the questions that non-Jewish Germans have been asking themselves and their families for decades since the war.

What John Reynold's truly succeeds in doing in this novel, is to take the reader away from Germany to ask these questions. We begin asking ourselves other questions, knowing that there are other genocides and holocausts of a different form going on around us right now. This is not just and never has been just a German problem. That holocaust was hideously enacted and must never be forgotten. But what about all the other genocides and holocausts of differing names being enacted all around us now? What are we, as global citizens, doing about this, in our own countries or globally? What are we doing to prevent or aid such movements in our Asia-Pacific regions right now?

When performing in Europe recently, I chose to enact scenes from *Manawa Toa: Heart Warriors* www.spinifexpress.com.au which depicts the indigenous protests against French nuclear testing at Moruroa Atoll in the Tahitian Island. There were documented references to the genocide and continued holocaust against indigenous people in the Pacific. Some Germans who had not read the book but heard about this, protested. I invited them to an open discussion after the performance. It turned out they argued that the holocaust was a word that could only ever be used for the Nazi holocaust. I argued that this was indeed a holocaust that must never be diminished or forgotten but that this attitude denied the genocide and other forms of holocaust around the world and thus denied the suffering of people under such regimes today. In the end, many agreed with me and we shared resources so they could find out more about these regimes. For this reason and many others, I applaud John Reynolds for his bravery in raising the issues of collaboration and resistance in this novel and for placing it in a setting outside Germany. Tau ke, John.

A good novel not only entertains but gets us thinking further about the issues it raises. John Reynolds has succeeded in doing this par excellence. I hope this book is widely read so that others, globally, will continue to ask and answer these questions, examining their and our own consciences.

So who is John Reynolds? Many readers outside Aotearoa/New Zealand may not know of his work so this will be sketched briefly here. John Reynolds was born and raised on the North Shore. After qualifying as a teacher he travelled widely, taking up teaching positions in London, Saskatchewan (Canada) and Zimbabwe. During this period he also travelled extensively through Europe, Russia, North America and Africa. After returning to New Zealand he completed a BA in History at the University of Auckland and, as a result of his film-making work with children received a Creative New Zealand grant to complete an MA in Educational Media at San Jose State University, California. On his return to New Zealand he held a range of tertiary positions including Auckland College of Education, Auckland University of Technology, and the University of Auckland. During this period he authored two textbooks on media studies a number of documentary film scripts and, with composers Shade Smith and Gary Daverne, wrote five full-length musicals Starblaze, Valley of the Voodons, Windust and Robyn Hood: Outlaw Princess that have been performed throughout New Zealand and overseas.

John Reynolds also developed an interest in radio broadcasting, and for the past decade has been the presenter of a live weekly breakfast radio programme Varsity Hour on behalf of the University of Auckland and was a regular contributor to Radio New Zealand's Sunday Supplement. He completed a PhD on the life and works of veteran filmmaker John O'Shea. Much of this research involved New Zealand in the 1930s and 40s – the period of time in which Uncommon Enemy is set. John is an accomplished and entertaining speaker and is willing to speak about his writing to any interested groups. Dr John Reynolds: jbess@xtra.co.nz

After reading these reviews, if you are inspired to write your own novel, or thinking about it, order John Reynold's Writing Your First Novel www.polygraphianz.com
Kia kaha- Be strong- do not let anyone deter you, follow John's advice, good luck!

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