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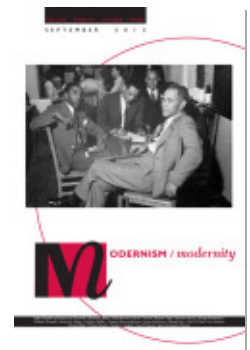
*Ford Madox Ford and the Misfit Moderns: Edwardian Fiction  
and the First World War* by Rob Hawkes (review)

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- 614 **Ford Madox Ford and the Misfit Moderns: Edwardian Fiction and the First World War.** Rob Hawkes. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Pp. ix + 196. \$85.00 (cloth).

**Reviewed by Wyatt Bonikowski, Suffolk University**

Rob Hawkes's engaging study of "misfit moderns" positions Ford Madox Ford alongside writers like Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Richard Aldington, and Rebecca West, all of whom in some way have an uneasy relation to modernism, either as non-modernists against whom the modernists defined themselves or as not-quite-modernists who never achieved the centrality of Joyce or Woolf. While these writers all have a place in Hawkes's study, Ford is the primary focus, "the misfit *par excellence*" (22), because while he was an Edwardian like Bennett and Wells, he also wrote two modernist masterpieces, making him both a central figure within modernism and not fully of the period. Ford's writing "occupies aesthetic territory between the conventional realist novel and high modernism" (2), a position of "in-betweenness" that, far from making Ford a "peripheral figure on the margins" of both Edwardians and moderns, "constitutes an acute and exemplary responsiveness to the conditions of modernity" (3). The "destabilizing" effects of Ford's writing, for Hawkes, respond to the uncertainties and anxieties inherent in modernity in the way it "acts upon the reader, activating and disrupting, in equal measure, the desire and need for the stability and coherence that narratives usually provide" (6).

Hawkes's argument relies on the notion of a desire for narrative coherence in the midst of uncertainty, a notion developed from Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot*. Ford's novels and the novels of other misfit moderns "destabilize" such coherence through a variety of narrative strategies, frustrating readers' expectations. Hawkes marshals the history of Ford criticism to demonstrate the often fraught judgments and interpretations of Ford's work, but rather than locating the source of these critical conflicts in Ford's aesthetic failure, Hawkes argues that Ford's narratives respond to specific anxieties inherent in modernity about the discursive construction of identity, the ability to know others, and the difficulty of giving form to traumatic experience.

The first chapter focuses on Ford's approach to characterization in his novels *A Call* (1910) and *The Good Soldier* (1915). For Hawkes, Ford's characterization raises epistemological questions about the discursive construction of identity, represented by Ford's emphasis on the social function of gossip in *The Call* and the multiple, contradictory discourses at play in *The Good Soldier*. These questions, Hawkes argues, emerge from Ford's rejection of realist conventions of the nineteenth-century novel as theorized by Alex Woloch in *The One vs. the Many* (2009). Hawkes shows how Ford's novels undermine realist conventions in two ways. First, rather than portraying a "round" central protagonist surrounded by many "flat" minor characters, Ford's novels give significant narrative space to multiple characters, unbalancing the notion of a "central" character. Second, Ford situates these multiple characters in competing discourses that emphasize the constructed nature of identity. Ford was not the only one to experiment in such ways with character, which Hawkes demonstrates through careful readings of Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) and H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1909).

The second chapter develops this examination of competing discourses by switching its focus from character to plot. Drawing on Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot*, Hawkes argues that Ford's *The Fifth Queen* trilogy (1906–08), *Ladies Whose Bright Eyes* (1911), and *The Good Soldier* destabilize readers' expectations of narrative coherence by making the events of the plots revolve around the multiple meanings and implications of "plotting," both in the events of the novels and in their presentation. Hawkes explores Ford's relationship with Conrad as they developed their ideas of literary impressionism, which they explicitly opposed to narrative understood as a

clear reporting of events in temporal sequence. At the level of the *récit* (or *sjuzet*, the order of events presented), impressionism disturbs temporal sequence and makes difficult a coherent reconstruction of the *histoire* (or *fabula*, the sequence of events in temporal order). Hawkes compares Ford's impressionistic plots to Conrad's in *The Secret Agent* (1907) and to their collaborative novel *The Inheritors* (1901). These novels "rel[y] less on plot's ability to provide shape and structure within a narrative than on the very tenuousness and fragility of our attempts to impose interpretive order onto a life which 'does not narrate'" (98).

While the first two chapters focus on Ford's novels up to the brink of the First World War, the final two chapters consider Ford's postwar writings. These chapters link destabilized narrative coherence to the traumatic experience of war and a desire to shape these events into a meaningful form. The third chapter examines Ford's first attempt to write about the war in his memoir *No Enemy* (1929), written in 1919 but not published until ten years later. The book is oddly structured, blurring the line between fiction and nonfiction by presenting Ford's experiences through an alter-ego named Gringoire and a narrator who refers to himself as the Compiler and who often interrupts and comments on Gringoire's story. The memoir sets up a tension between "the Compiler's efforts to structure the text and Gringoire's resistance to his endeavours" (107), a tension that captures Ford's struggle to give narrative form to his war experiences. Hawkes compares Ford's memoir to a few of the most famous war books, including Sassoon's three volumes of George Sherston memoirs (1928–36) and Graves's *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), both of which also blur the line between fiction and nonfiction, though less disruptively than Ford's memoir does.

The fourth chapter examines Ford's four-volume novel *Parade's End* (1924–28) in relation to Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929) and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918). All three writers, Hawkes argues, express a desire for omniscience in the midst of the confusion of war and the symptoms of shell shock, an omniscience that would give narrative shape and meaning to experience during wartime. But their narratives undermine any notion of omniscience, instead presenting frustrated desires for knowledge through limited and fractured perspectives.

Hawkes's study is most effective when grappling with the compelling oddities of Ford's narratives through close textual analysis, situating his own readings in relation to intriguing debates within the history of Ford criticism. His comparisons to other "misfit moderns" are not only apt but also bring welcome attention to often-neglected works. The narrative theory, especially Hawkes's account of Woloch, at times seems overly simplified, giving the impression that the nineteenth-century novel that Ford rejects always follows a particular pattern. The historical dimension of the argument, particularly in the earlier chapters, can also seem too generalized with multiple variations on the theme of the uncertainties of modernity. Hawkes's treatment of the relationship between the traumatic events of the First World War and their impact on narrative is more effective. Despite these quibbles, Hawkes offers a valuable addition to Ford criticism and to modernist criticism in general by virtue of his strong emphasis on the narrative practices of misfit moderns and on those practices' destabilizing effects.

**Ezra Pound's *Adams Cantos*. David Ten Eyck. London: Bloomsbury, 2012. Pp. xiii + 228. \$120.00 (cloth).**

**Reviewed by Sean Pryor, University of New South Wales**

On September 30, 1938, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy signed the famous Munich Agreement, putting an end to the crisis over the Sudetenland and staving off another European