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Novel Theory and Technology in Modernist Britain by Heather Fielding (review)

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future studies that seek to offer a more comprehensive picture of twentieth-century literature find space for the likes of Charlotte Mew and Alice Meynell, to name just a couple of writers who should have been present here. Otherwise, the tired roll call of Joyce, Pound, and Eliot risks being merely supplemented with that of Bennett, Brooke, and Wells.

Notes

1. See Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada and Anne Besnault-Levita, ed. *Beyond the Victorian/ Modernist Divide* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Kate Hext and Alex Murray, ed. *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

2. Peter Howarth's otherwise excellent *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) addresses a range of non-modernist twentieth-century poets, including Edward Thomas, Thomas Hardy, and Wilfrid Owen, but does not focus on any women poets.

Novel Theory and Technology in Modernist Britain. Heather Fielding. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. 200. \$99.99 (cloth); \$80.00 (ebook).

Reviewed by Andrew Gaedtke, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Heather Fielding's *Novel Theory and Technology in Modernist Britain* offers a rich account of modernist writers' conceptions of narrative form and aesthetics in the machine age. In her illuminating discussions of the essays and fiction of Henry James, Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, and Rebecca West, Fielding demonstrates sustained efforts to formulate a theory of the novel in relation to the challenges and possibilities produced by modern media technologies. If middlebrow fiction and mass culture were thought to invite affective immersion and easy consumption, these theorists imagined an artistic form of the novel that would assert its own formal autonomy, keep the reader at a critical distance, and model synthetic cognitive processes at a time of information overload.

Fielding's most original contribution emerges in her claim that these conceptions of the novel were developed through comparisons to modern technology. In these theories, the novel should be regarded as autonomous such that its operations do not require the participation of the reader but function independently like modern machines. Fielding suggests that for Henry James the cinematic projector was the technological model for a narrative form that would mediate the pace, direction, and scope of the audience's perception while foregrounding its own formal mediations. In Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924–28), the telephone is the paradigmatic technology which establishes and interrupts informatic connections across space and time as a novel should. Wyndham Lewis and Rebecca West, Fielding argues, develop more abstract conceptions of technology as epistemic frameworks for knowledge production that guide their proposals for the artistic novel. Fielding provides a thorough guide to these and other modernist writers' interventions in debates over the aesthetic and epistemological paths for the novel as well as modern understandings of technological media.

The cinematic eye is not subject to the audience's control but mediates the movement of attention and the pace of information. Henry James's *The Ambassadors* (1903), Fielding argues, functions by imposing similar constraints; information is deferred or occluded to such an extent that it becomes fully eclipsed by the formal technique, such that the reader's awareness is re-trained on the novel's form. This is presented as a challenge to interpretations that see the reader's lack of knowledge as correlative to the character's lack of knowledge or to the protocols and prohibitions on explicit disclosures. While acknowledging that, "[a]s James puts it in one formulation, the point-of-view figure's consciousness is what is projected onto the fictional scene," Fielding argues that James's novel and theory subordinate interest in subjectivity, character, and social protocols in favor of an extreme formalism that eclipses these potentially absorbing concerns (32). Her reading establishes persuasive links among James's novel theory, his fiction, and his underestimated commentary on media technologies such as the projector.

In Ford Madox Ford's essays on the novel, information overload and a crisis of synthetic reason are the problems that the modern novel must stage and resolve. These problems and their technological manifestations are most clearly expressed in *Parade's End*. Fielding convincingly shows how the telephone serves as an organizing principle of the tetralogy: telephone conversations are presented in fragments and separated by many pages, and this narrative technique becomes a figure for Christopher Tietjens's failing efforts to establish cognitive links across the traumatizing time and space of the Great War. The difficulty of maintaining such connections is a challenge posed by modernity, and, one might think, it is a challenge that is also posed by Ford's novel to the reader. However, against earlier theorists of literary impressionism, Fielding presents a theory of the novel that "pushes directly against such a vision of deep and necessary reader-text interaction" (63). For Fielding, the reader does not perform the work of recall, comparison, and synthesis; instead, "[t]he whole is there, and the fragments are connected—we just need to follow along as the novel carries itself" (86). The reader's role is therefore minimized in Fielding's account, because, she suggests, "the novel could generate connective momentum only if it attained a kind of autonomy from its reader" (62). Fielding makes this claim by reference to Ford's essays in which he distinguishes the formally designed "Novel" from merely affecting "Romance."

When Fielding moves to Wyndham Lewis, the argument shifts from a specific type of technology to a more general attitude toward technological change. She argues that Lewis views the novel as inherently romantic rather than classical, since it unfolds in time, it invites the participation of the reader, and it leverages emotional engagement rather than rational assessment. Fielding argues that Lewis attempted but ultimately failed to reconstruct the novel according to his preferred classical, visual aesthetics in which the audience should view the totality of an artistic form from a critical distance. Following the rubric of Heidegger's critique of the modern conception of technology, Fielding finds in Lewis's prolific work of the late 1920s a critical account of "the machine age" that does not reject technology entirely so much as the mindless instrumentalisation of culture and subjectivity that defined the era. Fielding suggests that Lewis proposed an alternative conception of technology, although the contours of this alternative remain somewhat unclear, perhaps in part because Lewis's work tends toward negative, satirical modes and rarely offers stable, affirmative proposals.

In the work of Rebecca West, Fielding finds a conception of the novel as experimental apparatus which could yield "information" rather than "affect." West's aim, in Fielding's analysis, is a justification of the artistic novel as a form of scientific inquiry. Precisely how the scientific method is adapted for the novel remains somewhat unclear, but Fielding shows how West invoked the rhetoric of science in order to promote the epistemological prestige of a particular form of fiction. This chapter also shows how West's notion of a cultural "super-cortex" anticipated Marshall McLuhan's analysis of media technology while observing crucial differences between these two thinkers. For McLuhan, modernism marked the rise of participatory media that extended

the cognitive engagement and reach of the user or reader; West, in Fielding's view, asserted the novel's cognitive affordances but also insisted upon its autonomy. This account may suggest an unacknowledged humanism in which subject and object remain neatly separated by resisting a logic of prosthesis in which the two become mutually imbricated and transformed, but Fielding does not discuss this tension in those terms.

Such inquiries into the phenomenological consequences of media technologies and narrative techniques often seem to be short-circuited by the figures discussed by Fielding who writes that "modernist theorists attempted to imagine how the novel could avoid being an experience, how it could be its own, independent, intellectual object" (159). It is somewhat difficult to know how to interpret this claim. The formally inventive novels written and discussed by these modernists offer distinctive and even challenging reading experiences, but the assertion of the novel's autonomous operations often seems to entail a disavowal of the emotional experiences or cognitive activities of the reader. Here, a more critical assessment of these theories would be clarifying, but it is sometimes unclear whether Fielding is simply describing the theories of James, Ford, Lewis, and West or if she adopts them as persuasive accounts of modernist texts.

While the connections between these writers' theory and fiction are often illuminating, it would also be helpful to consider possible points of disjunction. "Affect and epistemology are opposed," Fielding writes in reference to West (127). This opposition recurs in most of the chapters, and it is often mapped onto a hierarchy between artistic novels and middlebrow fiction. One might ask how clearly such a distinction can be maintained, especially with regard to a text like *Parade's End* which is structured by problems of cognition as well as a sentimental romance plot. Might essays on the novel by West, Ford, and others be read more skeptically for their blind spots or as promotional work written to shape the reception and prestige of their fiction? Fielding does cast doubt on Lewis's rather dubious suggestion that one could evaluate a novel by reading a single page at random, but critical pressure could also be put on West's claim that the novel performs a scientific function.

Despite these questions, Fielding offers a valuable discussion of modernist theories of the novel that renews ongoing debates over aesthetic divisions between high culture and mass culture, while also showing how these theories are often modulated through discourses of technology. Her knowledge of narrative theory and modernist aesthetics is impressive, and her readings make important contributions to the scholarship on James, Ford, Lewis, and West. Her extensive research also draws attention to figures such as Percy Lubbock and Q. D. Leavis who helped to shape the ways in which modernist novelists thought about form. Fielding's book brings into focus a fascinating debate over the aesthetics and epistemology of the modern novel as a technology for knowing.

***Rural Modernity in Britain: A Critical Intervention*, ed. Kristin Bluemel and Michael McCluskey. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. Pp. 328. \$110.00 (cloth); \$110.00 (eBook).**

Reviewed by Ben Clarke, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

As Bluemel and McCluskey observe in their introduction to this valuable, wide-ranging collection of essays, modernism, as "theorised by twentieth-century critics associated with university and metropolitan centres, is a product of cities: Baudelaire's Paris, Wyndham Lewis's London, Kafka's Prague, Alfred Stieglitz's New York" (3). Different scholars might suggest different authors