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Literary and Cultural Alternatives to Modernism: Unsettling Presences ed. by Kostas Boyiopoulos, Anthony Patterson, Mark Sandy (review)

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196 earnestly emphatic primitivism of Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929), arguing that the latter novel works through a "romantic anticapitalism" that nevertheless "does not rest on a romance of oppression" (141). Focusing on the salient tension between the musical aspects of *Banjo* and its endless drive toward signification (exemplified through the preponderance of lists throughout the narrative), Etherington works through the ways in which McKay's novel is at points "suspended between narrative primitivism and philo-primitivist narration" (157). In Etherington's final analysis, "the unevenness of the Ray novels perhaps reveals a set of problems that could not be reconciled in the novel form" (159). This comment is no mere dismissal, however, for he also makes a strong case for McKay as a writer whose novels must not be condemned for their "racial essentialism" nor merely celebrated as a critic of such essentialisms, but rather appreciated as taking the novel as far as it can go for the utopian aesthetic project of literary primitivism.

The conclusion offers an illuminating comparative reading of C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins* (1938) and Guy Endore's *Babouk* (1934) and an acute critique of recent positivist trends in "world literature," before closing fittingly on a final meditation on Césaire, who "did not "appropriate" "Western" primitivism" but "more powerfully cast primitivism's counterspell" (163). As with the book as a whole, this chapter is startling in the originality of its readings, its theoretical élan and deep materialist understanding of history. A landmark work of dialectical criticism, this bold study should be a required reading for any scholar of primitivism, postcolonial studies, Marxism, or world literature, and indeed for anyone interested in twentieth-century literary, intellectual, and cultural history more broadly. Explicitly never intended as a comprehensive survey (which Etherington convincingly argues would be a futile endeavor requiring an ahistorical definition of primitivism), it would miss the point to name any "omissions" as such in *Literary Primitivism*. The one aspect this reader might have liked to read more about—gender and sexuality—is acknowledged by Etherington himself, who makes clear that there is more work to be done on gendered violence in D. H. Lawrence, Richard Wright, and McKay, as well as on Zora Neale Hurston in the light of his reassessment of the morphology of literary primitivism. And this is the ultimate strength of this powerful study: it should prove generative for discussions of literary primitivism and related forms for years to come.

***Literary and Cultural Alternatives to Modernism: Unsettling Presences*, ed. Kostas Boyiopoulos, Anthony Patterson, and Mark Sandy. New York: Routledge, 2019. Pp. 258. \$155.00 (cloth); \$57.95 (eBook).**

Reviewed by Sarah Parker, Loughborough University

The moment is clearly ripe for a full-scale reconsideration of twentieth-century literature, beyond the confines of modernism, however capaciously defined. Recent critical studies have challenged the boundaries between "Victorian" and "modernist" literature, unearthing continuities between aestheticism, decadence, and modernism.¹ The narrative of literature in the early decades of the twentieth century is shifting away from the decisive rupture between "modernist" and "non-modernist" towards a vision of continuity and connection. To borrow a Woolfian image, we are increasingly inclined to imagine Arnold Bennett and Woolf as occupying (however ambivalently) the same railway carriage, although they might be ultimately headed to different destinations.

Literary and Cultural Alternatives to Modernism: Unsettling Presences aims to present a wide and varied picture of twentieth-century literature that is not confined or defined by

modernism, although it occasionally encompasses or overlaps with it. The introduction makes a compelling case for the role of coteries in defining modernism in terms of “inside” and “outside,” productively uncovering tensions within modernist cliques. Through reconstructing the process of canon formation, the introduction reveals how modernism came to dominate narratives of twentieth-century writing, turning other approaches into marginalized “dissenting voices” (2). To counteract this distorted narrative, the collection’s authors seek to reconstruct “how the *avant-garde* felt for people within the period,” including those outside of it, or on the margins (10). While acknowledging the significance of experiments with *vers libre* in poetry and realism in fiction, the volume “attempts to see those gestations anew without the heavy filters of New Critical and post-1960s academic canon-building” (9). By considering works that offer alternative responses to modernity outside of modernism, the collection builds a picture of a diverse twentieth-century literature in which modernism is only one of several aesthetic developments.

The ensuing fourteen chapters do not always live up to this enticing premise. While some authors aim to argue certain texts or writers into established modernist canons, others propose an alternative set of values through which to address their subject. In terms of the former approach, “modernism” itself remains a fixed category, with outsider authors being positioned (and valued) in relation to it. The most successful essays are those which genuinely consider their subject on its own terms, in refreshed, nuanced contexts.

The volume subsections are somewhat arbitrary. This is certainly true of Part I, entitled “Unsettled Voices: Imaginative and Cultural Encounters.” This section might more accurately be titled “Male Poets of the Twentieth Century.” Andrew Hodgson’s chapter on “Rhetoric and Feeling in Rupert Brooke” offers a convincing re-reading of Brooke’s poetry, often dismissed for its patriotic sentimentalism. Through a series of deft close readings, Hodgson shows how an ear for irony is essential to grasping the complex tone of Brooke’s works, which have often been misread as one-dimensional earnestness. Hodgson’s essay offers a genuinely new perspective on this ‘rhetorical’ poet that could be productively applied to other, similarly misconstrued poets. The following two essays are less revelatory. Mark Sandy’s essay draws comparisons between Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and the Romantic poets, particularly Shelley (the Keatsian echoes are more obvious, though Sandy seems hesitant to pursue this connection). However, the significance of such continuities to twentieth-century poetics is left implicit, with the essay instead devoted to listing intertextual examples. Michael O’Neill’s essay considers the poetic “I” in Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas, and Stephen Spender, who all exhibit sustained confidence in poetic subjectivity (in contrast to the Eliotian suspicion of “personality”). Again, although the poetic readings are detailed, they are not fully embedded within contexts of the poets’ career development or the poetic cultures of the twentieth century, and thus the wider significance of the argument remains unclear.

In Part II, “Dissenting Voices: Aestheticism, Gender and the Art of Identity,” Katharine Cockin addresses the fascinating artist, writer and occultist Pamela Colman Smith. Cockin unveils Colman Smith’s overlooked role in the Celtic Revival but in trying to cover her entire career, the essay attempts a little too much, with interesting episodes and works (such as the *Annancy Stories*) skimmed over rather than fully addressed. Sondeep Kandola’s essay draws connections between the Sapphic modernism of Vernon Lee and D. H. Lawrence. The inclusion of Lee is welcome, as is Kandola’s contention that male authors should be included in discussions of Sapphic modernism. Nineteenth-century studies has long acknowledged male Sapphic inspiration—in the work of Charles Baudelaire, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Pierre Louÿs, for instance. Kandola focuses on arguing Lee into modernism, rather than tracing the affinities of Lawrence’s work back to their source. Cross-gendered affiliations continue in Kostas Boyiopoulos’s analysis of Arthur Symons’s late poetry. Boyiopoulos offers insightful readings of Symons’s use of myth as a way to dramatize (rather than escape) the self. He is particularly perceptive on gender, analyzing the way that Symons speaks through the femme fatale archetype in order

198 to paradoxically explore “male selfhood” (111). The enduring twentieth-century career of a fin de siècle aesthete is also addressed in Margaret D. Stetz’s captivating discussion of Richard Le Gallienne. Stetz explores Le Gallienne’s response to modernity, epitomized by his 1905 poetic response to the Brooklyn Bridge, conveyed in a manner decidedly not modernist.

The third section, “Double Voices: Central and Peripheral Transactions,” opens with a discussion of M. R. James’s narrative techniques. Luke Seaber argues for James as postmodernist due to the metatextual elements of his stories, especially his address to the academic reader. Unfortunately, Seaber’s chapter seems somewhat out of place in the collection, perhaps because it does not forge connections between James and other writers/texts of the period, but rather positions him as an exceptional figure. In contrast, Michael Shallcross’s essay sketches the complex relationship between two unlikely figures—G. K. Chesterton and T. S. Eliot. In doing so, Shallcross uncovers the affinities between modernists and non-modernists, often revealed through parody, an ambivalent act of appropriation and identification. The theme of duality continues in Kate Symondson’s essay on E. M. Forster’s double vision. Symondson convincingly argues that rather than a failed or tentative modernist, Forster intentionally layers both realist and abstract techniques in his novels in order to reconcile the material and the metaphysical, as part of a sophisticated philosophical project. Saikat Majumdar’s essay also addresses a dual perspective, that of the Trinidadian C. L. R. James, who spent time in Bloomsbury. In Majumdar’s ambitious discussions of the relationship between the autodidact and the amateur, and the cosmopolitan and the provincial, James himself sadly gets somewhat lost.

The final section, “Popular Voices: Questions of Realism, Politics and Modernity,” is the most unified in the collection. Carey Snyder raises the vexed question of whether H. G. Wells should be defined as modernist or middlebrow. This issue is slightly sidestepped, as Snyder’s essay instead focuses on whether we can consider his “feminist” *Ann Veronica* (1909) radical or reactionary. The implication here seems to be that addressing a modern theme qualifies an author as modernist, to some degree. Again, one gets the impression that Wells is being argued into modernism due to his subject matter. Anthony Patterson’s essay is more effective in negotiating the subtle difference between arguing significance in relation to modernism while not taking modern on its own terms. Patterson shows that Bennett was unfairly constructed as a straw man for modernist authors, when he in fact consistently championed avant-garde, continental art and was defiantly anti-censorship. Patterson’s essay explores Bennett’s generous and considered reactions to Joyce, Lawrence, and Woolf and persuasively positions him in dynamic conversation with modernist art, without arguing that he himself was a modernist. Finally, Koenraad Claes’s detailed analysis of Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End* traces how Ford’s modernist style is combined with plot devices derived from elements of Tory fiction of nineteenth century, such as the novels of Walter Scott, Benjamin Disraeli, and Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Claes’s essay demonstrates that modernist innovations were often woven from nineteenth-century materials, linking back to the themes of continuity and double vision that permeates the collection.

Several interconnecting threads run productively through the collection. Reading across chapters, complex relationships between unexpected figures emerge, illuminating twentieth-century literary culture across the divide. Parodic responses to modernism is another strand running through the collection, recurring in essays by Shallcross, Stetz, and Snyder. The latter two contributors allude to intriguing parodies of modernism by women writers, Carolyn Wells and Katherine Mansfield. This links to my main criticism of the volume—the lack of women writers represented here. Across fourteen essays, only one and one half focus on women’s writing (though women writers appear briefly in other essays). This is a major oversight, as it was often women writers who spoke from the margins (either by necessity or choice), and who have been historically left out of accounts of both canonical modernism and twentieth-century literature more broadly conceived.² The present volume explicitly aims to address marginalized, alternative voices, so the near complete neglect of women’s writing is a missed opportunity. I hope that

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.