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The major theoretical contradiction that becomes clear in the conversion of the articles into a book is not Artese’s alone but is evidence of deep problems with the historicist project of the so-called “new modernist studies.” Artese argues that Conrad and James were suspicious of the rhetorical power-play of the journalism of their day in disguising individual reporters’ “testimony” in unauthored articles whose anonymity made an unwarranted claim to authority. This suspicion, according to Artese, leads these two novelists to develop textual strategies that carefully locate the testimonial authority of their witnesses. But this assertion about the origins of their narrative strategies conflicts with the other oft-heard line of argument among the new modernists that Artese also adopts and endorses—namely, that it is wrong to view the modern novel as focusing on epistemological issues and formal questions about how to render subjectivity (its so-called “inward turn”) because these are symptoms of more fundamental political, social, and institutional problems. The alleged concern of “impressionism” with these matters is “a great shibboleth in modernist studies” (6), in Artese’s words, and he instead wishes “to demonstrate...that this embrace of subjectivity and this retreat inward, purportedly the necessary consequences of Conrad’s [and James’s] narrative arrangements, are in fact critical phantasms” (10). If they are “phantasms,” then his argument about their efficacy in countering journalistic anonymity falls to pieces. Artese’s observation about Conrad’s and James’s wariness of journalism is surely a reason why epistemology and form matter—why we should pay attention to how these novelists develop formal techniques to foreground “testimony” and thereby to question unwarranted claims of authority—and not why the narratological focus on focalization, point of view, and narration is misguided.

This kind of contradiction is endemic in the new modernist studies because its focus on textual origins and contexts blinds it to an equally important aspect of a text’s historicity—the history of its reception and its effect on future readers. Artese’s assertions about the sources of impressionist techniques may or may not be true, but his denial that epistemology and form are anything more than “phantasms” ignores the work narrative techniques do in the experience of reading. This is not a blindness of which he alone is guilty. It is, rather, a mistake that the field of modernist studies needs to rectify if it is to reunite its historicist concerns with an appreciation of the rhetorical power of literary forms.

PAUL B. ARMSTRONG, Brown University


J. Dillon Brown’s Migrant Modernism calls for a re-reading of four West Indian writers of the Windrush generation whose complex relationships to both Caribbean and British literary culture are often overlooked or misread. As part of the first wave of Caribbean migrants sailing on the S.S. Empire Windrush, to fill post-WWII labor shortages in the mother country, Guyanese Edgar Mittelholzer, Barbadian George Lamming, Trinidadian Samuel Selvon, and Jamaican Richard Mais are among those considered to be the founding fathers of a distinct West Indian canon, who published during a time when the Anglophone Caribbean was still made up of British colonies,
and whose arrival “intensified the perceived crisis of postwar Englishness” (22). Though London offered opportunities for publication, critics voiced their disapproval when Caribbean literature failed to meet British expectations for tropical tales of cultural transparency or Caribbean expectations of freeing themselves from the yoke of colonialism. Brown’s book illustrates “that for these early West Indian authors, modernism was not, as postcolonial criticism sometimes assumes, merely an alien literary force to be rejected, but a potentially liberatory aesthetic with strategically useful cultural connotations” (7). In a time when England was trying to reestablish a stability of national identity and the superiority of its literary forms, these migrant writers employed modernism to challenge British assumptions and commercial demands for tropical flavor, transparency, and apolitical, anthropological vignettes of life in the third world. Migrant Modernism argues that the experimental, diverse, often dense, and thereby challenging literature of Selvon, Mittelholzer, Lamming, and Mais demonstrates both the writers’ literary inheritance and distinct appropriation of modernism, from mimicking a dying British tradition to expressing a living West Indian experience.

The book is divided into five chapters, the first laying the historical foundation to understand the literary environment at the time and the modes of reading that have elided the view of the migrant writers’ repurposing of modernism. Thereafter, each chapter focuses on one writer and his criticism, analyzing the pressures each faced and specifically what complaints and misconceptions his work suffered: Mittelholzer’s experimentalism was regarded as a lack of authentic voice, Lamming was considered too difficult and thus failed in a perceived intention to perform British high culture, Selvon was mistaken to be a simple and exotic storyteller, and while Mais’s aesthetic complexity was appreciated in Britain, his political gestures were read as Eurocentric by Caribbean critics who preferred an African diasporic core to cultural independence. Brown’s alternative analyses of the novels evidence his claim for migrant modernism. Mais’s novel, The Hills Were Joyful Together (1953), is understood to “enchant the reader into a similar state of attentive, sympathetic consciousness” (144), demonstrating how art can bring about a self-fashioning and inclusive recognition of new nationhood, and ultimately suggesting that a “community is ultimately responsible for its own narration” (154). Selvon uses modernist techniques to insist on the transnational particularity of Caribbean people, “in light of the enforced cosmopolitanism of the region—examples of a world citizenry” (133). Lamming’s work is revealed to challenge British assumptions of superiority with the difficulty of his prose, to demand not only the recognition of Caribbean people as unique and creative, but also obliging the reader to “enact a specific ethic of reading” (102) to “decipher the rich network of impressions, desires, and historical experience bound within even one person” (93). Likewise, Mittelholzer’s variety of styles and genres is understood through migrant modernism to complicate and express the agency of the individual’s active choices in combination with inheritance and tradition to create an interconnected network of identity, proof “that the very pronounced cultural mixture of the Caribbean cannot be ignored” (63). Brown includes support from the writers’ interviews and essays on what they hoped to achieve with their work and commentary on both their British literary forefathers and Caribbean contemporaries.

Migrant Modernism successfully illustrates that former approaches to the Anglophone Caribbean’s engagement with modernism have been too narrow, “offering an analytically sterile false choice between metropolitan and Caribbean” (182), and thus have neglected early West Indian literature’s inherent transnationality especially in
the decades preceding national independence. Through careful analysis of these writers’
aesthetics, reception, characterization and mischaracterization, and significance of
difference, Brown illuminates the richness of migrant modernism as a foundation
for a more inclusive, complex, and politically active Caribbean literature. Migrant
Modernism will appeal to scholars of modernism, contemporary British and black
British literature, Caribbean literature, and postcolonial literature, and will allow for
reading and teaching the works Brown explores with a newly refined and sensitive
perspective.

ALLYSON SALINGER FERRANTE, Bridgewater State University

BRÜHWILER, CLAUDIA FRANZISKA. Political Initiation in the Novels of Philip

When I was in graduate school, a classmate was struggling to compose a heavily
theoretical, Derridean dissertation on Beowulf. After months of critique over dinners
with cheap wine, one of us posited correctly that what he was actually writing was
closer to a New Critical reading of Beowulf, which horrified its author to the point he
never finished. The language and theoretical framework had simply gotten in the way,
obscuring what the dissertation was truly about. I felt something similar when reading
Claudia Franziska Brühwiler’s Political Initiation in the Novels of Philip Roth. This is
not to say that Brühwiler’s study is densely theoretical—it is not, and I mean that in the
best sort of way—nor is it to say that there are not admirable and valuable contributions
in this study, because there clearly are. Rather, my feeling throughout this relatively
short book was that the overused terminology and language got in the way, obscuring
what the critic was trying to reveal about Roth’s novels. Useful, perceptive observations
would begin to come into focus, but by the end of the paragraph I would lose the thread
and, eventually, interest.

Brühwiler’s study is concerned with “political initiation,” specifically how Roth’s
characters construct their political identities, and also how the initiation process recurs
throughout one’s life. Her methodology stems from a combination of three disciplines:
political science, literary theory, and anthropology. Any approach which can shed new
light on texts while expanding the borders of literary study should be welcomed and
applauded. That said, such terms as political and initiation are employed so frequently
(the former appears twenty-three times over two consecutive paragraphs in the
prologue) that their meaning pales (xii-xiii).

Brühwiler’s study is divided into four parts, which “follow the trajectory of
initiations, from Roth’s variations on classical initiation stories and their defining
aspects to more radical outcomes and, finally, their reversal or denial” (xiv). Part I,
which considers Portnoy’s Complaint, outlines “the methodological approach and
triangle of disciplines involved” (xiv). Part II, which treats The Plot Against America
and Indignation, “is dedicated to instances in Roth’s oeuvre where he followed
quasiclassical patterns of initiation stories, yet departed from certain conventions and
introduced broader themes” (xiv); it also addresses how literature and reading figure in
I Married a Communist and how space and identity operate in The Prague Orgy, The
Counterlife, and Operation Shylock. Part III considers “political initiation as a total