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# Migrant modernism: post-war London and the West Indian novel

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Mansfield's vignette "The Garden Party" simply do *not* revel romantically, like Aretoulakis, in their "lower-class district [which] seems to espouse the reality of death in all its magnificence" (54). There are strong analyses, such as Stefanie Rudig's finely nuanced intertextual exploration of affinities between Mansfield and Robert Louis Stevenson and W. Todd Martin's fascinating study of narrative "vocality" in Mansfield's *German Pension* stories. Lorenzo Mari cogently explicates a (fairly obvious) reading of the allegorical "Pearl Button" dream-vision text, and Anne Brown-Berens makes the illuminating claim that in her early New Zealand frontier fictions, Mansfield "was to re-envision a nineteenth-century European settler society in crisis through the lens of modernist writing" (119). Emily Ridge proffers a finely-worked contrast and linkage between Mansfield's and Edith Wharton's concerns, also illuminating Mansfield's penning of reviews ("critical-creative interplay", 87) to enhance her own self-reflection as an evolving practitioner. Ridge's essay is exciting as it unpacks Mansfield's reviewing and fictive imagery (her "mind/garden" analogy, 89), as foundational to her colonial modernism, with the skill of Caroline Spurgeon's pioneering study of Shakespeare.

This volume is enhanced by some surprising archival updates and Vincent O'Sullivan's thoughtful reflections on co-editing the superb Edinburgh University Press *Collected Fiction* of Mansfield (and paying rare, but justified, respectful heed to "the great Mansfieldian", Antony Alpers). Taken all in all, this handsomely produced, richly varied volume is a most welcome addition to the impressively gathering corpus of intelligent Mansfield criticism.

## References

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**Migrant modernism: post-war London and the West Indian novel**, by J. Dillon Brown, London, University of Virginia Press, 2013, 246 pp., £24.95 (paperback), ISBN 978 0 8139 3394 8

Literature produced in 1950s Britain has long been characterized as rejecting modernism in favour of the narrow confines of the campus and the kitchen sink. Where some accounts have cited the end of empire as triggering this disavowal, J. Dillon Brown's study maintains that a post-war modernist aesthetic is not only evident in the 1950s, but that its development is intrinsically tied up with decolonization. Drawing on theories of global modernisms, Brown contends that a reading of works by non-white migrant writers who travelled from the Caribbean to London during the end of empire – otherwise known as the "Windrush generation" – cannot be divorced from their "elective affinity with modernist practice" (9), whereby a modernist aesthetic was

adapted to include a range of "politically and racially expansive" concerns (13). Arguing for a view of the period as a "pivotal moment" both politically and culturally, *Migrant Modernism* makes a critical appreciation of Windrush-era writers central to an understanding of the "emergent aesthetic formations" (170) of what would later become Black British and postcolonial literatures.

Refreshingly, the book looks beyond the oft-cited triumvirate of George Lamming, Sam Selvon and V. S. Naipaul to include neglected works by Edgar Mittelholzer and Roger Mais, as well as a discussion of Kamau Braithwaite, Wilson Harris and Andrew Salkey in the book's coda. Brown's attentive analysis of these writers, which is contextualized alongside reviews, extracts from the BBC radio programme *Caribbean Voices*, and an account of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), convincingly posits that the "oppositional impulse of modernism" they adapted represents a strategic move to "interrogate the culturally and geographically narrow boundaries of British fiction" (40–41). Whilst attending to their aesthetic and political heterogeneity, Mittelholzer, Lamming, Selvon and Mais are seen as modifying the innovations of Eliot, Woolf, Joyce and Lawrence respectively to produce anti-colonial texts that oppose a post-war literary establishment where value was informed by the racial hierarchies of colonialism.

Brown situates his analysis at a moment of crisis in English culture, when modernism's "place in the cultural field" was still uncertain (4). In mapping this milieu from the outset, *Migrant Modernism* acknowledges that an understanding of 1950s literature "as characterised by a monolithic rejection of modernist tenets" is an oversimplification (24). Although the work at times relies on a dichotomy between West Indian modernist modes of writing and the anti-modernism of writers associated with "The Movement" (particularly Kingsley Amis), it furthers an understanding of the affinities between modernism and postcolonial literature posited by Simon Gikandi (2004) and Neil Lazarus (2011). Brown's analysis, moreover, invites an examination of the relationship between the Windrush generation and other post-war writers, such as William Golding and Anthony Burgess, who also responded to decolonization through the appropriation and adaptation of modernism. In offering an illuminating account of the literary landscape in 1950s Britain, *Migrant Modernism* is a long-overdue contribution to debates about the positioning of anti-colonial literatures both within and in opposition to metropolitan culture.

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