

Broadcasting Modernism. Edited by Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Jane Lewty. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. 320 pp. \$69.95 cloth.

Broadcasting Modernism is the first essay collection devoted to demonstrating the centrality of the radio within modernism. Each essay begins with the historical coincidence of modernism and the radio, but then pushes on thoughtfully to analyze the role that radio played in generating modernist forms and genres as well as how radio changed auditory perception for writers and readers alike. This important, original collection aids in substantiating and theorizing the provocative connections between auditory technologies and modernism—connections that showcase the networking of “high” and “low” culture, tune readers in to the auditory nature of modernist literature, and announce the various ways that turn-of-the-century technological developments have impacted sound perception. As the editors aptly state in their introduction, “The unprecedented power of radio in its time is almost impossible to overstate; its presence intermittently ebbed and flowed as direct subject matter, as a platform for artistic expression, or as a subliminal force shaping the dynamics of modernist textualities” (2).

Indeed, along with the phonograph, the telephone, and the talkie, the radio contributed to modernist aesthetics and sensibilities in ways that scholars have only recently begun to explicate.

The first section of the collection, which deals with the idea of radio within culture, fittingly begins with an essay by Aaron Jaffe that examines how the radio was initially conceptualized by Guglielmo Marconi and Nikola Tesla. Even more interesting, Jaffe connects these inventors to Joseph Conrad, claiming that they share a sense of “radiant modernity” (14). This metaphoric reading of the radio continues in Jeffrey Sconce’s essay, which investigates Freud’s writing on telepathy and the unconscious. Sconce productively likens early twentieth-century anxieties about losing control of one’s self to anxieties about the radio as a tool for controlling the masses. Derived from his longer study, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi*, Timothy C. Campbell’s essay considers the influence of the wireless on Filippo Marinetti’s poetic practices and Futurist manifestos. Turning to actual radio performances, Martin Spinelli postulates that the famous broadcasts of Orson Welles and Norman Corwin are examples of “radiogenic Modernist literature,” a form that revamped the relationship between audience and art (69). The last essay of Part I, by David Jenemann, charts Theodor Adorno’s ambivalent responses to the radio. Jenemann shows that, for Adorno, the radio “offered subjects the possibility of new types of bodies and new forms of subjectivation,” despite his simultaneous assessment of the medium as an instrument of authoritarianism (92).

Part II of the collection focuses on how early twentieth-century writers reacted differently to the radio, depending on their particular cultural contexts. For instance, Sarah Wilson draws upon the form and function of radio programming in America in the 1930s and 1940s to read Gertrude Stein’s last major work, *Brewsie and Willie* (1946). Jonah Willihnganz, on the other hand, presents a significantly more pessimistic interpretation of American radio in his close reading of Richard Wright’s *Lawd Today!*, where the radio is “equated ... with the disempowerment of fascism and racism” (127). Shifting to the context of the BBC in the 1930s, when it was associated with John Reith’s imperialistic and homogenizing agenda, Debra Rae Cohen insightfully demonstrates how leftist writers of the time formally and metaphorically represented the radio to express their wariness of the medium. Although many writers discerned a disturbing monolithic power in the mass communication of the radio, the last two essays of this section articulate ways in which modernist writers used the BBC for positive ends. A chapter by Todd Avery, a version of which was published in his excellent critical work, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938*—another seminal text for researchers of modernism and auditory technologies—reveals how Desmond MacCarthy, along with other Bloomsbury members, was able to use the BBC to voice both progressive

and aesthetic ideas. Likewise, the last essay of this section by Michael Coyle perceptively analyzes T. S. Eliot's BBC wartime broadcasts to India and Europe, which suggest Eliot's positive view of the radio as well as his idealized concept of culture.

The last part of *Broadcasting Modernism* consists of essays that range over three generations of writers, each essay delving into the relationship between the radio and a specific writer. The section is bookended by Jane Lewty's essay on how radio shaped the difficult works of Ezra Pound and James Joyce, and Steven Connor's essay, which probes representations of on/off switches, volume, and tuning in Samuel Beckett's radio plays. The rest of the essays in this section expand the reach of the collection by focusing on how the radio influenced and was an outlet for poetry. For example, Brook Houglum argues that Lorine Niedecker's experiences as both an audience member and writer for radio engendered "a poetics of aural collage, speech reportage, and voice experimentation" (222); while J. Stan Barrett's essay astutely discusses Wallace Stevens's poetic response to what he perceived to be the radio's threat to individuality. Analyzing a recorded broadcast of Edna St. Vincent Millay reading her poetry, Lesley Wheeler explains how Millay used American radio to perform her poetry and reach new audiences, yet was also used by the network (WJZ, New York) to bolster the "cultural legitimacy" of radio (240).

As the array of essays discussed above makes clear, modernist reactions to and representations of the radio were not simply positive or negative. While many were ambivalent toward mass media, the technology still permeated their work and changed their way of hearing the world, the other, and the self. Most of the modernists covered in *Broadcasting Modernism* are American, British, or Irish, leaving the reader longing for a second collection that considers modernists of different backgrounds. What these essays have done competently, however, is lay the groundwork for a new critical perspective and vocabulary within modernist studies. This project complements and updates similar interdisciplinary collections such as Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead's *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (MIT Press, 1992) and Adalaide Morris's *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997). More recently, Pamela L. Caughie's "Virginia Woolf: Radio, Gramophone, and Broadcasting" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf* (edited by Maggie Humm, Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and Jane Lewty's "Joyce and Radio" in *A Companion to James Joyce* (edited by Richard Brown, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) have also made significant contributions to this emerging discourse on the relationship between modernism and auditory technologies. *Broadcasting Modernism* is essential reading for scholars of the time period and auditory studies. Not only is it impressive in its breadth of material and approaches, but it also

presents a high quality of research, argumentation, and eloquence, making it a helpful and gratifying resource.

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