

At Home and Abroad in the Empire: British Women Write the 1930s. Edited by Robin Hackett, Freda Hauser, and Gay Wachman. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2009. 244 pp. \$54.00 cloth.

The editors' introduction to *At Home and Abroad in the Empire* promises an essay collection that "simultaneously counters the myth of the failed thirties, expands critical views of modernism in general, and broadens critical understanding of the diversity of women writers' styles of engagement with aesthetic and political issues" (18). That is a complex set of propositions for a single volume to tackle, but *At Home and Abroad* lives up to its editors' claims with eleven essays by some of the more well-established and politically cogent scholars of feminist interwar literary history. The editors have deliberately ordered the essays, each focusing on a different writer, to emphasize the resonances between and among the chapters, so that the complete volume's representation of issues of empire between the wars is a complex and nuanced achievement.

At Home and Abroad begins and ends with studies of popular mystery writers, immediately presenting the "fractur[ing] ... of a monolithic modernism" as one of the volume's purposes (16). Phyllis Lassner's "The Mysterious New Empire" offers a historicized reading of Agatha Christie's effeminate Hercule Poirot, recontextualizing the detective in terms of Middle Eastern and Balkan "otherness" and American colonialism. As the first chapter in the collection, Lassner's essay introduces the multiple, global imperialisms that existed in the Thirties, providing a background for several of the chapters that follow. Linda Camarasana discusses Jean Rhys with only a brief nod to the author's colonial heritage and focuses her chapter instead on the 1937 Paris Exhibition that shaped the background of Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight*; her chapter analyzes the self-representation by competing fascist empires included in the exhibition. Freda Hauser's examination of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Salutation* illustrates how that novel's political vision ranges from Spanish and English colonial interests in South America to the fascist movement in Spain and across Europe. After an opening section that is deftly international, the editors present a number of chapters that loosely share an interest in English identity. The

late Julia Briggs's study of Virginia Woolf, Englishness and empire perhaps treads some familiar ground, but as a discussion of the ambivalent sense that Woolf had of her own place as a woman and writer in England and in the world, the chapter intersects neatly with those that immediately follow it: Claire M. Tylee's discussion of Jewish identity, exile, and British racisms in Betty Miller's *Farewell Leicester Square*; Geneviève Brassard and Marianne Guénot-Hovnanian's interesting semiotic analysis of a French version of Woolf's *The Waves* as part of a broader discussion of the "cultural colonialism" of translation; and Tory Young's study of Nancy Cunard, the surrealist writer and activist who was, like Woolf, born into the English establishment. Young's chapter asserts the importance of Cunard's *Black Man and White Ladyship* to discussions of sexual politics and race in the Thirties while also reminding readers of the connections between English, continental, and African-American modernism.

The next two chapters also focus on activists, but again contribute new political interpretations that continue to link gender, race, and empire in useful ways. Barbara Winslow's chapter "The First White Rastafarian" shifts from Ireland and India to the United States before finally examining the impact of events in Ethiopia under Haile Selassie on Sylvia Pankhurst's "anticolonial, antiracist, and Pan-Africanist political activities" (171). Bonnie Kime-Scott focuses not on fiction but on private letters to illustrate the sexual harassment experienced by Rebecca West and other women, such as Emma Goldman, who entered the public sphere as activists, and her discussion ranges geographically and historically to include Spain and Ireland as well as the Yugoslav republics that are featured in West's masterpiece, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. The final chapters of the collection turn to writers "absent from most modernist syllabi" but whose work nonetheless corresponds as much to the concerns of modern art as to those of modern women (203). Jean Radford reads Edith Sitwell's *I Live Under a Black Sun* alongside Djuna Barnes, Benjamin, and Kristeva to theorize that text's deliberate melancholia, and asserts that Sitwell wrote the book as an allegory of the increasingly mad (and maddening) European political situation. In another posthumously published chapter, Lillian S. Robinson discusses the politics of Dorothy L. Sayers, who was writing her Lord Peter Wimsey novels "just as Mussolini was seizing power in Italy" (223). Robinson's chapter argues that even populist fiction not part of the modernist canon deserves serious consideration because politics can always be located "in sites that are usually assumed to be politically neutral" (222). Her chapter, the final essay in the book, appropriately ties together many of this collection's interests in revision and recovery, and also neatly circles back to the detective genre with which *At Home and Abroad* begins.

The final chapter by Robinson also invites a critical dialogue with the reader that indicates another of this collection's purposes, this one

implied. Robinson uses her discussion of Sayers's *Gaudy Night*, a novel set in a fictional Oxford women's college, as an opportunity directly to address her "*co-seurs*—academics, feminists, socialists, all of us women whose research and activism situates gender in the context of class, race, nation, and sexual orientation." As she analyzes Sayers's beloved university narrative, Robinson asks contemporary feminist scholars what they are doing to create "the beloved community of women functioning within masculine university tradition. It is hard to admit that that community does not, cannot exist unless we build it" (231). While Robinson speaks specifically and explicitly to contemporary *women* academics as potential activists, read as a whole this collection of essays suggests a broader agenda, of which Robinson's is a particular example. In their shared insistence upon the long, complex history of imperialism as the global problem that underlies *all* other forms of oppression, this group of essays asserts that historical context must necessarily inform contemporary literary study. By juxtaposing popular writers and canonical high modernists, and then locating those authors against the background of global—not merely English—imperialism, the contributors to this volume achieve an intellectual sweep not unlike the wide-ranging interests of the women writers who are their subjects; together they disrupt multiple established interpretations of political, cultural, and gendered history. *At Home and Abroad in the Empire* thus exceeds the purposes suggested by its own modest title as a cogent and timely example of critical scholarship published at a moment in history "in which dissent is often and powerfully equated with a dangerous lack of patriotism" (20). In that sense, editors Robin Hackett, Freda Hauser, and Gay Wachman have put together an admirably risky volume, one that will certainly contribute to revisionist studies of modernism while also, and perhaps more compellingly, provide necessary "insight into the ways in which imperial matters can infuse conversations and literature that might seem to have very little to do with empire" (20).

—Ashlie K. Sponenberg, Tulane University