

ethical and aesthetic category is carried out formally throughout his oeuvre: 'Where Levinas seems to believe that too much will be just about sufficient, Beckett seems to know that any effort will be at once too much and not enough' (p. 158). This critical difference or point at which the two writers miss each other is situated fittingly within the methodological scope of *Late Modernist Style in Samuel Beckett and Emmanuel Levinas*. From its opening pages, the book sets out not only to illuminate two intersecting discourses on failure and alterity, but moreover to do so with the self-reflexive understanding that any such comparative project must somehow, sometimes fail. Reading Beckett and Levinas alongside one another, Fifield's book elucidates both what he deems 'a largely shared artistry' (aesthetic relation) and 'a related anxiety' (ethical obligation) between the two (pp. 50, 165). Critically, as Fifield, Beckett, and Levinas would have it, the text invites its reader to fail better yet.

Michelle Rada  
Brown University

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## Note

- 1 Shane Weller, *Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

## Ira Nadel

Mia Spiro, *Anti-Nazi Modernism, The Challenges of Resistance in 1930s Fiction* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 308 pp., \$45.00 (pbk)

Is it possible that fiction of the 1930s actively resisted fascism? Were narrative methods, as well as subject matter, pointedly anti-Fascist? Did Djuna Barnes, Christopher Isherwood and Virginia Woolf actually challenge Nazi ideology? Mia Spiro in *Anti-Nazi Modernism* argues that they did – largely through their readers' engagement with their texts rather than direction action by the authors. Because of their original styles and destabilising forms, the authors succeeded in challenging the enforced conformity of fascist ideology. The very composition and reading of these works was, in the past and in the present, an 'act of resistance' opposing Nazi oppression and 'totalitarian thinking' (p. 246, 17).

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Spiro shows in her detailed study how her three authors resisted authoritarianism and spectacle – the Nazi's primary form of enacting power – and contends that their texts addressed issues of identity, discrimination and ethics in ways that challenged Nazi beliefs. Such claims link her study to the recent work by Roger Griffin, Mark Wollaeger and Paul Sheehan, although she privileges textual rather than political elements<sup>1</sup>. Understood in this context, fiction of the 1930s becomes a form of political protest, while scholarship becomes the study of how modernist texts bring to light the 'complex matrices of oppression . . . in modernist cultural production' during the Nazi era (p. 246). But did anti-Nazism directly inform the work of Barnes, Isherwood and Woolf? If so, how? And was the performative role of fiction in play this period of oppression?

Spiro begins tangentially by shaping her historically based study of anti-fascist fiction against the larger assertion that Barnes, Isherwood and Woolf exemplify how 'ideology and political discourse filter into literary works' (p. 4). The premise is that the role of literature is fundamentally an expression of cultural rather than literary values. She asserts that through the formal properties of their works, her authors warn, if not challenge, their readers to react against the spectacle of Nazism and the suppression of individuality, sexual difference and racism. This fashions what Spiro labels an 'anti-Nazi aesthetic'. Through theme and narrative technique, the authors alert their readers to the Nazi threat, while encouraging the critique, if not resistance, to totalitarianism. Theoretically, Spiro argues that a liberal political imagination encouraged literary resistance expressed through discursive and aesthetic strategies. But to do so, the authors had to convey their message obliquely and through experimental texts, potentially alienating readers who could not understand the works.

Spiro does not shy away from the difficulty of her task, admitting that there are ambiguities and complexities resulting from the use of modernist modes of 'artistic resistance that only indirectly and obliquely' uncover 'the insidious elements of Nazism' (p. 4). But how conscious were her writers in formulating these questions and shaping their literature to answer them? Can literary works actually encourage political resistance? She believes her writers were aware of the social/political challenges and in fact employed their texts to challenge the politics of the time. She acknowledges that there is not yet a method of linking modernist aesthetics and fiction writing to Nazi resistance but she offers some tentative, well-documented steps in establishing such a connection.

Literary resistance to Nazi spectacle, used by Hitler to unite the public to his ideology, characterises the anti-Nazi aesthetic Spiro proposes. She reads the work of Barnes, Isherwood and Woolf as 'antispectacle narratives' (p. 7), offering close readings of *Nightwood* (set in 1930, pub. 1937), *Goodbye to Berlin* (set in 1930–33, pub. 1939) and *Between the Acts*

(set in 1939, pub. 1941). The essence of Spiro's argument is that experimental narratives, non-linear plots, time shifts, unreliable narrators and parody challenge the illusion of harmony and unity proposed by the Nazis. As a consequence, these works become forms of protest in addition to examples of the literary avant-garde. Instead of polemics or propaganda, the texts themselves become vehicles of ethical action, their multiplicity of voices in contrast to the unanimity of voices promoted by Nazi propaganda.

'Experimental novelisation' is at the core of the writers' anti-Nazi strategies according to Spiro. The nexus of this approach is understanding experimental art as a critique of Nazism and the belief that the irony, parataxis and textual disruptions found in the work of her three writers implicitly oppose the Nazi insistence on political and cultural accord. Spiro assumes that experimentation is by the nature of its time and place – 1930s Europe – an expression of an 'anti-Nazi aesthetic'. By this standard alone, however, Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound would be leading critics of fascism and the Nazis. But Stein, as Barbara Will has convincingly shown in *Unlikely Collaboration*, was not, while Pound was a vocal supporter of Mussolini and the fascist cause<sup>2</sup>. And individual texts appear resistant: Spiro admits that in *Nightwood* it is challenging to identify a clear condemnation of Nazism, even though the work is highly 'experimental, parodic, whimsical and ultimately cynical'. The novel's very experimentalism may actually restrict its Nazi critique making its cultural analysis unclear (p. 17). But if Nazism suppressed difference and subjugated the 'other', the work of Barnes, Isherwood and Woolf stands against such dominance.

The most interesting and engaging chapter in the study is one that does not deal directly with literature: 'Vamps, Tramps and Nazis: Representations of Spectacular Female Characters'. It focuses on the complex and often ambiguous presentation of women in popular European culture in an effort to analyse the 'image' of woman as a metaphor in both Nazi and anti-Nazi discourse. It asks if 'woman' is a threat or beacon, a victim or accomplice in the allure or critique of fascist ideology. Setting the stage for the discussion is a lengthy survey of the cultural transformation of the depiction of women ca. 1880–1940. Relying on a thesis style (repeated citations from other critics, averaging three to four references a paragraph), Spiro arrives at an argument based on 'gendered paradigms of viewing' which became more sinister and threatening in Germany after 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor (pp. 87, 88, 90). Writers reflect this: Woolf, for example, unsurprisingly reveals that sexual relations 'are linked to political ones'. A complicated association exists, Spiro offers, between 'artistic production', 'mass manipulation' and fascist practices (p. 98).

Spiro presents Sally Bowles, Robin Vote and Mrs. Manresa (rather than the more frequently discussed Miss La Trobe) as challengers to patriarchy and opponents to Nazi versions of female oppression and exploitation. At

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times, however, her literary analyses of these characters (see, e.g., p. 93) are overshadowed by her larger concerns dealing with destabilising 'sexual identities by overturning perceptions of gender norms' (p. 94). But as Spiro acknowledges, on occasion the subversive performances of women slip into fantasy; these presentations ultimately 'support fascism, Nazism and their oppression of others' (p. 20). It seems one can have it both ways.

Spiro argues that all three novelists use women as an allegory to 'represent a political message' and that self-fashioning, crucial to the leading female characters, becomes a way of evading responsibility. But this is complicated: for the characters, it is a way of constructing a new identity and new freedom, but to others, it 'ultimately supports totalitarian ideologies and their oppression of Others' (137). The complexities of gender representation compete with Spiro's anti-Nazi thesis as she addresses matters of stabilising sexual identities, gender norms, the performative aspect of the feminine and how women critique fascism. Spiro summarises this situation when she argues that women's bodies 'become like the author's text, a body of work that challenges the illusion-inspiring spectacle' with their own 'brand of illusion making' (p. 94).

*Anti-Nazi Modernism* is a serious study concerned with the ethical dimensions of authorship and history. It seeks to translate literary texts into political acts of resistance performed by the reader who must 'fill in the writers' perspectives that are missing in the textual "gulf"' (p. 246). But reading fiction in terms of its political context does not always make it a political act to be performed by the reader. However, according to Spiro, the reader has a responsibility to recognise rhetoric that is 'anti-Semitic, sexist, homophobic ... within the cultural and historical context of the 1930s, and even today' (p. 246). This shifts the work of protest and recognition to the reader, occurring in part because of the political, social and even sexual limitations the individual authors encountered limiting their candour. The reader has a responsibility, Spiro argues, for the proper cultural/political assessment of the text. The ambiguities of modernism and the way British novelists of the 1930s engage with and resist propaganda are at the heart of this study. Spiro's desire to place 'literature in a dialogic relationship with cultural and ethnic discourses' makes for a stimulating balance between text, interpretation and reader (p. 247). Written with conviction, *Anti-Nazi Modernism* aims high with a challenging if at times unsettling argument.

Ira Nadel

*University of British Columbia*

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## Notes

- 1 See R. Griffith, *Modernism and Fascism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), M. Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media and Propaganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) and P. Sheehan, *Modernism and The Aesthetics of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 2 See B. Will, *Unlikely Collaboration: Gertrude Stein, Bernard Faji, and the Vichy Dilemma* (Columbia, 2013).

## Richard Maguire

Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 326 pp., £60 (hbk)

For too long ‘queer’ has been understood as the antithesis of the domestic, insofar as the domestic is taken to represent the strict heteronormative gender roles that queer seeks to challenge. On the face of it, then, the title of Matt Cook’s new book, *Queer Domesticities*, might seem paradoxical as queer desires often destabilise the traditional marital and familial home. But, with political gains such as gay marriage in Britain, perhaps there is now less threat to heteronormative ideals in the ways that people with same-sex desire organise their living-spaces. With the greater acceptance and visibility of homosexuality, queerness and domesticity are no longer incompatible; queer has been welcomed into the domestic as a permanent resident. In short, queer has been domesticated.

Avoiding contemporary debates about homonormative assimilation, *Queer Domesticities* examines the various ways men with same-sex desire lived together in London during the last century, and how their queerness was reflected in their living arrangements and their interior designs. Starting with Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts in the 1880s and concluding with Derek Jarman, a hundred years later, the majority of Cook’s subjects are artists and writers; but, through a series of interviews, less-celebrated men are also given space to discuss their own domestic set-ups. The word ‘queer’ for Cook in this volume leans less to the political and more towards the aesthetic; indeed, it is only Jarman and the photographer Ajamu who were involved in the queer activism of the 1980s and 1990s. Cook favours the more traditional definitions of queer such as ‘odd’ or ‘eccentric’ and so has no need to address theory such as Lee Edelman’s polemic *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* which pits the queer against the child, a stalwart of the domestic, or Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* which reclaims the table, the most homely item of

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