

Reviews

JESSICA MARTELL, *Farm to Form: Modernist Literature and Ecologies of Food in the British Empire*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2020. Pp. vi + 232. \$55.

The past several years of supply chain shortages and panic buying have offered a stark reminder of just how reliant many of us in so-called “developed” countries are on global supply chains. Such a realization might feel new—or at least newly urgent—to anyone who could not find legumes for the first six months of the pandemic, to say nothing of those who are still rationing infant formula. Reading Jessica Martell’s *Farm to Form: Modernist Literature and Ecologies of Food in the British Empire* offered me a well-timed reminder that these recent shortages are connected to a much longer history of global food chains. The book “presents the food history of the late British empire as an extended rehearsal for our era of industrial food supremacy,” in which imperial foodways have been replaced by “today’s multinational food corporations” (p. 3). *Farm to Form* focuses on modernist (or modernist-adjacent) novels, and how they reflect “the ways in which industrial food production in imperial Britain not only reworked the natural world but also reconditioned the lived experience of it” (p. 5). In Martell’s account, “imperial foodways made the natural world ‘modernist,’ . . . disorienting, unfamiliar, and artificial; but also exhilarating, prone to excess, and above all, new” (p. 5).

The first three chapters of *Farm to Form* focus on novels that reflect how industrializing food production in late-Victorian England changed the relationship between British people and their food sources. The first chapter, on Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, addresses the “pastoral” interlude that Tess spends as a milkmaid at Talbothays Dairy. The chapter includes fascinating historical context about the English milk industry’s resurgence in the late nineteenth century, which is often presented as a “rare rural foodways” success story (p. 46). Martell argues that Hardy complicates this triumphant narrative by showing how “the dairy’s integration into industrial

modernity” comes at a cost (p. 47). Her close reading of the scene where Tess and Angel Clare load milk onto a London-bound train considers the alienation Tess feels from the anonymous milk drinkers of London—and from Angel, who sees both Tess and the natural world through the lens of a “sentimental pastoralism” that prevents him from understanding their complexities (p. 46).

The second chapter turns from the domestic milk supply chain to the growth of the international meat trade. Martell reads E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* in relation to the growing market for meat imported from Britain’s colonies (especially New Zealand), a market made possible by advances in refrigeration technology. Martell argues that the narrator of *Howards End* “responds to the instability of the fast-paced modern age by searching for its precedent in the historical past; and its frequent reanimation of prior historical eras is an act that mirrors the thawing of a frozen carcass for consumption” (p. 64). The chapter also draws upon rich archival work that demonstrates how, in Edwardian food marketing, “the label of ‘domestic’ expands to include imperial territories, some of them thousands of miles away. Thus, the project of empire enabled the perception of agrarian continuity; and these perceptions in turn underwrote the project of empire” (p. 63).

We enter more officially modernist territory in chapter 3, which focuses primarily on Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. The chapter begins, though, by recounting Arthur Conan Doyle’s short story “Danger!” Written a year and half before the start of World War I, Doyle’s story warns of the potential for German U-Boats to upend British food supply chains and highlights how “Britain’s profound dependence upon food imports” could affect national security, especially during wartime (p. 84). At the same time, drawing on accounts of food rationing and hunger in Woolf’s letters and diaries as well as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Martell unpacks how, “in the wartime reality created by industrial food, food itself also became a tool for ‘total war,’ or state control of noncombatants during the conflict” (p. 93). The chapter ends with a consideration of how the trauma of food scarcity also influences Woolf’s narrative style in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which can feel at times rationed itself, even as it is also trying to build connections.

The final two chapters of *Farm to Form* focus in more detail on how food played a central role in the relationship between the center and periphery of the British empire. Chapter 4 considers what Martell terms “imperial metabolism” in Joseph Conrad’s writing and analyzes how Conrad’s “modernist techniques of negative narration—such as ellipses, elisions, and delays—are immanently connected to material

systems of food production that function smoothly only by building pockets of dearth into their structural foundations” (pp. 120–21). Building on chapter 4’s examination of the uneven distribution of food across empire and its relationship to state control, chapter 5—the last chapter of *Farm to Form*—considers one of the most extreme examples of this uneven food distribution: the Irish famine of 1845–49 and the long shadow it cast over Irish life and literary production. Engaging with postcolonial works that contextualize famines as crises worsened by “imperial power,” rather than as unavoidable natural disasters (as they are so often described), the chapter puts the Irish writer George Russell in conversation with James Joyce. Russell, a poet, novelist, and Irish nationalist, was also the editor of *Irish Homestead*, the weekly magazine produced by the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), “an association that advocated for local farming cooperatives” (p. 167). In her discussion of Russell’s writing, Martell also returns to a theme discussed in chapter 3: Britain’s dangerous reliance on imported food. Unlike Doyle, Russell was not simply concerned about food access during World War I; he was especially worried about how English disregard for Irish life might bring about another avoidable famine due to wartime food shortages. Russell’s editorials “establish his advocacy for co-operation in agriculture, a vision for collective democracy supported by a local food economy that provides the blueprints for a modernized, independent nation” (p. 167).

The latter part of the chapter considers how Joyce offers a very different take on Irish foodways from Russell, whose “hobbyhorses,” Martell admits, can “read as a conservative embrace of dietary purity intended to ward off the unhealthy influences of internationalism” (p. 193). In contrast to Russell, whom he satirizes in *Ulysses*, Joyce “is unwilling to accept the binary that Russell’s fervent dedication to Irish produce forces between the perceived wholesomeness of local offerings and the corrupting, debilitating influence of imports from abroad” (p. 195). Reading *Ulysses*—which many of its detractors criticized as viscerally disgusting—Martell considers how the novel’s controversial excesses represent Joyce’s response to dominant narratives about Irish scarcity and famine. Martell persuasively argues that “the heavy matter of Joycean excess suggests the possibility of a new Irish cultural identity, one that is based upon an eating, growing body that thrives beyond the reach of imperial management,” and that the novel’s excesses also “recognize the value of a different model of narrative production, one that does not value selection but inclusion” (pp. 198, 200).

This final chapter on *Ulysses* does, in my opinion, the most persuasive job of connecting the rise of industrial food in Britain to an analysis of form. In other chapters, the book's formal claims often felt underdeveloped. This argument might have been aided by a more robust discussion of the book's contribution to the field of novel studies. As it is, *Farm to Form*, a study that focuses exclusively on novels, does not engage in a sustained way with the particular affordances (and potential limits) of the novel. Alternatively, the book might have dispensed with some of its more formalist claims in order to lean more strongly into its exciting interdisciplinary strengths. The archival research and industrial food history in *Farm to Form* is fascinating. Martell is at her strongest when making a case for how "studying the food politics of empire" can help "trac[e] the evolution of modern state power as it moved toward more subtle strategies of management, from poor laws to public health interventions," and how taking an interdisciplinary approach to this study that includes reading the literature and culture of the time "reveals the ways that alternative visions, and the people working to build alternative systems, challenge new forms of control" (p. 16).

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ELIZA RICHARDS, *Battle Lines: Poetry and Mass Media in the U.S. Civil War*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. Pp. viii + 247. \$65.

In *Battle Lines: Poetry and Mass Media in the U.S. Civil War*, Eliza Richards places American Civil War poems at the intersection of mass warfare and mass media, making the case that we should understand poetry as one of the war's crucial print genres. She shows how poets' engagements with the news drove them away from the kind of emphasis on personal subjectivity we might generally associate with post-Romantic lyric and toward approaches that could express both the factual particulars of events and a sense of collective affect. As Richards analyzes in detail, Union and Confederate poets sought to invoke and adapt established poetic tropes and forms in order to place contemporary events in historical perspective as well as to communicate more readily with a mass public that was also reading the news, sometimes in the same publications as it read poems. In her account, even the wartime poetic experiments and innovations of