experience of London. What Hardy called his "idiosyncratic mode of regard" is as much in evidence here as in Wessex (*The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate [London, 1985], 235). His London is at once haunted by the past and startlingly new: the descriptions of the city's streets and skylines in his last novel, *The Well-Beloved*, have an affinity with other fin-de-siècle writing, and indeed with Impressionist painting, but when he looked out at Charing Cross Bridge from his offices in Adelphi Terrace, his first thoughts were of Garrick and Johnson. Like his fictional Casterbridge, Hardy's London was layered with history.

Hardy himself thought that living in London induced something "mechanical" in his writing. This was to underestimate the transforming power of his imagination. As Ford quotes, watching the Lord Mayor's Show in 1879 from an upper floor in Ludgate Hill, he noted that as the crowd grew denser, it mutated from an aggregation of individuals into "'a molluscous black creature … whose voice exudes from its scaly coat, and who has an eye in every pore of its body'" (19). This is close to the visceral unease felt by other commentators on the city, notably John Ruskin in *Fiction, Fair and Foul* (1880), but it also prefigures the literal and metaphorical view of human existence taken by the Spirit of the Years in Hardy's epic verse-drama, *The Dynasts* (1904–1908).

Ford's study begins with Hardy's macabre double funeral, with his heart buried in Stinsford and his ashes in Westminster Abbey. Other critics have similarly made this episode a paradigm for accounts of a divided Hardy, torn between the rural world he came from and largely wrote about and the metropolitan world he aspired to enter and which provided his audience, but few have done so with the subtlety and dispatch displayed on every page of *Thomas Hardy: Half a Londoner*. This is, in sum, a masterly blend of biography and literary criticism. It is also a beautifully produced book. Both Mark Ford and his publishers are to be congratulated.

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SEBASTIAN GROES. *British Fictions of the Sixties: The Making of a Swinging Decade*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Pp. 206. $114.00 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2017.80

D. J. Taylor, in "Clinging Sixties," an essay in the *Times Literary Supplement* (27 July 2016), takes issue with recent scholarly efforts to single out the avant-garde strain of writing from the baggy and contradictory literary world of the 1960s: "It was an age of self-conscious avant-garderie, and also an age of carrying on as usual." For Taylor, the experimenters cannot be allowed to represent the period, not merely because they were only a small part of it, but because they failed to reach many readers, missing the crucial element of "straightforward narrative satisfaction." Reading someone like B. S. Johnson today might be acceptable if you want your "historical curiosity … slaked," but that, he reckons, is where readers draw the line. "We" do not read experimental writers of the sixties in the same way we read Dickens, "or even Anthony Powell." Intervening confidently in forty years of debate about the realism/experimentalism divide, Taylor's essay makes explicit the assumptions on which it rests; why would people read books that were so uninterested in pleasure, he asks.

Sebastian Groes's *British Fictions of the Sixties: The Making of a Swinging Decade* in part offers an answer to this question, and others. It is a welcome addition to the still scant, though growing, criticism about the British literature (specifically, the novel) of the sixties, seeking to apportion attention more equally between the mainstream, carrying-on crowd and the

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2017.80 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"extreme" (Groes's term) avant-gardists; in fact, he argues, the latter may in some ways do a better job of explaining the cacophonous and gaudy sense impressions that come down to us about the decade. In particular, the book offers welcome recuperations of Eva Tucker and Maureen Duffy, among others (indeed, the attention it pays to women experimentalists is admirable throughout). The decade, he suggests, works as "an epistemological hinge moment," a moment that is "clothed in myths" (1). It is these myths that threaten our ability to read the period with any clarity, and Groes teases out some implications of the famous distinction made by Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending* (1965) between myth and fiction—namely the elaboration of a fiction that might "make sense of the here and now" (Kermode 39).

Groes argues that literature thus offers us a superior mode of historical analysis to the merely empirical; fiction should not "piggyback" (11) onto sociohistorical discourses that seek to explain the decade. In doing so, we risk both an unrepresentative sense of which literature mattered the most—this, he suggests winningly, is why we have had such a surfeit of references to Angry Young Men, while more brilliant authors, those with a more "intricate aesthetic" (11), have been ill attended to. Groes thus grapples with clichéd pop-cultural images of the sixties in order to shed them, and is instead keen to acknowledge the multistranded and paradoxical influences and preoccupations that comprise the decade: its complicity in its own mythology, its susceptibility to nostalgia and narcissism, but also its fealty to revolution and rupture—its odd closeness to us, and yet its fundamental inaccessibility. We think we can know it, but we cannot.

Groes's book is admirably broad in scope, and in its attempts to say something big about the sixties seems aimed at an audience that might encompass the general reader as well as the student of literature. That said, it is possible that Groes's particular approach—one informed by neuroscientific analyses of literature and the processes by which we read, and one to which he stays faithful—might be less useful to the general reader, even offering as it does "a series of deep cognitive readings of fiction that presents the experience and consciousness of the sixties at the level of literary representation" (14). On the realism/experimentalism debate, perhaps surprisingly, he ends up at times almost at the B. S. Johnson end of the spectrum, writing that "Th[e] shift in aesthetics and literary sensibility … ensures that traditional forms of realism are and will remain untenable" (15). One of the major strengths of the book is its rescuing of writers like Angus Wilson from the staidly realist camp, and the ways in which he shows that Wilson and Margaret Drabble "almost always appropriate traditional realism to bring to the fore important social, cultural and critical issues" (though presumably every realist novel worth its salt does some version of this). Groes thus rightly traduces any "reductive, dismissive attitude to realism" (38), but his endorsement of the period term "anti-novel" perhaps implies more of a schism between the "extreme" writers of the sixties, as he has it, and those that he has carefully teased out of their usual position as placeholders for a perhaps mythical, conventional, and moribund realism.

Nevertheless, and though Groes is occasionally ill-served by his proofreaders, the book articulates a strong argument: that the whole point of the sixties was its tolerance of variance, a tolerance ideally extended to novels of all leanings. Groes makes his case with illuminating analyses of writers like Drabble and Spark put into adjacency with experimenters like J. G. Ballard and Eva Figes, and showing how the intermingling of them all produces the decade's explosion of possibilities for the future of the British novel.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2017.80 Published online by Cambridge University Press