

Research Project

PhD Thomas Manson; Remapping the Outmoded in Rural England, 1870-1995

Project funded by own resources

Project title PhD Thomas Manson; Remapping the Outmoded in Rural England, 1870-1995

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Organisation / Research unit

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Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin and his surrealist-inspired theory of the outmoded, this dissertation project re-reads rural England from 1870–1995 through the works of five authors – Thomas Hardy, Mary Butts, John Cowper Powys, Ithell Colquhoun and W.G. Sebald – whom Manson proposes as central participants in a previously unrecognized tradition of rural modernity. The project examines how these writers stage encounters between outmoded forms (objects, figures, rituals) and modernity which create new spatio-temporal assemblages, refiguring the rural as a dialectical space where outmoded forms are recuperable in combatting capitalist encroachment upon rural landscapes. Utilizing a theoretical approach more usually applied to urban settings, the project asks how Benjamin’s urban-focussed conception of the outmoded may be read to incorporate the rural; and how the encounters between the outmoded and modernity staged by these authors provide a means of mobilizing the rural at the intersection of capitalism, globalization and rural traditions.

The project employs a methodology that investigates both the formal and narrative strategies deployed by these authors, as well as examining how literature is able to represent performance forms such as folk drama and ritual. Through this methodology, which Manson terms *literature as performance*, the project aims to show not just how these texts utilize the outmoded as a narrative device, but also how the outmoded becomes a formal part of their expression, realizing Benjamin’s radical model of historicity as performance. In doing so, these writers forge new ways of framing the rural, not as a nostalgic pastoral retreat, but as a repository of history that is of equal importance in the formulation of modernity as the metropolitan city.

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