

Play and the Politics of Reading: The Social Uses of Modernist Form

By Paul B. Armstrong

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"Classrooms and curricula should be structured to foster the playful interaction that can teach students how to negotiate social and political differences in an emancipatory, noncoercive manner. . . . Teaching reading as a playful exercise of reciprocity with otherness can help prepare students for a democracy understood as a community of communities."?from the "Pedagogical Postscript"Reading is socially useful, in Paul B. Armstrong's view, and can model democratic interaction by a community unconstrained by the need to build consensus but aware of the dangers of violence, irrationality, and anarchy. Reading requires mutual recognition but need not culminate in agreement, Armstrong says; instead, the social potential of reading arises from the active exchange of attitudes, ideas, and values between author and reader and among readers. Play and the Politics of Reading, which has important implications for education, draws on Wolfgang Iser's notion of free play to offer a valuable response to social problems.Armstrong finds that Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, Henry James, and James Joyce provide apt examples of the politics of reading, for reasons both literary and political. In making the transition from realism to modernism, these authors experimented with narrative strategies that seek simultaneously to represent the world and to question the means of representation itself. The formal ambiguities and complexities of such texts as *Howards End* and *Ulysses* are ways of staging for the reader the difficulties and opportunities of a world of differences. Innovative formal structures challenge readers to reconsider their assumptions and beliefs about social issues.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This intelligent and high-minded book nobly seeks to prove the unlikely: that reading itself can be an exercise that will strengthen democracy, educate students to live in more open and pluralistic societies, and lead all of us (if we are as fair-minded and intellectually generous as its author) to the privileged station of being 'liberal ironists' (where we know everything is groundless yet plunge on with ideals we cannot justify). Armstrong provides close and well-reasoned essays on Henry James, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, and James Joyce to show how a critic as intelligent as himself can observe four writers deploying strategies of ambiguity, flexibility, and multifaceted self-awareness—all of which can elicit from their sensitive readers the give-and-take, the shared understanding, the 'dance' of reciprocated acknowledgment, and the 'consensual relationship of mutuality' on which reading of the best sort depends, the kind of reading that once made Lionel Trilling say: 'A real book reads us.'"—William M. Chace, *Common Knowledge*, Fall 2006

"Play and the Politics of Reading is a cogently argued contribution to our understanding of contemporary humanistic theory, modernist fiction, and important debates about pedagogy in our schools and universities. Nothing quite like it exists. Armstrong provides an original intellectual framework for reading central modernist narratives in English. Within that framework, he focuses on narration as it allows readers to respond to issues of difference, value, and power. Armstrong's commentary on *A Passage to India*, for example, takes full advantage of his subtle method for describing the moral and aesthetic implications of narration and the reader's role in modernist fiction."—John Paul Riquelme, Boston University

From the Inside Flap

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About the Author

Paul B. Armstrong is Professor of English and Dean of the College, Brown University. He is the author of *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in James, Conrad, and Ford*; *The Phenomenology of Henry James*, and *Conflicting Readings: Variety and Validity in Interpretation*. He is also the editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Howards End* by E. M. Forster and a forthcoming revised Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad.

Users Review

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Frank Dawson:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important action, like looking for your favorite guide and reading a book. Beside you can solve your short lived problem; you can

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Jose Suh:

Exactly why? Because this Play and the Politics of Reading: The Social Uses of Modernist Form is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap the item but latter it will zap you with the secret this inside. Reading this book close to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such amazing way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining means but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this ever again or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of benefits than the other book get such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking approach. So , still want to hold off having that book? If I were being you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

Catherine Hershey:

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