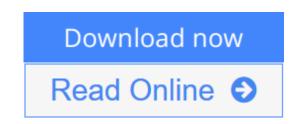


Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development (Modernist Literature and Culture)

By Jed Esty



Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development (Modernist Literature and Culture) By Jed Esty

Unseasonable Youth examines a range of modernist-era fictions that cast doubt on the ideology of progress through the figure of stunted or endless adolescence. Novels of youth by Oscar Wilde, Olive Schreiner, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, H.G. Wells, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and Elizabeth Bowen disrupt the inherited conventions of the bildungsroman in order to criticize bourgeois values and to reinvent the biographical plot, but also to explore the contradictions inherent in mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire. The intertwined tropes of frozen youth and uneven development, as motifs of failed progress, play a crucial role in the emergence of dilatory modernist style and in the reimagination of colonial space at the fin-desiècle. The genre-bending logic of uneven development - never wholly absent from the coming-of-age novel -- takes on a new and more intense form in modernism as it fixes its broken allegory to the problem of colonial development. In novels of unseasonable youth, the nineteenth-century idea of world progress comes up against stubborn signs of underdevelopment and uneven development, just at the same moment that post-Darwinian racial sciences and quasi-Freudian sexological discourses lend greater influence to the idea that certain forms of human difference cannot be mitigated by civilizing or developmental forces. In this historical context, the temporal meaning and social vocation of the bildungsroman undergo a comprehensive shift, as the history of the novel indexes the gradual displacement of historical-progressive thinking by anthropologicalstructural thinking in the Age of Empire.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The power of Esty's text to rewire one's thinking is most evident in the fact that such quibbles arise only once one has accepted his ambitious reframing of the late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century novelistic tradition. ... This is a major rereading of the modernist novel. Its analysis will be unavoidable for future critics of the period.

--Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History

"[Esty's] extensive secondary references, awareness of critical trends, and what the series editors right call his 'admirable stylistic panache' are all impressive. Recommended." --*CHOICE*

"Jed Esty is a fabulous phrase-maker, but his most extraordinary talent is for pattern recognition. There are breath-taking moments of such recognition throughout *Unseasonable Youth*. Esty is forever uncovering formal patterns that had somehow escaped other observers and always mark interesting changes in the landscape of his genre and period. It will be hard if not impossible for future readers to think of the modernist bildungsroman without also reflecting on his powerful and original argument." --Bruce Robbins, author of *Upward Mobility and the Common Good*

"*Unseasonable Youth* offers a masterful set of inquiries into the relations among novel theory, empire, fraying national sovereignty, and the sublimations of modernism, and the results are riveting: this is a brilliant, game-changing argument about the literary wages of uneven development. By forcing an expanded reading of the 'frozen youth' of so many of modernism's protagonists, Esty leads us through some of the most patient, illuminating, and theoretically vivid discussions that I've read in years. Brimming with insights on every page, erudite and supple, Unseasonable Youth is a joy to read. Jed Esty has produced a major contribution to the field of modern literary studies." --Janet Lyon, author of *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*

"Powerful in its theoretical engagements, nuanced in its readings of fiction, *Unseasonable Youth* transforms our understanding of the bildungsroman in the modernist era. In a series of elegant analyses, Esty shows that the progressive developmental narrative associated with both individual and nation in the nineteenth century was not discarded by the twentieth but disenchanted, deformed, and reconfigured in ways that register the "unshapely time" of imperialism and global capital. *Unseasonable Youth* represents a major intervention in recent debates at the intersection of modernist and postcolonial studies--a book that others will admire, draw upon, and contend with for years to come." --Douglas Mao, author of *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860-1960*

"This ambitious study politicizes the modernist Bildungsroman...Besides its weighty historicism, this book will also be enjoyed for its Kermodean interest in the ordering of time--'the empty chronos that is the dark other of the bildungsroman itself'--the technique of novel writing--'How does such a novel, a tale of endless becoming, function as a narrative?'--and for how, like the meta-Bildungsroman itself, it gently registers the attractions of the genre it deconstructs." --*Times Literary Supplement*

"Undoubtedly an important book for the way in which it provides a new and rich perspective on the work of several canonical authors, something that so often eludes other writers. Ultimately, the same remarkable ability Esty exhibited in *A Shrinking Island* for recognising submerged patterns across a wide range of key texts means that *Unseasonable Youth* will forever change how we think aabout the modern *Bildungsroman* and understand 'the fiction of development'." --*Make Magazine*

About the Author

Jed Esty is Associate Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and Natural Culture in England* and a coeditor of *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*.

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