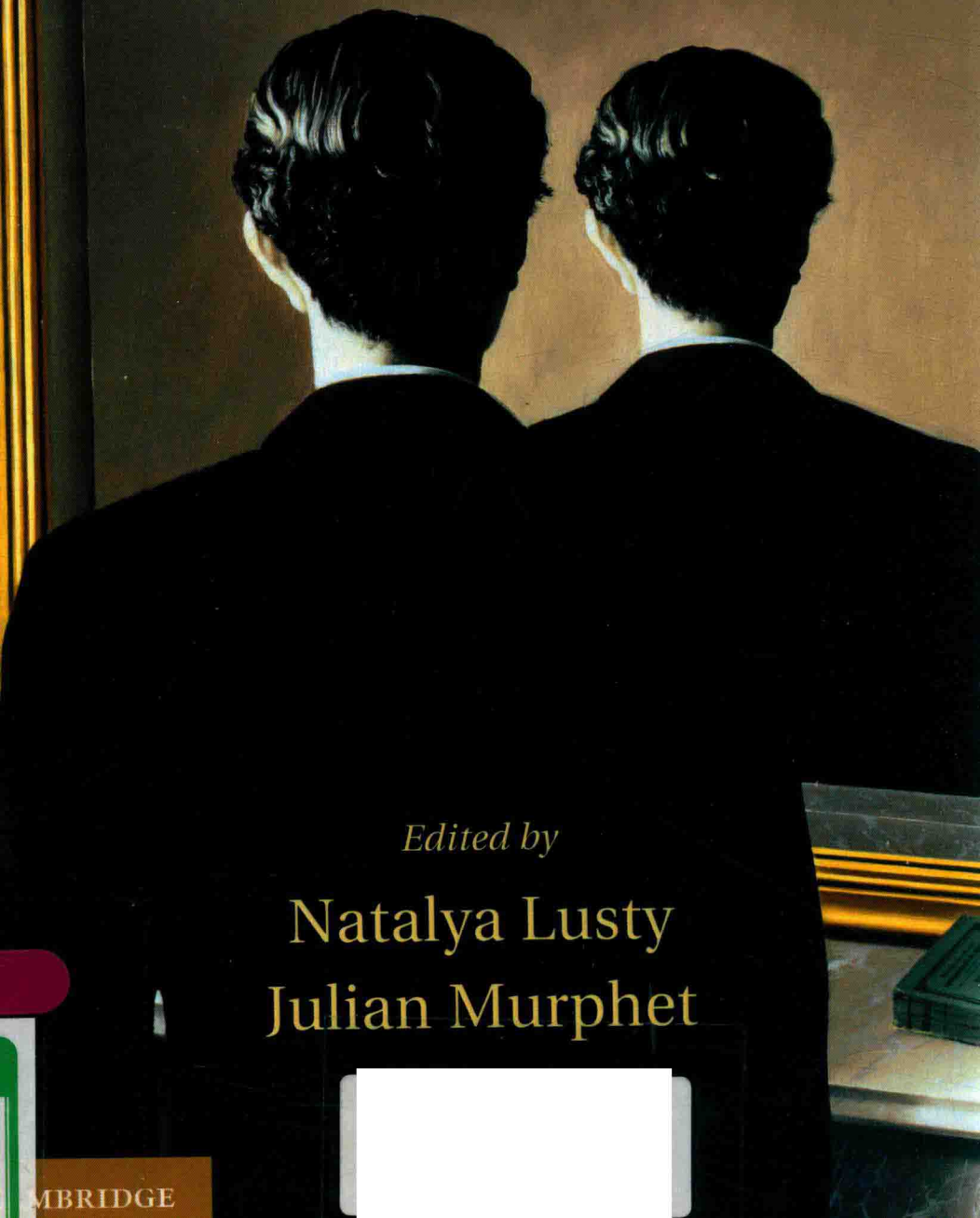
Modernism and Masculinity



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MODERNISM AND MASCULINITY

Modernism and Masculinity investigates the varied dimensions and manifestations of masculinity in the modernist period. Thirteen essays from leading scholars reframe critical trends in modernist studies by examining distinctive features of modernist literary and cultural work through the lens of masculinity and male privilege. The volume attends to masculinity as an unstable horizon of gendered ideologies, subjectivities and representational practices, allowing for fresh interdisciplinary treatments of celebrated and lesser-known authors, artists and theorists such as D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Henry Roth, Theodor Adorno and Paul Robeson, as well as modernist avant-garde movements such as Vorticism, surrealism and Futurism. As diverse as the masculinities that were played out across the early twentieth century, the approaches and arguments featured in this collection will appeal especially to scholars and students of modernist literature and culture, gender studies and English literature more broadly.

Natalya Lusty is Associate Professor in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney. She is the author of *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* and, with Helen Groth, *Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History*. She is currently writing a book on feminist manifestos and the history of radical feminism.

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THOMAS STRYCHACZ has published numerous articles and three books on modernist literature: *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism* (Cambridge University Press 1993); *Hemingway's Theaters of Masculinity* (Louisiana State University Press, 2003) and *Dangerous Masculinities: Conrad, Hemingway, and Lawrence* (University Press of Florida, 2007), the latter two focusing on the representation of masculinity in modernism. He teaches at Mills College, California.

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Several of the introductory paragraphs of the DuPlessis essay contain material also in her *Purple Passages: Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012).

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Introduction
Modernism and Its Masculinities

Natalya Lusty

Modernism and Masculinity brings together a collection of essays concerned with the varied dimensions and manifestations of masculinity in the modernist period. The volume reframes the critical terrain of modernist studies by expanding the gendered portrait of modernity through the lens of masculinity. It offers a renewed opportunity to interrogate some of the distinctive features of modernist literary and cultural expression by attending to masculinity as an unstable horizon of gendered ideologies, subjectivities and representational practices. The focused perspectives that these essays bring to the gendered dimensions of modernist literary and cultural production has been made possible by the interdisciplinary field of masculinity studies, which has produced rich conceptual models for the critical analysis of men, masculinity and male privilege. The approaches and arguments of the essays in this collection are nevertheless as diverse as the masculinities that were played out across the early decades of the twentieth century.

Masculinity Studies

Academic and popular accounts of men and masculinity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been routinely marked by a rhetoric of 'crisis' as a way to frame the threatened nature of masculinity, be they bourgeois or working class masculinities deemed 'at risk' from the encroachments of newly visible marginal groups – women, homosexuals, and ethnic, racial and other cultural minorities. This has led some scholars to question the adequacy of the term 'crisis' in light of the common assumption that masculinity in any given historical period will always be marked by instability and contestation.[1] This still begs the question, however, as to why the concept of crisis is rarely applied to femininity. What is it about masculinity and the masculine that recurrently assumes the rhetorical force of vulnerability, anxiety and even extinction? Given the history of male hegemony,

masculinity had largely (until recently) remained unmarked, a transparent and under-scrutinised category.[2] Subsequent attempts to examine the category of masculinity have precipitated a defensive response to a perceived questioning of authority (a reactionary crisis) *and* a constructive attention to the historical complexities and transformations of manhood, masculinity and male privilege. R. W. Connell's sociological analyses have been instructive in developing concepts of masculinity informed by empirical research based on the experiences of men and boys but also firmly rooted in the political goals of social justice. Connell's work was instrumental in defining the field of masculinity studies throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in part because she developed a series of critical concepts that analysed the systemic effects of male privilege and power even while exploring men's experiences of inadequacy and vulnerability.[3] Expanding the conceptual ground of the field through the identification of distinct formations of masculinity ('hegemonic', 'marginalized' and 'complicit'), Connell's work drew attention to the historically mutable nature of masculinity alongside the contemporary social forces that shape the heterogeneous experiences and practices of being a man.

The post-structuralist turn in feminist and queer scholarship sparked an important trans-disciplinary focus that expanded the critical terrain and the political goals of masculinity studies. Drawing on a range of critical tools, including deconstruction, psychoanalytic models, Althusser's theory of ideology, and Foucault's genealogical analysis of modern sexuality, feminist scholarship began to scrutinise more closely masculine forms of power ingrained within the sex/gender system. Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire* (1985) brought a valuable literary focus to the study of masculinity, defining literature as an important site for understanding the social and sexual bonds that inform the techniques of power and inequality. In a series of close readings of canonical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary works, Sedgwick examined 'the structure of men's relationships with other men'; the way male social bonds (rivalry, friendship, entitlement, mentorship and homosexuality) facilitated the exchange of women, real or imagined, in ways that empower men and regulate sexual desire and gendered identity.[4] The literature of Western modernity reveals, according to Sedgwick, 'a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power.'[5] While the omnipresence of male homosocial desire rests on the prohibition of men choosing each other as sexual objects, the resulting alignment of homophobia and misogyny functions as a powerful oppressive of

'the feminine' in both men and women. The wider impact of Sedgwick's work for masculinity studies was to bring a fine-tuned literary eye to the analysis of the micro-rituals of power embedded in the social worlds of literary works, moving beyond Foucault's often-broad historical generalisations, which invariably occluded the gendered dimensions of disciplinary power.

With the work of Judith Butler, the idea of crisis or at least 'trouble' has assumed an altogether different turn, signalling the impossibility of a coherent gendered subject and its stable alignment with a sexed body. For Butler, the performative dimension of gendered behaviour allows us to see masculinity and femininity as constitutive effects of 'the regulatory practice of gender coherence' rather than as fixed forms of sexual difference.[6] As Butler argues, 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results.'[7] According to Butler's argument, gender both constrains and enables particular expressions and practices that are always tied to the contingencies of time and place. The publication of *Gender Trouble* (1990) assisted in reconceptualising masculinity as tenuous and fragile, a 'stylized repetition of acts' rather than the expression of a core gendered ideal.[8] The provisional nature of gendered performance proffered the possibility of less oppressive and obligatory forms of masculinity, ones in which feminist and queer theorists might actively participate in shaping.[9] Butler's work prompted a renewed attention to the historical operations of masculinity and the dismantling of what Butler defined as the 'illusion of continuity between gender, sexuality and desire' that has served to define heterosexuality as the obligatory sexual orientation. Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (1998) offered an important corrective to that illusion by uncovering a barely visible history of female masculinities, from nineteenth-century invert practices to twentieth-century drag-king performances. In distancing masculinity from its immediate association with men, Halberstam uncovered the diversity of identifications, desires and practices that inform gendered identity. Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992) similarly turned to marginal and deviant masculine subjectivity in order to expose what she calls the 'dominant fiction' of conventional or phallic modes of masculinity. Investigating male subjectivities that 'eschew Oedipal normalization' in a range of literary and filmic texts, Silverman analysed the psychoanalytic vicissitudes (castration, alterity and specularity) that define a non-phallic openness to the domain of femininity. As Silverman argues, 'saying "no" to power necessarily implies achieving some kind of reconciliation with ...

femininity'(3). Providing an important *rapprochement* between psychoanalytic feminism and ideological critique, Silverman insisted on the importance of fantasy – unconscious desire and identification – alongside the role of ideology in the formation of subjectivity. Her analysis offered an illuminating account of conventional masculinity's fantasy of exemplarity, a 'murderous logic' that rests on a belief in 'the commensurability of penis and phallus, actual and symbolic father' (46). But as Silverman's rich case studies reveal, desire and identification also deviate from the expected paths and delineations that make up the 'dominant fiction' of phallic masculinity. Silverman therefore provided an important defence of feminist theory's increasing preoccupation with the analysis of masculinity, defining the book's motivations as steeped in the way 'masculinity impinges with such force on femininity'. Silverman thus contends that '[t]o effect a large-scale reconfiguration of male identification and desire would, at the very least, permit female subjectivity to be lived differently than it is at present' (2–3).

Although fully mapping the terrain of masculinity studies is beyond the scope of this introduction, the work described above illustrates the diversity of the field in overcoming the stifling dichotomies – constructivist and essentialist, historical and ideological – that have traditionally framed accounts of gender within the humanities and social sciences. While the essays in this collection do not always directly address the scholarship of masculinity studies, the volume as a whole is indebted to Sedgwick's call for 'a more historically discriminate mode of analysis' that pays close attention to the individual and structural conditions informing the nexus between modernity and masculinity.[10] The volume interrogates the idea of 'crisis' as it pertains to masculinity in the modernist period but remains open to the possibility of modernism's own self-diagnosis as a period in which men experienced radical transformation, often caught between new and obsolete models of masculinity. If the aesthetic and cultural practices of modernism defined masculinity in relation to cultural fragmentation *and* regeneration, this reflects the broader antinomies of progress and decline that shaped the cultural and discursive space of modernity.

Modernist Masculinities

World War One has long been defined as a collective historical wound gendering modernism as a site of masculine emotional trauma and corporeal fragmentation. The historical work on masculinity during this period has been exemplary in producing nuanced accounts of the protean

experiences of war that both contested and conformed to the military and civilian expectations of men of the period.[11] Elaine Showalter's analysis of male hysteria has revealed the ambivalent psychiatric response to the epidemic of war neurosis, which by 1916 accounted for 40 per cent of British war causalities.[12] Often diagnosed as a lack of discipline or loyalty, military psychologists were reluctant to acknowledge the emotional and psychological vulnerability of men, which reflected a pervasive Victorian masculine ideal of courage, self-control and above all a manly ethos of not complaining. More recently Mark S. Micale has unearthed a more comprehensive, albeit barely visible history of the suppression of male nervous illness by Western scientific and medical discourses, which long upheld an image of male detachment, rationality and objectivity in the face of contrary evidence produced in clinical studies and on the battlefield. In suppressing the fragility of male mental and emotional experience, Micale suggests, Western medical knowledge is marked 'not by the steady, rational accumulation of knowledge, but by anxiety, ambivalence, and selective amnesia.'[13]

Sarah Cole and Santanu Das revise existing studies of First World War experience by examining a distinctive literary voice that captured the intensity, as well as the inexpressibility, of male wartime intimacy. Cole's *Modernism, Male Friendship and the First World War* (2003) turns to the familiar modernist themes of alienation, loss and fragmentation, but newly configures them as the 'excavated' remains of 'lost male comradeship'.[14] Examining the figure of the lost friend together with the beleaguered sense of male friendship in the work of Forster, Lawrence and the war poets, Cole traces the decline of the Victorian institutions (educational networks that fostered Hellenic ideals of male community and military ideals of comradeship and loyalty) that had provided protective and familiar forms of male friendship. Cole argues that the fracturing experience of war intensified the waning of traditional forms of male intimacy, giving rise to unstable and often incompatible forms of male community. Cole's study of the so-called threshold modernists revises the overriding portrait of modernism as an intensely collaborative male enterprise, providing an expanded narrative of how the war opened up a disjunction between private friendship and culturally sanctioned forms of comradeship, which both compelled and constrained male social bonds in the period. In *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2005) Das, like Cole, is interested in reorienting our familiar sense of male forms of intimacy and the efforts of soldiers and nurses to capture the unrelenting physicality and emotional intimacy of life in the trenches and field hospitals. His optic,

however, zooms in on the localised and transient forms of human contact that emerged from the eviscerating experience of what he terms the 'slimescapes' of the trenches: 'The experience of trench mud was one of the most powerful encounters of the human subject with the immensity and chaos of inert matter ... it brought the soldiers to the precipice of non-meaning in a world that was already ceasing to make sense.'[15] Das persuasively argues for the primacy of human 'touch' in a world stripped of the consoling myths of heroic masculinity, noting the irony of how 'the world's first industrial war, which brutalized the body on such an enormous scale, also nurtured the most intense of male bonds.' (136)

If World War One seemed to promise new forms of male-bonding that might ameliorate the Victorian ideal of masculine physical prowess and emotional self-discipline, the figure of the masculine fascist subject would soon haunt the landscape of nationalist masculinity. Klaus Theweleit's two-volume study, *Male Fantasies* has produced a confronting portrait of proto-fascist subjectivity and the psychic repressions of militarised forms of masculinity.[16] Reading the memoirs, letters and novels of the German *Freikorps*, mercenary soldiers employed to contain the spread of communism in Germany between the wars, Theweleit discovered the exaltation of a masculine militarised body in terms of hardness, impenetrability and self-discipline, a body defined as at risk of contamination by the soft, oceanic fluidity of the female body. The intense misogyny and violence directed towards women by the private *Freikorps* army disclose a psychic fragmentation that tied anxieties around the penetrability of the male body to the vulnerability of the nation state. Within this rigidly defined gendered imaginary, the masculine body and the nation state were thus rigidly bordered and protected from foreign contamination: Jews, communists, homosexuals or indeed any form of 'soft' masculinity. Theweleit's study has made a significant impression on recent theories of modern masculinity across a range of disciplines, in part because the thrust of his argument asserts, sometimes controversially, that the fantasies embedded within fascist masculinity are prototypical rather than extraordinary. Implicit in this argument is the idea that all embattled modes of masculinity depend on the pathologisation of those forms of femininity that pose a threat to men's desire for bodily and national control. Historically, Theweleit's study reveals how the fascist 'new man' of National Socialism was forged within a rigid gendered imaginary, the containment of which necessitated ruthless forms of persecution and violence.

The culturally regenerative space of modernism nevertheless provided an opportunity for the critical reappraisal of prevailing and emergent

models of masculinity in Europe, the United States and elsewhere. The increasing fluidity of social and sexual roles made possible by industrialisation, commodification, the extension of the franchise, suffragism, sexology, psychology, urbanisation, and new forms of transport and communication meant that masculinity at the beginning of the twentieth century entered into a protracted period of cultural reflexivity and malleability. As the cultural influx from the colonised world was progressively absorbed into Western forms of social behaviour and self-consciousness, the very idea of 'being a man' came under renewed scrutiny and pressure. The effects of industrial warfare, as we have seen, disrupted long-established conventions of intimacy, honour and manly sacrifice. Conversely, as social mobility and migration became a fixture of everyday life, so 'the Jew' emerged as a distinctly feminised spectre of modernity, whose racial demonisation was to entail new forms of nationalist masculinity, fashioned through the violent protocols of pure bloodlines and fantasies of contamination. As national forms of hegemonic masculinity were being solidified in Germany and Italy, in Britain the visibly disruptive demonstrations of the Suffragists had already radically feminised the public sphere, even as their manifestos and political tracts often problematically tied women's political emancipation to sexual propriety.

The culture and artworks of modernism emerged from the flux of irreconcilable social energies. The 'new woman' and the 'new man' were salient figures in the cultural ideologies of art at the time, in response to the progressive erosion of gender norms in the system of commodity culture and in the ensuing rearrangement of public and private life. But while social, economic and political forces shifted gendered norms and the sexual ideologies that informed them, the ideologies of art reinvented them in unexpected and complicated ways. What emerges from the maelstrom of modernist cultural expression is a range of masculine subject positions, male practices and representations of masculinity, sometimes carrying with them the traces of the very femininity associated with tradition and mass culture (Joyce's Bloom), or the enervation of the emasculated modern man (Eliot's Prufrock). Leopold Bloom, the womanly man, is one prototype of the period: heroically defeating every challenge to his equanimity and humanism, yet lampooned mercilessly as an effeminate parasite and cosmopolitan liberal. Prufock is another model of modern masculinity: confounded by the impotence of his masculinity, his halting cry, 'That's not it at all, that's not what I meant at all', hints at sexual and emotional paralysis. The self-promotional hyper-masculinity of Futurism provides one response to the perceived feminisation of political culture, while the