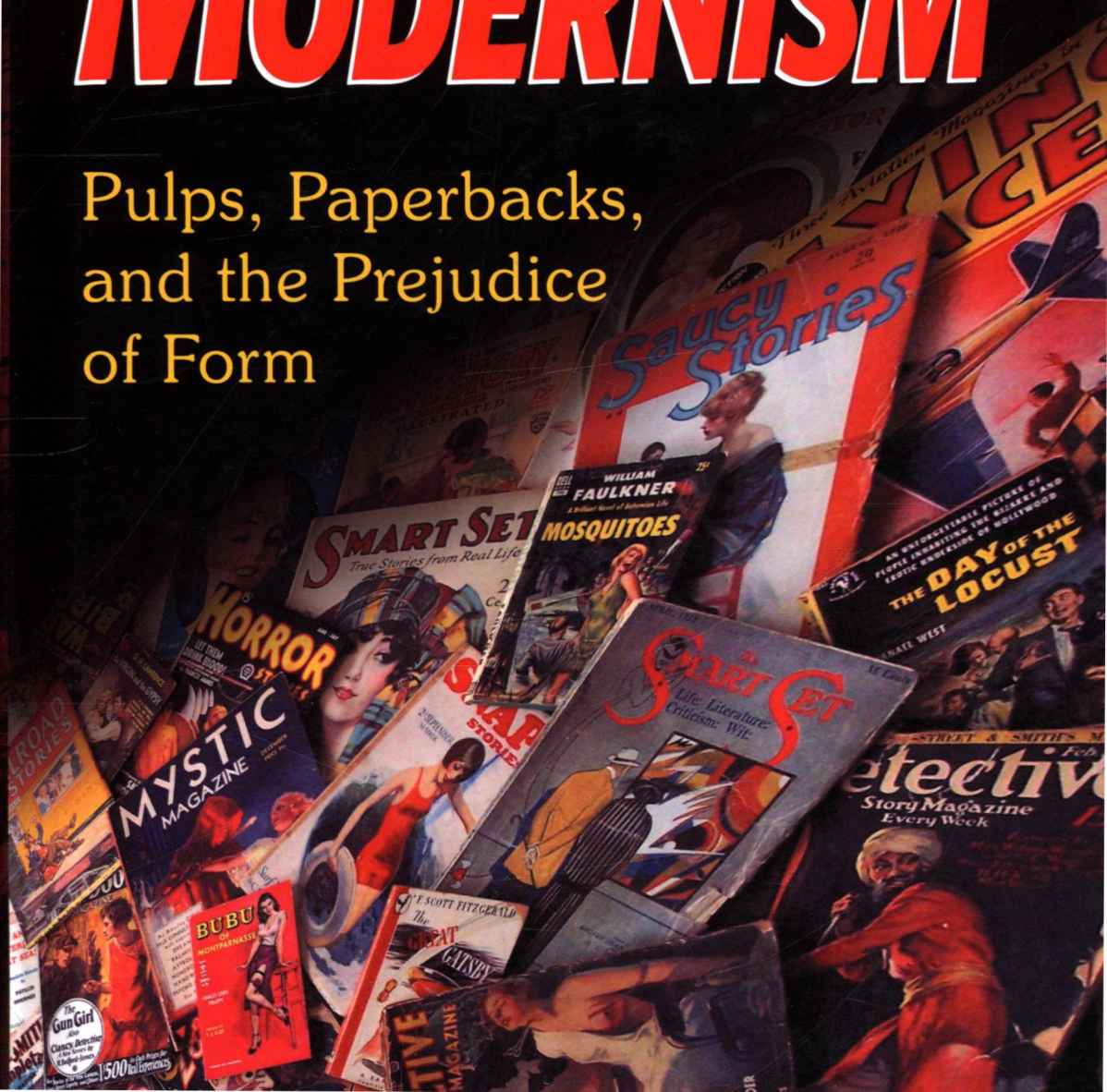


DAVID M. EARLE



# RE-COVERING MODERNISM

Pulps, Paperbacks,  
and the Prejudice  
of Form





In the first half of the twentieth century, modernist works appeared not only in obscure little magazines and books published by tiny exclusive presses but also in literary reprint magazines of the 1920s, tawdry pulp magazines of the 1930s, and lurid paperbacks of the 1940s. In his nuanced exploration of the publishing and marketing of modernist works, David M. Earle questions how and why modernist literature came to be viewed as the exclusive purview of a cultural elite given its availability in such popular forums. As he examines sensational and popular manifestations of modernism, as well as their reception by critics and readers, Earle provides a methodology for reconciling formerly separate or contradictory materialist, cultural, visual, and modernist approaches to avant-garde literature. Central to Earle's innovative approach is his consideration of the physical aspects of the books and magazines—covers, dust wrappers, illustrations, cost—which become texts in their own right. Richly illustrated and accessibly written, Earle's study shows that modernism emerged in a publishing ecosystem that was both richer and more complex than has been previously documented.

**David M. Earle** is assistant professor of English at the University of West Florida, USA.

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*University of West Florida, USA*

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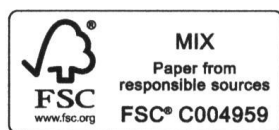
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# RE-COVERING MODERNISM

*To My Parents  
For Filling My Life with Books  
And Love*



# Acknowledgments

The idea of this book started, I must believe, long ago with me lying on the carpet in my father's library, leafing through the pages of Tony Goodstone's book on the pulps. I couldn't have been more than eight or nine years old, but I remember the fascination that the sensational, colorful, often gruesome but always exciting cover illustrations held for me. I was soon voracious for Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard, H.P. Lovecraft; I collected their paperbacks, early Grosset and Dunlap reprints, and eventually their pulp magazines. And as I grew older I ranged wider, into Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and eventually Joyce—all under the quiet influence of my father's library and my mother's indulgence. Hence it is for them that I must dedicate this book for instilling in me the passion for reading, the academic hunger, and the somewhat maddening fetishes of a true collector. But most of all, for the unceasing love and support and faith that allowed them to never dictate, but let my passion lead. And I am of course indebted to the rest of my family: my sister and brother; to my grandparents who are sorely missed; to Brisa Roche; Scott Bakoss, Jamie DiPietro, and Luca. And Monica.

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# Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	viii
Introduction	1
1 <i>The Smart Set</i> , Modernism, and the Expanded Field of Magazine Production	17
2 Pulp Modernism	71
3 Lurid Paperbacks and the Re-Covering of Modernism	151
<i>Bibliography</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	235

# List of Figures

I.1	<i>Man's Magazine</i> , Oct. 1961 © 1961 Almat Publishing Corporation	2
1.1	<i>Smart Set</i> , June 1914 © 1914 John Adams Thayer Corporation	19
1.2	<i>Smart Set</i> , Sept. 1915 © 1915 Smart Set Company, Inc.	43
1.3	<i>Smart Set</i> , April 1923 © 1923 Smart Set Company, Inc.	44
1.4	<i>Smart Set</i> , Sept. 1923 © 1923 Smart Set Company, Inc.	46
1.5	<i>Saucy Stories</i> , Nov. 1919 © 1919 The Inter-Continental Publishing Corporation	47
1.6	<i>Snappy Stories</i> , Dec. 1, 1925 © 1924 New Fiction Publishing Corporation	53
1.7	<i>Flapper</i> , May 1923 © 1923 The Flapper Publishing Company	55
1.8	<i>Smart Set</i> , July 1927 © 1927 Magus Magazine Corporation	57
1.9	<i>Golden Book</i> , Dec. 1925 © The Review of Reviews Corporation	67
2.1	<i>Courtroom Stories</i> , Aug.–Sept. 1931 © 1931 Good Story Magazine Company, image supplied by Adventure House	76
2.2	<i>All Story Love Stories</i> , Sept. 21, 1935 © 1935 The Frank A. Munsey Company	81
2.3	<i>The Plot Genie</i> , 1931 © Ernest F. Gagnon Company. Copyright never renewed	96
2.4	<i>Film Fun</i> , April 1930 © 1930 Dell Publishing Company	99
2.5	<i>Black Mask</i> , Feb. 1922 © 1922 Pro-Distributers	108
2.6	<i>Operator #5</i> , Dec. 1934 © 1934 Popular Publications, image supplied by Girasol Collectibles	117

2.7	Ad, Nuxated Iron from <i>Parisienne</i> , May 1919 inside back cover	133
2.8	Ad, International Correspondence School, <i>Argosy</i> , Aug. 7, 1937. Pg. 1	134
2.9	<i>Illustrated World</i> , Dec. 1916 © 1916 Illustrated World	138
2.10	Keeler Graph, <i>The Author and Journalist</i> , April 1928. Pgs. 18–19. Copyright never renewed	143
2.11	<i>The Author and Journalist</i> , April 1928 © 1925 The Author and Journalist	144
3.1	<i>Bubu of Montparnasse</i> . Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1957	152
3.2	<i>Against the Grain</i> . Albert and Charles Boni, 1930	156
3.3	<i>Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i> . Penguin Signet, 1948	163
3.4	<i>Nana</i> . Pocket Books, 1945	170
3.5	<i>The Great Gatsby</i> . Bantam Books, 1946	171
3.6	<i>Women in Love</i> . Avon, 1951	181
3.7	<i>Aaron's Rod</i> . Avon, 1956	182
3.8	<i>Snappy Magazine</i> , Sept. 1935 © 1935 D.M. Publishing Company	191
3.9	Ad, Uthaid from <i>Ulysses</i> , A Collectors Publication (pirated) n.d.	192
3.10	<i>Pylon</i> . Signet, 1951	199
3.11	<i>Wild Palms</i> . Penguin; 1948; Signet, 1950	207
3.12	<i>Across the River and Into the Trees</i> . Dell, 1953	211
3.13	<i>One Lonely Night</i> . Signet, 1952	212
3.14	<i>The Damned</i> . Lion Library, 1956	216

# Introduction

*Man's Magazine* is a typical example of the mid-century men's adventure magazine, a genre known for sensational color covers that usually featured men or scantily clad women being attacked by baboons, Nazis, or more scantily clad women. The December 1961 issue is no exception (see Figure I.1). A portrait painting of Field Marshall Kesselring, "The Nazi Butcher of Rome," glares from its cover, complete with warts and beads of sweat. In the background shirtless male prisoners are being gunned down by Nazi guards. The headline reads "10 Italians Must Die For Every German." The rest of the magazine substantiates the cover's sensationalism. Besides the usual ads for stag films, correspondence schools, and hair tonics, there are stories on jungle survival, Brigitte Bardot, ways to improve one's sex life, and hidden among these is James Joyce's short story "Two Gallants," replete with suggestive illustration and the tagline: "She made love willingly, but he – and his pal – wanted more."

The sensational connotations of this version of "Two Gallants" might surprise those familiar with the canonized reading of the story as being more about economics and Dublin homo-social behavior rather than risqué sexuality. Considering Joyce's reputation as the flagship of modernism, it is surprising that he is appearing in such a venue at all. In actuality, Joyce's appearance here was really not so strange for he made numerous appearances in similar magazines throughout the 1950s. The first issue of *Nugget* magazine (Dec. 1955) republished "The Boarding House." There were articles about him in magazines such as *Debonair* (Feb. 1961), or about *Ulysses* such as *Modern Man's* "Classic Battle over a Sex Classic" (March 1957). The example of "Two Gallants" is a bit more extreme since *Man's Magazine* is lower on the cultural scale from such pseudo-literary *Playboy* knockoffs, but Joyce wasn't the only "highbrow" author to appear in these magazines; they were liberally peppered with stories by modernists: *Gent Magazine* featured Faulkner, John O'Hara, Huysman, and even Jean Paul Sartre; *Escapade* featured S.J. Perelman, William Soroyan, Somerset Maugham, and Jack Kerouac; *The Dude* featured D.H. Lawrence, Farrell, Faulkner, Budd Schulberg, and Robert Lowry; *High* featured Farrell and Pierre Louys; the list goes on. Other authors that appeared regularly were Nelson Algren, Norman Mailer, Erskine Caldwell, Ben Hecht, and Paul Bowles. Many magazines also featured articles *about* famous literary figures: not only Joyce, but Faulkner, Henry Miller, DeMaupassant, Lawrence, and Oscar Wilde as well.

These stories and articles are interspersed with pictorial features that tie into the innate risqué nature of modernist art, such as the premiere issue of *Nugget's* articles "The Eternal Idol," about famous erotic sculptures like Rodin's "The Kiss," and "Modern Art for the Modern Man," which counterpoints nude pinups with paintings by Renoir and Modigliani. These articles rely upon, or at least belie, a certain fascination with the dynamics of modernism. This use of highbrow art and



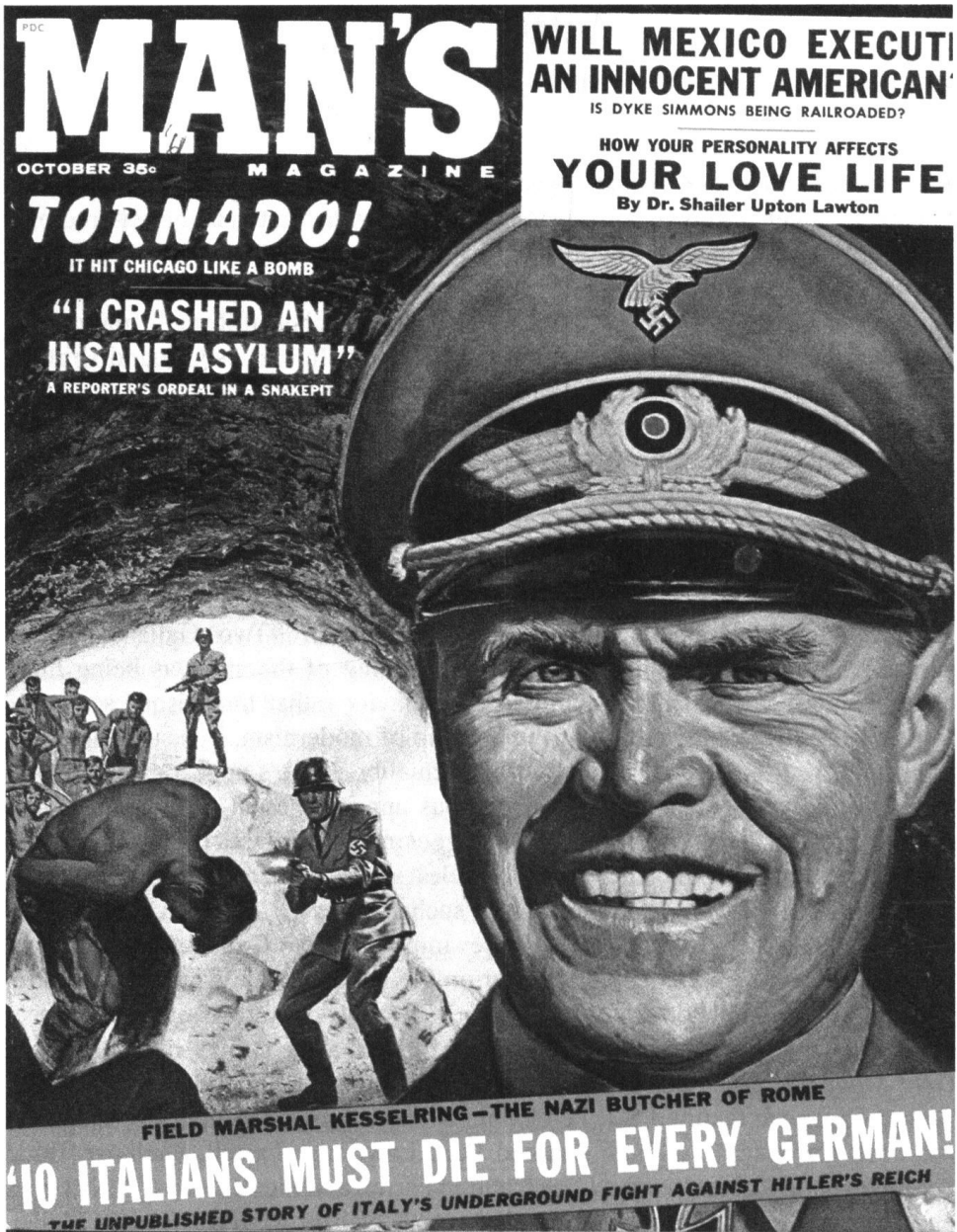


Fig. I.1 *Man's Magazine*, Oct. 1961 © 1961 Almat Publishing Corporation

authors was pragmatic, giving such magazines cultural capital to fight censorship, but it also parallels how modernist works often relied and profited by notoriety and sensationalism—the popularity and canonization of *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterly's Lover* are the obvious examples. Furthermore, modernist pieces in this context, like “Two Gallants” and “The Boarding House,” recapture the innate risqué nature they held at their original publication, lost in their usual sanctioned surroundings of

academic anthologies or editions—indeed, *Man's Magazine's* marketing (taglines and illustrations) of “Two Gallants” relies upon the same ambiguity that Joyce uses to make the story's climax so effective.

These men's magazines of the 1950s and 1960s are the final apotheosis, the death throes of the Pulp Magazine, and apparitions of modernism under these hyper-masculine connotations can even be seen as the culmination of Pound and company's reaction to a popular literature that they defined as too effeminate. Such instances of “Pulp Modernism” don't mark colonization of the movement by the sensational mass market, but actually divulge an alternate populist history of modernism that can be traced back to its very beginnings, one that has been studiously ignored. This book is an overview of that history of popular modernism.

I chose to begin with Joyce in the 1950s not only because he is the arch-modernist, but because his largely overlooked *popular* publishing career spans, encapsulates, and bookends populist modernism. This is especially true in America where he started his publishing career more than 40 years earlier in the middlebrow *Smart Set*, which published “Eveline” and “A Little Cloud” in 1915 alongside authors such as Achmed Abdullah, the author of the pulpish *Buccaneer in Spats* and *The Thief of Baghdad*. Joyce also appeared throughout the 1920s and 1930s in mass reprint magazines such as *Golden Book*, *Two Worlds*, and *Fiction Parade*, and in the 1940s and 1950s in popular men's magazines and paperback editions and anthologies. Poetry of his from *Chamber Music* even appeared in *American Girl* (May 1933), the magazine for the Girl Scouts of America.

These overlooked, popular manifestations of modernism involve a series of submerged tensions and dichotomies that are emblematic—and problematic—to a reified idea of modernism as a canonized, defined movement. The idea of a popular, alternate, or shadow history of modernism singular with its inception and rise (but not canonization) troubles the idea of the continuous absorption of the avant-garde into mass-culture; rather, it forwards the idea of a popular avant-garde. That Joyce appeared alongside established pulp authors in *The Smart Set*, or that the magazine's editors, H.L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, were also publishers of the lowbrow pulps *Parisienne*, *Saucy Stories*, and *Black Mask* is enough to warrant critical attention. The overlooked *Smart Set*—just one of the many ignored outlets for modernism considered in this study—illuminates how slanted our history of the movement is in regard to the *forms* of modernism; our increasingly sophisticated understanding of modernism is still reductively based upon the material forms that those early literary historians thought worthy of archiving: the little magazine, manuscripts, and first editions, rather than reprint magazines and literary digests, reprint and circulating library hardback editions, pulp magazines, and paperbacks—all forms that evince a modernist (yet unsanctioned, ignored) heritage. *Re-Covering Modernism*, an exploration and illumination of modernism's popular genealogy, establishes a relationship far from antagonistic between modernism and the most popular and ephemeral literary forms of the time; it does so by focusing on the forms of popular literary

production in the twentieth century: early fiction and reprint magazines, interwar pulp magazines, and popular paperbacks.

This portrait of modernism is admittedly controversial, though less so than it would have been thirty years ago when the concept of modernism was still built upon exclusion and elitism, constructed as a singular coterie avant-garde movement based on stylistic experimentation and difficulty, and defined by its “great divide” from popular culture. Artists and critics have been attempting to define modernism as a cohesive movement since its inception; indeed, the date of its inception has been a point of contention, whether Woolf’s 1910 or the “men of 1914” of Eliot and Pound. Such an attempt for concrete dates and, more importantly, definition is obviously counterintuitive to the multivalence of modernism. Certain books, like Michael Levenson’s *A Genealogy of Modernism* (1984), attempt to sidestep problematic definitions by seeing the term “modernism” as a necessary evil: as Levin puts it, “Vague terms still signify,” and “As a rough way of locating our attention, ‘modernism’ will do.”<sup>1</sup> Yet such flippant motioning to perhaps the most problematic labeling in English studies history is indicative of the deeper reductivism in both Levenson’s book and pre-revisionary modernist studies. Though a sophisticated study of the criticism of Arnold, Eliot, Pound, and Hulme, Levenson’s book just propagates the Monolithic and Elite definitions of modernism: Monolithic because he does not take into consideration the rich histories of women, homosexuals, and minorities working within (and against) the movement; Elite because he never takes into account how modernism was working within the marketplace or even that there were popular forms and aspects of the movement. This latter is more forgivable than the former, for the feminist revision of the modernist canon was well under way when Levenson was writing in the mid-1980s; the attention paid to women writers in his book is confined to three passing references to Woolf—a gross injustice even by 1984 standards. But the latter—the debunking of modernism’s elite coterie—has only now come into full revisionist momentum.

But this still leaves the problem of definition. Invariably, the more attempts there are, the more modernism becomes difficult to pin down. The problem or “paradox” (as Robert Scholes has labeled it) of modernism’s resistance to categorization and reduction is in actuality the problem of the academy, of the codifying mindset.<sup>2</sup> At its very heart, modernism defies borders, it is anomalous, anti-structural. The shortcomings innate in applying such a necessarily reductive codifying ethos to a multivariate, multivalent, and ultimately noncohesive movement become evident in those many contrasting dates that critics and artists have assigned to the beginning and end of modernism, and more so in the revisionists’ charges of reductivism aimed at the idea that modernism was solely the realm of white males.<sup>3</sup> The worrying of the term and definition of modernism has been one

<sup>1</sup> Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (NY: Cambridge U P, 1984), vii.

<sup>2</sup> See Scholes, *Paradox of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale U P, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism: The Women of 1928* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1995), 80–83.

with the expansion (or explosion) of the traditional modernist canon through the recovery of lost authors, forgotten texts, overlooked little magazines, and media such as film, jazz, and radio. Feminist, postcolonial, and African-Americanist critics have justly revealed the omissions of the predominately white, male model of the artistic avant-garde forwarded by largely male and new critical literary historians. Feminist critics were the pioneers of this and continue to be so, ranging from such innovative works as Bonnie Kime Scott's *Refiguring Modernism* (1996) and Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank* (1987) that forwarded the female role in the modernist agenda, to the rediscovery of female authors such as Mary Butts, to the recent and promising studies of print and periodical culture, such as Francesca Sawaya's *Modern Women, Modern Work*, Jean Lutes's *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction* (2006), and Sharon Harris and Ellen Gruber Garvey's *Blue Pencils and Hidden Hands* (2004). Riding this wave of expansion, academic societies and journals, such as the Modernist Studies Association, *Modernism/Modernity*, and *Cultures of Modernism*, have taken to using "Modernisms" as indicator of the movement(s)'s plurality.<sup>4</sup>

This revisionist momentum has brought modernist studies to a moment of both crisis and fertility: as Jennifer Wicke pointed out at the initial meeting of the Modernist Studies Association and in an ensuing article for *Modernism/Modernity*, the multitude of modernisms and modernist re-envisioning threaten to undermine our own critical project.<sup>5</sup> For Wicke, our reinvention of modernism into "new modernisms" involves a "purifying" agenda without acknowledgment of our own implication with Modernism's "brand name" or market dynamic. This, and the ensuing debates about what *is* (or should be) modernism only encapsulates or highlights the pluralist agenda of modernism that was simplified by the monolithic definition of the movement constructed in the mid-century by new critical canonization and by critics such as Malcolm Cowley. It is this plurality that Wicke appreciates in her suggestion to see ourselves—the critics and historians of modernism—in terms of colportage, displaying a simultaneity of plurality, a richness of product not so much without value judgment but heavily invested with a plurality of values. In this sense, *Re-Covering Modernism*, organized around fiction and reprint magazines of the teens and 1920s, interwar pulp magazines, and '40s and '50s paperbacks, is critical colportage on a massive scale concerned with forms of publishing that consisted of dozens of genres, hundreds of subgenres, thousands of titles, and millions of readers, all seen in relation to, implicated within the traditions of modernism. And like colporteur in its true sense—a traveling hawker of books and newspapers—this study is innately about and organized around the material product, modernism in the marketplace, as found on the newsstand, in the drugstore, over the counter.

<sup>4</sup> See also Richard Shepherd's "The Problematics of European Modernism," in Giles' *Theorizing Modernism* (NY: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Wicke, "Appreciation, Depreciation: Modernism's Speculative Bubble," *Modernism / Modernity*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 389–403.



Likewise, it might be useful to define the age of modernism materially—like the Iron Age or Bronze Age—as the Paper Age, as a way to broaden the definition of the movement, or at least to spark thinking about it in terms of material production. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, technology made possible affordable paper, printing, graphic reproduction, and large-scale means of distribution. The birth of national magazines and newspapers, modern advertising and circulation, mass publications, mass entertainment created the first media-influenced mass culture, where an entire nation had simultaneous access to the same titles, authors, articles, news, and opinions. As Mathew Schneirov points out, “Popular magazines, forerunners of modern mass communications, were central in the development of the new social order of corporate capitalism.”<sup>6</sup> These things—mass culture, popular magazines, advertising, corporate capitalism—are exactly what modernism is traditionally said to be a reaction against, to be separated from by a “great divide.” Hence it is the little magazines, (small, privately produced, noncommercial avant-garde periodicals) that are seen as the forms and propagators of the movement. But if, as divulged by popular material manifestations of modernism, this great divide is illusory, more of a posture for self-marketing, then modernism is just another aspect of this age of production, of the paper age. In Andreas Huyssen’s influential but hotly contested study of the Great Divide, mass culture has always been the hidden counterpoint of modernism.<sup>7</sup> In *Re-Covering Modernism* though, modernism has always been an available aspect of mass culture.

My title, *Re-Covering Modernism*, not only plays off of my focus on the visual material aspects of marketing modernism (covers, dustwrappers, the physical properties of book production), but also my return and rediscovery of aspects of modernism that have been overlooked exactly due to their very mass appeal, marketability, and sensationalism. If we consider the outward aspects of a text, such as cover, font, price paid, and venue as integral to a book’s overall “aura,” then the marketing of a book is an important text in its own right, necessary to study. The construction of elite modernism would have it that literature is above monetary concerns, and the corresponding forms that have been archived by the academy have been collected as rare products of the pure production of art. The forms of the all-fiction wood-pulp magazines and the mass paperback examined here are oppositional to this idea. They epitomize literary ephemera in the mass marketplace: the pulps, for example, were seen as disposable literature produced cheaply on disposable (almost instantly disintegrating) paper. Likewise, modernist reprints in popular digests and magazines, cheap circulating library editions and paperbacks are uncollected and unexamined despite the fact that they had circulations in the tens or even hundreds of thousands. There has been no academic capturing in amber of what has always been considered and remains the literary trash of the early twentieth century. Instead, pulp magazines and paperbacks have

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America 1893–1914* (NY: Columbia U P), 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1986).