



A HISTORY OF THE MODERNIST NOVEL

Edited by

GREGORY CASTLE

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Arizona State University



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A HISTORY OF THE MODERNIST NOVEL

A History of the Modernist Novel reassesses the modernist canon and produces a wealth of new comparative analyses that radically revise the novel's history. Drawing on American, English, Irish, Russian, French, and German traditions, leading scholars challenge existing attitudes about realism and modernism and draw new attention to everyday life and everyday objects. In addition to its exploration of new forms such as the modernist genre novel and experimental historical novel, this book considers the novel in postcolonial, transnational, and cosmopolitan contexts. *A History of the Modernist Novel* also considers the novel's global reach while suggesting that the epoch of modernism is not yet finished.

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Acknowledgments

When I was first approached by Ray Ryan at Cambridge University Press to edit *A History of the Modernist Novel*, I was wary: How could it be done? I considered an emphasis on individual authors (the Great Personality theory of literary history) or on movements and “-isms” (the Great Event theory) but rejected both in favor of an approach that looked at ideas, problems, and themes as they were articulated at various points (temporal and geographic) and in various constellations of social and cultural significance. I wanted to examine the destiny of the novel ca. 1890–1950, an epoch that witnessed great technological development alongside the most extraordinary savagery; an epoch in which literary and artistic innovations were often coupled with reactionary political positions; an epoch that witnessed the highest forms of spiritualism alongside the brute realities of lived experience. One could say the passage of literature through this epoch enacts something akin to Adorno and Horkheimer’s “dialectics of enlightenment,” in which rationality reveals its dangerous mythic side. One could say of modernism, as Habermas says of modernity at large, that it is an “unfinished project” precisely because this dialectic continues to propel certain trends in contemporary literary production. *A History of the Modernist Novel* is founded on the idea that at any given point new interventions will change the contours of this history (of any literary history), so it is *unfinished* in the sense that it puts into play a series of original investigations into the historical “placement” of the novel in the modernist epoch. It is our hope that these essays will spark conversations about the direction of modernism, the destiny of the novel form, the nature of literary history

and literary canons, and the authors who might have been included or those who might have been discussed differently.

I have been tutored in modernism and the novel by a great many people. For longer than I can recollect, there's been John Paul Riquelme, who taught me much about modernism and about editing. I can still recall the clarity and rigor of Michael North's instruction, which is echoed in every one of his books, and Cal Bedient's insistence on a modernism that doesn't sit still. I couldn't begin to do justice to the multitude of critics and theorists on the novel from whom I have learned since college. My colleagues in Irish studies — people such as Nicholas Allen, Margot Backus, Patrick Bixby, Kevin Dettmar, Sean Duffy, Seán Kennedy, David Lloyd, Vicki Mahaffey, Margot Norris, Jean-Michel Rabaté, and Joseph Valente — have taught me how powerfully Irish writers have influenced the general development of modernist fiction. All of the contributors to this volume are people I have read, admired, quoted, and grappled with over the years, and I am grateful that each and every one participated in the project. Their timeliness and professionalism would be the envy of any editor. As would be the work of the project manager, Sathish Kumar, and his team at Cambridge University Press, and my graduate intern, Christopher Hall, who provided the index. I am happy to have completed another project under Ray Ryan's direction, an editor who has shaped the Cambridge University Press list on modernism in new and exciting ways. The Cambridge series on literary history, of which this volume is a part, is an invaluable contribution to literary and cultural study, and I am proud to be part of it.

Much of my work on this volume was produced in Dublin in the summer of 2014, while being nurtured by such arguments in sound as those produced by Benoît Pioulard, Brian Eno, Stars of the Lid, Labradford, and the master, Miles Davis. I am grateful for their company. As for the history of love? I continue to learn that from Camille Angeles-Castle, a conqueror of time.

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INTRODUCTION

Matter in Motion in the Modernist Novel

Gregory Castle

Modernism and the Problem of the Real

In 1933, Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary of her frustration with the novel. "The thing is to be venturous, bold, to take every possible fence. One might introduce plays, poems, letters, dialogues: must get the round, not only the flat. Not the theory only. And conversation; argument."¹ *A History of the Modernist Novel* attempts to fill in this tantalizing and elliptical description of the novel, made at a time when experimentalism in the form was at its height. It confirms in sometimes surprising ways that the modernist novel has always been "venturous and bold," from the era of the sensational aesthetic novel of Beauty to the late modernist tales of beautiful failures. It charts the myriad temporalities, lines of development, subgenres and styles that flourished in the modernist epoch (ca. 1880–1950).² A multi-voiced approach to literary history suits well a genre characterized by pluralism and a degree of aesthetic experimentation that frequently entailed collaboration, interdisciplinary borrowings, and hybrid literary forms. Its generic richness – which includes naturalist, aesthetic, fantasy, adventure, Gothic, comic, impressionistic, didactic and parodic styles and modes – is the result of a singular openness to the reality it strives to include. M. M. Bakhtin recognized this in the 1930s, in his examination of the novel as a dynamic and dialogic form. The novel, he wrote, is "the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted," the sole genre to occupy a zone of "maximally close contact between the represented object and contemporary reality in all its inconclusiveness."³