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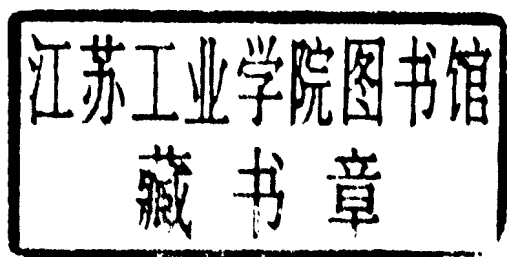


MODERNISM

Edited by Michael Levenson

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
MODERNISM

EDITED BY
MICHAEL LEVENSON
University of Virginia



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CHRONOLOGY

- 1890 James George Frazer, first volumes of *The Golden Bough*
(1890–1915)
William Morris, *News from Nowhere*
Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*
William Booth, *In Darkest England*
The dismissal of Bismarck
- 1891 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*
Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes stories begin in *Strand* magazine
Franco-Russian *entente*
- 1893 Arthur Wing Pinero, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*
Formation of the Independent Labour Party
The four-wheel car of Karl Benz
- 1894 The quarterly journal, the *Yellow Book* launched
George Moore, *Esther Waters*
George Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man*
Claude Achille Debussy, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (music)
The conviction of Dreyfus for treason
- 1895 Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*
Joseph Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*
Founding of the London School of Economics
The trial of Oscar Wilde
Roentgen's discovery of X-rays
Guglielmo Marconi invents telegraphy
- 1896 Anton Chekhov, *The Seagull*
Founding of the *Daily Mail*, London
First modern Olympiad, Athens

- The last Gilbert and Sullivan opera, *The Grand Duke*
Giacomo Puccini, *La Bohème* (opera)
- 1898 Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems*
H. G. Wells, *War of the Worlds*
Oscar Wilde, *Ballad of Reading Gaol*
The Curies discover radium and plutonium
- 1899 William Butler Yeats, *The Wind among the Reeds*
Frédéric François Chopin, *The Awakening* (music)
Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy, *Resurrection*
Beginning of the Boer War (1899–1902)
Peace Conference at The Hague
- 1900 Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*
Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*
“Boxer rebellion” in China
- 1901 Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*
Johan August Strindberg, *Dance of Death*
Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*
Death of Queen Victoria
- 1902 André Gide, *The Immoralist*
John Atkinson Hobson, *Imperialism*
Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin, *What is to be Done?*
William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*
- 1903 Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (published posthumously)
Henry James, *The Ambassadors*
George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*
G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*
The Great Train Robbery (film)
First successful flight of the Wright brothers
Emmeline Pankhurst founds the Women’s Social and Political Union
- 1904 John Millington Synge, *Riders to the Sea*
Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*
Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*
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- 1905 Richard Strauss, *Salomé*
Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

- Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*
 Albert Einstein proposes the theory of relativity
 The founding of Sinn Féin, the Irish nationalist party
- 1907 Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (painting)
 Cubist exhibition in Paris
 Joseph Conrad, *Secret Agent*
 John Millington Synge, *Playboy of the Western World*
- 1908 Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*
 Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale*
 Jacob Epstein, *Figures* for the British Medical Association
 Ford Madox Ford edits *English Review*
 George Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*
 Bela Bartók, first string quartet
- 1909 Gustav Mahler, *Symphony* No. 9
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 Frank Lloyd Wright, Robie House
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 Arnold Schönberg, *Five Orchestral Pieces*
 Lloyd George's "People's Budget"
 Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev produces the Russian Ballet in Paris
 Sigmund Freud lectures on psychoanalysis in the US
- 1910 Post-impressionist exhibition in London
 Igor Stravinsky, *The Firebird* (ballet)
 E. M. Forster, *Howards End*
 Bertrand Russell and A. N. Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica*
 (1910–1913)
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 Death of Edward VII, accession of George V
- 1912 Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (painting)
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 Sinking of the Titanic
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- 1913 Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*
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 Robert Frost, *A Boy's Will*

- Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*
 Igor Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du Printemps* (ballet)
 Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology*
 Suffragette demonstrations in London
- 1914 James Joyce, *Dubliners*
 Joseph Conrad, *Chance*
 Robert Frost, *North of Boston*
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 Outbreak of World War I
- 1915 Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*
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 Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage*
 Ezra Pound, *Cathay*
 Cecil B. de Mille, *Carmen* (film)
 D. W. Griffith, *Birth of a Nation* (film)
- 1916 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
 D. W. Griffith, *Intolerance* (film)
 Dadaism in Zurich
- 1917 T. S. Eliot, *Prufrock and Other Observations*
 Paul Valéry, *La Jeune Parque*
 Amy Lowell, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*
 Serge Sergeevich Prokofiev, "Classical" Symphony
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- 1918 James Joyce, *Exiles*
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- 1919 Pablo Picasso, *Pierrot and Harlequin* (painting)
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- 1920 D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*
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- Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*
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- 1921 Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*
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- 1922 T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*
 James Joyce, *Ulysses*
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 Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*
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- 1924 E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*
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- 1925 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*
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- 1926 Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*
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- 1927 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*
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- 1929 Robert Bridges, *The Testament of Beauty*
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- 1930 W. H. Auden, *Poems*
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- 1932 Bertolt Brecht, *The Mother*
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- 1933 Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*
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- 1935 T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*
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MICHAEL LEVENSON

Introduction

Still we call it Modernism, and this despite the anomaly of holding to such a name for an epoch fast receding into the cultural past. Not long after this volume is published, “Modernism” will be the name of a period in the beginning of a previous century, too distant even to serve as a figure for the grandparent. Uneasily but inevitably, we have reached a time when many feel the obsolescence of a movement still absurdly wearing such a brazen title. The temptation, much indulged in recent years, has been to dance beyond the reach of the aging, dying giant, to prove that one can live past the epoch marked by such names as Joyce and Woolf, Pound and Eliot, Eisenstein and Brecht, Freud and Marx. Certainly, many forces have joined to change the vectors of late twentieth-century culture. But our contemporary imperative to declare a new period and to declare ourselves citizens of a liberated postmodernism has badly distorted and sadly simplified the moment it means to surpass.

No one should be surprised by the distortions and simplifications of Modernism. Nor should anyone waste tears of sympathy on figures who themselves were more than willing to cut the shape of the past to suit present polemical purposes. And yet the task of rendering a fuller account is justified not only by the desire to provide richer, thicker narratives but also by a pressing need to clarify our own late-century, new-millennial position. A coarsely understood Modernism is at once an historical scandal and a contemporary disability.

Do we call for a return to Modernism? Certainly not, if this implies a nostalgic attempt to undo the last decades in order to share the dream of a movement that would never age and never end – but incontestably, if it means availing ourselves of the great timeliness of a revaluation. The influence of the first thirty years of the century over the next fifty was so great that the achievement of a distance from Modernism remains an event in contemporary culture. We are still learning how not to be Modernist, which is reason all the more to see what such an ambition could mean.

No clarification will be possible unless we who live at a moment of cultural skepticism are able to acknowledge the force of cultural conviction. When Gertrude Stein exploded stylistic propriety in order to release new rhythms in language, when Picasso painted primitive masks over the faces of his *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, when Antonin Artaud howled "No more masterpieces," when Woolf conjured a sister to Shakespeare, when Joyce trained himself to "scorch" the culture that nourished him, they all knew themselves to be engaged in forms of creative violence. For these figures the aim could never be simply to set the imagination free; it was rather first of all to challenge an unfreedom, the oppressions of journalism, of genteel audiences, of timid readers, of political and religious orthodoxy. So much of the story that these figures told themselves was a tale of tyranny and resistance. The name of the tyrant changed – the Editor, the Lady, the Public, the Banker, the Democrat – but whatever the scenario, the narrowness of the oppressor was seen amply to justify the violence of the art.

Much of this narrative was strategic, a means of rousing the will of the artist and of stimulating the useful anger of the public. We late-century historians can now see and show that the agon between revolutionary artist and benighted traditionalist was a caricature and that, as Lawrence Rainey argues below, high Modernist purpose was closely wound in the web of the commercial market. Rather than paint them as elite purists seeking a magic circle for the imagination, we can better see these artists as sharply conscious of their historical entanglements, their place within an epoch of accelerating social *modernization* that was always a challenge to a cultural Modernism.

Because its leading voices eagerly assumed not only the burden of making new artifacts, but also the responsibility for offering new justifications, the misunderstandings of Modernism began at the start, began with the ambition of writers and artists to set the terms by which they would be understood, where this often meant setting the terms by which others would not qualify for understanding. The circle of initiates was closed not only against the unwashed public, but also against rival artists who were excluded from the emerging narrative of Modernism triumphant. In the last twenty years this once dominant narrative has lost its power to control responses to the period, and we now have a dramatically enlarged perception of the range and reach of achievement. What once seemed the exclusive affair of "modern masters," the "men of 1914" (as Wyndham Lewis called them), now stands revealed as a complex of inventive gestures, daring performances, enacted also by many who were left out of account in the early histories of the epoch, histories offered first by the actors themselves and later produced within an academic discourse, willingly

guided by the precedents of the eminent artists. As Marianne DeKoven shows in her chapter, it is now deeply startling to realize how Stein's literary radicalism was omitted by the canonical narratives. And as Sara Blair securely demonstrates, the challenge of the Harlem Renaissance must belong to any account of Modernism with even modest aspirations to historical density.

No one should expect that our recession from these early century decades will allow the many varied performances to assume at last the crisp shape of unity. Nor should we regret the loss. Within the emerging historical revision there can still be found certain common devices and general preoccupations: the recurrent act of fragmenting unities (unities of character or plot or pictorial space or lyric form), the use of mythic paradigms, the refusal of norms of beauty, the willingness to make radical linguistic experiment, all often inspired by the resolve (in Eliot's phrase) to startle and disturb the public. Increasingly, though, attention has fallen upon a range of irreducibly local ambitions, highly particular projects not broadly shared but peculiar to a band of eager practitioners working in a sharply delimited field. The course of modern drama narrated here by Christopher Innes needs to be preserved in the specificity of its medium, as do the provocations of painting and cinema, described by Michael Wood and Glen MacLeod. As we acknowledge the full compass of the work, it will prove better to be minimalist in our definitions of that conveniently flaccid term *Modernist* and maximalist in our accounts of the diverse *modernizing* works and movements, which are sometimes deeply congruent with one another, and just as often opposed or even contradictory.

So much of the artistic passion of the period was stirred by questions of technique, where "technique" should not suggest attention to "form" as opposed to "content," but should imply rather the recognition that every element of the work is an instrument of its effect and therefore open to technical revision. Nothing was beyond the reach of technical concern: not the frame of a picture, not the shape of a stage, not the choice of a subject, not the status of a rhyme. If a new medium such as film was extravagantly bound up with problems of technique, so too was an ancient genre such as lyric poetry. And as David Trotter's chapter shows in great detail, novels of the period continually enacted strenuous negotiations between new formal strategies and the unprecedented social matter that they sought to absorb.

One of the notable effects of the regime of technique was precisely to bring attention to the close particularities of a specific genre. How long should a poem be? Could a still life rise off the surface of a painting? The general disposition – to radicalize the techniques of art – resolved into a rich multiplicity of different strategies, strongly localized experiments.