



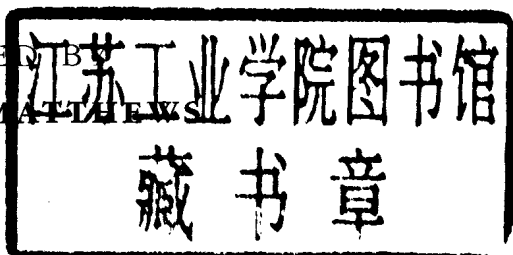
A COMPANION TO
THE *MODERN*
AMERICAN NOVEL
1900-1950

EDITED BY
JOHN T. MATTHEWS

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

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Michelle Stephens published *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the U. S., 1914–1962* in 2005. She is at work on a second project provisionally entitled “Black Acts: Race, Masculinity and Performance in the New World.” Associate Professor of English at Colgate College, she specializes in American, African-American, and Caribbean literatures.

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Preface

When I first agreed to edit this collection of essays on the modern American novel, I thought immediately of the sorts of pieces I wished I'd been able to send my students to through the years. A number of excellent resources for teaching modern literature have appeared recently, almost all of them designed to provide concise but comprehensive coverage of standard literary topics and movements in the period and genre of study. The best do an excellent job of locating and relating individual works and authors, and helping readers understand where given literary elements fit in the broader accounts of major developments. The series of Companions in which this volume appears, however, in allowing a greater number of essays and more flexible organization, invites attention to other pedagogical purposes. Over the past two decades, modernist studies has enjoyed a burgeoning of exciting new historical, theoretical, and cultural scholarship. This innovative work has at least complicated, and sometimes even called into question, almost every accepted assumption of our field.

One of the objectives of this Companion is to reflect the directions of such new scholarship: not only do many of the essays propose fresh descriptions of familiar novels of the period, or new descriptions of freshly (re)discovered ones, they also root their reformulations in contemporary theoretical speculation and historical research that ought to stimulate advanced students (and nonspecialist teachers) to their own explorations of the field and its underlying conceptual questions. The bibliographic sections that follow the essays include titles suggested for further reading. We can imagine many ramifications, some beyond the bounds of what gets said here: the continued reconfiguration of courses to allow comparison of texts from other national traditions around the globe, from underrepresented literatures within hemispheric America, and from minority traditions within the continental US; writing assignments that ask students to work historically with modernity while thinking analytically of modernism; the study of modernism as conceptually intertwined with the experience of postmodernity and postmodernism. This collection brings together established literary scholars who have set new agendas in the study of the modern

American novel, and younger scholars who have begun to publish the next generation of cutting-edge work. It also includes articles by a number of historians, who provide invaluable accounts of the material and intellectual environments occupied by novelists and their readers during the first half of the twentieth century.

We hope to have met a standard of authoritative originality throughout the essays. They have been conceived to furnish readers with a variety of tools: to provide concise studies of relevant economic, social, and cultural contexts; to rethink traditional accounts of familiar topics like realism, naturalism, and regionalism with respect to modernism; to complicate the origins and purposes of modernism; in fact, to extend an idea proposed by Peter Nicholls that we should be thinking more in terms of a plurality of modernisms, including a range of ethnic and mass-cultural varieties; and to question some of the received categories for study of the nation's fiction during this period, including those upon which the volume's self-definition rests: the novel, America, modernism, and modernity. The luxury of a book like this is that so many of our essays aim to incite reconsideration, inquiry, and speculation, as well as provide information.

The first set of essays recreates the habitat for literary activities between 1900 and 1950. Eric Rauchway's essay on economic history addresses many central topics: urbanization, immigration, speculation and consumption, labor and the New Deal, and postwar recovery. Each of these sets backdrops for much of the period's fiction, particularly in the interwar years, when some kinds of modernism sought refuge in aesthetic opposition to the economic and social transformations attendant to modernity, and subsequent tendencies toward political literature during the Depression insisted on representing such conditions to national audiences. Rauchway's chapter enriches numerous essays that follow here, including those on realism and capitalism, the proletarian movement, Southern literature, and regionalism. Nancy Woloch provides a concise, comprehensive account of major changes in women's lives over the period. Her essay furnishes much useful empirical data about the conditions affecting women – data about employment and education, for example – that will help students of literature read the novels of this era with a usable sense of what was happening, and how different writers both reflect and intervene in these trends (or in some cases ignore or oppose them). The essay keeps the distinct stories of various groups of women in mind, and shows how differences in class and race affected opportunity and the decisions women could make. Readers will be able to see how the artistic ventures of women writers of the Harlem Renaissance, for instance, grew out of the broader effects of migration to northern cities, and the distinctive employment pattern of African-American women. In the next essay, Matthew Guterl recounts the broader history of modern African-American life through the lens of literary perceptions of it. His essay charts distinct phases of black experience and mentality, from the horrors of Jim Crow segregation, through the "New Negro" Renaissance, the Great Depression, and on to the horizon of the civil rights movement, each phase put in dialogue with influential cultural reflections like those of Thomas Dixon, Jr. or W. E. B. Du Bois.

Guterl's essay offers several points from which subsequent essays may be seen to launch out. Reading through the example of Richard Wright's short story "Long Black Song," from *Uncle Tom's Children*, Jeanne Follansbee Quinn distinguishes an aesthetics for fiction of the period that is drawn from pragmatist philosophy, such an aesthetics defining and enjoining the problem of progressivist art rather than insisting upon theoretical solutions. The essay maps the poles of modernist epiphany and proletarian conversion, then shows how pragmatism complicates, without expecting to solve, the step from aesthetic vision to political action. Wright's story becomes an epitome of the incommensurability of aesthetics and politics that troubled much other fiction of the 1930s. Woloch's piece gives the reader a context for Michael Trask's contention that the modern novel embraced (with productive ambivalence) a revolution in sexual mores, with its possibilities for individual emotional and even economic growth. His argument vivifies and expands the idea of the modern in the many novels he treats. Sex and ethics are pried apart in a way that suggests just how profound the shifts of modernity were; Trask restores some of that sense of newness, particularly now that scholars have begun to accept views that emphasize the continuities of modernism with earlier periods, or stress some of the conservative implications of modernist treatments of modernity. Readers will want to note Trask's analysis of Gertrude Stein's wayward style (or styling of waywardness) from the standpoint of sexual vagrancy, as well as his fresh discussions of frequently taught works like *Sister Carrie*, *The House of Mirth*, *My Ántonia*, *Winesburg, Ohio*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Grapes of Wrath*.

The two following pieces pursue the interplay between American fiction and two distinctive modern art forms: jazz and cinema. Jeremy Yudkin offers a documentary account of changing attitudes toward jazz from its inception to its canonization by mid-century. The essay's historical survey helps readers appreciate the flux of contemporary debates about this innovative kind of music, and invites them to explore the record of controversy themselves. The cultural nexus of the "American arts" of jazz and a jazz-inflected American literary style inspires Yudkin's suggestive discussions of Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison (who wrote extensively about jazz), and Norman Mailer. Justus Nieland explores the international cultural and political circumstances that led French intellectuals to appropriate American modernist literary style in order to invent a "visual humanism" after the two World Wars. Nieland shows how the 1940s French cultural critic Claude-Edmonde Magny translates modernist experimental technique in the novel into a style of film, one devoted to the sort of ethics that transcend individual subjectivity. The essay bends received delineations of textual and cinematic fiction by using interdisciplinary methods across the media (in this case prompted by Magny's own insistence on the common purposes crossing modern film and fiction). Nieland also opens up a transatlantic context for the cultural reception and value of the modern American novel.

The next group of essays reconsiders familiar categories of modern American literature: late nineteenth-century realism, literary naturalism, and modern realism. Andrew Lawson develops a line of inquiry into the realistic aesthetic of Henry James, William

Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and the early Edith Wharton that concentrates on the opposition between mass culture and elite forms of literary production. Lawson's analysis illuminates the shifting material circumstances of writing fiction – the economics of producing imaginative goods for a rapidly developing literary market – as it also provides the basis for a key family trait of early realist modernism: its self-consciousness about representational practice. The divide between high and low culture, now understood to have been more fluid and murky than critics once believed, provoked the kinds of equivocation Lawson charts; it also anticipates the assumptions grounding later essays in the Companion on subsequent phases of modernism such as the fiction of high modernism or the Hollywood novel. Donna Campbell thinks about what makes American naturalism a kind of protomodernism by employing a definition of modernism that emphasizes its addressing of modernity. Campbell's thesis disturbs a simple chronological sequence from naturalism to "classic modernism," showing instead that the two may mostly be different spaces of continuing engagements with modernity. The essay provides concise yet thorough analyses of main exemplars of naturalism like Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, the later Dreiser, Jack London, and Anzia Yezierska, while suggesting broader affiliations with a range of other writers (such as Wharton and Paul Lawrence Dunbar, for example). Richard Godden examines labor and production history in the period of high capitalism during the American 1920s to excavate economic preoccupations in Ernest Hemingway, Wharton, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Godden's essay demonstrates how imaginative work resisted assumptions being posited by modern capitalism: the dominance of industrial production, the myth of liberal individualism, the confidence in gratification through the consumption of commodities. Godden suggests how forms of modernism emerged to counter these dominant features of modernity – what Godden considers a (false) *capitalist* realism: in Hemingway producing a sensitivity to the way the consumption of commodities encouraged amnesia toward labor; in Wharton leading to a sort of hyperrealistic attention to objects that challenges the forgetfulness of reification; and in Fitzgerald exposing the fictionality of self-made men like Gatsby as those who have forfeited their own material reality.

Several essays take up the idea that, as Campbell suggests, alternative modernisms occupy simultaneous spaces during the early century. Leigh Anne Duck unfolds modernism's concern with negotiating the temporal changes of modernity by treating them through spatial and demographic segregation. Drawing on Bakhtin's analytical category of chronotope (pertaining to time and space in a narrative), Duck shows how progressive capitalist time contrasts in modern literature with personal eccentric forms that resist it. Duck's analysis allows for a more explicitly materialist explanation of why modernist art gravitates toward the spatialization of experience, and she ranges across a wide variety of examples: Sherwood Anderson, Nathanael West, Du Bois, Gertrude Stein, the Native American writer John Joseph Mathews, Faulkner, and Ellison. The essay also suggests how the urgencies and anxieties of modernism extend into contemporary permutations of global modernity, anticipating a number of essays in the volume that explore the intertwining of modernism and postmodernism. Hsuan

Hsu also centers economic factors in his account of regionalism. Hsu distinguishes separate moments and kinds of regionalism: a turn-of-the-century form of regionalism associated with the local color movement and exemplified by Hamlin Garland, Charles Chesnutt, and Sarah Orne Jewett, for example, as opposed to a newer regionalism of the 1920s. That regionalism – instanced in Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Edgar Lee Masters, and the Southern Agrarians – performed the cultural work of *producing* regions for modern national-level capitalist development. Hsu's closing section on ethnic regionalism demonstrates how labor exploitation based on racial subjugation was transmuted into the cultural differences of place, and how writers like Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), Américo Paredes, Jean Toomer, and Carlos Bulosan questioned such conventions of representation. Ed Comentale offers an original reformulation of Midwestern modernism through Giorgio Agamben's theory of potentiality. Comentale suggests that the Midwest is inevitably associated with national potential. But potentiality necessarily swings between a condition of general sadness or disappointment that accompanies any specific materialization of an ideal (it's never what's dreamt of) and a resource for more critical resistance to the specific *kind* of materialization embodied in urban industrial capitalism, with its emergent culture of consumption (life could always be better, in ways symbolized by regional habitation). Comentale considers Midwestern writers like Ruth Suckow, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, and Dreiser, but also turns to the painters Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton to amplify his thesis. Susan Donaldson picks up on Hsuan Hsu's inclusion of Southern authors in modern regionalist writing by seeking the origins of modernist narrative self-consciousness in the violent abruption of modernity on the South by the Civil War. Donaldson documents the upheavals brought to all Southern groups by the collapse of the Confederacy, showing how African-American writers like Julia Anna Cooper, Ida B. Wells, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper explored new ways of telling stories in order to consolidate new social and political narratives. Donaldson incorporates most of the prominent post-Reconstruction through early twentieth-century Southern novelists into her innovative account of an indigenous Southern modernism – from George Washington Cable through Charles Chesnutt, James Weldon Johnson, Allen Tate, Faulkner, Frances Newman, Eudora Welty, Richard Wright, and Ellison.

My essay on high modernism corresponds with Donaldson's by arguing that the confrontation with a Southern past was central to modernism's engagement with the realities of modernity. At the cusp of the new century, the nation's uneasy denial of its relation to the peculiar social and economic history of the South finally had to be addressed when the federal government began to act toward new foreign colonial territories as it had formerly acted toward its Southern region. Debates about racial subjugation, neoplantation agricultural empire, and an increasingly strong federal state all figured into modern literature's anxious recognition that the South had always been integral to the national project and prosperity, based as it was on hemispheric plantation colonialism. Many principal American modern novelists were Southern in essential ways, and this essay suggests how habits of denial might be traced through

a figure surprisingly common to many high modernist texts: the colonized black male body. Michelle Stephens explores the ways African-American artists sought to realize the opportunities for racial self-expression offered by modern social realities such as migration to Northern cities and increased access to cultural organs like the stage and magazines. She chronicles phases in the difficult attainment of a separate black modernism, beginning with an insistence on racial visibility in popular theatre and early film. Stephens valuably links the later, more self-possessed modernist art of the Harlem Renaissance to Caribbean anticolonialist culture of the 1920s, showing how the African-American modern novel must include hemispheric Americans like Eric Walrond and George Lamming. The essay's final turn follows out the challenge to a largely masculinist New Negro African-American modernism by other writers of color: conspicuously Zora Neale Hurston, but also Jean Toomer (who writes sympathetically of women's oppression in the plantation South).

More combatively, Rita Keresztesi challenges the hegemony of high modernism as an aesthetic formation that guarded ethnic privilege. She contends that canonical modernism reinforced social practices that policed ethnic populations during the migratory movements characterizing modernity. The essay insists that there is a politics involved in formulating modernism as essentially "high," and that there is a variety of "ethnic" writing that ought to be counted as modernist, not all of it characterized by formal experimentalism or designed for consumption by educated elites. The essay arcs from the emergent modernism of *The Confidence-Man* to a residual form in *Invisible Man*. Writers like Nella Larsen and Hurston are positioned as examples of one kind of modernism, while Native American writers like Mourning Dove, D'Arcy McNickle, and John Joseph Mathews appear as practitioners of another, and Jewish-American ones like Anzia Yezierska and Henry Roth of still another. Barbara Foley reprises a thematic taxonomy of proletarian fiction in her essay, listing scores of titles treating each of the genre's five principal subjects: strikes, race and antiracism, nonclass-conscious workers, the development of class consciousness, and everyday working-class life. Foley then moves to a consideration of formal classification, and in particular two subgenres, that she finds more illuminating to proletarian purposes: the single-protagonist novel of development, and the collective novel. In addition to remarks about a host of proletarian novelists from these standpoints, Foley also suggests how Richard Wright and John Dos Passos exemplify the appropriation of modernist formal techniques for proletarian novelistic objectives. A contrasting kind of progressivist fiction appears in Susan Edmunds' account of the modern sentimental novel. Edmunds argues that the modern sentimental tradition, far from functioning as a distraction from political imagination, actually associated domestic life with the possibility of social revolution. Edmunds reads a remarkable array of writers – Edith Wharton, Nella Larsen, Edna Ferber, Yezierska, Walter White, Meridel Le Sueur, Richard Wright, Faulkner, Toomer, Djuna Barnes, Tillie Olsen, Nathanael West, Flannery O'Connor – as drawing terms from the discourse of home life to represent debates about the formation of the US welfare state.

The next set of essays recuperates a number of former “minority” traditions of the American novel from the first half of the century now being reconceptualized as fully central to modernism. Heather Love complicates the category of lesbian fiction by noting the ambivalence generated by the emergence of lesbianism under social and medical disciplinary impulses: the formation of lesbian identity cannot be separated from its pathologization. Love’s readings begin with Henry James’s *The Bostonians*, then take up Sarah Orne Jewett, Gertrude Stein, Hilda Doolittle (H. D.), Nella Larsen, Gale Wilhelm, Djuna Barnes, Jane Bowles, and Patricia Highsmith; they describe a trajectory toward more explicit affirmation of same-sex affection between women. The analytical subtlety of the essay foregrounds aspects of textual unrepresentability – kinds of opacity, strains of searches for the language of inchoate new social relations and forms of affectional attachment. Christopher Looby detects a similar concern with matters of formal representation in observing the inseparability of reflection on story-telling itself and the question of homosexual desire. Looby traces a preoccupation in gay fiction with the question of whether the queer novel might be possible at all given the snug ideological fit between traditional novelistic plots of self-realization and narratives of heterosexual romance and marriage. Looby’s essay focuses on early instances like Charles Warren Stoddard’s *For the Pleasure of His Company* (1903) and Edward Prime-Stevenson’s *Imre: A Memorandum* (1906) to explicate the historical, theoretical, and artistic quandaries constraining gay writers at the turn of the century. The essay goes on to survey a range of gay fiction during subsequent decades, lingering particularly over neglected works by “Blair Niles,” Dawn Powell, and Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, and ending with a reflection on Carson McCullers’ *A Member of the Wedding*.

William Handley’s essay is one of three to address modern popular subgenres, in his case the Western. Handley raises numerous provocative questions about the historical significance of the Western, as well as its current timeliness: the essay looks at issues of high versus popular culture, gender and genre, market demands versus resistance to commodification, and the Western’s typical engagement with myths justifying the domestication of the land. The essay focuses on that ur-Western, *The Virginian* (1906), and the best-selling author of them all, Zane Grey, but also gives ample space to lesser-known artists and, very valuably, to women writers of Westerns. Handley also detects the pressure of the Western on more canonical works by Cather and Fitzgerald. Charles Rzepka maps the chronological development of detective fiction during the first half of the century, covering all the usual suspects: Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler during the interwar years of the hard-boiled form; Horace McCoy and James M. Cain from the postwar noir period; Mickey Spillane and Chester Himes principally as Cold War instances; and, growing out of earlier traditions of “alternative” detective fiction, more contemporary feminist and gay/lesbian, postmodernist, and high cultural parodic versions (the last in Vladimir Nabokov and Thomas Pynchon, for example). Mark Eaton pursues the relation of hard-boiled detective fiction to the Hollywood novel, not only establishing in helpful detail the familiar hostility of “serious” writers to their reliance on periodic indenture to the film studios,

but more surprisingly showing that Hollywood was actually indispensable in other ways. For one thing, studio contracts subsidized authors who wouldn't have been able to get any writing of their own done otherwise; Eaton looks at the exemplary career of Faulkner in this regard. But as an object of fascination for modern America, Hollywood also provoked a huge number of novelistic treatments of itself as phenomenon, and Eaton's essay goes on to survey those Hollywood-themed novels – many by lesser writers, along with notable ones by Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, Horace McCoy, and Nathanael West.

The closing cluster of essays probes the limits of the definitions enabling our collection. Delia Konzett challenges the usual positioning of Asian-American fiction within postmodernism, making a compelling case that what drives Asian-American writing is a “belated modernist project”; Konzett identifies the roots of post-World War II Asian-American writing in the experience of migration and displacement – principal features of modernity. The essay joins a number of earlier ones here that spell out the plurality of modernisms the field has come to recognize, expanding the set of literary responses to modernity far beyond what Konzett sees as the experimental techniques tending to distinguish “high” modernism. Patrick O'Donnell isolates strains in modernism that come forward in the light of postmodernism. The essay steers clear of the period-model of evolution and rupture for the succession of modernism by postmodernism, undercutting the whole notion of temporal contiguity, and showing the challenge to linear temporality as a central modernist/postmodernist problematic to begin with. Readers will appreciate O'Donnell's account of key debates, with its summaries of principal schools of interpretation and theories of postmodernism. Readings that focus on Stein, Barnes, and Faulkner illustrate key purposes of modernism (the destabilization of knowledge and identity through their spatialization into the language of process in Stein; the destabilization of gender/identity binarism in Barnes; and the textualization of genealogy, history, and consciousness in Faulkner). George Handley begins his essay by positioning American modernism – especially of the regional and racial minority varieties – within the hemispheric movements of anticolonialism, under which common efforts were made to affirm the value of indigenous rural cultures against the incursions of imperialist modernity. Handley mounts a trenchant argument against treating US literature as exceptional, maintaining that it shares with other New World nations three fundamental conditions: the effects of widespread diaspora, often violently forced; the genocide of indigenous populations; and the degradation of the environment. Against the forgetfulness of imperialist powers toward such history, across the hemisphere, the modern novel offers the work of countermemory.

Jani Scandura concludes our book with a rumination on the afterlife of modernism. Scandura makes something of a deconstructive turn against modernism's desire for and exaltation of the thing *itself* – its apparent longing for an end to (as transcendence of) figurative language. This desire she reads as fetishistic, harboring an equivocation that ends up revealing the figural within the literal, and making the remnant/the leftover/Derrida's *le reste* internal to the thing. Scandura manages to weave this