



Freewomen and Supermen: Edwardian Radicals and Literary Modernism

Anne Fernihough

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Freewomen and Supermen adds to the comparatively recent body of research which has sought to re-evaluate the literature and culture of the 'long' Edwardian period (1900-1914). It singles out the editors of two of the most important magazines for the history of modernism, Dora Marsden, editor of the Freewoman (later renamed the New Freewoman and then the Egoist) and A.R. Orage, editor of the New Age. Together with other

editors such as Emma Goldman in America, Marsden and Orage fostered an optimistic, colourful, aube-de-siècle culture to rival the fin-de-siècle culture of the preceding decade. Their magazines were interdisciplinary in approach, with articles on literature and philosophy appearing alongside discussions of such matters as anarchism, eugenics, suffragism, suburban architecture, vegetarianism, and the 'intermediate sex'. Anne Fernihough argues that the often extreme positions adopted amongst 1900s radicals on both sides of the Atlantic were a response to a period of political turmoil and startling demographic and technological change. Their radicalism impacted in its turn on a wide range of literary forms, contents and theories, and continued to so beyond the First World War and into the 'high modernist' period. The book discusses

both British and American writers across different genres, including Henry James, Dorothy Richardson, Upton Sinclair, Rebecca West, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, May Sinclair, Virginia Woolf, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Theodore Dreiser, Katherine Mansfield, Robert Tressell, and Gertrude Stein. Other cultural figures discussed include the sexologists Otto Weininger and Edward Carpenter, and the diet-reformer, Horace Fletcher. The film and television industries have often capitalised on a nostalgic vision of the Edwardian, but Freewomen and Supermen emphasises the more embattled aspects of Edwardian culture such as anarchism, suffragism, eugenics and food-reform, and shows how Edwardian radical thought was to play a crucial role in the development of literary modernism.

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