



Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900-1930

Rachel Potter

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Anglo-American modernist writing and modern mass democratic states emerged at the same time, during the period of 1900-1930. Yet writers such as T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Ford Madox Ford were notoriously hostile to modern democracies. They often defended, in contrast, anti-democratic forms of cultural authority. Since the late 1970s, however, our understanding of modernist culture has altered as previously marginalized writers, in particular women such as Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, H. D., and Mina Loy, have been reassessed. Not only has the picture of Anglo-American modernist culture changed significantly, but the understanding of the relationship between modernist writing and politics has also shifted.

Rachel Potter here reassess the relationship between modernism and democracy by analyzing the wide range of different reactions by modernist writers to the new democracies. She charts the changes in the ideas of democracy as a result of the shift from liberal to mass democracies after the First World War and of women's entrance into the political and cultural spheres. By uncovering hitherto-unanalyzed essays by a number of feminist writers she argues that in fact there was a widespread skepticism about the consequences of mass democracy for women's liberation, and that this skepticism was central to the work of women modernist writers.

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