

Make Modernist Sexes, Genders, and Sexualities New

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Abstract:

The goal of *Modernism, Sex, and Gender* by Celia Marshik and Allison Pease is to introduce readers and researchers to a debate about modernism spanning over a century in which sex, gender, and sexuality played and still play a constitutive role in the processes of understanding modernism. It does so by tracing how the changing ideas of gender and sexuality in concatenation with the recovery of forgotten, mostly women, authors altered the course of the conceptualizations of modernism in literary criticism, beginning with T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, through the landmark studies of the second wave feminism, all the way through to the last two decades. One of the greatest achievements of *Modernism, Sex, and Gender* is its meticulous recording of the conjunction of shifts in modernist, as well as feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies, all of which – from a multitude of viewpoints – prove that sexes, genders, and sexualities are not only one of the many thematic interests of modernist criticism, but unavoidable and central to the very definition of modernism, despite its changes during the decades.

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The concluding sentence of *Modernism, Sex, and Gender* posits that “the modernism of the future will surely be different [...] as scholars ‘make it new’ not in Ezra Pound’s famous formulation but in our own” (“Coda,” n. pag. in EPUB version). The goal of this volume is to introduce readers and researchers to a debate about modernism spanning over a century in which sex, gender, and sexuality played and still play constitutive role in the processes of understanding modernism. It does so by tracing how the changing ideas of gender and sexuality in concatenation with the recovery of forgotten, mostly women, authors altered the course of the conceptualizations of modernism in literary criticism, beginning with T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, through the landmark studies of the second wave feminism, all the way through to the last two decades. Marshik and Pease provide a roadmap through the myriad of ways in which modernism, including Pound’s looming presence which can be read as a synecdoche of the men canonical literary history came to celebrate, is incessantly being renewed under the terms of new and emerging scholarship of sexes, genders, and sexualities.

The four chapters address major milestones in how “the act of looking” or, “who pays attention to what texts and why” first created then overhauled the consensus on what modernism is and what is the place of sexes, genders, and sexualities in it (“Introduction”). Each of the chapters also includes instructive case studies of authors and their works whose critical treatment and, consequently, interpretative possibilities changed and widened in the course of the decades. Critical bibliographies are also included on the key topics that were thematized in the chapters and that mark scholarly engagement with modernism and its sexes, genders, and sexualities.

The first chapter addresses how second wave feminist scholars revamped the existing knowledge about modernism in two ways: they unearthed works by women authors whose recognition was long overdue and they reexamined all things feminine (sentimentality, the

domestic, maternal, middlebrow) in opposition to which highbrow experimental modernism has traditionally been defined. The second chapter addresses sexuality from six different angles – sexology and psychoanalysis, politicizing discourses, otherness, gay and lesbian indentures, queer theory, perversion – demonstrating how new theories of sexuality produced new interpretations of modernism’s conflicted engagement with sexes, sexualities, bodies, desire, and intimacy. The third chapter focuses on masculinities from four perspectives. Beginning with seminal theoretical interventions arguing for masculinities to be seen as social constructions determined by power dynamics, the chapter continues on to address exemplary models of masculinities: reactionary; imperialists, cowboys, and soldiers; ‘the others’ – blacks, Jews, and imperial subjects. The fourth chapter showcases not only the permanent wrestling of modernist authors with different types of law including libel, copyright, marriage, property, obscenity, and censorship, but it also illuminates how women and the working class found themselves in a crossfire between predominantly white, male, and middle class modernist authors and the law. The chapter ends with a section that provides an overview of criticism on modernist engagement with politics, especially suffrage, empire, and fascism.

Feminist criticism, along with queer studies, masculinity studies, race studies, and new modernist studies, is not only thematised and discussed, but also applied at its best practice. The first and second chapters in particular trace the diversity of positions of key feminist critics from the second wave in the seventies and eighties, through the major queer theorists, and the contemporary scholars of modernism. Furthermore, the chapter delineates how some of the leading critics revised their arguments by integrating the emerging discoveries of new modernisms, thereby demonstrating how feminist criticism reacts to newly emerging intellectual, social, and literary constellations, as well as new findings in modernist scholarship in and beyond sexes, genders, and sexualities. For example, after publishing her first groundbreaking anthology *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington 1990) Bonnie Kime Scott revisited her selection and the rationale behind it in her second anthology, *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections* (Urbana 2007). Susan Stanford Friedman in her monograph *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity across Time* (New York 2015) critically engaged with her influential arguments in her earlier 1975 essay “Who Buried H. D.? A Poet, Her Critics, and Her Place in the Literary Tradition” (*College English* 36.7, 1975). The key institutions of contemporary modernist criticism are marked, providing

researchers with an overview of major critical outlets next to monographs and articles: the journals *Modernism/modernity* (2003-), *Feminist Modernist Studies* (2018-), *Modern Fiction Studies*, and the Cambridge and Edinburgh companions. Finally, the case studies of May Sinclair, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Willa Carter, Ernest Hemingway, Radclyffe Hall, and James Joyce succinctly display how new critical theories shed different light on these authors and their works which, in turn, renews modernism again and again.

One of the greatest achievements of *Modernism, Sex, and Gender* is its meticulous recording of the conjunction of shifts in modernist as well as feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies, all of which – from a multitude of viewpoints – prove that sexes, genders, and sexualities are not only one of the many thematic interests of modernist criticism, but unavoidable and central to the very definition of modernism, despite its changes over the decades. In this vein, it would have been fruitful if more detailed and systematic attention were given to the expanding field of trans studies, as well as the possibilities it raises for interpretation of modernist literary works, beginning from the mentioned case studies of, for example, Willa Carter and Radclyffe Hall. As part of the Bloomsbury series *New Modernisms* that consists of excellent and essential guides for researchers of modernism, this volume dedicates a chapter to law, and in each of the chapters consequently engages with race, yet it was preceded by a separate work on law – *Modernism and the Law* by Robert Spoo (London 2018), and was succeeded by one on race – *Race and New Modernisms* by K. Merinda Simmons and James A. Crank (London 2019). Likewise, a future volume on trans modernisms can be only welcome. However, *Modernism, Sex, and Gender* represents an excellent, systematic display of scholarship on modernist women and modernist lesbians spanning more than a century. As such, it is a paradigmatic example of facing a major and persistent challenge troubling modernist critics, as rightfully pointed out by Marshik and Peace: How to not only uncover, anthologize, and write about women and femininity in modernism, but also how to maintain their presence in evolving critical discourses.

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German Abstract:

Das Ziel von *Modernism, Sex, and Gender* von Celia Marshik und Allison Pease ist es, Leser_innen und Forscher_innen in eine Debatte über den Modernismus einzuführen, die sich über ein Jahrhundert erstreckt und in der Sex, Geschlecht und Sexualität eine konstitutive Rolle für den Prozess des Verstehens von Modernismus spielten und spielen. Dabei wird nachgezeichnet, wie die sich wandelnden Vorstellungen von Geschlecht und Sexualität in Verbindung mit der Wiederentdeckung vergessener, meist weiblicher Autor_innen die Entwicklung der Konzeptualisierungen des Modernismus in der Literaturkritik verändert haben – angefangen bei T. S. Eliot und F. R. Leavis über die wegweisenden Studien der zweiten Welle des Feminismus bis hin zu den letzten beiden Jahrzehnten. Eine der größten Errungenschaften von *Modernism, Sex and Gender* ist die akribische Erfassung des Zusammenhangs der Verschiebungen in der modernistischen wie auch feministischen Kritik, der Queer-Theorie und den Masculinity Studies. Aus einer Vielzahl von Blickwinkeln zeigen all diese, dass Geschlechter und Sexualitäten nicht nur eines der vielen thematischen Interessen der Modernismuskritik, sondern trotz ihrer Veränderungen im Laufe der Jahrzehnte unumgänglich und zentral für die Definition des Modernismus selbst sind.