

Literary Modernism and Beyond: The Extended Vision and the Realms of the Text

By Richard Lehan

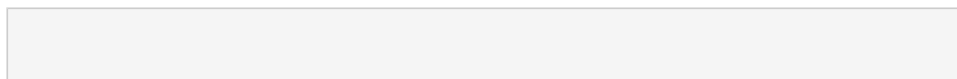


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Early modernists turned to theories of consciousness and aestheticism to combat what they saw as the hostility of naturalism and to find new ways of thinking about reality. This consciousness took various forms, including a Jamesian sense of moral ambiguity, Proustian time spots, and Bergsonian intuition, but the Nietzschean theory that reality depends on perception connected them all. This modernist movement reached a distinguished level of achievement with novelists Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce, but a succession of counterinfluences transformed it after World War II, when elitism and a desire for a homogeneous culture gave way to diversity and elements of mass culture. In *Literary Modernism and Beyond*, Richard Lehan tracks the evolution of the movement from its emergence in the late nineteenth century to its recent incarnations.

In this wide-ranging study, Lehan demonstrates how and why the "originary vision" of modernism changed radically after it gained prominence. With critical discussions on a wide variety of major modernist writers, intellectuals, and artists and their works -- including Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Andre Gide, Franz Kafka, Zora Neale Hurston, Ian Fleming, and J. K. Rowling -- Lehan examines the large-scale changes that came as critical authority moved from one generation to another. Both popular culture and literary criticism -- especially "critical theory" -- acted as key agents of change, and structuralism, poststructuralism, and concerns with gender and race also greatly influenced the movement. Along with a process of decline and a nihilism that emerged from the modernist movement, these changes created a new literary reality and with it a new textuality.

Literary Modernism and Beyond treats modernism's major innovations of myth, symbol, and structure not as individual pieces but as interrelated contributions to a historical process, the product of three generations of transformations. Lehan's analysis provides a more complete understanding than ever before of the movement itself.



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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

"[Lehan] has further widened his scope (and deepened his insights) with a sweeping study of modernism and postmodernism.... [Literary Modernism] provides an indispensable overview of literary creation and criticism over the past one-hundred-plus years. It is an engrossing read as well as a useful research tool, its index directing the reader to enlightening looks at particular writers and concepts in the context of their time and its tendencies." -- Studies in American Naturalism

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About the Author

Richard Lehan is professor emeritus of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. The recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship and a Fulbright award, he is the author of nine other books, including *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* and *Realism and Naturalism: The Novel in an Age of Transition*.

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