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# Modernism Keywords

WILEY Blackwell



## **Modernism: Keywords**

## **Keywords in Literature and Culture**

The books in this series present keywords for individual literary periods in an easily accessible reference format. More than a dictionary, each volume is written by a leading scholar and consists of an engaging collection of short essays, which consider the ways in which words both register and explore historical change. Indebted to the work of Raymond Williams, the series identifies and documents keywords as cultural analysis, taking the reader beyond semantic definition to uncover the uncertainties, disagreements, and confrontations evident in differing usages and conflicting connotations.

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# **Modernism: Keywords**

**Melba Cuddy-Keane  
Adam Hammond  
Alexandra Peat**

**WILEY Blackwell**

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The production of this work as a collaborative effort makes it impossible to assign specific credit for individual portions of it. All members of the team contributed substantially to the research and most also commented on draft entries and suggested approaches to structure. The graduate students employed by the project inevitably varied in the length of time they could be involved in the project, as reflected in their different roles, but the project is greatly indebted to them all. Members of the research team included collaborating writer Marybeth Curtin; collaborating contributors Glenn Clifton and Rohanna Green; contributors Claire Battershill, Kimberly Fairbrother Canton, and Daniel Harney; and research assistants Tania Botticella, Stewart Cole, and Sarah Copland. Rohanna Green and Adam Hammond provided invaluable assistance in establishing our collaborative websites. Special thanks are also due to Claire Marie Stancek for her excellent research, recordings of our meetings, and commentaries on numerous entries.

## *Credits and Acknowledgments*

Primary responsibility for the project was undertaken as follows: Melba Cuddy-Keane was project director and senior editor, and Alexandra Peat served for many years as project manager. Marybeth Curtin and Adam Hammond joined Cuddy-Keane and Peat on an editorial team in the spring of 2010, all four collaborating as writers until Curtin graduated and took up a government research position in June 2011. Cuddy-Keane, Hammond, and Peat continued as co-writers; in the last phase of the project, Cuddy-Keane and Hammond revised and expanded the text, developing and completing the remaining entries, the bibliography, and the keyword index; Peat provided editorial assistance. All three co-authors collaborated in copyediting and proofreading.

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# Introduction: Unsettling Modernism

Spanning the “long” modernist period, from roughly 1880–1950, *Modernism: Keywords* tracks words used with frequency and urgency in “written modernism.” The approach takes its inspiration from Raymond Williams’s *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), which argued that we can best understand the character and thought of an era not through its dominant beliefs, but through the problems and debates inadvertently revealed in its words. Differing from periodizations that try to identify an era’s dominant ideology, or “the spirit of the age,” a keywords approach identifies controversial words that mattered enough to become magnets of cross-talk and exchange. Unlike dictionaries and glossaries, *Keywords* focuses on words that cannot be easily and summarily defined: words with unstable meanings and conflicting implications, which testify to culture as an active and living thing. Unlike historical dictionaries, *Keywords* goes further than quotation to analyze relationships and to probe the issues or forces underlying ambiguous words. *Keywords* attempts to discover cultural processes at work.

## ***Aims and Approach***

While adopting Williams’s combination of cultural analysis and close reading, *Modernism: Keywords* responds as well to the revolutionary changes in research techniques since his time. By his own account, Williams’s resources consisted primarily of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (the OED) and his own reading over an approximately 25-year span. Today, electronic databases and online searching have vastly increased the number of texts readily available, while the range of accessible materials extends to forms such as popular journalism, advertisements, and (often posthumously published) letters and diaries. In addition, while Williams focused his study on British culture and society, the research offered here embraces the transatlantic and, where possible, the larger English-speaking

world. The new scope requires vast quantities of material and the technologies to make it available; the present work could not have been written without electronic databases, internet searching, and the wide reading of a collaborative research team. As a result, the evidence we present differs from the original *Keywords* as well. Williams, for the most part, offered generalized broad summaries about the meaning of terms; *Modernism: Keywords* documents usage with specific quotations, citing, from a much larger bibliography of works consulted, over 1100 primary texts.

To assist manageability, however, this volume has a more specific focus than Williams's work: our subject is *written* modernism and our audience is, first and foremost, a readership engaged in the study of English Literature. Although emphasizing the nineteenth century, Williams's coverage ranged from earliest usages to the mid-1970s; the present work limits itself to seventy years, concentrating on a period particularly noted for radical change. Furthermore, whereas Williams's approach was broadly cultural and sociological, the approach here always considers the relevance of its "interdisciplinary" usages – in, for example, psychology, sociology, and science – for understandings pertinent to the discipline of literature.

A word should be said too about ideology. As a Marxist, Williams was accused – notably by William Empson (1977) – of political partisanship, although we believe that a careful reading of his *Keywords* reveals it to be remarkably fair. Williams himself, however, drew attention to the inescapability of bias, noting the prevalence in the OED of "orthodox opinion," and the way that his own "positions and preferences" inevitably seep through. The present work certainly aspires to ideological fairness, on the assumption that we can recover a sense of on-going conversation only by giving all voices equal chance to speak. We pursue, in this light, a comment by Williams himself: "an 'enlightened Radical or Liberal' ought, as Mill said of Coleridge, 'to rejoice over such a Conservative' as Eliot" for the way he "raised questions which those who differ from him politically must answer, or else retire from the field" (1956). We take inspiration as well from a critic speaking from the liberal-humanist side: as F. R. Leavis stated, "finding essential insight in work about which one has to have critical reserves is a most important order of educational experience" (1969). Those who contributed research for this volume represent a wide range of interests, beliefs, and political allegiances, and these collaborative voices helped us to listen carefully to the range of voices in the works that we read. Yet, finally, even a study of vocabulary makes ethical judgments at certain points. While we have tried, for example, to present the reasons why some writers used words such as fascism or imperialism in positive ways, we still expose the ethical problems in endorsements of these terms.

## ***Theoretical Implications***

A keywords approach implies a methodological and theoretical departure from most critical books being written today. First, not only does it focus on words rather than ideas – or rather, it accesses ideas *through* words – but it also relies on what words meant to the modernists rather than what they mean to us now. It may seem like a simple process of leaping over current assumptions, but – as we have learned – it is not as easy as it sounds. Second, our entries seek out diversity, even messiness, rather than resolution, so that contrary to the usual scholarly demand for original and singular interpretations, forestalling over-arching interpretation has been our goal. Keywords thus resonates with current dissatisfactions with linear histories, as expressed, for example, in Michael Levenson's turn to "adjacencies." Arguing an approach to modernism through "the simmering of conversation, the unstoppable circulation of jokes and curses, critical dicta and common-readerly buzz" (2011: 677), Levenson advocates a historicism based on "a network of heterogeneous manifestations" "which needn't be elevated to "frameworks" or "metanarratives" (2011: 676, 675). Keywords also aligns with Michael Whitworth's view that returning to "the full historical context" can "unearth associations and implications which complicate meaning," with the result that "historicism can reopen texts, and that reopening can place the past in new dialogues with the present" (2012: 22).

But the project of "opening history" urges us to go beyond juxtaposition to interaction. *Modernism: Keywords* envisions a mobile history through the trope of "the bounce," conceiving the words of the past as bouncing against each other as well as out to us. Imagine a field full of multiple players hitting multiple bouncing balls, which spring up from the ground, ricochet off each other, pass from hand to hand, and bounce out to the spectators too. The balls seem to be propelling themselves by their own volition, yet almost invisible hands animate them, speeding them on their way. Like these bouncing, colliding balls, words carry the imprint of previous touch, since communicative power depends on communal speech. Like the watchers, we, as readers and critics, influence the course of the motion, our changing perceptions bringing multiple patterns into play. By focusing our attention, we bring one ball or one word or one text into the foreground and place others in the background, but by frequently shifting focus, we activate a continual alternation between what is foreground (text) and what background (context). Our vision is most likely limited to a series of rapid still shots of partial aspects, but long exposure and slow watching help us imaginatively to glimpse the whole. The bounce is simply a suggestive metaphor and not meant exactly to replicate the way words work. It will be useful if it offers possibilities for glimpsing, if not fully apprehending, a total field of motion, and capturing the mobile, dynamic, noncentric interaction of keywords at work.

Conceiving history as motion also means infusing history with doubt. As art historian Richard Schiff said in a recent interview: “Theorizations are hypotheses to be tested – they’re pragmatic guesses, often guesses quite in the dark. Belief in your own theory eliminates the capacity to doubt” (Siegel, 2008, Web.) At times, these entries will ask you to set aside your own point of view, even to read from the enemy’s position. Although this doesn’t mean abandoning judgments about value and ethics, it does involve trying to understand the other’s view in its own terms. If we do then return to our initial theories, they will have accumulated depth and complexity along the way.

### ***Modernists and Modernism***

While this book does not seek to engage current debates about modernism, the method itself inevitably challenges ideas about modernists and modernism that, in the latter half of C20, became ensconced. A keywords approach makes it more difficult to label a writer’s thought, or to place writers definitively in opposite camps, since, in a relational network, utterances often overlap with those of apparent opponents, or expose the insecurity and uncertainty underlying fixed meanings and views. Theories about segregated cultures, about “divides” between “highbrow” and “middlebrow,” or between serious art and popular culture, simply become more difficult to maintain. And the plurality inherent in a keywords approach challenges any single idea of modernism itself. Modernism is coming to signify in the way “romanticism” now does: it can be understood as an identifiable transhistorical style, approach, or response (although one with internal variations and disagreements); alternatively, it can be simply a period, or an era, delimited somewhat arbitrarily and yet meaningfully by certain dates. From scholars who take the latter approach, a new comprehensive version of historical modernism is emerging, rather like the modernists’ own sense of “atmosphere,” in which boundaries are porous and ideas circulate – as they began to do literally on radio – through the air. Perhaps, indeed, our greatest departure from Williams lies in our proffered view of modernism itself, since Williams, somewhat ironically, contributed to its labeling when he defined modernism as “metropolitan” art (1989). Our project, conversely, seeks not to settle modernism; in charting what unsettled modernists, we unsettle the idea of modernism as possible to define. The modernist period was a vibrant time of broadly circulating difference, evidencing neither an ultimate messiness nor an ultimate cohesion; its heartbeat sounded in an ongoing engagement of many people, in many of the same things, at the same time. Modernists also had no certain idea of what modernism was or how its debates would end. Nor perhaps do we.

### **A Note on the Words**

Our materials encompass all forms of writing in the modernist period, or by writers whose work falls primarily within our dates. Our sources range from vernacular prose to experimental literary forms, including books, periodical literature, newspapers, songs, even advertising. We mix canonical works with noncanonical, conservative with radical thinkers, "serious" with "popular" culture, generalist with specialist discourse, paying equal attention to all. While our selection is guided by the anticipated use of this book by literary students and scholars, here "fictive" or "imaginative" works inhabit a mixed universe, immersed in the larger textual world. Since our subject is written, not visual or musical, modernism, with a concentration on works written in English, references to the nonverbal arts and to European writers are minimal, limited to works that had significant impact on written English at the time. Our examples derive primarily from British and American writers, although where possible we have included writers from Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, India, New Zealand, and South Africa.

The words in this book are of several kinds: new words that were coined during the modernist period ("fascist," "Hamletize"); words that were changing/shifting in meaning or connotation ("propaganda," "hygiene"); words that were being used frequently but in conflicting and contradictory ways ("realism," "woman"); and "word clusters" indicating emerging ideas, for which no single word was consistently used ("common mind/group thinking/super-cortex"). As the evidence emerged from our data, the results were often not what we expected to find. Many words associated now with modernism ("avant-garde") were, on their home turf, surprisingly thin; words we expected to be disappearing ("God") were in strong circulation, or being translated into other terms. And words that seem later to have settled into one dominant usage ("coterie," "form") were, in the modernist period, translucent and prismatic, reflecting many different sides.

We omitted words easily to be understood by consulting the OED; and we avoided words whose definition can be found in handbooks of literary terms, unless they were part of a larger conversation involving divergent interpretations and usages. Nor have we included foreign terms not yet translated into English (like Walter Benjamin's "aura"), or critical terms that became established after the mC20 to discuss modernist texts ("cultural capital" or "free indirect discourse"). Our focus is always on words that modernists were using, and the dynamics and complexities of that use.

### **A Note on Methodology**

Identifying keywords depends on both objective database searching and interpretive judgment. Keywords must be in wide circulation, and they must exhibit uncertainty

and variation in use. Frequency of use is not the only criterion, so that statistical counts, even if we had all relevant texts in an electronic data-base, would not suffice; keywords always embody some underlying dynamic tension, or some significant process of change, and identifying those features depends on the critical mind. Two important resources are thus needed for this task: the availability of extensive print and digitized materials, and a collaborative research team.

Inevitably, projects begin with what we know, and with a research group extending, over the years, to twelve people, most of them graduate students, we were aided by the reasonably large database of a collective mind. But the scope of the enterprise required us to go far beyond our own knowledge and our own critical frames. By responding to the results of our searches, as opposed to what we sought, we were frequently prompted to new understandings and new views. As scholars, we tend to store in our memories what we select as most important and significant; keyword searches of electronic archives, however, don't distinguish between important and insignificant usages – they simply return every "hit." What human memory could recall one of the earliest cultural references to modernism in a *Cosmopolitan* advertisement for "Rubdry towels"? Our numerous databases were fully part of the collaboration, especially in uncovering unpredictable use.

Research on such a grand scale depends on massive resources; we were assisted both by excellent libraries and by the increasing amount of material available online. Our materials included digitized books (through Project Gutenberg, Open Alliance, Google Books, the HathiTrust Digital Library, and especially Internet Archive); early journals and periodicals (the *TLS* Historical Archive; the Modernist Journals Project; *JSTOR*; UNZ.org and numerous other newspaper and periodical databases); anthologies of modernism; bibliographies in scholarly works; scholarship on modernism, and a wide range of print materials from the modernist time.

We became alert as well to the potential problems of internet resources: OCR recognition (translation from scanned printed text to searchable electronic form) is strikingly imperfect: "Racism" in a Google Book turned out to be an erroneous transcription of "Itacism"; in another transcribed text, the original word was "Ostracism." A publication listed from the United Nations in 1911 was clearly an error; the actual date was 1981. Further, as the creators of the Google Ngram Viewer have explained, "some metadata providers assign any book whose date is unknown the date 1899; others use 1905; still others use different dates" (Michel *et al.*, 2011). The internet is also full of misattributions, and once the misattribution occurs on one website, it is picked up and repeated on numerous other sites as well. Online searching, we discovered, needs to be complemented by reading that returns to the original, either the facsimile or the actual printed page.

## Introduction: Unsettling Modernism

### Using This Book

*Modernism: Keywords* is designed for advanced undergraduates, graduate students, teachers, and advanced scholars of literature in English, with the hope that it will be of interest to broad interdisciplinary and general audiences as well. In its nature, this book falls between a dictionary and a book of criticism; it can be approached by reading a single entry, reading from cover to cover, starting with one entry and following the “see also” suggestions to track related ideas, or ferreting out entries relating to a specific topic of interest or research. Collectively, the entries offer a wealth of information, but they are best understood as an accompaniment and guide to further work. Many of the entries pair well with readings we consider “keywords in action” – novels, poems, plays that may not use the actual words we discuss, or use them only infrequently, but that nevertheless participate in the underlying debates. It is hard to think of a work that wouldn’t pair with entries such as modern/modernism, readers/reading, reality/realism, and words, but more specific pairings can be used as well. To cite a few possibilities:

*Dark Princess* (W. E. B. Du Bois) with empire/imperialism, internationalism, universal

*Death Comes for the Archbishop* (Willa Cather) with propaganda, bigness/smallness, universal

*Heart of Darkness* (Joseph Conrad) with convention, empire/imperialism, primitive

*The Heat of the Day* (Elizabeth Bowen) with fascism, democracy, shock/shell shock

*Jacob’s Room* (Virginia Woolf) with bigness/smallness, biography, common man

*Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (George Bernard Shaw) with conventional, sentimental/sentimentality, woman/New Woman

*Passing* (Nella Larsen) with queer, personality/impersonality, unconscious

*The Sound and the Fury* (William Faulkner) with Hamlet (Quentin’s chapter), race

*Vile Bodies* (Evelyn Waugh) with coterie/Bloomsbury, shock shell shock

*The Waste Land* (T. S. Eliot) with common mind, difficulty/obscurity, God/gods

While these examples list some of the works most frequently read in the classroom, the references at the end of each entry frequently cite less well-known works as well. Readers will also, we think, be surprised to discover how frequently these words appear in writings not cited here; our examples were many more than we could include, or fully track. The richness of these words will be discovered through further reading, and further reading will undoubtedly discover more keywords.

## Future Directions

*Modernism: Keywords* is only a beginning in the larger project of using language to track the full modernist network of discussion and debate. The Table of Contents offers a relatively small selection, although additional words appear in the Index of Keywords. The keywords we have selected are significant, but modernism's significant words do not end with our list. We hope to cover additional words in future publication; we also hope, as did Williams, that others will join this collaborative task (indeed, several recent monographs use the approach of investigating a particular word.) For the future, more could be done to increase the international scope, to recognize the way foreign words were enriching the English language, and to complement this study with similar work in the nonwritten arts. Ideally, such work could move to a digital environment, with possibilities for incorporating feedback and submitted contributions; the web of meaning could then become a scholarly web as well. We should remember, however, that a keywords approach is designed not to replace but to mix with more traditional scholarship. This book will serve its function if it increases alertness to words and their changing meanings, and if it stimulates the reading of modernist texts for the meanings that were circulating at that time. Whether or not our readers take up a keywords approach for themselves, we hope they will all find their readings changed by reading *Modernism: Keywords*.

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# Note on References

Every effort has been made to cite the earliest publication or circulation of our keywords in the modernist period. Original publication dates, where they differ, appear after the title (for novels, this includes dates of serial publication). If the work was written significantly earlier than the date of publication, the date of composition is presented in square brackets, as are variant titles and dates for different previous versions of a text or, for works in translation, their original language publication. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from non-English works are ours.

A complexity of modernist bibliography worth mentioning is the frequency of simultaneous publication by different, and sometimes multiple, presses on both sides of the Atlantic. We have generally followed the practice of listing the publisher in the country where the writer resides, unless the work itself carries the imprint of different publishers. Our approach of weaving together different “national literatures,” however, finds support in the publishing evidence that modernist readers were encountering these books in precisely that way.

## Advertising

In *A Hope for Poetry* (1934), the poet Cecil Day Lewis lists “advertisement and cheap publicity” among the “‘gross and violent stimulants’ that are reducing the modern mind ‘to a state of almost savage torpor.’” Likening advertising to numbing intoxicants, Day Lewis quotes William Wordsworth’s attacks, in his Preface to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, on the numerous forces in *his* society serving “to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind.” The irony, however, is that, in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Wordsworth’s introductory remarks were headed not “Preface,” but “Advertisement.” Day Lewis thus unwittingly signals a significant semantic shift: from its early neutral meaning of notification and information, “advertising” by the modernist period had come to name an industry, a rhetoric of persuasion, and a competing art form.

Citizens of modernity were exposed to advertising in a dazzling variety of forms. Skywriting, neon signs, billboards, posters, newspaper ads, window displays, sandwich boards, throwaways (flyers), and jingles had become elements of daily life. The ubiquity of advertising led French journalist Louis Chéronnet to remark in 1927, “The composition of the air has changed. To the oxygen and nitrogen we breathe we have to add Advertising. [. . .] It surrounds us, envelops us, it is intimately mingled with our every step, in our activities, in our relaxation, and its ‘atmospheric pressure’ is so necessary to us that we no longer feel it.” Indeed, as early as 1913, *Maclean’s Magazine* declared, “We live in the Advertising Age.”

**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**

As might be expected, many modernist works exhibit strong antipathy to advertising, often contrasting dishonest, sensational, hoax-prone advertising with disinterested “pure” art. H. G. Wells’s *Tono-Bungay* (1908) satirically depicts the aggressive marketing of a “slightly injurious” bogus tonic (loosely based on Coca-Cola), in contrast to the serious but nonlucrative art of the narrator’s alter-ego Bob Ewart. The advertisements (illustrated in the first edition) temporarily make the family’s fortune, but the narrator retrospectively describes the process as “the giving of nothing coated in advertisements for money.” In George Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), Gordon Comstock – recognizing the “bestly irony in the fact that he, who wanted to be a ‘writer,’ should score his sole success in writing ads for deodorants” – similarly confronts the reality that it is advertising, not pure art, that pays. More threateningly, advertising reflects the reductiveness of totalitarian discourse in Stephen Spender’s *Vienna* (1934): the Executive (the Fascist Dollfuss regime in Austria) say of the Unemployed, “We can read their bodies like advertisements/On hoardings, shouting with common answers.”

Yet such outright attacks were countered by arguments in advertising’s defense. In *Nuntius: Advertising and its Future* (1926), Gilbert Russell sought to convince an “ill-informed or misinformed public” that advertising was not only an economic necessity but an “educative” and “civilising” force as well. Advertising, he argued, helped to maintain manufacturing quality, alerted consumers to safer and healthier products, and increased exposure to culture, prompting people to read more widely. In its most positive guise, advertising connoted creativity. According to André Billy, the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire “found a source of inspiration in prospectuses, [ . . . ] catalogues, posters, advertisements of all sorts,” and named advertising “the poetry of our epoch” (1912). In a similarly positive vein, the Austrian-born philologist and critic Leo Spitzer took the coinage of “sunkist” for “oranges” as typifying advertising’s ability to inject beauty and poetry into an overly rational world, and he argued further that this advertisement’s playfully ironic overtones prompted its audience to reflect critically on the differences between reality and dream (1949). Whether advertising is imaginative art or humbug plays out in the polarized responses to circus entrepreneur P. T. Barnum. In 1910, the trade journal *The Printers’ Ink* marked the 100th anniversary of Barnum’s birth by disclaiming any relation between Barnum’s notorious sensationalism and modern business practices, noting that his “advertising ability,” though “interesting as a starting point of the profession,” was “lamentably gross and misrepresentative of the modern development of it.” Conversely, in 1940, Yale professor William Lyon Phelps linked advertisement positively with the arts by calling Barnum “the Shakespeare of advertising” (Wallace, 1959).

A similar division of attitudes surrounded the question of advertising’s style. Hostile responses cast its rhetoric as the obverse of the literary, with charges ranging from its goal of coercion to its mode of desperation. Q. D. Leavis and Wyndham Lewis portrayed advertising as an ideological tool productive of

unreflecting conformity. "It is more than difficult, it is next to impossible," wrote Leavis, "for the ordinary uncritical man to resist when, whichever way he looks in the street, from poster and hoarding, and advertisement in bus and tramcar [...] the pressure of the herd is brought to bear on him" (1932). Lewis interpreted advertising as mind control, arguing that the masses had been "hypnotized into a sort of hysterical imbecility by the mesmeric methods of Advertisement" (1927). Evelyn Waugh associated advertising with the fetishization of the new: claiming that "no serious writer has ever been shy of an expression because it has been used before," he accused "the writer of advertisements" of "always straining to find bizarre epithets for commonplace objects" (1946).

Other modernist usages positioned advertising as a literary genre – one from which more traditional genres could learn. While one view, as we have seen, attributed a literary character to advertising due to its poetic creativity, another approach, valuing economy and precision, extolled the rhetoric of advertising as a desirable element in literary form. Aldous Huxley called advertising "one of the most interesting and difficult literary forms" – adding the qualified term "applied literature," however, for those benighted readers "who still believe[d] in the romantic superiority of the pure, the disinterested, over the immediately useful" (1920). Huxley himself praised the "elegance and economical distinction" of advertising prose; reflecting on its "honest man-to-man style" – "lucid and simple enough to be understood by all" – he concluded, "the art of advertisement writing has flowered with democracy." In "The Advertisement is Literature" (1926), Dashiell Hammett called the advertiser a "literary worker" since he "must set his idea on paper in such a form that it will have the effect he desires on those who read it"; like Huxley, Hammett suggested that literature could learn from advertising by replacing "the needlessly involved sentence, the clouded image" with the concision, clarity, and efficiency of good ad copy.

Yet in modernist literature overall, the prevailing treatment of advertising was less clear-cut. In the penultimate chapter of Henry James's *The Ambassadors* ([1903]1909), when Chad Newsome – a Jamesian "American abroad" – announces his discovery that advertising is "the great new force" which is "infinite like all the arts," his words waver between the chilling suggestion that he is reverting to his family's economic materialism and the complicating possibility that a new, dynamic energy is infusing his habitually passive demeanor. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the faded billboard picturing the pale eyes and gigantic spectacles of the vanished oculist Doctor T. J. Eckleburg initially suggests the disappearance of God in an ethically weak capitalist society: after the catastrophic accident, when George Wilson looks up at the billboard and intones, "God sees everything," "That's an advertisement" is his friend's curt rejoinder. Yet Eckleburg's human counterpart – nicknamed "Owl Eyes" because of his "enormous owl-eyed spectacles" – is the one character other than the narrator who responds to *Gatsby* with perception and compassion, an oddity suggesting that the billboard

can be read as a text about human witnessing as well. In Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), advertising is initially a force of social hypnosis. The narrator Anna, transplanted to London from the Caribbean, hears a jingle for Standard Bread which, despite her resistance, plays "over and over again" in her head: "It's the tune that's so awful; it's like blows." Yet in a climactic moment, Anna's childhood memory of "a picture advertising the Biscuits Like Mother Makes" leads to a crucial insight: the depiction of "a little girl in a pink dress" with "a shiny pale-blue sky" near enough to touch exposes the Empire's utopian marketing of England as a "cosy" and happy place where God is always near, while the "high, dark wall" behind her signifies the inaccessibility of this dream for the colonized outsiders.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), a novel littered with slogans, posters, throw-aways, and sandwich boards, captures the ambiguity of advertising as simultaneously a playful, creative art and an insidiously dominating form. Protagonist Leopold Bloom – himself an ad canvasser and practitioner of what one character calls "the gentle art of advertisement" (with a subtle ironic play on the well-known expression "the gentle art of persuasion") – subverts such coercive intent when he uses "Plumtree's Potted Meat" as a springboard to free associate everything from the sexual act to a buried corpse. Nonetheless, as Bloom goes to sleep at the end of the novel, he fantasizes about "the infinite possibilities hitherto unexploited of the modern art of advertisement" and he dreams of creating a totalizing advertisement with the power "to arrest involuntary attention, to convince, to decide." The tension between regulation and freedom is similarly embodied in the famous skywriting scene in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). As an airplane flies over central London, skywriting ragged and rapidly dissolving letters in smoke, scattered pedestrians are both uniformly held in a moment of coerced attention and loosely combined in a participatory act of group seeing. The ambiguous skywriting produces a scene of modernist reading, eliciting interpretations ranging from the mystical to the mundane. What Septimus Smith interprets, in aesthetic rapture, as a sign from the beyond, other onlookers collectively decipher as a message about something to eat: "they were advertising toffee."

Advertising thus exhibited a double voicedness, as both a dominating, manipulative rhetoric and a cultural sign to be creatively produced, read, and used. As concerns about standardization and mass marketing grew, however, educators and cultural theorists gravitated to the uniformly negative readings of Lewis and Leavis. Marshall McLuhan, for his part, wavered in his sentiments, expressing concerns that "the business of the advertiser is to see that we go about our business with some magic spell or tune or slogan throbbing quietly in the background of our minds" (1953), yet, only one year later, "blessing" "advertising art" for "its pictorial VITALITY and verbal CREATIVITY" (1954). For Northrop Frye, however, advertising was straightforwardly an "anti-art" – a form of propaganda with a dangerous propensity to "stun and demoralize the critical

consciousness with statements too absurd or extreme to be dealt with seriously" (1967). Such powerful critiques served to entrench modernism and advertising as an oppositional binary; crosscurrents within the modernist period, however, show "advertisement" functioning in plural and controversial ways.

**SEE ALSO:** *Best Seller; Form; Propaganda; Readers, Reading*

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## Atom, Atomic

When Karl Pearson published his third edition of *The Grammar of Science* (1911), he added a Preface warning against assumptions of permanent scientific truth. The contemporary physicist, he admonished, might be in danger of treating the electron, as he did the “old unchangeable atom,” as “a reality of experience,” forgetting “that it is only a construct of his own imagination,” “certain to be replaced by a wider concept as his insight expands.” Atom was truly a powerful imaginative construct in both scientific and general discourse, although subject to rapid change and varying use. The mysteries, multiplicities, and contradictoriness of the atom, however, constituted a large part of its imaginative appeal.

Until almost the end of C19, the atom was considered the smallest unit of the physical universe. The following half-century subjected the atom to two revolutionary turns: the discovery of subatomic particles named electrons and protons, and the construction and detonation, in 1945, of the atomic bomb. Metaphorical uses of atom often lagged, in knowledge, behind scientific research, yet they captured the implications of the new physics in at least three significant ways: (i) the idea or experience of being a minute particle, especially in the expanded scale and heightened speed of the modern world; (ii) an uncertainty and even radical doubt about a knowable, meaningful universe; and (iii) an increased reverence for the new forces unlocked by science, along with a horror at the appalling destruction now possible to inflict upon living bodies and the planet itself.

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For much of the period, literary and popular references to the atom generally assumed the earlier sense of smallest imaginable unit, but now in the context of new dimensions in scale. Overawed by the sky, Virginia Woolf's Miss Anning thinks humbly of herself and her companion as “atoms, motes . . . and their lives . . . as long as an insect's and no more important” ([1925?] 1944); conversely, Tom Sefton's poem “Incarnation” forges a link between the tiny self and cosmic space: a “glimpse” in the “sub-conscious mind” leads him to affirm, “I am a part/Of one vast pulsing heart;/An atom of a comprehensive whole” (1912). Atom could also suggest the minute individual in a vast social scheme. In *Memoirs of a Social Atom* (1903), W. E. Adams – the son of a plasterer and the editor of a local weekly – described himself as “a small speck on the surface of society”; nonetheless, he asserted that a record of “the hopes and aspirations of the common people” would not “lack interest on that account.” Atom indeed conveys a new literary attentiveness to the small, in writers as different as F. T. Marinetti and Virginia Woolf: Marinetti, seeking to overpass what he considered the obsessively human, called upon writers to fuse “the infinite smallness that surrounds us, the imperceptible, the invisible, the agitation of atoms” with the “infinitely great” ([1913] 1973). Virginia Woolf's appeal in “Modern Fiction” ([1919] 1925) for a new literature that “record[s] the atoms as they fall upon the mind” was a testimony to the value

of common, everyday experience and every sensation and perception that it involves. A note in her diary records her commitment, too, to the smallest particle of time: "what I want now to do," she wrote, "is to saturate every atom [. . .] to give the moment whole" ([1928]1977–1984).

If modernist responses to the fragment find expression in the single atom, the idea of multiple fragments – as Marinetti's "agitation" and Woolf's falling atoms suggest – finds embodiment in atomic motion. Just as the individual atom could signify significance or insignificance, so the chaotic speed and incessant motion of numerous atoms could instill fear or wonder. In his memoir of his partly fictional self, Henry Adams represented the cataclysmic break with C19 thought by writing that science had catapulted him into "a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old" ([1907]1918). Imagining himself not simply "an isolated atom in a hostile universe, but a sort of herring-fry in a shoal of moving fish," Adams conceived this "ocean of colliding atoms" as demolishing any comforting assumptions of "unity," "direction," and "progress" and ushering in a "supersensual world" powered by "chance collisions of movements." Even more fearfully, a character in a John Buchan novel worries about "the danger of splitting into nebulae of whirling atoms" (1933). Yet for David Lowe, the divisible atom was proof that the earth was "as fluid and fluxible and flexible as thought itself," drawing us "nearer the divine breath" (1909). Similarly, in the self-named "weird fiction" of H. P. Lovecraft, "the feeling that our tangible world is only an atom in a fabric vast and ominous," turns a character into "a searcher for strange realms" seeking something that "would bind him to the stars, and to the infinities and eternities beyond them" ([1927]1938); in another Lovecraft story, the narrator, believing "that human thought consists basically of atomic or molecular motion, convertible into ether waves or radiant energy," sets up telepathic communication with an alternate universe of light (1919). In "Exploring the Atom," Edward Free explained the new scientific vision to a lay audience: "Beneath the visible structure of the universe there exists, we have discovered, another universe almost infinitely finer in grain. Solid objects like a block of lead are not really solid at all; they are mostly space. Motionless objects like a grain of sand lying on the table are not really without motion; the sand grain, for example, is a mass of billions of tiny particles all in the most rapid movement, some of them at speeds exceeding 20,000 miles a second" (1924). The broad dissemination of these ideas, and the sense of wonder they could occasion is reflected in Virginia Woolf's *The Years* (1937) when Eleanor looks at a cup of tea and asks, "What [is] it made of? Atoms? And what [are] atoms, and how [do] they stick together?" considering the matter a "marvelous mystery."

The image of multiple atoms also generated metaphors of society, focusing on relations between individuals and the whole. The socialist A. R. Orage attacked individualism as "presuppos[ing] an atomic structure, an infinite multiplicity,

a congeries of persons without the necessary addition of the unity amid the diversity" (1907). Similarly, combating "capitalist democracy" with "its atomic conception of social life" and emphasis on "the freedom of citizens," socialist Harold Laski made a "plea for variety in unity" and "a new balance between order and freedom" (1933). The liberal and feminist Dorothy Thompson, commenting on "the America of today," decried "a sterility in human relations" resulting from "an atomization, loneliness, frustration," and she urged a return to "the living, the vital, the human," with "the individual and society, the person and humanity, not in contradiction, but in union, organically united, as the family is, or once was" (1938). T. S. Eliot, for his part, welcomed atomic structure, but its meaning for him was more complex. Finding a remedy for war in the "atomic view of society," he urged the need for each individual to belong to multiple overlapping social groups, so that no one group could again seize a dominant, totalitarian position of power ([1946]1948). Atomic structure, for Eliot, meant an interactive formation of multiple patterns, a paradoxical conjunction of "unity and diversity" that embraces the particle in a fluxible whole.

Beyond such metaphoric employments of physical atoms, increasingly rapid developments in scientific research caused the atom to be literally associated with epistemological and ontological uncertainty. In the negative sense, atomic theory could signify destructive instability. C. A. Ward, reporting "the latest decisions in chemistry," wrote, "Atoms are now said to be infinitely divisible, invisible, imponderable," and offered the pessimistic general reflection, "All this makes one ask what need we have of deciding anything" (1890). In its positive use, however, the divisible atom signified a fruitful decentering of knowledge. D. H. Lawrence celebrated "relativity and quantum theories" for their very uncertainty, making him feel "as if the atom were an impulsive thing always changing its mind" (1929), while for Havelock Ellis, "the very structure of the 'atom' [was] melting into a dream" and the "physical world" was becoming "more impalpable and visionary" (1923). Eugene Jolas wrote, "The atom, once the last reality, has given way to new disintegrations which open up possibilities for tremendous evolutions" (1929). Not all new uses of atom focused on uncertainty, however, since scientific discoveries could also betoken progress, stability, and order. An editorial in the London *Times*, reporting on the Edinburgh meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, referenced Sir Edward Thorpe's vision of "the atom as an ordered system," "a macrocosm of energy in microcosmic space," noting how such "evolution of knowledge" promised a "revolution of thought" (1921). Bart Kennedy interpreted the atom as representing "in miniature" the "macrocosm" of cosmic continuity: "Our world is at one with the shining transplendent whole" (1910). In Eugene O'Neill's *Dynamo* (1929), Reuben both acknowledges the mystery of the divisible atom and reads it as requiring a central organizing force: "The sea is only hydrogen and oxygen