



Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity (Literary Modernism Series)

Jonathan Goldman

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The phenomenon of celebrity burst upon the world scene about a century ago, as movies and modern media brought exceptional, larger-than-life personalities before the masses. During the same era, modernist authors were creating works that defined high culture in our society and set aesthetics apart from the middle- and low-brow culture in which celebrity supposedly resides. To challenge this ingrained dichotomy between modernism and celebrity, Jonathan Goldman offers a provocative new reading of early twentieth-century culture and the formal experiments that constitute modernist literature's unmistakable legacy. He argues that the literary innovations of the modernists are indeed best understood as a participant in the popular phenomenon of celebrity. Presenting a persuasive argument as well as a chronicle of modernism's and celebrity's shared history, *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* begins by unraveling the uncanny syncretism between Oscar Wilde's writings and his public life. Goldman explains that Wilde, in shaping his instantly identifiable public image, provided a model for both literary and celebrity cultures in the decades that followed. In subsequent chapters, Goldman traces this lineage through two luminaries of the modernist canon, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein, before turning to the cinema of mega-star Charlie Chaplin. He investigates how celebrity and modernism intertwine in the work of two less obvious modernist subjects, Jean Rhys and John Dos Passos. Turning previous criticism on its head, Goldman demonstrates that the authorial self-fashioning particular to modernism and generated by modernist technique helps create celebrity as we now know it.

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