



# **Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism (Columbia Themes in Philosophy)**

*Ewa Ziarek*

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Despite the prominence of feminist theory in literary, film, and visual arts critique, feminist theories of aesthetics remain rare, obscuring a crucial chapter in women's history. Ewa Plonowska Ziarek redresses this oversight through a full articulation of feminist aesthetics, focusing on the struggle for freedom in women's literary and political modernism and the devastating impact of racist violence and sexism. Her study is one of the first to combine an in-depth engagement with philosophical aesthetics, especially the work of Theodor W. Adorno, with women's literary modernism, particularly the writing of Virginia Woolf and Nella Larsen, along with feminist theories on the politics of race and gender.

Ziarek examines the contradiction between women's transformative literary and political practices and the oppressive realities of racist violence and sexism. She situates these tensions within the entrenched opposition between revolt and melancholia in studies of modernity and within the friction between material injuries and experimental aesthetic forms. Her political and aesthetic investigations concern the exclusion and destruction of women in politics and literary production and the transformation of this oppression into the inaugural possibilities of writing and action. Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism profoundly reorients common interpretations of Woolf and Larsen, as well as the history of suffrage militancy. By bringing seemingly apolitical, gender-neutral debates about modernism's experimental forms together with an analysis of violence and destroyed materialities, Ziarek challenges both the anti-aesthetic subordination of modern literature to its political uses and the appreciation of art's emancipatory potential at the expense of feminist and anti-racist political struggles.

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