



Wittgenstein and Modernism

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Ludwig Wittgenstein famously declared that philosophy “ought really to be written only as a form of poetry,” and he even described the *Tractatus* as “philosophical and, at the same time, literary.” But few books have really followed up on these claims, and fewer still have focused on their relation to the special literary and artistic period in which Wittgenstein worked. This book offers the first collection to address the rich, vexed, and often contradictory relationship between modernism—the twentieth century’s predominant cultural and artistic movement—and Wittgenstein, one of its preeminent and most enduring philosophers. In doing so it offers rich new understandings of both.

Michael LeMahieu Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé bring together scholars in both twentieth-century philosophy and modern literary studies to put Wittgenstein into dialogue with some of modernism’s most iconic figures, including Samuel Beckett, Saul Bellow, Walter Benjamin, Henry James, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Adolf Loos, Robert Musil, Wallace Stevens, and Virginia Woolf. The contributors touch on two important aspects of Wittgenstein’s work and modernism itself: form and medium. They discuss issues ranging from Wittgenstein and poetics to his use of numbered propositions in the *Tractatus* as a virtuoso performance of modernist form; from Wittgenstein’s persistence metaphoric use of religion, music, and photography to an exploration of how he and Henry James both negotiated the relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical.

Covering many other fascinating intersections of the philosopher and the arts, this book offers an important bridge across the disciplinary divides that have kept us from a fuller picture of both Wittgenstein and the larger intellectual and cultural movement of which he was a part.

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Editorial Review

Review

“The absence of extensive debate about the fruitfulness of reading Wittgenstein through the lens of the idea of modernism—and vice versa—is notable to anyone with even a casual interest in these matters. This book creates a space in which those cross-readings can happen, and I can’t imagine a more successful attempt at doing so. Addressing a wide range of thinkers, texts, and topics, this ambitious and arresting volume should be widely discussed across disciplines.”

(Alice Crary, author of *Inside Ethics*)

“*Wittgenstein and Modernism* is a model of its genre, a collection of thought-provoking essays bound together with LeMahieu and Zumhagen-Yekplé’s richly insightful introduction. As the volume progresses, its central themes resonate and find variations in sinuous interworkings. We move from the European context of Wittgenstein’s life, to the scope of his influence from his Cambridge base outward to broader intellectual circles, and on to the many interrelations between his work and modernist literature. The result is a book that will be of wide use: for scholars of Wittgenstein, it will immediately take its place as a benchmark contribution, but it should also serve as an illuminating introduction for anyone with an interest in modernism who has not yet looked into Wittgenstein’s thought.”

(Garry L. Hagberg, author of *Describing Ourselves*)

About the Author

Michael LeMahieu is associate professor of English at Clemson University and coeditor of the journal *Contemporary Literature*. He is the author of *Fictions of Fact and Value: The Erasure of Logical Positivism in American Literature, 1945–1975*. **Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé** is assistant professor of English and an affiliated faculty member in the Stone Center for Latin American Studies and the Programs for Gender Studies and Film Studies at Tulane University.

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