



Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics

By Jesse Matz

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Jesse Matz examines the writing of such modernists as Henry James, Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf, who used the word 'impression' to describe what they wanted their fiction to present. Matz redefines literary Impressionism, focusing on the way that impressions destroy standard perceptual distinctions between thinking and sensing, believing and suspecting. He argues that these writers favoured not immediate subjective sense, but rather a mode that would mediate perceptual distinctions. Just as impressions fall somewhere between thought and sense, Impressionist fiction occupies the middle ground between opposite ways of engaging with the world. Matz also argues that the resulting confusion becomes a basic plot feature of modernist fiction. This wide-ranging 2001 study addresses the problems of perception and representation that occupied writers in the early decades of the twentieth century.

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Review

"[a] worthy contribution to the ethics and politics of literary Modernism." Woolf Studies Annual

About the Author

Jesse Matz is Assistant Professor of English at Harvard University.

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