

Lateness and Modernism

In the aftermath of World War I, a sense of impasse and thwarted promise shaped the political and cultural spheres in Britain. Writers such as D. H. Lawrence, Hilda Doolittle, T. S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis were among the literary figures who responded by pursuing vividness, autonomy and impersonality in their work. Yet the extent to which these practices were reflected in ideas about music from within the same milieu has remained unrecognized. Uncovering the work of composer-critics who worked alongside these figures – including Philip Heseltine (Peter Warlock), Cecil Gray and Kaikhosru Sorabji – Sarah Collins traces the shared tendencies of literary and musical modernisms in interwar Britain. Collins explores the political investments underpinning these tendencies, as well as the influence of English Nietzscheanism and related intellectual currents, arguing that a particular conception of the self, history and the public characterized an ethos of ‘lateness’ within this milieu.

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Untimely Ideas about Music, Literature and
Politics in Interwar Britain

SARAH COLLINS
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We are not only the ‘last men of an epoch’ [...] we are more than that, or we are that in a different way to what is most often asserted. *We are the first men of a Future that has not materialized.* We belong to a ‘great age’ that has not ‘come off’. [...] all that is ‘advanced’ moves backwards, now, towards that impossible goal, of the pre-war dawn.¹

¹ Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937; London: John Calder, 1982), 256. Original emphasis. Thank you to the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust for permission to use this quotation as an epigraph.

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- 1.1 William Orpen, ‘The Café Royal, London 1912’, courtesy of Bridgeman Images. *page* [xvi]
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- 5.1 Photograph of Cecil Gray on the island of Capri, © The British Library Board, Cecil Gray Papers, MS 57803, pencil mark 72. [122]

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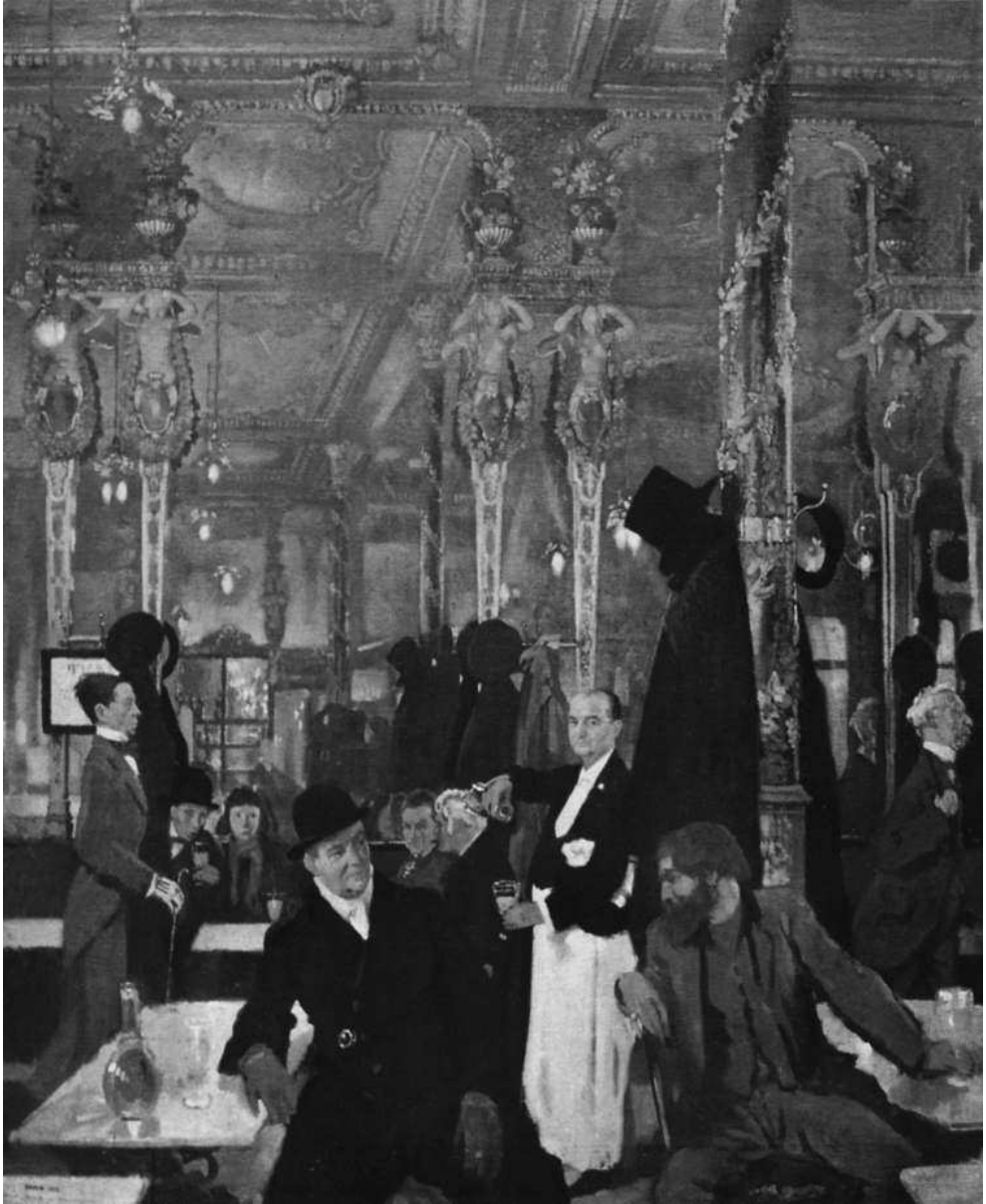


Figure 1.1 William Orpen, ‘The Café Royal, London 1912’; courtesy of Bridgeman Images.