

BRITISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION, 1920–1940: FUTILITY AND ANARCHY

Literature from the ‘political’ 1930s has often been read in contrast to the ‘aesthetic’ 1920s. This collection suggests a different approach. Drawing on recent work expanding our sense of the political and aesthetic energies of interwar modernisms, these chapters track transitions in British literature. The strains of national break-up, class disension and political instability provoked a new literary order, and reading across the two decades between the wars exposes the continuing pressure of these transitions. Instead of following familiar markers – 1922, the Crash, the Spanish Civil War – or isolating particular themes from literary study, this collection takes key problems and dilemmas from literature ‘in transition’ and reads them across familiar and unfamiliar cultural works and productions, in their rich and contradictory context of publication. Themes such as gender, sexuality, nation and class are thus present throughout these essays. Major writers such as Woolf are read alongside forgotten and marginalised voices.

CHARLES FERRALL is Associate Professor of English, Victoria University of Wellington. He is the author of *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (Cambridge, 2001) and, with Dougal McNeill, *Writing the 1926 General Strike: Literature, Culture, Politics* (Cambridge, 2015). He is editor of the *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, and is currently working on a study of working-class interwar British literature.

DOUGAL MCNEILL is Senior Lecturer in English, Victoria University of Wellington. He is the author, with Charles Ferrall, of *Writing the 1926 General Strike: Literature, Culture, Politics* (Cambridge, 2015). Other books of his include *Forecasts of the Past: Globalisation, History, Realism, Utopia* (2012) and an edition of Harry Holland’s *Robert Burns: Poet and Revolutionist* (2016).

BRITISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION SERIES

Editor

Gill Plain, *University of St Andrews*

British Literature in Transition maps a century of change. It also seeks to change the way we think about British literary history by reconsidering the canonical certainties and critical norms that shape our understanding of twentieth-century writing. Breaking down the century into twenty-year blocks, each substantial volume surveys, interrogates and challenges prevailing assumptions of critical memory to create a vibrant picture of literary culture in its time. Importantly, this revisionary series both recognises the contingency of the ‘experimental’ and argues that long-established canons do not do justice to the many and various forms that innovation took across the breadth of the twentieth century. As a result, Transition reinstates lost complexities and reanimates neglected debates, its authoritative new essays setting familiar figures alongside forgotten voices to generate a rich and provocative picture of a transformative century. Exploring transitions in writing, performance, publication and readership from the *fin-de-siècle* to the new millennium, the series offers new routes to an understanding of how British literature arrived in the twenty-first century and what made the nation’s writing what it is today.

Books in the series

British Literature in Transition, 1900–1920: A New Age? edited by JAMES PURDON

British Literature in Transition, 1920–1940: Futility and Anarchy edited by CHARLES FERRALL AND DOUGAL MCNEILL

British Literature in Transition, 1940–1960: Postwar edited by GILL PLAIN

British Literature in Transition, 1960–1980: Flower Power edited by KATE MCLOUGHLIN

British Literature in Transition, 1980–2000: Accelerated Times edited by EILEEN POLLARD AND BERTHOLD SCHOENE

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-14553-5 — British Literature in Transition, 1920–1940: Futility and Anarchy

Edited by Charles Ferrall, Dougal McNeill

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

BRITISH LITERATURE IN
TRANSITION, 1920–1940:
FUTILITY AND ANARCHY

EDITED BY

CHARLES FERRALL

Victoria University of Wellington

DOUGAL MCNEILL

Victoria University of Wellington



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-14553-5 — British Literature in Transition, 1920–1940: Futility and Anarchy
 Edited by Charles Ferrall, Dougal McNeill
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
 It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
 education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107145535
 DOI: 10.1017/9781316535929

© Cambridge University Press 2018

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2018

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograph S.p.A.
A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Ferrall, Charles, editor. | McNeill, Dougal, 1981– editor.
 TITLE: British literature in transition, 1920–1940 : futility and anarchy /
 edited by Charles Ferrall, Dougal McNeill.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2018. |
 Series: British literature in transition

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2018026092 | ISBN 9781107145535 (hardback)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: English literature – 20th century – History and criticism. | Literature
 and society – Great Britain – History – 20th century.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PR478.S57 B77 2018 | DDC 820.9/00912–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018026092>

ISBN 978-1-107-14553-5 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
 URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication
 and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
 accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page viii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	ix
<i>General Editor's Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvi
Introduction <i>Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill</i>	I
PART I: AFTER THE WAR	27
Introduction to Part I	29
1 Out of Mrs Colefax's Drawing-Room: Poets and Poetry Between the Wars <i>Harry Ricketts</i>	33
2 Perverting the Postwar: Sexuality and State Violence in Women's Literature <i>Layne Parish Craig</i>	51
3 Journeys without Maps: Literature and Spiritual Experience <i>Lara Vetter</i>	68
PART II: LITERATURE AFTER HUMAN NATURE CHANGED	85
Introduction to Part II	87
4 Writing the Vote: Suffrage, Gender and Politics <i>Sowon S. Park and Kathryn Laing</i>	91

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
5	Literature and Human Rights <i>Rachel Potter</i>	108
6	Psychoanalysis and Modernism <i>John Farrell</i>	125
	PART III: IMMENSE PANORAMAS OF FUTILITY AND ANARCHY: WRITING AND POLITICS	143
	Introduction to Part III	145
7	History: The Past in Transition <i>Gabrielle McIntire</i>	149
8	Women's Work? Domestic Labour and Proletarian Fiction <i>Charles Ferrall</i>	166
9	Ordinary Places, Intermodern Genres: Documentary, Travel and Literature <i>Kristin Bluemel</i>	182
10	Bloomsbury Conversations that Didn't Happen: Indian Writing between British Modernism and Anti-Colonialism <i>Snehal Shingavi and Charlotte Nunes</i>	199
	PART IV: THE FIRST BREAK-UP OF BRITAIN	217
	Introduction to Part IV	219
11	Between Holyhead and Kingstown: Anglo-Irish Perspectives on the Character of British Fiction <i>Michael G. Cronin</i>	225
12	Cancer of Empire: The Glasgow Novel between the Wars <i>Liam McIlvanney</i>	242
13	Lewis Jones and the Making of Welsh 'Identity' <i>Shintaro Kono</i>	259
14	'From Optik to Haptik': Celticism, Symbols and Stones in the 1930s <i>Peter Mackay</i>	275

	<i>Contents</i>	vii
	PART V: TRANSITIONS HIGH AND LOW	291
	Introduction to Part V	293
15	On the Home Front: Designs for Living in British Drama between the Wars <i>Penny Farfan</i>	299
16	Middlemen, Middlebrow, Broadbrow <i>Nicola Wilson</i>	315
17	Detective Fiction: Resolutions without Solutions <i>J. C. Bernthal</i>	331
18	British Literature in Transmission: Writing and Wireless <i>James Purdon</i>	348
	<i>Index</i>	365

Figures

- 4.1 David Low, 'Adam and Eves – New version, in modern dress', *Evening Standard*, 18 Feb 1928. DLo056, Associated Newspapers Ltd. / Solo Syndication, British Cartoon Archive (www.cartoons.ac.uk). page 94
- 15.1 Alfred Lunt as Otto, Noël Coward as Leo, and Lynn Fontanne as Gilda in *Design for Living*, New York, 1933. (Photo by Vandamm Studio © Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts). 304

Notes on Contributors

J. C. BERNTHAL teaches at the Institute for Continuing Education, University of Cambridge. He has a PhD from the University of Exeter and is the editor of *The Ageless Agatha Christie* (2016). His *Queering Agatha Christie* appeared in 2017.

KRISTIN BLUEMEL is Professor of English and Wayne D. McMurray Endowed Chair in the Humanities at Monmouth University in New Jersey. She has published articles and books on modernist and inter-modernist writers, including George Orwell, Stevie Smith, Inez Holden, Dorothy Richardson, A. A. Milne, E. H. Shepard and Gwen Raverat. Her work in progress, 'Enchanted Wood', examines British women wood engravers in the 1930s wood engraving revival.

LAYNE PARISH CRAIG is the author of *When Sex Changed: Birth Control and Literature Between the World Wars* (2013), along with a number of articles on representations of gender and sexuality in the First World War and interwar years. She is currently pursuing a project on women's rhetorical use of the language of sexuality and reproduction during the First World War, as well as researching narrative representations of Assisted Reproductive Technology. She is a teaching faculty member at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas.

MICHAEL G. CRONIN is a Lecturer in English at Maynooth University, Ireland. Along with *Impure Thoughts: Sexuality, Catholicism and Literature in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (2012), he has published essays on the writing of Roger Casement and Padraig Pearse. He is currently working on a project provisionally entitled 'Revolutionary Bodies: Homoeroticism and the Political Imagination in Irish Writing'.

PENNY FARFAN is Professor of Drama at the University of Calgary. She is the author of *Performing Queer Modernism* (2017) and *Women, Modernism, and Performance* (Cambridge, 2004), as well as many articles and book

chapters on modernism and performance and contemporary women playwrights. She is also the co-editor of *Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the Twenty-First Century* (2013).

JOHN FARRELL is Professor of Literature at Claremont McKenna College. He is the author of *Freud's Paranoid Quest* (1996), *Paranoia and Modernity* (2006) and, most recently, *The Varieties of Authorial Intention* (2017).

SHINTARO KONO is Associate Professor at Hitotsubashi University. He has recently published *Fighting Princesses, Working Girls* (in Japanese, 2017) and has translated works by Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, Edward W. Said and others into Japanese.

KATHRYN LAING lectures in the Department of English Language and Literature, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Her teaching and research interests are principally in late nineteenth-century Irish women's writing, New Woman fiction, women's writing and modernism. She is a co-organiser and administrator of the Irish Women's Writing Network.

LIAM MCILVANNEY is Stuart Professor of Scottish Studies and Co-Director of the Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Otago. He is the co-editor (with Gerard Carruthers) of *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature* (Cambridge, 2012). His third novel is *The Quaker* (2018).

GABRIELLE MCINTIRE is Professor of English at Queen's University Canada. She is the author of *Modernism, Memory, and Desire* (Cambridge, 2008) and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to 'The Waste Land'* (Cambridge, 2015).

PETER MACKAY is a poet, broadcaster and Lecturer in English at the University of St Andrews. He is the co-editor of *Modern Irish and Scottish Poetry* (2011) and author of a book on Sorley MacLean (2010). His poetry collection, *Gu Leòr/Galore*, was published by Acair in 2015. He was named a BBC New Generation Thinker in 2015.

CHARLOTTE NUNES is Director of Digital Scholarship Services at Lafayette College Libraries in Easton, Pennsylvania. Her contribution for this volume emerged from her work as a Research Fellow for the Modernist Archives Publishing Project and was supported by a research fellowship at the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas.

Notes on Contributors

xi

SOWON S. PARK is Assistant Professor in English at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is the co-editor of *Women's Suffrage* (2007) and author of several essays about suffrage and modernism. She is currently working on the relationship between modernism and cognitive neuroscience.

RACHEL POTTER is a Professor of Modern Literature at the University of East Anglia. She writes on modernist and early twentieth-century literature, literature and censorship, and free expression and writers' organisations. Books include *Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment* (2013), the *Edinburgh Critical Guide to Modernist Literature* (2012) and *Modernism and Democracy* (2006). She is currently completing a book on International P.E.N. and freedom of expression as well as leading an AHRC-funded project on international writers' organisations.

JAMES PURDON teaches in the School of English at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of *Modernist Informatics: Literature, Information, and the State* (2016) and is currently working on a second book, about literature, philosophy and science in Cold War Britain. He is the editor of the 1900–1920 volume of *British Literature in Transition*.

HARRY RICKETTS is Professor of English at Victoria University Wellington. He has published around thirty books, including two literary biographies – *The Unforgiving Minute: A Life of Rudyard Kipling* (1999) and *Strange Meetings: The Poets of the Great War* (2010) – and ten collections of poems (most recently *Half Dark*, 2015).

SNEHAL SHINGAVI is Associate Professor of English, University of Texas. He is author of *The Mahatma Misunderstood: The Politics and Forms of Literary Nationalism in India* (2013) and translator of *Angaaray* (2014) and Bhisham Sahni's autobiography *Today's Pasts* (2015).

LARA VETTER is Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She is the author of *A Curious Peril: H.D.'s Late Modernist Prose* and *Modernist Writings and Religio-Scientific Discourse: H.D., Loy, and Toomer*. She is editor of H.D.'s *Avon River*.

NICOLA WILSON is Lecturer in Book and Publishing Studies at the University of Reading. She is the author of *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (2015) and editor of *New Directions in the History of the Novel* (2014). Her most recent book, co-authored, is *Scholarly Adventures in Digital Humanities: Making the Modernist Archives Publishing Project* (2017).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-14553-5 — British Literature in Transition, 1920–1940: Futility and Anarchy

Edited by Charles Ferrall, Dougal McNeill

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

General Editor's Preface

British Literature in Transition maps a century of change. It is a project of revision and reappraisal that aims, through innovative juxtaposition and ambitious realignments, to reconsider the habitual practices and critical norms that shape our understanding of twentieth-century writing.

Each volume is distinctively the work of its editors and contributors: there has been no attempt to impose theoretical or methodological conformity. Rather, the aim has been to create a space of possibility for the reimagining and reconfiguring of twentieth-century literature. The century has been broken down into twenty-year blocks, with a view to disrupting habits of periodisation (most obviously, the decade). Twenty-year blocks are no less arbitrary or problematic, but, by moving to this model, British Literature in Transition is able to ask new questions of the boundaries, books and narratives, the critical perspectives and the canons, through which the century has come to be known. Crucially, the volumes seek to build a picture of literature *in its time*. This historical focus gives new impetus to old questions, while also requiring us to interrogate the selective picture of the century that survives in publishers' catalogues and the reading lists of academia. The multiple volumes of the British Literature in Transition series ask, then, questions as diverse as: what is the modern and whose writing exemplifies it? Does the First World War represent a break in the development of literary practice? Why, habitually, have we come to see the literature of the 1920s and the 1930s as radically different? Why has the writing of the first age of austerity seemingly disappeared without a trace? What were the effects on literature of decolonisation and mass immigration? What did the Cold War do to British literary culture, and how did one woman – Margaret Thatcher – come to have such a profound influence on the writing of a generation?

As these questions suggest, this series pays close attention to the dynamic relationship between literature and history, asking questions not just about the canon that has survived but also about the writing that has been

unjustly forgotten or excluded. The series examines both the prestigious and the popular and aims to understand literature's role in mediating the developments of the past hundred years. British Literature in Transition argues for the importance of both politics and aesthetics, and it seeks to understand the constraints and generative possibilities of challenging cultural contexts. An acknowledgement that the outside world shapes literary creativity, or that literature engages in a process of 'world-making', is hardly new, but the seeming onset of an age of historical amnesia suggests it is acquiring fresh significance. What, we might ask, in the aftermath of the 2016 'Brexit' vote, will *British* literature come to mean in the next decades of the twenty-first century? The evidence of the vote suggests that a significant proportion of the nation had forgotten why a European Union was once so urgently needed and desired. It also suggests the instability of narratives of progress, tolerance and integration, exposing the fears of a world that – at the end of the twentieth century – seemed to be becoming inescapably global. At the time of writing, the political and economic consequences of the Brexit decision remain mired in uncertainty, but statistics already reveal its profound social impact. The rhetorical register of the campaign, suffused with a misplaced nostalgia for the 1940s, has given new legitimacy to the violent expression of prejudice. Reasserting a firmly bounded concept of the island nation has equally reinstated discredited discourses of xenophobia, racism and homophobia.

The 'contemporary' thus tells us that transition itself is unstable, unpredictable and even – disturbingly – cyclical. Its manifestations across the twentieth century are far from uniform, and there is no necessary correlation between historical event and literary transition. The years 1940–60, for example, a time of almost unimaginable geopolitical change and social upheaval, emerges as a period of relative stasis – full of radical innovations, but uncertain in direction and beset by more or less readily acknowledged nostalgia. It is hard here to detect a paradigm shift in *literary* form. Quite the opposite might be argued of 1920–40, where 1922 stands out as a defining year in the literary understanding of the modern. But is 1922 an end or a beginning? Should the game-changing literary outputs of that year – *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses*, *Jacob's Room* – be taken as the zenith of a modernity evolving since the nineteenth century, or do they represent a year zero, the moment that literature took a decisive turn – a transition – that criticism would herald, and thus enshrine, as an aesthetic watershed? The answer, of course, is both, and more. Consequently, as each volume in the series approaches its subjects, it does so with multiple concepts of transition in mind. Transition might mean movement – some notion of progress, transit

General Editor's Preface

xv

or return – or it might mean flux, indeterminacy and the liminal. Transition is equally a change of state, a recognition of the unsettled and the refusal to occupy a fixed or determined place. In literary terms, this means that the innovative and the experimental might take radically different forms – and, to expose this, the Transitions series changes both the *dramatis personae* of literary history and the company they keep. The usual suspects of the twentieth-century canon are here, but they appear in different contexts and in dialogue with unexpected others. These realignments are not the product of editorial whim, but rather an attempt to reconstruct a historical context that recognises the worlds in which these writers wrote, and in which their work was received. The five volumes of the Transitions series thus seek to reinstate the often complex and disingenuous relationship between literature and its contexts. Previous critical work is scrutinised and debated, and fossilised canons are cracked apart and enlarged, to provide readers at all levels, from undergraduate to research professional, with a richer picture of the possibilities of a transformative century.

I began by suggesting that British Literature in Transition was a mapping project, but no map is ever definitive. Cartographers revise their work in the light of emergent knowledge, fresh technologies and new ways of seeing; they fill in blank spaces and reveal occluded paths. To function effectively, critical maps must also periodically be redrawn, and this is one such re-plotting that forges new routes through territory we have, perhaps erroneously, long thought familiar.

Gill Plain
University of St Andrews

Acknowledgements

Our first thanks go to our editors, Gill Plain and Ray Ryan, for initiating this project and showing great good humour, patience and care along the way. Thanks also to all of our contributors for their willingness to work to our sometimes demanding and unexpected schedules and requests. The School of English, Film, Theatre, and Media Studies and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Victoria University Wellington, supported the book by providing Charles with research leave and much-appreciated grants. Adam Grener, Nikki Hessel, Sarah Ross, Philip Steer and Mark Williams all offered us insights on modernism and editing as well as much-needed moral support and friendship.