



Paradoxy of Modernism

By Robert Scholes

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In this lively, personal book, Robert Scholes intervenes in ongoing discussions about modernism in the arts during the crucial half-century from 1895 to 1945. While critics of and apologists for modernism have defined modern art and literature in terms of binary oppositions—high/low, old/new, hard/soft, poetry/rhetoric—Scholes contends that these distinctions are in fact confused and misleading. Such oppositions are instances of “paradoxy”—an apparent clarity that covers real confusion.

Closely examining specific literary texts, drawings, critical writings, and memoirs, Scholes seeks to complicate the neat polar oppositions attributed to modernism. He argues for the rehabilitation of works in the middle ground that have been trivialized in previous evaluations, and he fights orthodoxy with such paradoxes as “durable fluff,” “formulaic creativity,” and “iridescent mediocrity.” The book reconsiders major figures like James Joyce while underscoring the value of minor figures and addressing new attention to others rarely studied. It includes twenty-two illustrations of the artworks discussed. Filled with the observations of a personable and witty guide, this is a book that opens up for a reader’s delight the rich cultural terrain of modernism.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Paradoxy of Modernism* develops a powerful and persuasive new understanding of paradox and pleasure in modernist art and literature; it is a must-read for modernists."—James Phelan, editor of *Narrative* and author of *Living to Tell About It*

(James Phelan)

About the Author

Robert Scholes is Research Professor of Modern Culture and Media, Brown University. He is the author of numerous books, including most recently *The Crafty Reader* and *The Rise and Fall of English*, both published by Yale University Press.

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