



American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Moment: Modernism and Place (Modernist Studies)

Donald Pizer

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Montparnasse and its cafe life, the shabby working-class area of the place de la Contrescarpe and the Pantheon, the small restaurants and cafes along the Seine, and the Right Bank world of the well-to-do...for American writers self-exiled to Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, the French capital represented what their homeland could not a milieu that through the freedom of thought and action it permitted and the richness of life it offered, nurtured the full expression of the creative imagination. How these expatriates interpreted and gave modernist shape to the myth of "the Paris moment" in their writing is the altogether fresh focus of Donald Pizer's study of seven of their major works. Through careful readings of the texts, Pizer identifies both the common threads in the expatriates' response to the Paris moment and the distinctive expression each work gives to their shared experience. Most important, he addresses the neglected question of how the portrayal of the Paris scene helps shape a specific work's themes and form. He traces such experimental devices as fragmented or cubistic narrative forms, the dramatic representation of consciousness, and sexual explicitness, and explores the powerful and evocative tropes of mobility and feeding. As Pizer demonstrates, Paris between the two world wars was for the American expatriates more than a geographical entity. It was a state of mind, an experience that engendered the formal expression of a personal aesthetic. The engaging and significant interplay between artist, place and innovative self-reflexive forms composes, Pizer maintains the most distinctive contribution of expatriate writing to the literary movement called high modernism.

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