

Manhattan Transfer: Modernist Aesthetics and Social Critique*Elena Lamberti*

Manhattan Transfer, John Dos Passos's third novel, goes beyond the reinterpretation of the quintessentially American myth of the self-made man and depicts the newly forming American mass society. The writer outlines a world in which individuals are losing their humanity to become passive servants of an economic and social system that, muddling free will, is turning them from citizens to consumers. This essay shows how Dos Passos, while consolidating his peculiar Modernist poetics, explores the evolution of a society that is transforming all relationships between people and systems of production. Blurring ethics and aesthetics, *Manhattan Transfer* renders the American urban context of the time through an innovative fragmented form that Dos Passos employs to make his reader see, hear and feel the ongoing change in its making; by so doing, he anticipates the uncanny consequences that still inhabit the new millennium.

A Knitting Machine for the New World: An American Tragedy, by Theodore Dreiser. Act 1 and Act 2*Carlo Pagetti*

This essay examines Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* through the lens of the naturalist tradition and its evolution in the early twentieth century. Drawing from Conrad's mechanistic metaphor of the universe as a "knitting Machine," the author situates Dreiser within a lineage of writers who portray human beings as shaped by impersonal social and economic forces. The essay traces Dreiser's influences—from Balzac and Zola to Spencer and Darwin—and highlights the stylistic ambivalence critics perceived in his work. Focusing on the first two acts of *An American Tragedy*, it explores Dreiser's epic depiction of American life, where desire, class mobility, and industrial capitalism intersect. The narrative's dense realism, cinematic techniques, and symbolic use of landscape reveal a world governed by chance and structural determinism. Clyde Griffiths emerges as an Everyman trapped in a vast socio-economic machine, embodying the limits of naturalist knowledge and the novel's tragic vision.

Oil Men and Ash Heaps: *The Great Gatsby* and the Energy Economy *Harry Stecopoulos*

This article argues that *The Great Gatsby* is a novel deeply concerned with the temptations and dangers of fossil fuel culture. After providing an overview of the contemporaneous Teapot Dome Scandal, Stecopoulos examines Fitzgerald's subtle linkage of the novel's more precarious characters with petro-modernity. By analyzing figural accounts of Gatsby as oil detector, Myrtle Wilson as gusher, and George Wilson as depleted energy field, the essay offers an ecologically oriented account of a classic American novel.

In the Time We Have. On *In Our Time*, by Ernest Hemingway *Carmen Gallo*

This article offers an overview of Ernest Hemingway's collection of short stories *In Our Time* (1925), drawing on a series of suggestions surrounding the title within the historical context of the post-World War I moment, as well as in light of a dialogue with T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* and its reflection on peace in the contemporary world. It then focuses on the diptych structure of the work (a short prose followed by a story) and on its modernist strategy of montage and juxtaposition, which illuminates certain dynamics of re-emergence and reinforcement of a web of themes and questions, particularly those related to violence, impotence, historical disillusionment, and the weakening of social and human relationships, which prove still relevant to our own time.

"Thinking more collectively": *The New Negro* and the Harlem Renaissance Archives *Sonia Di Loreto*

This article's focal point is the year 1925 as a fundamental date for the creation and institutionalization of Black culture, within the period known as the "Harlem Renaissance." Two fundamental and interconnected entities were created in 1925: the anthology *The New Negro*, edited by Alain Locke, and the library center called

“The Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints” at the 135th St. branch of the New York Public Library in Harlem, based on the collection owned by Arturo Alfonso Schomburg. It also explores how these institutions, in different but somewhat complementary ways, worked to foster a sense of intergenerational, transnational, and interclass Black collectivity and community, a sense that is not always recognized or valued in studies that tend to keep these fields separate. The last section of the article takes into consideration Zora Neale Hurston’s short story titled “Spunk,” published in *The New Negro*, as a crossroad of Black language, imaginary and self-representation of Black lives, representative of the experiment that the anthology carried out.

The Value of Independence: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, by Anita Loos

Leonardo Buonomo

This article examines Anita Loos’s 1925 novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* which, although originally rewarded with great popular success and admired by such canonical authors as Edith Wharton, William Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson and James Joyce, only began to attract critical attention after the mid-1970s. Narrated in the form of a diary, the novel follows the adventures of Lorelei Lee in the United States and Europe as she juggles several suitors who try to claim possession of her person under the guise of “improving” her mind, or in exchange for satisfying her seemingly compulsive desire for jewels and other valuable commodities. The analysis highlights Loos’s masterful deployment of ambiguity in her treatment of Lorelei’s relationship with men, as evidenced by the lack of consensus among critics and scholars, as to what (if anything) Lorelei gives her suitors in exchange for their patronage. By contrast, what is very much on display in the language and actions that Lorelei’s admirers deploy in the novel, is the possessive, coercive nature of their attitude towards women. In the best tradition of American irreverence, Loos makes use of her heroine’s European tour to satirize simultaneously American materialism and European pretentiousness and decadence. In the final part of the novel, Loos

draws from her own Hollywood experience, to expose the hypocrisy of self-proclaimed moral crusaders through her devastating portrayal of Henry Spoffard. Even though *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* ends with Lorelei's marriage to Spoffard, Loos emphasizes her commitment to her new career and the ability with which she asserts control not only over her husband, but his entire immediate family. As the novel draws to a close, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that for Lorelei, independence and agency are far more precious than all the jewels she had previously collected.

Genealogies of Despair: Losers, Wannabes, and Outlaws in William Carlos Williams's *In The American Grain*

Fiorenzo Iuliano

This essay focuses on William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*, a fascinating book that presents the history of the United States as a succession of failures, illusions, and misguided aspirations. Written during a decade when many American writers and intellectuals were preoccupied with the search for a "usable past," usually grounded in a rejection of the Puritan legacy in American culture, Williams's text offers a radical alternative. He proposes a multilingual and multicultural genealogy of the United States, in which the travelers, explorers, statesmen, and artists who shaped the nation are reimagined not as heroic founders, but as fragile, tormented figures. These individuals are portrayed as struggling less against the physical hardships of the New World than against their own anxieties, their inner demons and psychological torments. The last part of the essay, in particular, focuses on the figure of Red Eric, through whom Williams suggests an unconventional form of American exceptionalism, rooted not in the embrace of democracy but in its rejection.