



Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment 1900-1940

Rachel Potter

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During the period 1900-1940 novels and poems in the UK and US were subject to strict forms of censorship and control because of their representation of sex and sexuality. At the same time, however, writers were more interested than ever before in writing about sex and excrement, incorporating obscene slang words into literary texts, and exploring previously uncharted elements of the modern psyche. This book explores the far-reaching literary, legal and philosophical consequences of this historical conflict between law and literature. Alongside the famous prosecutions of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* huge numbers of novels and poems were altered by publishers and printers because of concerns about prosecution. Far from curtailing the writing of obscenity, however, censorship seemed to stimulate writers to explore it further. During the period covered by this book novels and poems became more experimentally obscene, and writers were intensely interested in discussing the author's rights to free speech, the nature of obscenity and the proper parameters of literature. Literature, seen as a dangerous form of corruption by some, was identified with sexual liberation by others. While legislators tried to protect UK and US borders from obscene literature, modernist publishers and writers gravitated abroad, a development that prompted writers to defend the international rights of banned authors and books. While the period 1900-1940 was one of the most heavily policed in the history of literature, it was also the time when the parameters of literature opened up and writers seriously questioned the rights of nation states to control the production and dissemination of literature.

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