



# Ephemeral Modernisms

British Association for Modernist Studies

International Conference 2024

University of Leeds, 27-29 June

## Call for Papers

Modernist writers are ‘day creatures’: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Mulk Raj Anand set their respective work in the frame of a single day. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) parallels the eponymous protagonist’s party planning with Septimius’s last day of his short life. *Ulysses* (1922) simultaneously chronicles and rearranges an ephemeral influx of perceptions and sensations on the stage of Dublin, flowing over the boundary of one day and ending in Molly Bloom’s continuous stream of consciousness. By depicting a young sweeper’s day, *Untouchable* (1935) critiques the caste system and argues for the end of the untouchability of the lower caste. These one-day literary works capture diurnal rhythms as well as nocturnal thoughts, exploring the sense of ending and mortality and curating fleeting moments of epiphany, passion, brilliance and remembrance that shape modernism. As such, modernism is ephemeral; in the word’s original sense in Greek, ‘lasting only for a day.’

Everydayness and impermanence underpin the single-day narratives and preoccupy modernist writers, who turn their gazes towards death as much as life, especially in the context of two global wars. T. S. Eliot traces an ordinary day of working in London under the brown fog

in *The Waste Land* (1922) only to place the flimsy structure of orderliness amongst the ruins. Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss' (1918) undermines the eponymous feeling, at the end of the story, to resist the politics of happiness in the domestic space. In stories such as 'Narthex' (1927) and 'The Usual Star' (1934), H. D. explores queer identity in writing the quotidian as a mode of 'unbeing', that is to reject the heteronormative narrative of a woman's life and to subvert the binary between the self and the other (Vetter, 2022).

Beyond the transitory human condition, modernist writings attend to nonhuman forms, diseases and the environment to contemplate the ephemeral beyond its semantic limit of 'living only for a day.' Recent scholarly works explore how writers respond to rapidly changing planetary life by examining the modernist Anthropocene (Adkins, 2021) or how the insect body inspires modernists' formal innovations (Murray, 2020). Modernist texts paradoxically immortalise the ephemeral and while evanescence and presence are the quintessence of being 'modern', a word originating from the Latin *modo* ('just now'), those 'modern' voices still reverberate a century later.

This three-day conference aims to bring together modernist scholars across disciplines and creative writers across genres to contribute to an inclusive conversation on and about ephemeral modernisms in the broad sense.

### **How to submit:**

Proposals are invited from researchers and practitioners, at all career stages, for individual 20-minute presentations (you can read out a paper, give a PowerPoint talk, or choose a different format); themed panels (with 3–4 speakers giving presentations); roundtables (with 3–6 speakers discussing a particular theme or idea); or other more innovative dialogues or discussions on the broad theme of 'Ephemeral Modernisms'. These will be drawn from a range of disciplinary fields, and we encourage proposals from modernists in art, architecture, music, and more. The following is a non-exhaustive list of suggestions for potential topics:

- Ephemeral media: performance, pamphlets and magazines
- Lost works; neglected authors and artists
- Modernism speaking to its present moment; ephemerality of meaning and sense
- Ephemeral moods, visions, emotions
- Non-permanence, change, instability
- Transience, shifting subjectivities, making it new

- Ephemeral happenings; events and moments
- The poetics of presence
- Transit and transition
- Ephemeral species and fleeting ecologies
- Ephemeral objects / the 'throwaway'
- Passing fashions
- Ephemeral movements/coteries/manifestos
- Things cut short early; brief lives; brief active periods as writers
- Transience on celluloid; evolving technologies
- Transitional or liminal spaces
- Fleeting consciousness and the reflective inner self
- Passing crises

Abstracts for individual papers should be no more than 250 words, with a 100 word bio.

Abstracts for other proposed formats should be no more than 500 words, and should include short abstracts of proposed contributions; an additional 300 words should cover brief details of their organisers and contributors. We welcome proposals in non-traditional formats, for example:

- Performance
- Creative practice
- Discussion/Q&A
- Poster presentations
- Digital artefacts/videos
- Show & Tell
- Workshops
- Creative Writing
- Thesis in Three

We aim to showcase the work not only of individuals but of groups, societies, institutions and research projects, so strongly encourage proposals from, for example, author societies, research projects and departmental research centres.

**Deadline for individual paper proposals:** Friday 16th February, 2024

**Deadline for other format proposals:** Friday 8th March, 2024

Please submit your proposal via this form: <https://forms.gle/1yCpytz4LS3kpdX68>

Decisions on proposals will be communicated within 4 weeks of the later deadline.

If you have any questions, please email [conference@bams.ac.uk](mailto:conference@bams.ac.uk).

**Attendance and fees:**

The conference is open to anyone, in any discipline, working on modernism. The conference will take place in Leeds, but there will be some remote presentation and attendance options. Please indicate whether you would like to attend in person or online when you submit your proposal.

Further details, including keynotes, prices for the conference and details of how to pay, will appear shortly.

We ask that attendees of the conference are members of BAMS. To join or renew, go to:

<https://bams.ac.uk/membership/>

Current annual membership rates, which include a subscription to *Modernist Cultures*, are £57.50 standard; £46 student and unwaged; online-only standard £40; online-only student and unwaged £34.

We will be offering some bursaries to enable BAMS members without institutional support to attend the conference.

Membership: <https://bams.ac.uk/membership/>

Questions: [conference@bams.ac.uk](mailto:conference@bams.ac.uk)