



# **A Sense of Shock: The Impact of Impressionism on Modern British and Irish Writing**

*Adam Parkes*

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What does modern British and Irish literature have to do with French impressionist painting? And what does Henry James have to do with the legal dispute between John Ruskin and J.M.W. Whistler? What links Walter Pater with Conrad's portrait of a genocidal maniac in *Heart of Darkness*? Or George Moore with Irish nationalism, Virginia Woolf with modern distraction, and Ford Madox Ford with the Great Depression? Adam Parkes argues that we must answer such questions if we are to appreciate the full impact of impressionist aesthetics on modern British and Irish writers. Complicating previous accounts of the influence of painting and philosophy on literary impressionism, *A Sense of Shock* highlights the role of politics, uncovering new and deeper linkages. In the hands of such practitioners as Conrad, Ford, James, Moore, Pater, and Woolf, literary impressionism was shaped by its engagement with important social issues and political events that defined the modern age. As Parkes demonstrates, the formal and stylistic practices that distinguish impressionist writing were the result of dynamic and often provocative interactions between aesthetic and historical factors. Parkes ultimately suggests that it was through this incendiary combination of aesthetics and history that impressionist writing forced significant change on the literary culture of its time. *A Sense of Shock* will appeal to students and scholars of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, as well as the growing readership for books that explore problems of literary history and interdisciplinarity.



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