



Museum Trouble: Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism

Ruth Hoberman

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By 1901, the public museum was firmly established as an important national institution in British life. Its very centrality led to its involvement in a wide range of debates about art, knowledge, national identity, and individual agency. Ruth Hoberman argues that these debates concerned writers as well. *Museum Trouble* focuses on fiction written between 1890 and 1914 and the ways in which it engaged the issues dramatized by and within the museum.

Those issues were many. Art critics argued about what kind of art to buy on behalf of the nation, how to display it, and whether salaried professionals or aristocratic amateurs should be in charge. Museum administrators argued about the best way to exhibit scientific and cultural artifacts to educate the masses while serving the needs of researchers. And novelists had their own concerns about an increasingly commercialized literary marketplace, the nature of aesthetic response, the impact of evolution and scientific materialism, and the relation of the individual to Britain's national and imperial identity.

In placing the many crucial museum scenes of Edwardian fiction in the context of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century cultural discourse, *Museum Trouble* shows how this turn-of-the-century literature anticipated many of the concerns of the modernist writers who followed.

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