

Proust and Kafka's Modernist Afterlives

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Modernist afterlives have garnered much critical attention recently, so much so that one might diagnose a centenary obsession with modernism in 2022. Modernism's afterlives operate with great freedom in contemporary literature, with many current writers designated as modernist inheritors, though this also risks suspending any experimental or innovative literature in a kind of modernist limbo. Urmila Seshagiri, the Lindsay Young Professor of English at the University of Tennessee, highlighted this recently, asking 'What distinguishes modernism's legacies from the afterlives of other literary or cultural movements?' We might also ask, what forms of modernism precede a modernist afterlife, and what theories of afterlife enable a finer description of the ongoing legacy of modernism in the twenty-first century? Critically interrogating Aby Warburg's notion of *Nachleben* ('after-life') against Walter Benjamin's preferred term *Fortleben*, ('living forth') and Derridean notions of haunting and survivance ('survival'), this paper examines the cases of Marcel Proust and Franz Kafka in order to attempt to refine the conceptual criteria through which we understand the very notion of modernist afterlives today.

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