This wide-ranging study of the late poetry and prose of Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and Wyndham Lewis brings together works from the 1930s and 1940s – writings composed by authors self-consciously entering middle to old age and living through years when civilization seemed intent on tearing itself to pieces for the second time in their adult lives. Profoundly revising their earlier work, these artists asked how their writing might prove significant in a time that Woolf described, in a diary entry from 1938, as “1914 but without even the illusion of 1914. All slipping consciously into a pit.” This late modern writing explores mortality, the frailties of culture, and the potential consolations and culpabilities of aesthetic form. Such writing is at times horrifying and objectionable and at others deeply moving, different from the earlier works that first won these writers their fame.

MORTALITY AND FORM IN LATE MODERNIST LITERATURE

JOHN WHITTIER-FERGUSON

University of Michigan
for Gale

and for Henry and Margaret

“And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight”
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Acknowledgments

Nothing that I write here will be adequate to the extent and the particulars of my indebtedness. But I nevertheless gather some names in these paragraphs at the beginning of this book and the end of its writing, hoping that this brief assembly will stand as a measure of my gratitude. Being so deeply indebted is, of course, also a measure of being blessed.

For many decades now, Victor Luftig’s friendship and his deeply principled example have been essential to every aspect of my life and my work – so essential, in fact, that it is impossible for me to isolate where in our continuing exchanges – leaf, blossom, or bole – my gratitude might come to rest, what I might single out for acknowledgment here. There is nothing in these pages that has not been shaped and made better by our years together.

Gregg Crane provided extensive, rigorous, detailed readings, perfectly timed encouragement, and such substantive help on so many aspects of this book’s making that I cannot imagine its completion without him. His friendship and his counsel have been crucial to my turning notes, drafts, proposals, and outlines into this book and have also served to show me why this making matters.

In the years when my wife Gale and I were raising our children, Henry and Margaret, and I was starting my work as a teacher at Michigan, it was often difficult for me to remember how and where I might fit scholarship into my life. Tobin and Jill Siebers, who graciously hosted a decade of regular gatherings – “The First Draft Club” – in their home, did a great deal to show me how to continue to attend to my own work and the work of my colleagues.

My current department chair and friend of many years, Mike Schoenfeldt, has helped me at every turn of my career and has been especially important in making possible the conditions for this book’s completion. Vince Sherry’s scholarship (particularly on the Great War and on Wyndham Lewis) has stood as a benchmark for my own work; his friendship and guidance have greatly enriched my life in this profession.
Acknowledgments

Kerry Larson gave me characteristically astute and encouraging advice about the structure of my Introduction. I am thankful, too, for a number of conversations I had with Martha Vicinus, before her retirement from the University of Michigan, about this work in some of its earlier forms. John Kucich also provided friendship and inspiration.

Scotti Parrish and Bruce Judge read and responded to portions of this book in manuscript and, together with their family, have helped turn Ann Arbor, for my family and me, from a place we live into the place we love. The overlapping and intersecting circles of friends Gale and I share, though for the most part not directly involved in the details of these chapters, kept me oriented, in the years of this book’s growth, toward all that matters most.

Meredith Martin knew just when and how to insist, and Eve Sorum, Jess Roberts, and Maren Linett joined in her encouragement. Maren also helped me in thinking about Woolf’s later work. My students, both graduate and undergraduate, as well as those who have audited my classes over the years, have continued to provide me with an inexhaustible and dependable source of inspiration and purpose and insight. I am indebted to them beyond measure.

I have learned much from the Michigan War Studies Group and have taken great pleasure in that group’s collegiality. I am especially thankful to Jonathan Marwil for introducing me to those Friday seminars and for offering me his advice, his insights, and his friendship.

Maria Bonn was the first person to read and comment on every manuscript chapter (and she did so at a time when having such an astute and sympathetic reader felt absolutely necessary). In seminars I held at The First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, I came to understand Christian aspects of T. S. Eliot’s later poetry more fully than I had before.

I have had important exchanges on aspects of this book with many colleagues: Stan Barrett, George Bornstein, Ulla Dydo, Maud Ellmann, Sarah Ensor, Monica Fagan, Peter Fritzsche, William Germano, David Halperin, Allan Hepburn, Marjorie Levinson, Aaron McCullough, Jerome McGann, Gabrielle McIntire, Anita Norich, Margot Norris, David Porter, Lawrence Rainey, Suzanne Raitt, Evan Rhodes, Sidonie Smith, Patsy Yaeger, Andrea Zemguly.

I am profoundly grateful to my readers for Cambridge University Press, who gave me extensive and crucial advice, who asked difficult questions, and who read the manuscript in precisely the ways that I hoped it would be read. No weaknesses that remain in this book are due to their suggestions, but it is most certainly stronger for their evaluation, and it owes its existence to their support.
I have been especially fortunate in a highly accomplished editorial and production staff at Cambridge: Ray Ryan (senior editor, English and American literature), and his editorial assistant, Caitlin Gallagher. Elizabeth Shand (production editor) and Devasena Vedamurthi (project manager) have kept things running smoothly through production. I am particularly grateful to my copy editor, Sue André Costello, for her fine eye and perfect ear. Rachel Nishan at Twin Oaks Indexing made this book’s index, and working on revisions with her was a pleasure. My thanks to LeAnn Fields and Marcia La Brenz at the University of Michigan Press for putting me in touch with Twin Oaks.

I have been supported in my work by the University of Michigan’s Associate Professor Research Fund and by an Arthur F. Thurnau professorship I have held since 2000. The staffs at the libraries of Cornell University, Yale University, and the University of Michigan have offered help at many important turns. I am specifically indebted to Elizabeth Frengel, research librarian at the Beinecke library, for her assistance in untangling a late-breaking textual question concerning the stage directions for Stein’s penultimate play. Ian Leith, acquisitions officer for English Heritage provided useful information about the photograph of Holland House library. In obtaining permissions for the images used in my book, I had help from Hugo Vickers, Rick Watson, Ian Paterson, and Lucinda Walker.

Portions of the Introduction and of Chapter 2 were published in Modern Fiction Studies (57.2 [Summer, 2011]) and Modernism/modernity (6.1 [1999] and 8.3 [Fall, 2001]). My thanks to the editors of both journals for the permissions to use excerpts from those essays in this book.

There are scholars who have not read drafts of this book but whose work and whose example in this profession have mattered enormously to me: Ron Bush, Jim Longenbach, Margot Norris, and Bruce Redford.

My brother, Charles Ferguson, who found the cover image, has been part of everything since the beginning. My parents, Oliver and Joanne Ferguson, continue, after all these years, to read and give advice about the largest and the smallest details of my work (and they were the first to teach me why those details, at every scale, were of consequence). Without them, none of this.

Gale, Henry, and Margaret make for me the world that sustains these pages.

Carl Dolan (1956–1999) is also at the heart of this book.

“When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire”