



Stratified Modernism: The Poetics of Excavation from Gautier to Olson

Sasha Colby

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This book proposes an alternative modernist tradition, a line of writers captured by the archaeological project and the poetic possibilities it created. This tradition spans from Théophile Gautier's mid-nineteenth-century passion for Egyptology to Charles Olson's literal excavations on the Yucatan peninsula in the 1950s. With attention to the historical development of archaeology, the author argues that the archaeological became a rich site of cultural fantasy, a location where modernity's alternatives could be considered, imagined, and transcribed. These models, taking their cue from new archaeological dynamics, include the ushering of primal intensities into the present, the tapping of the subterranean unconscious, and the decipherment of an original poetic language. Ranging from psychic excavations to the reactivation of political templates, the plumbing of the archaeological landscape became a key posture in modernist development, which the author pursues through the work of both twentieth-century modernists and their nineteenth-century substrata. Ambitious in scope, this book provides a compelling argument about the role of archaeology in the modernist literary imagination and the century-long evolution of the poetics of excavation.

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