



## From Aestheticism to Modernism, and Back Again

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This paper argues that the conventional art-historical periodization, in which Modernism inexorably supersedes Aestheticism, and the year 1900 marks a radical break in the history of art, is seriously flawed: not only historiographically naïve, it is also tinged with misogyny and homophobia. In a long perspective, it clearly makes sense to divide Victorian Aestheticism from twentieth-century Modernism. But in the shorter time frame of the very end of the Victorian period and the first few years of the twentieth century (the end of the `long nineteenth century`), the divide is not one of period. Aestheticism and Modernism overlap at this historical moment, and both of them involve serious exploration of basic problems in aesthetics and art theory. The difference between them is not a matter of chronology; instead it is a question of art-historical valuation, of what will count (in Clive Bell's term) as `significant` in modern art. The paper compares Aestheticist and Modernist paintings to argue that the similarities between them may be as important as the differences, and that this observation may change our evaluations on both sides.

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