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| Garnett, Edward (1868-1937) |
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| Although he wrote little of artistic merit himself, Edward Garnett was very influential on British modernism. Like Ezra Pound, Garnett had an uncanny ear for good literature. As a manuscript reader for publishers, he was instrumental in the discovery or fostering of many important writers during this period, among them Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, John Galsworthy, Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, W. H. Hudson, Liam O’Flaherty, Sean O’Faolain, Henry Green, and T. E. Lawrence. |
| Edward William Garnett was born in London on January 5, 1868. His father, Richard Garnett (1835-1906), was Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum, and Edward spent much time in the museum as a youth. This experience had a significant influence on Garnett’s education. In 1886, Garnett met Constance Black (1861-1946) and was instantly taken with her. The two married in 1889. In 1887, Garnett joined the publishing house of T. Fisher Unwin, eventually rising to the position of reader of manuscripts, a position he held with several publishers during his lifetime. While working for Unwin, Garnett read the manuscript of Joseph Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895), and recommended it for publication. After the novel’s publication, Garnett met and became lifelong friends with Conrad. He encouraged Conrad to continue his literary career, and some years later Conrad, who at the time of *Almayer’s Folly* still saw himself as a ship’s officer rather than an author, credits Garnett for Conrad deciding to become a full-time writer. Garnett would serve as an invaluable literary advisor and critic, especially early during Conrad’s literary career.  After working for Unwin for some ten years, Garnett moved to William Heinemann for several years. Garnett became frustrated with the market side of the publishing industry that so often overshadowed issues of literary quality, and in 1901 when he had the chance to leave Heinemann for Gerald Duckworth, a publisher much more interested in literary merit, Garnett welcomed the opportunity. He stayed with Duckworth until the First World War broke out, when he joined the Friends of Ambulance Corps in Italy. In addition to his work as a reader with Duckworth, Garnett also influenced the literary scene through his work as a reviewer and in the support and encouragement he gave to emerging writers during this period. After the war, Garnett went first to work for John Lane but then left the firm for Jonathan Cape, for whom he worked until his death.  Although Garnett’s primary contribution to the development of modernism came through his promotion, influence, and encouragement of promising writers, he did produce his own literary works. However, most of these were not successes. In 1888 and 1889, he published two novels: *The Paradox Club* and *Light and Shadow*. Neither sold well nor achieved literary distinction. The same is true of his 1894 book of prose poems, *An Imaged World*. Garnett achieved somewhat greater acclaim in the theater. His first play, *The Feud* (written in 1905), a drama about the Icelandic sagas, was praised by Conrad and Galsworthy, the latter himself a successful dramatist. Despite this appreciation, Garnett was unable to get *The Feud* produced in London. Another play, *Mischief*, was written the following year but was neither produced nor published. Garnett was more successful with *The Breaking Point* (1907), which Frederic Harrison agreed to produce at the Haymarket Theatre. However, this time the problem was the Censor, who banned the play from production. Numerous authors wrote letters to newspapers protesting, and eventually the Censor relented, with the play finally being staged in 1908. Like his previous efforts, *The Breaking Point*, in spite of the attention it had received, was unsuccessful when it was finally staged. In 1911, Garnett again approached the stage with *The Political Sex*, a play about the Suffragettes, but this play also failed to be produced. Garnett was, however, able to get three plays produced with modest success in Manchester, *The Feud* in 1909, *Lords and Masters* in 1911, and *The Spanish Lovers* in 1912. Garnett’s final play was *The Trial of Jeanne d’Arc* (1912). The play was not produced until 1931 and managed only a very brief run. Garnett’s final effort at creative work came with the essays that would make up *Papa’s War and Other Satires* (1919). Disillusioned, as were so many others, with the First World War, Garnett published the twenty-two satires that would make up the collection in various literary magazines during the war. The remainder of Garnett’s literary contributions appeared in the form of criticism, beginning with commentaries on two visual artists: *The Art of Winnifred Matthews* (1902) and *Hogarth* (1910). Garnett, a long-time enthusiast of Russian fiction, then published *Tolstoy* (1914) and *Turgenev* (1917). These titles were followed by *Friday Nights* (1922), in which Garnett collected essays and reviews written over a number of years on subjects such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Stephen Crane, Friedrich Nietzsche, W. H. Hudson, Conrad, Anton Chekhov, Henrik Ibsen, and Robert Frost.  As noted earlier, Garnett’s greatest contribution was in his influence on and promotion of unknown or underappreciated literary figures of his day. In addition to Conrad, Garnett made great efforts with influential figures in the American publishing world on behalf of Robert Frost, Stephen Crane, and Sarah Orne Jewett, for example. Similarly, he helped W. H. Hudson, Edward Thomas, and T. E. Lawrence get various works published that might not have found a publisher otherwise. Along with his influence on Conrad as a fledgling author, perhaps Garnett’s most important influence came in his work with D. H. Lawrence, particularly on *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, in helping him rework those novels to make their literary merit more effective and their content more palatable to the publishing world.  Edward Garnett is unique among Modernist figures in that his own literary efforts were largely artistic failures while his efforts on behalf of some of the most important writers of his time did nothing less than shape the direction of modernist literature in England.  List of Works  Novels  *The Paradox Club* (1888)  *Light and Shadow* (1889)  Poems  *An Imaged World* (1894)  Plays  *The Breaking Point* (1907)  *The Feud* (1909)  *The Trial of Jeanne d’Arc* (1912)  *Trial of Jeanne d’Arc and Other Plays* (1931)  Art and Literary Criticism  *The Art of Winnifred Matthews* (1902)  *Hogarth* (1910)  *Tolstoy* (1914)  *Turgenev* (1917)  *Friday Nights* (1922)  Essays  *Papa’s War and Other Satires* (1919) |
| Further reading:  *Biography*  (Bates)  (Heilbrun)  (Jefferson)  *Criticism*  (Barnes)  (Baron)  (Cahalan)  (Collin)  (Kirkham)  (Martin)  (Smith)  (Watts) |