

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



MODERNISM  
SECOND EDITION

*Edited by Michael Levenson*

CAMBRIDGE



# The Cambridge Companion to Modernism

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MICHAEL LEVENSON is William B. Christian Professor of Modern Literature and Critical Theory at the University of Virginia.

## **The Cambridge Companion to Modernism**

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Michael Levenson  
*University of Virginia*



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## Notes on contributors

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**Sara Blair** is Professor of English and faculty associate in the American Culture Program and the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan. She has published widely on Modernism and modernity, twentieth-century American literature, and photography and visual culture. Her most recent and forthcoming works include *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (2007); “About Time: Photographs and the Reading of History,” *PMLA* 125.1 (January, 2010); “Visions of the Tenement: Photography and Modernity on the Lower East Side,” *Images* 4.1 (Fall, 2010); and “Nation Time: Richard Wright, Black Power, and Photographic Modernism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2011).

Internationally known for her research in international, colonial, and postcolonial writing, ELLEKE BOEHMER is the author of the world best-seller *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995, 2005), the monographs *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920* (2002) and *Stories of Women* (2005), and *Nelson Mandela* (2008). She has also produced an edition of Robert Baden-Powell’s *Scouting for Boys* (2004). In 2009 she coedited essay collections on J. M. Coetzee and on “postcolonial terror”. She is the General Editor of the Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literatures series. Elleke Boehmer has published four widely praised novels, *Screens against the Sky* (short-listed for the David Higham Prize, 1990), *An Immaculate Figure* (1993), *Bloodlines* (short-listed for the Sanlam Prize, 2000), and *Nile Baby* (2008). The year 2010 saw the publication of her first collection of short stories, *Sharmilla and Other Portraits*. Elleke Boehmer is the Professor of World Literature in English at the University of Oxford.

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**James Longenbach** is the author of four books of poems, most recently *The Iron Key* (2010); of several books about modern poetry, including *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things* (1991) and *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* (1988); and of several books on poetics, including *The Art of the Poetic Line* (2008) and *The Resistance to Poetry* (2004). He is the Joseph H. Gilmore Professor of English at the University of Rochester.

**Glen Macleod** is the author of *Wallace Stevens and Company* (1983) and *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art* (1993). The author of numerous essays on American literature, he is presently completing a book-length study of Hawthorne, James, and Stevens.

**Steven Matthews** is Professor of English at Oxford Brookes University, and Assistant Dean for Research in the School of Arts and Humanities. He is author of *Irish Poetry: Politics, History, Negotiation. The Evolving Debate, 1969 to the Present* (1997), *Yeats as Precursor* (2000); and *Les Murray* (2001). He has contributed the volume on Modernism to the Bloomsbury Academic Contexts series, of which he is founder editor (2004). He is also currently editor of the Sourcebooks series for Palgrave, where his *Modernism* appeared in 2008. He is completing a study of influence and the Renaissance in T. S. Eliot's poetry.

**Allison Pease** is Associate Professor of English and Director of the Gender Studies Program at City University of New York's John Jay College. She is the author of *Modernism, Mass Culture and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (2000) and a

forthcoming book on Modernism and the bored woman.

**Lawrence Rainey** is the Chair in Modernist Literature at the University of York. He edits the journal *Modernism/Modernity*, and has written *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture* (1991), *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (1998), and *Revisiting The Waste Land* (2005).

**David Trotter** is King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at the University of Cambridge. He was cofounder of the Cambridge Screen Media Group and first Director of the University's M.Phil. program in Screen Media and Cultures. His most recent publications are *Cinema and Modernism* (2007) and *The Uses of Phobia: Essays in Literature and Film* (2010).

**Michael Wood** is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Princeton University. He is the author of, among other books, *America in the Movies* (1975, 1989), *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction* (1994), *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (2005), and *Yeats and Violence* (2010).





## Chronology

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<b>1890</b>	James George Frazer, first volumes of <i>The Golden Bough</i> (1890–1915)	William Morris, <i>News from Nowhere</i>	Henrik Ibsen, <i>Hedda Gabler</i>	William Booth, <i>In Darkest England</i>	T o
<b>1891</b>	Thomas Hardy, <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i>	Oscar Wilde, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes stories begin in Strand magazine	Franco-Russian entente	
<b>1893</b>	Arthur Wing Pinero, <i>The Second Mrs. Tanqueray</i>	Formation of the Independent Labour Party	The four-wheel car of Karl Benz		
<b>1894</b>	The quarterly journal, the <i>Yellow Book</i> , launched	George Moore, <i>Esther Waters</i>	George Bernard Shaw, <i>Arms and the Man</i>	Claude Achille Debussy, <i>L'Après-midi d'un faune</i>	T c A D tr
<b>1895</b>	Oscar Wilde, <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	Joseph Conrad, <i>Almayer's Folly</i>	Founding of the London School of Economics	The trial of Oscar Wilde	R di X
<b>1896</b>	Anton Chekhov, <i>The Seagull</i>	Founding of the <i>Daily Mail</i> , London	First modern Olympiad, Athens	The last Gilbert and Sullivan opera, <i>The Grand Duke</i>	G P B
<b>1898</b>	Thomas Hardy, <i>Wessex Poems</i>	H. G. Wells, <i>The War of the Worlds</i>	Oscar Wilde, <i>The Ballad of Reading Gaol</i>	The Curies discover radium and plutonium	
<b>1899</b>	William Butler Yeats, <i>The Wind</i>	Kate Chopin, <i>The</i>	Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy,	Beginning of the Boer War	P C

	<i>among the Reeds</i>	<i>Awakening</i>	<i>Resurrection</i>	(1899–1902)	T
1900	Joseph Conrad, <i>Lord Jim</i>	Sigmund Freud, <i>The Interpretation of Dreams</i>	“Boxer Rebellion” in China		
1901	Thomas Mann, <i>Buddenbrooks</i>	Johan August Strindberg, <i>The Dance of Death</i>	Rudyard Kipling, <i>Kim</i>	Death of Queen Victoria	
1902	André Gide, <i>The Immoralist</i>	John Atkinson Hobson, <i>Imperialism</i>	Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin, <i>What Is to Be Done?</i>	William James, <i>Varieties of Religious Experience</i>	
1903	Samuel Butler, <i>The Way of All Flesh</i> (posthumous)	Henry James, <i>The Ambassadors</i>	George Bernard Shaw, <i>Man and Superman</i>	G. E. Moore, <i>Principia Ethica</i>	E P G R (f
1904	John Millington Synge, <i>Riders to the Sea</i>	Anton Chekhov, <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	Joseph Conrad, <i>Nostromo</i>	Giacomo Puccini, <i>Madama Butterfly</i>	B th J (1
1905	Richard Strauss, <i>Salome</i>	Oscar Wilde, <i>De profundis</i>	Edith Wharton, <i>The House of Mirth</i>	Albert Einstein proposes the theory of relativity	T o th n p
1907	Pablo Picasso, <i>Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)</i>	Cubist exhibition in Paris	Joseph Conrad, <i>The Secret Agent</i>	John Millington Synge, <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	
1908	Gertrude Stein, <i>Three Lives</i>	Arnold Bennett, <i>The Old Wives' Tale</i>	Jacob Epstein, figures for the British Medical Association	Ford Madox Ford edits <i>English Review</i>	G R o

		<i>Tale</i>	Association		
<b>1909</b>	Gustav Mahler, Ninth Symphony	Henri Matisse, <i>The Dance</i>	Frank Lloyd Wright, Robie House	Ezra Pound, <i>Personae</i>	A S F O P
<b>1910</b>	Postimpressionist exhibition in London	Igor Stravinsky, <i>The Firebird</i>	E. M. Forster, <i>Howards End</i>	Bertrand Russell and A. N. Whitehead, <i>Principia mathematica</i> (1910–13)	J a K
<b>1912</b>	Marcel Duchamp, <i>Nude Descending a Staircase</i>	George Bernard Shaw, <i>Pygmalion</i>	Arnold Schoenberg, <i>Pierre Lunaire</i>	Sarah Bernhardt in the film <i>Queen Elizabeth</i>	S T
<b>1913</b>	Willa Cather, <i>O Pioneers!</i>	D. H. Lawrence, <i>Sons and Lovers</i>	Thomas Mann, <i>Death in Venice</i>	Robert Frost, <i>A Boy's Will</i>	M P S
<b>1914</b>	James Joyce, <i>Dubliners</i>	Joseph Conrad, <i>Chance</i>	Robert Frost, <i>North of Boston</i>	Founding of <i>Blast</i>	O W
<b>1915</b>	Virginia Woolf, <i>The Voyage Out</i>	D. H. Lawrence, <i>The Rainbow</i>	Somerset Maugham, <i>Of Human Bondage</i>	Ezra Pound, <i>Cathay</i>	C D C (f
<b>1916</b>	James Joyce, <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>	D. W. Griffith, <i>Intolerance</i> (film)	Dadaism in Zurich		
<b>1917</b>	T. S. Eliot, <i>Prufrock and Other</i>	Paul Valéry, <i>La Jeune Parque</i>	Amy Lowell, <i>Tendencies in Modern American</i>	Serge Sergeevich Prokofiev,	C T U

	<i>Observations</i>		<i>Poetry</i>	“Classical” Symphony	
<b>1918</b>	James Joyce, <i>Exiles</i>	Lytton Strachey, <i>Eminent Victorians</i>	Paul Klee, <i>Gartenplan</i>	Votes for women age 30 and over in Britain	
<b>1919</b>	Pablo Picasso, <i>Pierrot and Harlequin</i>	Thomas Hardy, <i>Collected Poems</i>	Ezra Pound, <i>Hugh Selwyn Mauberley</i>	Robert Weine, <i>The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari</i> (film)	S A W C
<b>1920</b>	D. H. Lawrence, <i>Women in Love</i>	George Bernard Shaw, <i>Heartbreak House</i>	Edith Wharton, <i>The Age of Innocence</i>	Katherine Mansfield, <i>Bliss and Other Stories</i>	S L S
<b>1921</b>	Luigi Pirandello, <i>Six Characters in Search of an Author</i>	John Dos Passos, <i>Three Soldiers</i>	Pablo Picasso, <i>Three Musicians</i>	Charles Chaplin, <i>The Kid</i> (film)	D G C th (f
<b>1922</b>	T. S. Eliot, <i>The Waste Land</i>	James Joyce, <i>Ulysses</i>	Virginia Woolf, <i>Jacob's Room</i>	Sinclair Lewis, <i>Babbitt</i>	B B D N
<b>1924</b>	E. M. Forster, <i>A Passage to India</i>	Thomas Mann, <i>The Magic Mountain</i>	Sean O'Casey, <i>Juno and the Paycock</i>	Cecil B. DeMille, <i>The Ten Commandments</i> (film)	
<b>1925</b>	Virginia Woolf, <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>	Gertrude Stein, <i>The Making of</i>	Willa Cather, <i>The Professor's House</i>	F. Scott Fitzgerald, <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	T D A

<b>1926</b>	Ernest Hemingway, <i>The Sun Also Rises</i>	T. E. Lawrence, <i>The Seven Pillars of Wisdom</i>	William Faulkner, <i>Soldiers' Pay</i>	Fritz Lang, <i>Metropolis</i> (film)	Je N
<b>1927</b>	Virginia Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i>	Ernest Hemingway, <i>Men without Women</i>	Marcel Proust, <i>Le Temps retrouvé</i> (posthumous)	Jacob Epstein, <i>Madonna and Child</i> (sculpture)	Je a H S
<b>1928</b>	W. B. Yeats, <i>The Tower</i>	D. H. Lawrence, <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i>	Aldous Huxley, <i>Point Counter Point</i>	Sergei Eisenstein, <i>October</i> (film)	
<b>1929</b>	Robert Bridges, <i>The Testament of Beauty</i>	Robert Graves, <i>Goodbye to All That</i>	Virginia Woolf, <i>A Room of One's Own</i>	Alfred Hitchcock, <i>Blackmail</i> (film)	S S m
<b>1930</b>	W. H. Auden, <i>Poems</i>	Hart Crane, <i>The Bridge</i>	William Faulkner, <i>As I Lay Dying</i>	Evelyn Waugh, <i>Vile Bodies</i>	F. "I C a C
<b>1931</b>	Eugene O'Neill, <i>Mourning Becomes Electra</i>	Tristan Tzara, <i>L'Homme approximatif</i>	Fritz Lang, <i>M</i> (film)	Charles Chaplin, <i>City Lights</i> (film)	B M G F N T D
<b>1932</b>	Bertolt Brecht, <i>The</i>	Louis-	W. H. Auden, <i>The</i>	Aldous Huxley,	

	<i>The Mother</i>	Ferdinand Céline, <i>Voyage au bout de la nuit</i>	<i>Orators</i>	<i>Brave New World</i>	
<b>1933</b>	Gertrude Stein, <i>The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas</i>	André Malraux, <i>La Condition humaine</i>	T. S. Eliot, <i>The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism</i>		
<b>1935</b>	T. S. Eliot, <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>	W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, <i>The Dog beneath the Skin</i>	George Gershwin, <i>Porgy and Bess</i>	Salvador Dalí, <i>Giraffe on Fire</i>	D S F S
<b>1936</b>	Dylan Thomas, <i>Twenty-Five Poems</i>	Stevie Smith, <i>Novel on Yellow Paper</i>	Piet Mondrian, <i>Composition in Red and Blue</i>	Charles Chaplin, <i>Modern Times</i> (film)	A L T L
<b>1938</b>	Elizabeth Bowen, <i>The Death of the Heart</i>	Jean Anouilh, <i>Le Voyageur sans bagage</i>	Jean Cocteau, <i>Les Parents terribles</i> (film)	Béla Bartók, <i>Violin Concerto</i>	L M T oj
<b>1939</b>	James Joyce, <i>Finnegans Wake</i>	Thomas Mann, <i>Lotte in Weimar</i>	T. S. Eliot, <i>The Family Reunion</i>	Pablo Picasso, <i>Night Fishing at Antibes</i>	Je T th (f



# Introduction

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Michael Levenson

This second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, with its new and revised chapters, engages fully with recent changes in our understanding of a major cultural episode. In the first decade of this century, Modernist studies have at once widened and deepened. An actively engaged community of scholars has produced more ambitious acts of contextualization, more inclusive histories, and more precise readings of formidable works. We have more Modernism now, as well as more flexible and perspicuous ways of interpreting it.

Still we call it Modernism, and this despite the anomaly of holding to such a name for an epoch fast receding into the cultural past. “Modernism” has now become the unstable name of a period in the beginning of a previous century, too distant even to serve as a figure for the grandparent. Uneasily but inevitably, we have reached a time when many feel the obsolescence of a movement still absurdly wearing such a brazen title. The temptation, much shown in recent years, has been to dance beyond the reach of the aging, dying giant, to prove that one can live past the epoch marked by such names as Joyce and Woolf, Stein and Eliot, Eisenstein and Brecht, Freud and Marx. Certainly, many forces have joined to change the vectors of a new millennial culture. But the imperative to declare a new period and to declare ourselves citizens of a liberated postmodernism has distorted and sadly simplified the moment it means to surpass.

No one should be surprised by distortions or simplifications. Nor should anyone waste tears of sympathy on figures who were more than willing to cut the shape of the past to fit present polemical purposes. And yet the task of rendering a fuller account is justified not only by the desire to provide richer, thicker narratives but also by a pressing need to clarify our own new-century position. A coarsely understood Modernism is both an historical blight and a contemporary disability.

Do we call for a return to Modernism? Certainly not, if this implies a nostalgic attempt to undo the last decades, in order to share the dream of a movement that would never age and never end – but incontestably, if it means availing ourselves of the timeliness of a revaluation. The influence of the first thirty years of the century over the next fifty was so great that the achievement of a distance from Modernism remains an event in contemporary culture. We are still learning how not to be Modernist, which is reason all the more to see what such an ambition could mean.

No clarification will be possible unless those of us living through a cultural skepticism can acknowledge the force of cultural conviction. When Gertrude Stein exploded stylistic propriety in order to release new rhythms in language, when Picasso painted primitive masks over the faces of his *Demoiselles d’Avignon*, when Antonin Artaud demanded



“No more masterpieces,” when Woolf conjured a sister to Shakespeare, when Joyce trained himself to “scorch” the culture that nourished him, they knew themselves to be enacting a creative violence. For such figures the aim could never be simply to set the imagination free; it was first of all to challenge an unfreedom, the oppressions of journalism, of genteel audiences, of timid readers, of political and religious orthodoxy. So much of the story that these artists told themselves was a tale of tyranny and resistance. The name of the tyrant changed – the Editor, the Lady, the Public, the Banker, the Democrat – but whatever the scenario, the narrowness of the oppressor was seen to justify the violence of the art.

Much of this narrative was strategic, a means to rouse the will of the artist and to stimulate the useful anger of the public. We new-century historians can now see and show that the agon between revolutionary artist and benighted traditionalist was a caricature and that, as Lawrence Rainey and Allison Pease argue below, high Modernist purpose was closely wound in transactions with the commercial market and the emergence of mass culture and new technologies. Rather than paint them as elite purists seeking a magic circle for the imagination, we can better see these artists as sharply conscious of their historical entanglements, their place within an epoch of accelerating social *modernization* that was always a challenge to a cultural Modernism.

Because its leading voices eagerly assumed not only the burden of making new artifacts, but also the responsibility for offering new justifications, the misunderstandings of Modernism began at the start, with the ambition of writers and artists to set the terms by which they would be understood, where this often meant setting the terms by which others would not qualify for understanding. The circle of initiates was closed not only against the unwashed public, but also against rival artists who were excluded from the emerging narrative of Modernism triumphant. In the last twenty years this once dominant narrative has lost its power to control responses to the period. We have been moving to a dramatically enlarged perception of the range and reach of cultural activity, including the wider geographic range registered by Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews, who show here how the experience of colonialism produced forms of writing that must belong to a history of Modernism but also stand in resistant relation to its emerging norms. What once seemed the exclusive affair of “modern masters,” the “men of 1914” (as Wyndham Lewis called them), now stands revealed as a complex of inventive gestures, daring performances, enacted also by many who were left out of account in the early histories, offered first by the actors by themselves and later produced within an academic discourse, willingly guided by the precedents of eminent artists. As Marianne DeKoven shows in her chapter, it is now deeply startling to realize how Stein’s literary radicalism was omitted by the canonical narratives. And as Sara Blair securely demonstrates, the challenge of the Harlem Renaissance must belong to any account of Modernism with even modest aspirations to historical density.

No one should expect that our recession from these early-century decades will allow the many varied performances to assume at last a crisp unity. Nor should we regret the

loss. Within the historical revision there can still be found certain common devices and general preoccupations: the recurrent act of fragmenting unities (unities of character or plot or pictorial space or lyric form), the use of mythic paradigms, the refusal of norms of beauty, the willingness to make radical linguistic experiment, all inspired by the resolve (in Eliot's phrase) to startle and disturb the public. Increasingly, though, attention has fallen upon a range of irreducibly local ambitions, highly particular projects not broadly shared but peculiar to a band of eager practitioners working in a sharply delimited field. The course of modern drama narrated here by Christopher Innes needs to be preserved in the specificity of its medium, as does the provocation of cinema described by Michael Wood. As we come to acknowledge the extraordinary compass of the work, it's likely that it will prove better to be minimalist in our definitions of that conveniently limp term "Modernist" and maximalist in our accounts of the diverse "modernizing" works and movements, that are sometimes congruent with one another, and just as often opposed or even contradictory.

So much of the artistic passion of the period was stirred by questions of technique, where "technique" should not suggest attention to "form" as opposed to "content," but should imply rather the recognition that every element of the work is an instrument of its effect and therefore open to technical revision. The course of modern music, charted here by Daniel Albright, is at once distinctive and exemplary, a succession of highly technical pursuits that brought one musical element after another – tonality, syntax, expressiveness – into profound question. In the neighboring arts too, nothing was beyond the reach of technical concern: not the frame of a picture, not the shape of a stage, not the choice of a subject, not the status of a rhyme. If a new medium such as film was extravagantly bound up with problems of technique, so too was an ancient genre such as lyric poetry. And as David Trotter's chapter shows in great detail, novels of the period continually enacted strenuous negotiations between new formal strategies and the unprecedented social matter that they sought to absorb.

One of the notable effects of the regime of technique was precisely to bring attention to the close particularities of a specific genre. How long should a poem be? Could a still life rise off the surface of a painting? The general disposition – to radicalize the techniques of art – resolved into a rich multiplicity of different strategies, strongly localized experiments. Despite a variety of efforts to bind the arts into a common cultural front, as in Pound's eagerness in 1914–15 to write poems somehow congruent with the experimental painting of Wyndham Lewis, the artistic results were most often short-lived and unpersuasive. The result is that the period from 1890 to 1930 saw the sharply uneven development of the separate enterprises. Within prevailing narratives of English Modernism, the achievements in poetry and the novel between, say, 1914 and 1922 have been taken as the paradigm of Modernist achievement. Useful as this view may be in comprehending the "men of 1914" – Pound, Eliot, Lewis, chief among them – it has become demonstrably inadequate to the enlarged domain. As Christopher Innes pointedly observes, such a paradigm has never been able to account for the development of

twentieth-century drama. James Longenbach implicitly demonstrates that such a reading makes no better sense of the careers of Frost, Moore, or Stevens. Nor can it comprehend significant developments in painting and in film.

Crisis is inevitably a central term in discussions of this cultural moment. Overused as it has been, it still glows with justification. War! Strike! Women! The Irish! or (within the art press) Nihilism! Relativism! Fakery! – this century had scarcely grown used to its own name, before it learned the twentieth would be the epoch of crisis, real and manufactured, physical and metaphysical, material and symbolic. The catastrophe of World War I, and, before that, the labor struggles, the emergence of feminism, the race for empire, these inescapable forces of social modernization were not simply looming on the outside as the destabilizing context of cultural Modernism; they penetrated the interior of artistic invention. They gave subjects to writers and painters, and they also gave forms, forms suggested by industrial machinery, or by the chuffing of cars, or, most horribly, the bodies broken in the war.

If the social cataclysms left traces on Modernist art, so did that art inform and to an extent form the conception of social life within historical crisis. Along with the massive intellectual challenge offered by Marx and Nietzsche, Freud and Frazer, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, chronicled in Michael Bell's essay for this volume, the new art of film changed habits of perception, and the experiments enacted within the older arts of painting, poetry, drama, and novel incited the consciousness of breakdown.

Yet if the milieu of crisis incontestably affected the spirits of artists, who like others in their generation sometimes succumbed to great personal demoralization, it would be a mistake to paint these decades in unending shades of gray. Was modern civilization all a "Heart of Darkness"? Was it an arid "Waste Land"? True enough, figures of nihilism, of degeneration and despair, circulate quickly both in the work and in the responses to the work. The loss of faith; the groundlessness of value, the violence of war, and a nameless, faceless anxiety – no one is likely to be surprised by such a list of disturbances, at once individual and social. But here we come to a further complex effect of the passion for technique. Not only did it solicit attention to the close particulars of a genre at a given historical moment; it also opened a field of action, a theatre of conviction, within the wider social failure.

It is fair, and indeed important, to preserve memory of an alienation, an uncanny sense of moral bottomlessness, a political anxiety. There was so much to doubt: the foundations of religion and ethics, the integrity of governments and selves, the survival of a redemptive culture. But if the fate of the West seemed uncertain and shadowy, the struggles with the metrical scheme of lyric poetry or the pictorial space of a Cubist painting could seem bracingly crisp. Shining luminously from so much of the work is the intensity of concentrated purpose and the pride of the cultural laborer, believing fully in the artistic task at hand.

Only a decade or two after Oscar Wilde's witty campaign against earnestness, these early-century Modernists are distinguished precisely by the earnestness of their resolve. A deep, sometimes even dour, seriousness allowed many fragile personalities to carry on through private hardship. And if there is one temperamental difference sharply separating our new-century selves and our last-century progenitors it may be our own instinctive distance from the belief that the publication of poem or the exhibition of painting can so triumphantly confirm the creator and so decisively serve the culture. Among these Modernists were many connoisseurs of irony, but the irony was characteristically in the service of high-minded conviction that became still more explicit – more politically strenuous, more religiously ambitious – as the movement wore on. Indeed, as Pericles Lewis persuasively suggests, the assumptions of a Modernist disenchantment (skeptical, atheist) must contend with the persistence of a religious imagination of re-enchantment within works that have been taken as rigorously secular.

What is so distinctive about such occasions of high conviction is how rarely they belonged either to solitary figures capable of pleasing themselves or to those who enjoyed comfortable relations with the wider public. The willingness to live out the risks of experiment – and the celebrity achieved later in the century should not obscure the extent of the risk – was characteristically nourished within small groups of mutually confirming artists, able to defend one another against neglect, incomprehension, or often biting critique. The circles forming around Stein, Woolf, Pound, and DuBois; the collaborations of Picasso and Braque or Ford and Conrad; the trooping together of Dadaists and Surrealists were as much the condition of what we call Modernism as any set of formal gestures. In January, 1923 Woolf filled pages of her diary with an account of a Bloomsbury party the evening before, which in her heightened presentation comes to seem an emblem of her cultural position, even an allegory of her modernity.

Suppose one's normal pulse to be 70: in five minutes it was 120: & the blood, not the sticky whitish fluid of daytime, but brilliant & prickling like champagne. This was my state, & most peoples. We collided, when we met: went pop, used Christian names, flattered, praised, & thought (or I did) of Shakespeare ... We were all easy & gifted & friendly & like good children rewarded by having the capacity for enjoying ourselves thus. Could our fathers? ... There is something indescribably congenial to me in this easy artists talk; the values the same as my own & therefore right; no impediments; life charming, good & interesting; no effort; art brooding calmly over it all.<sup>1</sup>

Woolf would write in other tones about many other evenings, but this passage speaks eloquently to the positive conditions of a Modernism of small social cells, nourished on the pleasures and powers of comradeship. In light of this description, and countless other such passages, we can speak of the micro-sociology of Modernist innovation, within which small groups of artists were able to sustain their resolve – or more than sustain,

able to create small flourishing communities based on the powers of reciprocal acknowledgment. Whether the opponent took on the aspect of the outraged traditionalist or the bored and inattentive distraction-seeker, the regular presence of the collaborator, or the group, was often enough to keep the will to cultural insurrection alive. Within this context the idea of a “party” takes on an important double signification: as a festivity and also as a cadre of insurrectionists. At such happy moments as this evening of 1923, the two senses combine, and it was possible to experience keen enjoyment while feeling that an advance was being made against the empire of those “fathers,” who never could enjoy themselves and whose moralism blocked the flow of artists’ talk.

Through the early decades of Modernist experiment, the mix of skepticism and ardor – skepticism about the destiny of the species, ardor for the latest innovation in a brush-stroke or a rhyme scheme – might well have led to the state of affairs familiar in recent caricatures of Modernism: the proud political abstention of those who sought perfection of the work at the expense of social engagement, who curled inside the “autonomy” of art, safe from the historical instability towards which they remained cool, indifferent, fastidious. We needn’t doubt the lure of abstention or the siren call of autonomy, but the more complete our historical recovery and the less constrained by polemical need, the clearer it is that the late, sometimes infamous, political turns were prepared during times of apparent social indifference. Pound’s *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* and Picasso’s *Guernica* are radically different works, but both strong political statements grew out of earlier aggressions performed within the politics of culture. The efforts to slay the authority of George Eliot or poetic rhetoric or the conventions of pictorial realism were a preparation for the often bombastic social politics of late Modernism.

Pound’s bellowing cry, “I want a new civilization,” was more peremptory than others and more unfortunate in its effects, but it was hardly a lone demand for the extension of formal concentration into the broadest realms of politics. The challenge from the Left, from workers’ parties within European democracies and from the example of the Russian revolution, and the challenge from the Right, from *Action française* to the rise of Fascism, squeezed liberal moderation and the moderate forms of art that nourished it.

The generation of artists who had created so much turbulence in their own and the century’s youth reached late middle age when the whole world began to shudder. By the late twenties and the thirties, a host of new reputations had been secured. And whether or not it was due to the triumph of cultural vindication, those who had stood in artistic alliance had nearly all separated. From the position of proud isolation, they encountered the miserable years of the mid-century.

How could the many Modernisms ever have aged gracefully? It’s not simply that the young had to grow older and that revolutionary fervor was likely to fade, but also that special historical torsions placed so much strain on ambitious careers. Did Picasso play the art market with integrity-weakening cynicism? Was Pound right in saying that his

*Cantos* were “a botch” and was Fascism the botching agent? Was Woolf’s feminism ensnared within a deep class snobbery? Did Eliot’s anti-Semitism reach down to the roots of his poetry? A movement committed to the rejuvenation of art exposed its own weaknesses as it grew older. Partly this was due to uglinesses of character that are not to be thought away, and partly it was due to the pressures of an ugly age.

As the grand artistic achievements have grown encrusted with cliché, the inescapable failings of an aging and increasingly divided Modernism – sometimes moral failings, sometimes aesthetic – have understandably encouraged the desire to consign those decades to a closed past. Certainly, whether we desire it or not, a new age is where we must live. But the long span of Modernism, longer now than ever, is a serious test of our own historical character. It is so tempting to make the many Modernisms into one thing, and then to place that one thing into a single chapter within a tidy narrative.

A *Companion* cannot be a friend to everyone. It cannot invite all achievement to the table; and ambitious though this volume is, it must perform resolute acts of exclusion in order to begin speaking at all. The strong central emphasis falls upon Anglo-American Modernism from the last decade of the nineteenth century up to the beginning of World War II. But this act of attention aims to be a focus, not a prison. My own hope is that the following strong chapters will encourage an eye for new distinctions that will free the reader to recognize the extraordinary profusion within which there is ample room for reverence and resistance.

## Notes

**1** Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. II, 1920–4, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp. 223–4.



# 1 The metaphysics of Modernism

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Michael Bell

## Approaching Modernism

Although the difficulties of defining Modernism are properly aired elsewhere in this volume, its broad outlines are now only too familiar: its peak period in the Anglo-American context lay between 1910 and 1925 while its intellectual formation encompassed a coming to terms with the lines of thought associated with Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. Yet despite its apparent familiarity, interpretation of the literature of the period had become less rather than more clear by the end of the century. In particular, as Modernism becomes the assumed background against which to define postmodernism, it is in danger of being both banalized and misappreciated at the same time. Since the change from Modernism to postmodernism is not a difference in metaphysic so much as a different stage in the digestion of the same metaphysic, this chapter focuses on how new thought was assimilated at the time. And similarly, rather than giving an encyclopedic synopsis of intellectual developments within and preceding the period, it concentrates on the interpretative cruxes of Modernism, which are in many ways precisely a testing of this body of thought.

Indeed, one of the reasons it is hard to get beyond Modernism on the purely intellectual plane is that the question of interpretation lies at its heart. The great triumvirate just mentioned, and the gender-specific term now seems only too appropriate, had a common impact in that they each turned human life into a fundamentally hermeneutic activity. Marx had analyzed the external realm of social and economic process and laid bare the “false consciousness” by which the advantaged classes unwittingly rationalized their own condition.<sup>1</sup> Freud investigated the inner realm of the psyche and showed how, through the processes of “sublimation,” consciousness may itself act as a sophisticated barrier to recognizing the true nature of instinctual desire. And this is not just a personal problem to be diagnosed, it is the necessary basis of civilization.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Nietzsche diagnosed the whole tradition of western metaphysics from Socrates onwards as a subtle form of falsehood reflecting an inner suppression and outer domination. Christianity in particular was a gigantic fraud perpetrated by the psyche on itself.<sup>3</sup> In all three cases it is not just that external appearances, and the common-sensical or rational means of understanding them, are limited and fallible. It is that such appearances and reasoning may be actively disguising contrary truths to which, by definition, there is no other access. The very principle of reason collapses unnervingly into possible rationalization while reason remains the only means of negotiating this recognition. On this reading, the attempt of the European Enlightenment to bring about a



rational and humane order not only suffered the dangers of rationalistic and utilitarian narrowness, to which romanticism was partly a reaction, but was tainted in itself. On the darkest interpretation, neither Enlightenment nor its alternatives are viable.

The specific theories, judgments, and premisses of these three cultural diagnosticians have themselves been increasingly subjected to radical critique as their own cultural and period formations have become more evident, but their underlying legacy of hermeneutic suspicion remains. Indeed, they have been most effectively fought by those who could best use their own weapons against them, and that effectively epitomizes the relation of the modern to the postmodern. A new cultural moment, and new forms of artistic expression, have undoubtedly come into being, yet they are inevitably still working out of the inner possibilities of the earlier period. The shift is in the cultural and political interpretation of the same metaphysic. But when an idea is differently lived, or is lived in a different historical world, it is in some sense a different idea and hence the need to clarify the underlying metaphysics of Modernism as understood in its day. Indeed, the question of living is crucial here since Modernist literature is often concerned with the question of how to live within a new context of thought, or a new worldview. This is why, although much literature of the period is notoriously self-conscious about its own form, this frequently goes with a remarkable implicitness as to its meaning. As Pound said, “An ‘idea’ has little value apart from the modality of the mind which receives it.”<sup>4</sup> This caveat, and the very bracketing of the word “idea,” catches a common Modernist resistance to concepts as such and suggests the importance of the implicit dimension, of what Wittgenstein called the “form of life,” as the level at which literary form becomes meaningful.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, translating Modernist literature into ideas may be the way to miss the most fundamental point. To appreciate the force of this it is helpful to start with the most objective and prestigious mode of knowledge to be challenged by the living metaphysic of several Modernist writers: namely, natural science.

## Science

The Modernist generation, both critically and creatively, was centrally concerned with the relations between literary form and modes of knowledge or understanding. Through much of the nineteenth century natural science had been the paradigmatic form of truth statement: as was evident in the way the fiction of the period constantly modeled itself, whether literally or metaphorically, on science. Zola’s naturalism, theorized in *The Experimental Novel* (1880), was the culminating example. But well before the turn of the century science itself was losing some of its epistemological self-evidence and privileged status. Einstein’s relativity theory was to catch the headlines and, like Heisenberg’s “indeterminacy,” it seemed to have an analogical application to other, nonscientific spheres.<sup>6</sup> But the true impact of the shift in scientific thinking arose from the last two decades of the nineteenth century: the same decades that saw the most intense unease about realist form. For fiction was also involved in the radical modern departure, across

all of the arts, from representational verisimilitude. However problematic they are, the terms “realism” and “verisimilitude” inevitably suggest some truth value in their mode of imitation and the general shift is part of an epochal epistemological change for which science provides the clearest focus.

Two books intended for educated lay readers conveniently bracket the period: Karl Pearson’s *The Grammar of Science* (1892) and Arthur Eddington’s *The Nature of the Physical World* (1928). In the middle of the nineteenth century physical science still seemed an irrefragably inductive structure built on the testable foundation of empirical observation. And in the layman’s conception this remained the case. But as scientific enquiry addressed itself to astronomical and subatomic scales the underlying notion of observation was increasingly problematic. It became evident that the universe at these levels behaved in a different way from the common-sense world of everyday experience while the necessary questions could only be asked through highly speculative theory. The last decade of the century saw a running controversy as to whether the basic material of the universe behaved like waves or particles: a controversy for which there was no direct observation.<sup>7</sup> Pearson expressed this for a general public by saying that science does not “explain” the workings of the universe, it merely describes what happens in given conditions. Quite evidently, this recognition of epistemological limitation did not impede the progress of science, indeed it reinforced the creative need to think outside common-sense or inherited terms, but it brought home the recognition that science is a construction of the human mind before it is a reflection of the world. And where there were serious doubts about the hegemony of scientific thinking in the culture at large this provided a philosophical argument for relativizing its value. As Nietzsche put it in 1872, “great men ... have contrived, with an incredible amount of thought, to make use of the paraphernalia of science itself, to point out the limits and relativity of knowledge generally, and thus to deny decisively the claim of science to universal validity and universal aims.”<sup>8</sup> This was crucial to several modern writers who deliberately used science as just one of the possible orders of understanding rather than as the ultimate form of truth statement. The “Ithaca” episode of *Ulysses*, the first part of *The Magic Mountain*, Lawrence’s essays on psychoanalysis, Proust’s use of scientific analysis and metaphor all carry this implication.

But there is a more complex and positive point here than the epistemological limitations of natural science. Arthur Eddington, looking back on the period, opens with a homely but telling image. The modern physicist, he says, lives in two worlds at once. He uses the same solid plane surface of the writing table as anyone else but he also knows that the table is “really” a mass of moving particles through which, given the appropriate technique, it would be possible to penetrate without disturbance.<sup>9</sup> Roentgen had invented the X-ray in 1895 and it was pregnantly used in Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1924).<sup>10</sup> That was Mann’s most synoptically Modernist work and the X-ray remains a suggestive image of Modernism. For Eddington implies a living synthesis of different world conceptions. The modern physicist continues to live in the Newtonian world of the

layman while knowing its limited, almost illusory, character. Or in other words, the common-sense table continues to exist but only within a human scale of reference. Several of the greatest works of modern literature are characterized by such a double awareness. They use realist representation, indeed they often use it consummately, yet with an X-ray awareness of its constructed, or purely human, character. The Modernist decades were a time of epochal shift, like that of Shakespeare and Cervantes, and the most summative works of the period were frequently those that, like them, owned a dual loyalty. Different world conceptions are held together in a mutually defining, mutually testing, relation. The past is criticized yet it is also preserved on a new basis and one consequence is that it becomes necessary to speak not of *the* world so much as of the human “world.”

## The human “world”

The force of this can be seen in Martin Heidegger’s retrospective definition of modernity as the “age of the world picture”:

The expressions “world picture of the modern age” and “modern world picture” ... assume something that never could have been before, namely, a medieval world picture and an ancient world picture. The world picture does not change from an earlier medieval one into a modern one, but rather the fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age.<sup>11</sup>

Heidegger sees this relativistic consciousness as a defining characteristic of modernity, and he goes on to cite both modern humanism and the rise of anthropology as aspects of this. For the awareness of living simultaneously on a human and a nonhuman plane inevitably problematizes the human itself as a worldview, or a congeries of overlapping worldviews. In the later twentieth century it has become common to speak disparagingly of humanism as an unacknowledged ideology naturalizing the given social order, and then to see Modernism in turn as tainted with this.<sup>12</sup> But the opposite is closer to the truth: the relative status of the human was a central recognition of Modernism itself. Lawrence, for example, writing in 1914 about the work that was to become *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920), rejected the “old stable ego” of humanist ethical characterization because he only cared “about what the woman *is* – what she *is* – inhumanly, physiologically, materially – ... what she *is* as a phenomenon (or as representing some greater, inhuman will), instead of what she feels according to the human conception.”<sup>13</sup> Yet of course he was equally interested in what his characters felt as individuals and the category of the individual retained a crucial importance for him. In the same letter, therefore, he criticizes the Italian Futurist Marinetti for seeking a purely scientific or technological vision when a human being was in question.<sup>14</sup> This precisely epitomizes the Modernist synthesis as outlined above. Marinetti’s Futurism, with its celebration of the

machine, represented a debunking of humanism, whereas Lawrence was incorporating something of Marinetti's spirit into an enlarged conception. In this he was one with James Joyce and Thomas Mann.

In this way, many writers "saved the appearances" of humanism and a traditional order by recognizing that in this area only appearances, viewpoints, are in question anyway although for human beings this viewpoint is the one that matters – or is the only one they can have.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the world itself does not privilege the human, which was a matter of shock to Thomas Hardy and other Victorian agnostics, was incorporated into a more self-standing humanist conception. Victorian attempts to base humanistic values, such as ethics and criticism, on science persisted well into the twentieth century but the Modernist decades started to reverse this relation.<sup>16</sup> Virginia Woolf's Mr. Ramsey, as a portrait of Woolf's father, the Victorian critic, Leslie Stephen, catches the note of absurdity that begins to surround the figure of the earnestly scientific agnostic. Although the Modernist writers were immensely serious, it was no longer important to be earnest, and to read them either humanistically or antihumanistically, therefore, is to miss the point since humanism, the necessary human standpoint, is acknowledged in its ultimate groundlessness.<sup>17</sup> *Ulysses* is the classic instance. With its burlesque jostling of cultural structures, myths, discourses, and intellectual disciplines, it re-enacts in contemporary terms an ancient tale of homecoming and thereby expresses a modern sense of what the human home is: a construction within a void.<sup>18</sup> This recognition of the self-grounding character of the human world is the truest meaning of the Modernist use of myth. Myth could be many things, including nostalgia for a lost unity, a fascistic regression, or a literary structure, but its most important meaning was as an emblem of the human world as self-created. Of course, Joyce's comedic inflection of this was not the only possibility. Kafka was the obverse. Whereas Joyce's apparent verbal density is ultimately transparent, allowing the reader to possess its world and know there are no other transcendental meanings, Kafka's enigmatic simplicity incites interpretation, a need for meaning, only to frustrate it. The anguish of Kafka's fiction, whatever its other causes or implications, comes from a desire still to find, rather than create, a meaning.

If the prestige of science as objective truth was dislodged, this suggests another aspect of the departure from traditional realism. For realism in fiction had been embodied in a narrative model of history that had itself been given a strongly scientific inflection, yet by the end of the century a number of thinkers were reacting against the dominance of the historicist mode of understanding that had developed since the late eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> The prestige of historicism was undermined by the questioning of the scientific model for the word "history" refers both to the unimaginably vast process of events making up collective human life and to the interpretative discipline through which it is understood. Meanwhile the factual concern of the discipline can give it a misleading impression of objectivity. But F. H. Bradley, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Benedetto Croce all emphasized, in turn, that history is written from the standpoint of the present and expresses values that

cannot themselves be based in science or research.<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche's early essay on "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874) brought several of these concerns together and proved to be effectively a manifesto for this aspect of Modernism whereby history is understood under the sign of myth.

## History, myth and tradition

Modernist writers were almost obsessively concerned with history in a double sense: they were concerned both about what was happening in their world and with the nature of historical understanding as such. The mythopoeic basis of history has several very different aspects but it importantly includes an underlying recognition of the projective nature of all historical meaning. Insofar as myth is an affirmation of values it may be a form of historical motivation: as it proves to be, through the retrospective understanding of the poet, for the patriots of Yeats's "Easter 1916."<sup>21</sup> Yet insofar as myth is concerned with values that are in some measure transhistorical, myth can also reflect a version of what Nietzsche called the "superhistorical" spirit.<sup>22</sup> When a great range of historical knowledge spanning different cultures and times has been assimilated, its effect, Nietzsche argues, may be to reveal the partiality and limitation of all those issues that seem supremely important to one's contemporaries. The superhistorical spirit transcends historical time and may focus this in a mythic timelessness such as Joyce finds in the Homeric parallel of *Ulysses*, or Yeats attributes to the sage "chinamen" of "Lapis Lazuli" (*Collected Poems*, pp. 336–9). Myth is highly ambivalent, therefore, in its relation to history: it may be a way of acting purposefully *within* history or a way of transcending, which is to say withdrawing *from*, it. Meanwhile the capacity for transcendence is not necessarily negative: it may rather be a condition of properly living within history: a secular equivalent of T. S. Eliot's more religious thought, "teach us to care and not to care."<sup>23</sup>

The mythic structures of Yeats, Joyce, Lawrence, and Mann are all concerned with this problematic awareness and the formal index of this is their development of spatialized rather than chronological structures.<sup>24</sup> The action takes place in time, but the meaning is created spatially: or, as Thomas Mann said, "musically."<sup>25</sup> On a larger scale, the cyclic conceptions of history in Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee have a related implication.<sup>26</sup> The causal process enacted within historical and personal time is set against, not so much the timeless, as the intrinsic, values represented emblematically in myth. For this is the important emphasis: not a withdrawal into some realm of the timeless but a recognition of the intrinsic and foundational import of these values for the given community or "world."

Of course, not every use of myth embodies this metaphysical implication. T. S. Eliot's grail legend in *The Waste Land* affirms a fertility that is largely belied by the sexual disgust in the poem itself and his use of myth proved to be rather a place-holder for the



religious faith that he was subsequently to adopt. Where Eliot came closest to the spirit of myth as defined through these other writers is in his sense of tradition.<sup>27</sup> Tradition, for Eliot, was not what he called an “orthodoxy,” a rule to be followed, but a largely unconscious inheritance being continually modified within the self. Like Pound and other Modernists, he thought closely about the paradoxes of tradition in relation to creativity; the most original talent is not only bound within a tradition but is most likely to reaffirm it; in this connection, “renewing” is a bottomlessly ambiguous term. And it was within this sense of the greater, transindividual “mind of Europe” that he was able to project his truly mythopoeic imagination. The “dissociation of sensibility” occurring during the seventeenth century was one of his powerful interpretations that, although offered as a literary-historical argument rather than as a myth, continued to grip the contemporary imagination with a mythic power even after Eliot had distanced himself from it.<sup>28</sup> Its essentially mythopoeic status is reflected in the fact that his evidence for dissociation was not an historical argument so much as a close reading of language understood as itself the embodiment of a quality of life. But that leads to another major theme for the Modernist generation.

## The linguistic turn

The pervasive concern with the construction of meaning helps explain the emphasis in all the Modernist arts on the nature of their own medium; and in the case of literature this means, as well as literary genres and forms, language itself. Furthermore, by the early teens of the century, there had occurred what has come to be known as the linguistic “turn”: rather than describing or reflecting the world, language was now seen to form it. And whereas nineteenth-century study of language was predominantly historical, concerned with origins and development, Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, published in 1916 after his death, emphasized the synchronic and structural dimension.<sup>29</sup> He showed how the linguistic sign stands in an arbitrary relation to its external referent while meaning is created relationally within the system of language itself. It is a precise reversal of the Adamic model of meaning as giving names to pre-existing things; it sees that we only come to have things by creating names for them. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921) was to develop a related point: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”<sup>30</sup> The Modernist generation were conscious contemporaries of this linguistic turn but they also represent an important watershed in its interpretation.

*Ulysses* started to appear at this time and its linguistic self-consciousness reflects an epochal ambiguity. The episode specifically devoted to language, “Oxen of the Sun,” creates a running parallel between the growth of the English language through a succession of literary prose styles and the development of a fetus. Nineteenth-century historical thinking about language had been strongly influenced by organicist conceptions and saw language as the manifestation of a particular national character. Such a legacy

was of special interest to Joyce as an Irishman whose “mother” tongue was English. On the face of it this episode seems to celebrate the language on this most organic of analogies, yet the parallel with fetal development occurs in a spirit of burlesque that might alert the reader against any too simple interpretation. Joyce is treading a watershed between different views of language. On the one hand, the organic evolution of language is perhaps only a parodic, rather than a real, parallel of fetal development, since the episode is after all demonstrating that these historical and personal styles are themselves subsystems, or codes, within the language, that can be individually cracked and reproduced. Even Dickens’s self-bestowed title of the “Inimitable” is put in question. Yet the episode plays with, and within, language as if in a sea of possibility so that behind the particular style language itself is enjoyed as a protean second nature. Hence, while the parodic tone hints at the literal absurdity of the analogy it also highlights its metaphorical appropriateness. As usual, Joyce admits of opposite readings with equal plausibility as if he had deliberately built into his work the revelatory doubleness of meaning that Hans Blumenberg calls “epochal ambivalence.”<sup>31</sup>

Over the same years as the installments of *Ulysses* were being published, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, and Proust were thinking critically about language as the medium of cultural tradition. Their thinking was not sentimentally organicist either but they all recognized, in their different ways, the complexity of language as the fundamental medium of culture in its historical, creative, and unconscious dimensions. In fact, there emerged from this period two rival, apparently incommensurable interpretations of the linguistic turn. One view, which has its most philosophically magisterial expression in Martin Heidegger, sees the human involvement in language as resistant to technical or external analysis. Linguistic analysis has its uses but it cannot encompass the human use of language.<sup>32</sup> Lawrence and Rilke are among the most telling literary embodiments of this understanding.<sup>33</sup> The other view seeks to build on Saussure’s perceptions to provide a radical analysis of culture, and an exposure of its ideology, through language. This has had a more French provenance with a very explicit variant, for example, in Roland Barthes.<sup>34</sup> On this view, if language is the index, and perhaps even the creating structure, of the human world, then it gives a complete critical insight into that world. This is the basis of what Paul Ricoeur has called “the hermeneutics of suspicion” and it is worth noting that Saussure became an important influence outside linguistics only in the latter part of the century when his analysis of linguistic structure began to be accorded a quasi-metaphysical significance as if he were saying that meaning itself is arbitrary.<sup>35</sup> Eliot and Pound were somewhere between these positions. On the one hand they saw that civilization depends on words and it is the function of the poet and the critic to keep words accurate. On the other hand, as with the sense of tradition, they recognized a properly unconscious and implicit dimension in this. It would be neither possible nor desirable to bring the whole form of life implicit in language into consciousness. In this aspect they were closer to Heidegger. They were forerunners of ideology critique but they also saw language as being, like the moon in Joyce’s “Ithaca” episode and

Lawrence's "Moony" chapter of *Women in Love*, an inscrutable surface sustained by an invisible body whose dark side cannot be known.

The difficulty of getting an analytic grip on language is compounded by another epochal phenomenon. Cultural periods are often characterized by dominant metaphors such as the medieval and Renaissance great chain of being, the eighteenth-century clock or machine, or the nineteenth-century organism. In the twentieth century, language itself became the pervasive metaphor. By the mid-century even the act of conception had become a matter of a genetic "code." This has led, in the latter part of the century, to a solipsistic hyperconsciousness of language whereby the recognition that language forms reality has acquired a newly literalistic meaning: as if the analysis of ideology in language can completely encapsulate the life world of its user. This hyperconscious reification of language has its partial origin in the Modernist period but there it was generally balanced by a sense of the unconscious or tacit dimension. In this respect, the gradual shift to the computer as a common model of the mind suggests that the metaphor of language is now giving way to an even more two-dimensional one. But the larger point here is that a view of language entails a view of the world, a usually implicit philosophy, and the divided responses to the linguistic turn have themselves to be understood in a broader philosophical context.

## The collapse of idealism

If it was Heidegger who most fully developed the rival conception of language to the Saussurean tradition this was because of his part in a larger shift in philosophical outlook in the early part of the century: the effective demise of the idealist tradition, which had lasted, in various transformations, almost since the time of Immanuel Kant. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) was a foundational text of modern thought. It answered the skepticism of David Hume, and radically changed the dualism of Descartes, by indicating how the world can be known only through the necessary categories of thought; the structure of thought is the structure of the world. He used the word "transcendental," therefore, not to refer to some realm *beyond* the phenomenal world, but to indicate the conditions of possibility for *experiencing* it. The philosopher J. W. Fichte, however, whose lectures at the University of Jena in the 1790s influenced a generation of German romantics, gave this philosophy a subjective inflection. He interpreted Kant as saying that the world is an aspect of the mind. F. W. Schelling reacted in turn by claiming that the mind is an aspect of the world. Despite its being subjected to radical critiques, the metaphysical preoccupation with the transcendental conditions of experience remained dominant throughout the nineteenth century and it was only in the new century that some form of idealism ceased to be the central premiss of philosophical activity. T. S. Eliot wrote a Ph.D. thesis on the "objective" idealist F. H. Bradley and yet claimed later in life that he no longer understood it.<sup>36</sup> However literally we take Eliot's remark, it has a representative value for the relation of Modernism to this earlier tradition, for, at one



level, the Modernist period, in Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, was a turn not just against idealism, but against metaphysics as such. The later world no longer believed in the questions, let alone agreed with the answers, of the earlier one. And yet, as several critics have noted, Eliot's poetry is full of the concerns, and formation, of Bradley's thought and this transformed continuity is equally representative of the period at large, for the important thinking of the modern age was where it attempted to meet, rather than ignore, the earlier tradition.<sup>37</sup> In the Anglo-American context the demise of idealism can be seen in William James's pragmatism, Bertrand Russell's mathematical logic, and Wittgenstein's restriction of the philosophical enterprise to an analysis of language use. Wittgenstein provides a revealing faultline here. In the later anglophone world he was associated with the metaphysical philistinism of A. J. Ayer rather than recognized as an antimetaphysical thinker.<sup>38</sup> Even Russell seemed not fully to comprehend this aspect of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein was like Joyce in being profoundly superficial, in understanding the limits of what could be said, whereas Ayer was merely superficial in thinking there was nothing of interest outside what he could say. But the most serious onslaught on the metaphysical tradition had come from Nietzsche before the turn of the century, while Heidegger was in turn his most productively critical reader; and the shift from Nietzsche to Heidegger helps to clarify much that was going on even in the Anglo-Saxon literary context in which Heidegger himself was unknown.

Heidegger endorsed Nietzsche's exposure of the whole tradition of metaphysics from Plato onwards as an enormous falsehood and psychological deceit: a quite different kind of "great lie" from what Plato had in mind in *The Republic*. In particular, the centrality of epistemology, the problem of knowledge, had grown, as they both thought, from an unwitting reification of consciousness and world into separate entities, the subjective and objective. Nietzsche proposed instead that the question of value was more primary than that of knowledge: we know, or question, what is of interest to us as living beings and the ideal of academic disinterestedness is only a misleading exception to this general truth. Heidegger approved all this but went on to argue that Nietzsche was not the end of metaphysics, as he had claimed, because the question of Being was more primary again than that of value.<sup>39</sup> Heidegger's translators capitalized "Being" to indicate that his concern was not with individual beings but with the sheer mystery of Being at all. Our everyday instrumental dealing with individual beings, whether human or not, deadens us to Being; and philosophical activity, as traditionally practiced, only reinforces this. For Heidegger this loss, or forgetting, of Being had set in since pre-Socratic times. Quite independently, Lawrence and Pound had the same conviction and invoked the supposedly pre-dualistic sensibility of that time to define its mythopoeic relation to the world. This leads to a central paradox of Modernism: the most sophisticated achievement of the present is a return to, or a new appreciation of, the archaic. As Thomas Mann put it in his lecture on Freud, "In the life of humanity the mythic is indeed an early and primitive stage but in the life of the individual it is a late and mature one."<sup>40</sup> To appreciate this it is necessary to trace the development of another important area of

enquiry, anthropology, which provided the contemporary models of the primitive and the archaic.

## Anthropology and the “primitive”

Primitivism is almost as old, it may be supposed, as civilization: both terms, of course, being relational.<sup>41</sup> As a literary convention primitivism allows the civilized to inspect, or to indulge, itself through an imaginary opposite. It is often a self-critical motif within the culture, like Montaigne’s essay on cannibals.<sup>42</sup> But in the Modernist period a radical questioning of the present civilization along with the close study of tribal peoples gave a new edge to the primitivist impulse.

In the past “primitive” peoples had been seen, whether nostalgically or condescendingly, as a simpler version of the “civilized.” Only their circumstances and social organization made them different. This had been the case with Rousseau and was still so for James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*.<sup>43</sup> By thinking of their circumstances one could imagine their frame of mind. But in the first decades of the twentieth century a new conception of the primitive was developed. For the generation of anthropologists typified by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s *How Natives Think* (1922) primitive man was believed to have a different way of thinking and of relating to the universe. Although this conception was developed through scholarly study and often field work, the field work was still frequently at second hand and the meaning of such primitive sensibility is best understood through its contemporaneity with the theme of forgetfulness of Being. For it is still partly a projected alter ego of the European observer. In this conception, clearly owing much to romantic thought, primitive man was believed to have had, like the pre-Socratic Greeks, a psychological continuity with his world: the practice of sympathetic magic, for example, suggesting this pre-dualistic relation. His sense of space and time were radically different from “ours.” Rather than being objectively measurable, they followed the contours of the psyche and of the sacred. This was not just prescientific, but a wholly opposed worldview and the Kantian philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, was to articulate at length the philosophical character of this archaic worldview as seen by anthropology in the early twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> By the latter half of the century it was becoming clear that this whole conception was itself quite unscientific and not least in its reification of a generalized “primitive mind” and its assumption that modern “primitives” represent an early stage of a universal development including that of modern Europeans. But if it was not scientifically true it is only the more telling as an epochal reflection, and its value as a literary or philosophical vision is not necessarily to be discounted; indeed, it may be increased.

The crucial point here is that the primitive should have been accorded not just an alternative state, but an alternative worldview. As Heidegger said, anthropology underwrites the experience of modernity as “the age of the world picture.” In many ways

the universalism, and the valorizing, of the “primitive mind” in these decades had a progressive, critical force against the home culture and the relativity of worldviews was an enabling condition for this. It made it possible for the primitive to acquire such a value of radical difference. In this way, the scientific study of myth throughout the nineteenth century eventually produced a reflector in which the scientific observer could see the scientific viewpoint itself as only one form of life, a lived worldview, a myth. Yet this was not a position of vulgar or open relativism. Any given life form is lived as life, not as a relative world picture; and likewise archaic myth, which seemed to be inhabited without the category of disbelief, exemplified the holism and faith with which any life form must be lived. This is why many of the modern writers, even while exhibiting formal self-consciousness, allowed the underlying metaphysic of a conscious worldview to remain implicit. They were concerned to absorb and live with this “tacit dimension” rather than make it the overt point of the work.<sup>45</sup> As Serenus Zeitblom, the “humanist” narrator of Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* put it, “Belief in absolute values, illusory as it always is, seems to me a condition of life.”<sup>46</sup> It was a central characteristic of the period to hold these contradictory aspects in conjunction.

This gives rise to complex truths and evident dangers. Myth, in the modern sense of a lived worldview, is highly ambivalent. The vulgar cooption of myth by Fascism has shorn this central Modernist term of its allure despite the efforts of Karl Kerenyi, the anthropologist, and Thomas Mann to save the humanistic value of its bracketing of belief.<sup>47</sup> Mann’s own humanism lay not just at the level of narrative values but in the tolerant skepticism with which the narrative is constructed. “Man is the lord of counterpositions,” and it is by inhabiting beliefs in this spirit of Modernist mythopoeia that one is most truly free from the seductions of modern barbarism (p. 496). It is ironic, but perhaps deeply fitting, that the same term “myth” should hold in counterpoint two opposite tendencies of the period: political regression and humane relativity. On the European political stage, a term that may be used advisedly here, virulent nationalisms were supported by a hand-me-down nineteenth-century mythic essentialism while the finer minds of the period had been dissolving nationhood itself into a mythic self-consciousness.

Modernist mythopoeia was universalistic and seemed to be endorsed in this by Frazer’s fertility rituals, Freud’s psychic structures, and Lévy-Bruhl’s primitive mind. The unwitting Eurocentrism of this supposed universalism has since become apparent but in its time it had a mainly progressive value in the tradition of the Enlightenment. It criticized the Enlightenment from within while the historic catastrophe of the Great War exposed the evils of nationalism in an urgent and practical way. At the same time, while in *The Rainbow* and *Ulysses* the mythopoeic invocations of the Bible and Homer raised humble provincial characters to a primary level of seriousness, both books are densely of their localities. Their national and local dimensions are present but are understood as formations rather than essences. That is why the reflexive self-consciousness of worldviews, the conscious relativity of forms of life, is a key to understanding the inner

process, however gradual and groping it was, by which the evils of colonialism came to be recognized.

## The colonial “other”

Anthropology grew up in the era of colonial expansion and had given “scientific” endorsement to the colonial “mission.” But by the early twentieth century the tradition of European Enlightenment, and indeed the whole post-Socratic conception of civilized culture, was being thrown into question, and the primitive alter ego was coming to be seen more honorifically. A changing attitude to the colonial “other” reflects a changing self-perception in the European. Freud was fascinated by primitive life and artifacts, and the relationship of consciousness to the unconscious in his metaphorical discourse reflects the structure of colonialism with the unconscious as the region to be colonized and controlled by the ego. *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) summed up his view that civilization was necessarily, and tragically, built on the suppression and sublimation of instinct. This was the white man’s burden externally and internally. C. G. Jung or Lawrence, on the other hand, would argue that the instinctual realm became destructive only because it was repressed rather than respected.<sup>48</sup> The homology between the two realms, of psyche and of empire, gives each a double meaning whereby internal and external liberation are linked. Three literary moments show the stages of this.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) recognized that the darkness lies not in Africa but in the human, and specifically European, heart. It took the crucial step of internalizing the problem even while retaining the “Freudian” model of tragic legitimacy. For Conrad is still committed to the colonial idea and, as a man of his time, he accepts the current views of Africa and its inhabitants. Indeed, as a naturalized Briton, and on the principle that a convert is more Catholic than the Pope, he deflects the major evil on to Belgium while Kurtz, with his German name, raises colonial brutality to a level of philosophical self-consciousness. The power of the book lies in its not quite suppressing its own deepest insight and it is hard to say whether Conrad’s creative struggle was the more invested in suppression or recognition. The tortured mystifications of the book reflect its significance as a cultural document. The heroizing of Kurtz as one able to face this dark knowledge of the self is a displaced reflection of what the book itself almost faces about the colonial relation at large, and in his day Conrad himself showed courage in peering into this abyss whose meaning has since become banal.

Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* (1915) is a generation later and from a native Englishman who had no illusions about the British governing classes. His character, Anton Skrebensky, another half-Polish émigré of genteel background, returns from colonial service in Africa to tell Ursula Brangwen of the strange exotic thrill, the repellent fascination, of the “African darkness.”

“One breathes it, like a smell of blood. The blacks know it. They worship it, really,

the darkness. One almost likes it – the fear – something sensual.”

She thrilled again to him. He was to her a voice out of the darkness. He talked to her all the while, in low tones, about Africa, conveying something strange and sensual to her: the negro, with his loose, soft passion that could envelop one like a bath.<sup>49</sup>

Although Skrebensky has long been detected by Ursula as a hollow man, she is momentarily affected by him here because through his “African” experience he has made some contact, however repressive and unacknowledged, with his inner self. His Africa is manifestly an Africa within and only through the projection on to a primitive “other” can he make contact with a lost aspect of himself. It is evident why Lawrence was at once the most important modern primitivist and the most serious critic of primitivism as a decadent symptom. What Skrebensky is “conveying” for the reader is a remarkable understanding of the inner structure of the colonial relation but the aspect to be noted for present purposes is that the book is not mainly about colonialism or the primitive. The clarity of insight in the episode arises from Lawrence’s more general Modernist awareness throughout the book of how characters and cultural communities inhabit their own “worlds.” Skrebensky lives in a different “world” from Ursula and his Africa is created as the effect of a voice in an English darkness. If modernity is the “age of the world picture,” the second decade of the century is where this recognition becomes critically self-conscious and the present episode suggests the seismic implications. Of course, none of this is evident to Skrebensky himself and after his rejection by Ursula he goes off to colonial service in India; and indeed E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924) exemplifies the next stage in the process of internal liberation.

Lawrence was not concerned with the colonial question as such, which may be why he had this insight into it. His setting in what George Eliot called the heart of England indicates where the true heart of the problem lay, and his representation of his characters’ world projections is so naturalized that it hardly emerges as a conscious “theme.” E. M. Forster was more directly concerned with colonial relations yet still as part of an, even more overt, thematizing of conflicting worldviews. For in *A Passage to India* different world projections are not a matter of internal psychological conflict so much as the institutionalized traditions of different world religions: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. Of course, despite its liberalism, the standpoint of the book is still one of European self-inspection and the book is not much more about India than Conrad’s was about Africa, but the positive meaning of this fact has to be understood. External liberation, in this instance, is partly a consequence of internal liberation and these three novels show a progressive process of inner recognition from which the present-day reader benefits as orthodoxy. These writers, however inadequate they may now seem in their racial perceptions, resisted the orthodoxies of their own day to start the liberation of European consciousness from one of its most pernicious and deep-lying formations. The conscious world creation of Modernism was a significant means to this. It is revealing, however,



that in all three of these books the repressive relation to the colonial “other” is linked to sexual repression, and that leads to a parallel Modernist theme of liberation inviting a different commentary.

## Sexuality and liberation?

Sexual liberation, and liberation through sexuality, were conscious and central projects of the time. Sex came out of the closet in Freud, Havelock Ellis, and others, and the sheer openness of treatment was a significant point in, for example, Franz Wedekind’s *Spring Awakening* (1891) in which young men masturbate on stage.<sup>50</sup> But sexuality was seen through highly ideological lenses, as in the extreme instance of Otto Weininger’s misogynistic *Sex and Character* (1903), and it has taken much longer for the gendered construction of sexuality itself to be recognized. Whereas for many male writers and thinkers sexuality might be a mode of liberation, for women it was just as likely to be another mode of suppression and women writers were therefore more aware of underlying contradictions that possibly made it more difficult to achieve, or to desire, the grand syntheses of some male Modernists. The immediate explosion of sexuality in the period largely hid the time-bomb of gender that was to explode later and is dealt with in Marianne DeKoven’s chapter in this volume.

Different levels of liberation can be seen in Joyce’s treatment of Leopold Bloom. Through Bloom, Joyce’s own voyeuristic tendencies and his masochistic fantasies about his wife’s unfaithfulness – the theme explored in *Exiles* (1918) – are acknowledged in a spirit of acceptance. The exemplary acceptance is bold and admirable in itself yet is still based on naturalizing the effects of a repressive culture or condition. Internal liberation, perhaps, does not come at a stroke or in one generation. But a more vital aspect of Bloom is his female identification. He is first seen cooking the breakfast and his womanliness is continually highlighted against the absurd virility of other characters. Lawrence’s female side was so developed he was always fighting it and having to assert his maleness while some of his earliest reviews assumed him to be female.<sup>51</sup> Lisa Appignanesi has identified in Modernism at large a connection between femininity and creativity even where the feminine, as in Proust, may not be biologically female.<sup>52</sup> Edward Carpenter proselytized strongly for a view of homosexuality as a creative and liberated condition.<sup>53</sup> Although Stephen Dedalus’s explicit theorizing about artistic creation privileges intellectual fatherhood as against mere biological motherhood, it is the “womanly” Bloom who is associated with Shakespeare.

Hence, in the early modern period, “woman” was often valued for qualities related to the philosophical concerns already indicated. Dorothy Richardson spoke of woman’s “awareness of being, as distinct from man’s awareness of becoming,” and Yeats and Lawrence had a strong investment in such a view.<sup>54</sup> When Yeats, in “Easter 1916,” said of Constance Markiewicz, who was to be the first woman MP in Britain, “that woman’s

days were spent in ignorant good will, her nights in argument” he clearly preferred the pre-political days when “young and beautiful she rode to harriers.” Yet his critique bears not against a woman in politics so much as against politics as such. Because “woman” is more whole she suffers the greater damage, or constitutes the greater waste, when drawn into the shrillness of politics or the shallowness of opinion. In this respect the understanding of “woman” in this period reflects, among other things, its central problematic of Being.

## Aesthetics and Being

A central ambiguity about Modernism lies in the understanding of the “aesthetic,” the meaning of the artistic realm as such. For Modernism is importantly not aestheticist, it is rather a turn against an earlier generation’s aestheticism, but it uses highly self-conscious aesthetic means to do so and Edmund Wilson had good reason to see the period, in *Axel’s Castle* (1930), as a continuation of aestheticism. Wilson’s interpretation implies a measure of withdrawal from historical commitment and a comparable charge was made by the Modernist writer and artist Percy Wyndham Lewis in *Time and Western Man* (1927). He attacked the pervasive preoccupation with time in this period extending from Bergson, Einstein, and A. N. Whitehead in philosophy and science through to Joyce and Proust in literature. Lewis saw time as a less real dimension than space since, apart from the fleeting present, experience in time is only known in the imaginative mode of memory and anticipation. Hence this whole preoccupation with time was an indulgent withdrawal in keeping with Wilson’s interpretation: and indeed with the Marxist view of Modernism, expressed by Georg Lukács, as an indulgent turning inwards of the western bourgeois self.<sup>55</sup> But the category of the “aesthetic,” like Nietzsche’s “superhistorical” spirit, is deeply ambivalent, and it went through a crucial transformation in the period that can be understood through Nietzsche’s parallel transformation of Schopenhauer’s thought on this subject, since Schopenhauer stands to the nineteenth-century Symbolist and aesthetic movements as Nietzsche stands to Modernism.

Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy in *The World as Will and Idea* (1818) saw human consciousness as evolved by nature to achieve its own blind “purpose” in the same way that wings or claws have done. But the irony of consciousness is that it works by imagining itself to be independently purposive rather than merely reflecting the great process, or Will, of nature. For him, all human purposes are an illusion. Given this understanding of things, the only dignified posture for the individual intelligence is mental withdrawal from the whole process and, adapting Kant’s definition of the artistic realm, in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), as “purposiveness without purpose,” Schopenhauer saw artistic experience as the principal means to this end. Art gives intensity with detachment. Nietzsche was strongly influenced by Schopenhauer, and always accepted his philosophical nihilism, but he gradually turned the structure of Schopenhauer’s thought on its head to serve a vitalistic affirmation. This inversion can be seen in the

early *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872) and the late *Twilight of the Idols* (1888). In the first, he adapts Schopenhauer's metaphysic of illusion to affirm the dream itself: "It is a dream. I will dream on." Only as a conscious dream, or as an "aesthetic phenomenon" are "human existence and the world eternally justified" (Nietzsche's emphases).<sup>56</sup> In the later work, however, he turns more critically against Schopenhauer for the sake of what seems to be a simpler vitalism. Artistic beauty, instead of standing in opposition to natural impulse, is now merged with the attraction of sexuality as part of a procreative affirmation. But Nietzsche was not abandoning the category of the aesthetic, he was rather making it the model of all experience and therefore eliding it by assimilating it. Life, like art, is a "purposiveness without purpose"; it is lived for its intrinsic value rather than for some transcendental end. Whereas aestheticism saw life in opposition to art, Nietzsche now saw art as the most telling image for the "joyful and trusting fatalism" with which life should be accepted.<sup>57</sup> This is a complex and subtle point to be understood through close reading of at least Nietzsche, Yeats, Joyce, and Lawrence, but the principal upshot is an elision of the category of the aesthetic into a life term.<sup>58</sup> It is like Wittgenstein's "ladder" at the end of the *Tractatus*, an argument you realize you must throw away when you have climbed up it. So too, the category of the aesthetic is necessary to see the point but the point is also the dissolution of the category.

Where Nietzsche was concerned with the aesthetic as a "justification" of human existence, as a constation of values in life, his elision of the categories opened the way to a different inflection that was most clearly expressed in Heidegger, namely art as an intuition of Being. For just as Heidegger saw the question of Being as more primordial than that of value, so he saw the function of art as pre-eminently the expression of Being. "Purposiveness without purpose" now suggested freedom from the instrumental relation to individual beings that commonly occludes Being. A favourite quotation of his was Hölderlin's "poetically man dwells upon the earth."<sup>59</sup> Art lets us know what it is to "be," and this Heideggerean dimension is evident in Lawrence and Rilke; and perhaps in an inverted way in Kafka and Beckett. The "aesthetic," of course, continued to mean many different things within the period and even the line of thought sketched here is controversial and often misunderstood.<sup>60</sup> But it would be more generally agreed that the aesthetic assumes some greater burden in the period even if the nature of the burden itself is disputed, and that leads to a further question: the rise, and the changing status, of literary criticism within the Modernist decades.

## Literature and criticism

T. S. Eliot's obituary compliment to Henry James that he "had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it" strikes an important Modernist note in its skepticism about ideas as such.<sup>61</sup> As part of the larger turn against metaphysical concerns, Eliot implies that truth is



to be found not in philosophical ideas or systems but by collapsing philosophical concerns into a close scrutiny of experience, and more particularly of language. Such a spirit is echoed in William James, the brother of the novelist, and in Wittgenstein. Where Eliot became a poet, Wittgenstein several times gave up philosophy and advised bright students to find an honest manual trade. The effect of this, for Eliot, Pound, and Lawrence, was to place an especially primordial philosophical burden upon imaginative literature, and through that on literary criticism, although Eliot's own turn to religious faith ultimately prevented him from allowing literature this full weight. The Modernist writers were remarkable and original critics, and would perhaps not be so comprehensible without their criticism. And the period of Eliot's influence especially saw the rise of literary criticism as an academic discipline partly sustained by a belief in literature as a primordial constation of values not to be reached or grounded by other means. The Arnoldian sense of literature as the modern substitute for religion was increasingly realized not, as the classicist Arnold had thought, as a source of transmitted wisdom, "the best that is known and thought in the world," but rather as the active means of questioning and discovering fundamental values, truths, and understandings for which there was no alternative grounding.<sup>62</sup> The critic who took this most fully and openly to heart was F. R. Leavis, and the history of his reception, including the common misreading of him as a naïve moralist, is an index of the history of this understanding, since he made overt what is otherwise the largely unacknowledged basis of criticism in the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup> Leavis, who had always an embattled relation to the institutionalized practice of criticism, provided a lightning conductor for this widespread refusal of acknowledgment. A central philosophical feature of Modernism, reworking a strain of romantic thought, is its claim for literature itself as a supreme and irreplaceable form of understanding.

## Notes

**1** Apart from the economic theory in *Das Kapital*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1887), Karl Marx, with Friedrich Engels, analyzed the cultural manifestations of capitalism.

**2** See especially Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill (London: George Allen, 1913); *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1952); *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Dodd Mead, 1919); *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1930).

- 3** See especially Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872); *The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874); *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887); *Twilight of the Idols* (1888).
- 4** Ezra Pound, *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1954), p. 341.
- 5** See, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 88.
- 6** Albert Einstein's "Special Theory of Relativity" was published in 1905; Werner Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle" in 1927.
- 7** William Crookes discovered in 1879 that cathode rays were bent by a magnetic field. The resulting controversy over waves or particles was settled by Heinrich Herz's experiment of 1892 and J. J. Thomson's discovery of the electron in 1897. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Macropaedia, 15th edn. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), vol. XIV, pp. 345–6.
- 8** Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 112.
- 9** Arthur Eddington, "Introduction" to *The Nature of the Physical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. xi–xix.
- 10** Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1955), p. 218.
- 11** Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question of Technology and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 130.
- 12** A much quoted expression of this view is Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto, 1985), pp. 111–25.
- 13** D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. II, ed. James T. Boulton and George Zytaruk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 182.

**14** Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1875–1944). For a good discussion of Futurism in a broad context of European artistic movements see Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (London: Macmillan, 1995), esp. pp. 84–111.

**15** For the significance of this phrase in relation to modernity see Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1965).

**16** For a full discussion of this topic see Peter Alan Dale, *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

**17** The allusion to Oscar Wilde here is relevant to changing conceptions of art and truth in the period as in his “The Decay of Lying” in *Intentions* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co, 1894).

**18** “... because founded, like the world, macro and microcosm, upon the void.” James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Walter Gabler (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 171.

**19** On this general topic see James Longenbach, *Modernist Poetics of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

**20** See F. H. Bradley, *The Presuppositions of Critical History* (Oxford: Parker & Co., 1874); Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York, Russell & Russell, 1960); Wilhelm Dilthey, *Meaning in History: Dilthey's Thoughts on History and Society*, ed. H. P. Rickman (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961).

**21** W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 2nd edn. (London: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 202–5.

**22** See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 64–6.

**23** T. S. Eliot, “Ash Wednesday,” in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1971), p. 67.

**24** The classic first treatment of this theme was Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” in *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3–62.

- 25** Thomas Mann, “The Making of *The Magic Mountain*,” *Atlantic* (January, 1953); reprinted in Mann, *Magic Mountain*, p. 723.
- 26** Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* 2 vols., trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (London: G. Allen and Unwin), 1926–1929; Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 12 vols, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934–1961).
- 27** See T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn. (London: Faber, 1951), pp. 13–22.
- 28** See T. S. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets,” in *ibid.*, esp. pp. 286–8.
- 29** Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Lausanne: Payot, 1916).
- 30** Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1933), p. 115.
- 31** This is a central motif of Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1983).
- 32** See, for example, Martin Heidegger, “The Nature of Language,” in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Herz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), esp. p. 98.
- 33** Heidegger cites Rilke but for the perhaps less evident relevance of Heidegger to Lawrence see Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 34** Barthes makes the Saussurean connection explicit in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: HarperCollins, 1973).
- 35** Ricoeur first developed his use of this phrase in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay in Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970).
- 36** T. S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (London: Faber, 1964).

- 37** A first important discussion was the chapter “Bradley,” in Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), pp. 35–59.
- 38** See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1936).
- 39** See, for example, Martin Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God is Dead,’” in *The Question of Technology*, op. cit., esp. p. 103.
- 40** Thomas Mann, “Freud and the Future,” in *Essays of Three Decades*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (London: Secker and Warburg, 1947), p. 422.
- 41** I discuss this question in *Primitivism* (London: Methuen, 1972).
- 42** Michel de Montaigne, “On the Cannibals,” in *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 228–41.
- 43** James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1919–1922).
- 44** Cassirer reflected the period in developing contemporary anthropological views of archaic sensibility into a sophisticated evolutionary theory of symbolic forms. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3 vols., trans. Ralph Mannheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953–5).
- 45** Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (London: Routledge, 1967).
- 46** Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 47.
- 47** See Thomas Mann and Karl Kerenyi, *Mythology and Humanism: The Correspondence of Thomas Mann and Karl Kerenyi*, trans. Alexander Gelley (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).
- 48** Carl Jung (1875–1961). One-time disciple who broke with Freud and emphasized the beneficial aspects of the collective unconscious and the archetypal.

- 49** D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 413.
- 50** Early publications of Havelock Ellis include *Man and Woman* (London: Walter Scott, 1894). His multi-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* appeared in Philadelphia (F. A. Davis, 1905–10). For a convenient summary see his *Psychology of Sex* (London: Heinemann, 1937).
- 51** R. P. Draper, ed., *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 3.
- 52** Lisa Appignanesi, *Femininity and the Creative Imagination: A Study of Henry James, Robert Musil and Marcel Proust* (London: Vision, 1973).
- 53** See Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming-of-Age* (1896); *The Intermediate Sex* (1908). Both are included in Edward Carpenter, *Selected Writings of Edward Carpenter*, vol. 1, *Sex* (London: GMP, 1984).
- 54** Dorothy Richardson, "Continuous Performance: The Film *Gone Male*," reprinted in Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., *The Gender of Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 424.
- 55** See Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John Mander and Neike Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1963).
- 56** Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, p. 44. The latter formulation occurs twice, initially p. 52, finally p. 141.
- 57** Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 103.
- 58** I offer such a reading in *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 59** See particularly Martin Heidegger, "... Poetically Man Dwells ...," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 213–29.

**60** For a counter-view of the aesthetic in post-Nietzschean modernity see Alan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985).

**61** T. S. Eliot, “In Memory of Henry James,” *Egoist* (January, 1918): 2.

**62** In Matthew Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” *National Review* (November, 1864).

**63** Leavis developed his explicit thought about the primordial creativity of language in imaginative literature in his late writings, especially *The Living Principle: “English” as a Discipline of Thought* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), which includes a close reading of T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*; and *Thought, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976). See also Michael Bell, F. R. Leavis (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 27–56.





## 2 The cultural economy of Modernism

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Lawrence Rainey

Charles Dickens, rising to his feet, stood at the table and surveyed the vast hall in which the leading citizens of Birmingham had gathered in early 1853 to pay him homage at a banquet. It was his duty to thank them now, and he proceeded to offer his tribute.

To the great compact phalanx of the people, by whose industry, perseverance, and intelligence, and their result in money-wealth such places as Birmingham, and many others like it, have arisen – to that great centre of support, that comprehensive experience, and that beating heart, – Literature has turned happily from individual patrons, sometimes munificent, often sordid, always few, and has found there at once its highest purpose, its natural range of action and its best reward.

“The people,” Dickens concluded triumphantly, “have set Literature free.” And in return for that gift of liberty, he opined, “Literature cannot be too faithful to the people.”<sup>1</sup>

Within thirty years of Dickens’s death in 1870, authors were far less confident about the beneficent effects of literature’s dependency on “the people,” or the prospects for a collective literary culture. In the intervening period, as many critics have noted, British popular fiction undergoes an unmistakable transformation, one in which the novel gradually acquires a class structure analogous to that of the social world surrounding it. By the decade 1900–10, the years when Conrad is writing his best work to little acclaim, the polarization between “high” and “low” literature is firmly in place, and the Modernist project issues its claim to aesthetic dignity by repudiating that Victorian literature, above all fiction, that had sold itself to a mass reading public. When Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of *Ulysses*, concludes his first appearance in the novel by cleansing himself of feces with pages torn from the popular weekly *Tit-Bits*, his gesture epitomizes the Modernist contempt for popular culture.

For some scholars, that contempt is Modernism’s salient characteristic. “Mass culture has always been the hidden subtext of the modernist project,” one critic urges, a project in which popular culture is construed as a threat of encroaching formlessness, gendered as female, and held at bay by reaffirming and refortifying the boundaries between art and inauthentic mass culture. More important, mass culture also marks the dividing line between Modernism and the avant-garde. In contrast to Modernism, “the avant-garde attempts to subvert art’s autonomy, its artificial separation from life, and its institutionalization as ‘high art,’” and this impulse accounts for its “urge to validate other, formerly neglected or ostracized forms of cultural expression,” chief among them popular culture. Modernism, in this account, becomes little more than a reactionary, even

paranoid fear of popular culture. Postmodernism, instead, seeks “to negotiate forms of high art with certain forms and genres of mass culture and the culture of everyday life” and is therefore the legitimate heir of the historical avant-garde.<sup>2</sup>

Such formulations have brought welcome attention to the ongoing dialog between Modernism and popular culture, but their tendency to postulate a rigorous opposition between “high” and “low” culture may be inadequate to account for the complexity of cultural exchange and circulation in modern civil society. Further, they generally draw on arguments derived solely from the reading of literary texts, a procedure that evinces excessive faith in our capacity to specify the essence and social significance of isolated formal devices and to collate them with complex ideological and social formations, slighting the institutions that mediate between works and readerships, or between readerships and particular social structures. To focus on those institutions, instead, is to view Modernism as more than a series of texts or a set of ideas that found expression in them. It becomes a social reality, a configuration of agents and practices that converge in the production, marketing, and publicization of an idiom, a shareable language within the family of twentieth-century tongues. The institutional profile of Modernism can be traced in the social spaces and staging venues where it operated, and to trace it can teach us a great deal about the relations between Modernism and popular culture as well as Modernism’s shifting status in more recent debate.

Anglo-American literary Modernism was unusual in the degree to which its principal protagonists interacted with one another through shared institutional structures during a brief but important period that runs from 1912 to 1922, from roughly the formation of Imagism to the publication of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*. Such historical boundaries are inevitably arbitrary, slighting the extent to which Anglo-American Modernism drew on cultural traditions that extend much further back in time, minimizing developments that occurred in the decades that followed. Still, they do acknowledge the density of the particular social space that bound together the authors whose works have been deemed central to discussion of the Modernist moment. To map the contours of that space, one might consider three events that best exemplify its working dynamics, the changing relations among authors and audiences that have been the subject of so much comment: a lecture on poetry that Ezra Pound gave in March, 1912; the publication of *Ulysses* in February, 1922; and the publication of *The Waste Land* a few months later in October.

When Ezra Pound arrived in London in September, 1908, he welded his claims to literary authority to the culture of Provence. The first poem that he published in England was a *sestina*, a Provençal verse form; his first books of poetry presented a succession of albas, planhs, sestinas, ballatas, madrigales, and tenzoni; and his first work of critical prose treated the same subject, Provençal poetry. Pound had rapidly become, as one reviewer approvingly put it, “the modern troubadour,” his literary identity inseparable from the courtly lifestyle that had once nourished the poetic culture of Provence. Indeed, by a curious stroke of good fortune his very life had also become linked with analogous

forms of aristocratic patronage. In March, 1910 he had been introduced to Margaret Cravens, a 30-year-old American expatriate who studied music in Paris and was a member of well-to-do Bohemia – an aristocracy of sensibility, in other words. Cravens promptly offered to become Pound's patron, and soon he was receiving about \$1,000 or £200 per annum, a sum that was neither mean nor princely. On the eve of World War I in England, the average wage for the adult male industrial worker was £75 per annum, while the average annual income of the salaried class was £340. The gap between these figures represented the divide between the working class and the whole of the rest of society, a great and accepted gulf that has been termed "the major social fact of the day."<sup>3</sup> Patronage meant that Pound lived just beyond that divide, though never far from the abyss that yawned behind him. Pound, in fact, was acutely aware of these economic and social distinctions. Throughout the same period he was also courting Dorothy Shakespear, the daughter of an established barrister, whose parents insisted that Pound possess an income of £500 per annum before they would consent to their marriage. In early 1912, Pound was pressing his case to show that he would be a worthy son-in-law. To Dorothy's father he wrote a letter describing his income in detail: his writings were earning nearly £100 per year; he had just signed a contract with a publisher that would guarantee an additional £100 per year; and together with his £200 from Cravens, his income amounted to "about £400 per year, with reasonable chance of increase." Though "this would not go very far in England," it was a respectable, promising figure.<sup>4</sup>

Such considerations form the background, at once economic, personal, and ideological, to a series of three lectures that Pound gave in March, 1912, designed to supplement his income and enhance his reputation among a small corpus of people with influence. The price for the three lectures was a steep one, £1 1s, slightly less than the weekly wage of the average male industrial worker. The audience was "limited to fifty," as a contemporary program announced, and the site was to be the "private gallery" of Lord and Lady Glenconner, located at 34 Queen Anne's Gate. With no expenses to cover (the event was offered "by the kind permission" of the Glenconners), Pound might earn between £50 and £60. Equally vital, however, was the effort to endow the lectures with an aura of aristocratic glitter, to distinguish them from mere offerings of the contemporary economy. Programs were not posted in public places, but privately distributed; tickets were not commodities to be purchased, but favors to be courteously requested ("tickets may be had on application to Lady Low," the program stated; Lady Low lived just off Kensington Gardens and hosted "evenings at home" for a circle of upper-middle-class intellectuals including G. W. Prothero, editor of the *Quarterly Review*).<sup>5</sup> Above all, however, these ambitions found expression in the site of the lectures.

Edward and Pamela Tennant Glenconner, the owners of 34 Queen Anne's Gate, were both from remarkable families. Edward (1859–1920) was the eldest son of Sir Charles Tennant (1823–1906), the third in a succession of enterprising Scottish industrialists who had established their wealth in chemical manufacturing in Glasgow, a heritage that Sir

Charles had transformed into an empire of international mining, finance, and steel. (At his death he was the chairman of fourteen different companies and director of nine others.) In 1894 his daughter Margot married Sir Henry Asquith, already a rising star in the Liberal Party. In 1895 his son Edward married Pamela Wyndham, the youngest daughter of a family with aristocratic background and artistic tastes – a house designed by Philip Webb, paintings by Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, carpets and curtains designed by Morris himself. After constructing their country house from 1904 to 1906, Edward and Pamela turned to their residence in town; in 1908 they purchased 34 Queen Anne's Gate and commissioned Detmar Blow to redesign it entirely. They occupied it in 1910, and in 1911 Edward was named the first Baron Glenconner by his brother-in-law Asquith, now the Prime Minister, a reward for Edward's many years of support for Asquith's costly electoral campaigns. The second floor (in British usage, the first storey) contained the "private gallery" that housed Edward and Pamela's collection of thirty-seven masterpieces by Reynolds, Hogarth, Romney, Hoppner, Gainsborough, Ramsay, Turner, Fragonard, and others. Pamela, who had published a book of poetry in 1905 and prose fiction in 1907, possessed discerning taste and genuine talents, and it was no doubt her decision that led to Pound's lectures in the "private gallery."<sup>6</sup> No space better epitomized the realm of elite bourgeois culture in which Pound's career had been fashioned to this point: a world withdrawn from public life and insulated from the grim imperatives of a commodity economy, a sphere in which literary culture was a privatized medium of symbolic exchange for an exiguous aristocracy of sensibility, a court of intellect now patronizing Ezra Pound.

Pound's first lecture (March 14) had concerned Guido Cavalcanti. His second (March 19) treated Arnaut Daniel, the master of *trobar clus* or "closed verse," the most hermetic vein of Provençal poetry. The gist of his lecture survives in an essay published two months later, in which Pound urged that Daniel's poems "are good art as the high mass is good art," a body of works that must be "approached as ritual" because they sought "to make their revelations to those who are already expert."<sup>7</sup> Pound, plainly enough, was describing his own poetry as well, and his lecture on Daniel, Daniel's poems, and their audience, was a self-referential discourse.

Pound's lecture acquires special relief when set against another lecture that took place the same day, this one given by F. T. Marinetti, the leader of the Futurists who had published the famous "Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism" on the front page of the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1909. Two weeks earlier the first exhibition of Futurist painting had opened at the Sackville Gallery, prompting an avalanche of reviews and widespread public debate, and it was in the wake of these events that Marinetti gave a much anticipated lecture, one that differed in almost every respect from Pound's. It was held not in a "private gallery," but in Bechstein Hall (now Wigmore Hall), a public concert room that seated 550 people. Whereas a ticket for a single lecture by Pound had cost 10s 6d, only the most expensive tickets to Marinetti's lecture had cost that much, and the lowest-priced ones had cost only 1s.<sup>8</sup> But perhaps the most significant difference

was style: far from gratifying his audience, Marinetti berated it, castigating the English as “a nation of sycophants and snobs, enslaved by old worm-eaten traditions, social conventions, and romanticism.” The spectators, one newspaper reported, “rewarded him with their laughter and applause,” or as another contemporary recalled, “wildly applauded his outspoken derision of all their cherished national characteristics.” And for an avid reader of newspapers such as Pound, the next day must have been unforgettable. Not one took note of his lecture on Arnaut Daniel, while Marinetti’s performance was fully reported in the morning edition of the *Daily Chronicle*, with a headline reading “‘Futurist’ Leader in London” and a subtitle announcing, “Makes an Attack on the English Nation.” The next day a second article on Marinetti appeared in the *Morning Leader*, while the venerable *Times* devoted its editorial column to a careful analysis of Marinetti’s remarks.<sup>9</sup> Marinetti’s audience had become not just those who had attended his performance, but the millions who read about it in *The Daily Chronicle*, *The Morning Leader*, and *The Times*. Nothing could have made plainer the value of a concerted polemical onslaught, the formation of a collective identity buttressed by theatricality and publicity. Nor is it possible that Pound was unaware of these doings: the day of his lecture he had received a note from his fiancée, who had advised him that she would be attending a lecture that evening – not his, however. She was going “to hear Marinetti lecture ... about les Futuristes.”<sup>10</sup>

A few weeks later Pound sent off the manuscript for his next book of poetry, *Ripostes*, at the back of which he included a brief statement since famous as the first public reference to Imagism: “As for the Future, *Les Imagistes*, the descendants of the forgotten school of 1909, have that in their keeping.” The conjunction of terms (*Les Imagistes* in French, a reference to “the future”) made all too plain the provenance of Pound’s new “school.” Yet taken by itself, Pound’s statement was little more than a cryptic hint, and his more definitive steps towards a reconception of art as public practice came only in the wake of three other events that occurred in the remaining months of 1912. In June Margaret Cravens committed suicide, leaving Pound without the financial support that had sustained him for the last two years; in October the publishing firm that had guaranteed him £100 per year also collapsed; and just a few weeks before he had learned that Edward Marsh was assembling an anthology to present the recent work of younger poets as a collective project, the *Georgians*, a volume whose future success was already apparent to discerning observers by December, 1912.<sup>11</sup> These developments account for Pound’s subsequent actions. In August and October, 1912 he sent off poems by himself and H. D. to *Poetry* magazine in Chicago, characterizing them as “Imagiste.” In December he wrote an essay containing the second public reference to Imagism, two paragraphs that asserted that Imagism was “the youngest school here that has the nerve to call itself a school.” The aggressive tone was at odds with the tentative statements that followed, formulations designed to underscore the difference between Imagism and Futurism. Whereas Futurism emphasized collective identity, Imagism was more casual and individualistic, the fortuitous outcome of “two or three young men agree[ing], more



or less, to call certain things good.” Futurism issued comprehensive theoretical programs, but Imagism shunned such ambitions: “a school does not mean in the least that one writes poetry to a theory.” (This claim echoes contemporary reviewers who charged that Futurist paintings were “rather a theoretic extension than a spontaneous development.”) And whereas Futurism was based on a systematic interpretation of modernity, Imagism was purely a matter of writerly technique: “Their watchword was Precision,” and they opposed only “interminable effusions.”<sup>12</sup> These features were accentuated in subsequent pronouncements. In March, 1913 Pound published an essay that explicitly posed an opposition between Imagism and Futurism: “The *Imagistes* admitted that they were contemporaries of the Post Impressionsists and the Futurists; but they had nothing in common with these schools. They had not published a manifesto. They were not a revolutionary school ...” Accompanying this was a second essay also by Pound, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” its very title implicitly repudiating the manifesto genre.<sup>13</sup> Imagism, though commonly treated as the first avant-garde movement in English literature, was something quite different – it was the first anti-avant-garde.

Imagism was being overtaken by events before its anti-program was fully formulated, a result of its failure to address the complications and unexpected consequences entailed in Marinetti’s novel use of publicity and theatricality for culture. Marinetti’s activities were eliding the boundaries that separated different spheres of cultural production; it was no longer the “private gallery,” the polite salon, or the genteel review, but the concert hall and the mass-circulation newspaper that would serve as the new agora of cultural debate. Theoretical consequences were also entailed, and in the months that followed his talk at Bechstein Hall Marinetti elaborated them in a series of four manifestos: “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature” (May, 1912), “A Response to Objections” (August, 1912), the famous “Destruction of Syntax – Radio Imagination – Words-in-Freedom” (June, 1913), and the ambitious “The Variety Theatre” (August, 1913). Already in the first of these he broke new ground by launching a violent assault on the notion of aesthetic autonomy, the very concept of art. “Let us boldly make ‘the ugly’ in literature, and let us everywhere murder solemnity. Go on! Don’t assume those priestly airs when listening to me. Every day we must spit on the *Altar of Art!*” By November, 1913, when Marinetti was again in England and giving lectures to packed houses, he was quoted as saying, “Art is not a religion, not something to be worshipped with joined hands.” Instead it “should express all the intensity of life – its beauty ... sordidness,” and “the very complex of our life to-day.”<sup>14</sup>

These developments were closely followed by London observers of the cultural scene, and English readers were kept abreast. In September, 1913 the journal *Poetry and Drama*, edited by Harold Monro, devoted an entire issue to examining Futurism. (Its previous issue had granted only a paragraph to Imagism.) It included a translation of “The Destruction of Syntax” and thirty pages of poems by Marinetti and his colleagues. In a prefatory editorial, Monro praised Marinetti warmly, hailing him for dissolving the distinction between poetry and popular culture, art and life. Marinetti had gained

“22,000 adherents” and his book *The Futurist Poets* had sold 35,000 copies, a fact that in itself constituted “Marinetti’s most interesting attitude.” Here was poetry no longer written “for ... close and studious scrutiny by the eye” and “no longer ... withheld from the people” by “educationalists” or “intellectuals.” Here, instead, was poetry intended “for the ear” and “for immediate and wide circulation,” poetry “regaining some of its popular appeal.” Marinetti was restoring poetry to its status in an earlier era, an age when “the minstrel and the ballad-monger then represented our modern Northcliffe.” It was a telling reference. Northcliffe, the greatest of the early modern press barons, was famous for having created the *Daily Mail* in 1896, a newspaper whose sales topped one million a day in 1902 and achieved the largest circulation in the world, addressing a mass audience with a mix of arresting stories, appealing format, and attractive competitions. Northcliffe, in short, had blurred the distinction between news and entertainment, turning the news into a species of diversion. Monro’s remark hinted at tensions latent in the collapse of life and art he wished to celebrate: for now there was no longer a meaningful distinction between poetry and the most ephemeral of all commodities, the daily newspaper.<sup>15</sup>

Marinetti returned to London two months after the publication of Monro’s special issue, the object of unprecedented media attention. His daily lectures were carefully reported and attentively analyzed by the press, and on November 21, 1913 he published his most recent manifesto, “The Variety Theatre,” in Northcliffe’s *Daily Mail*. The new work attempted to draw out the institutional and generic consequences of his previous attacks on the concept of aesthetic autonomy, doing so by an intransigent vindication of a despised and popular cultural form. The music hall, wrote Marinetti, “is naturally anti-academical, primitive, and ingenuous, and therefore all the more significant by reason of the unforeseen nature of its fumbling efforts and the coarse simplicity of its resources ... [It] destroys all that is solemn, sacred, earnest, and pure in Art with a capital A.”<sup>16</sup> Six months later Marinetti returned to England again, and now he was given a chance to put his theories into effect, booked to appear at the largest music hall in London, the Coliseum, for an entire week (twice daily, Monday to Saturday, June 15–21). By this time Marinetti had acquired an extraordinary stature in the life of the popular press. His self-portrait appeared on the front cover of the weekly *Sketch*; his views on “Futurist” clothes made headlines; his every lecture was respectfully chronicled and analyzed; and major newspapers competed for advance stories about the “Futurist Music” to be presented at the Coliseum.<sup>17</sup> When Marinetti strode across the stage to deliver his prefatory comments to a concert of Futurist noise-tuners, his every step betokened a momentous event – a crossing of cultural boundaries, a passage into a new realm of cultural practice.

The Coliseum, however, was not an ordinary music hall. Its planning and construction had epitomized new developments that were transforming the world of Edwardian entertainment. Its site had been selected for its proximity to Charing Cross station, addressing the crowds of prosperous and respectable suburbanites who poured into the metropolis for a day’s shopping. They were “middle-class people for whom a visit to a

serious play might seem too ambitious and a visit to a music-hall too racy.” The Coliseum, in other words, offered a version of music hall that was sanitized, deracinated from the culture of the working and lower-middle classes, and assimilated instead to the tastes of a middle class increasingly defined by consumerism. Marie Lloyd, the music-hall star whose risqué lyrics and double-entendres had won an adoring audience, never performed at the Coliseum: she was too vulgar. Opened in 1904, it was the most lavish music hall in London: its seating capacity was 4,000, its stage and proscenium the largest ever built, its architecture distinguished by a massive tower that held a revolving globe with the name “coliseum” in electric lights. Here was something “to catch the attention of those prosperous shoppers” – culture as consumption, art as entertainment.<sup>18</sup> Here was the site of Marinetti’s last theatrical venture in England.

It proved to be a failure, and contemporaries understood the reasons immediately. Reviewing the premiere performance, *The Times* wrote: “Signor Marinetti rather mistook his audience yesterday afternoon, when he tried to deliver an academic exposition of Futurist principles at the Coliseum, and he had, in consequence, to put up with a rude reception from a gallery which seemed fully qualified to give him a lesson in his own ‘Art of Noises.’”<sup>19</sup> Marinetti indeed “mistook his audience,” for he had badly gauged the changes that were overtaking the music halls. His sense of the music hall derived from his observations in Italy, where it was still a vital if troubled genre of urban popular culture, a hybrid form that addressed a public still making the transition from a largely agrarian to a more urban lifestyle, a form that adopted motifs of the village carnival in order to treat the dislocations of metropolitan experience. In England, however, the music hall was dying – indeed, already dead. It was a corpse that was experiencing a spurious afterlife through its incorporation into the “Palace of Variety,” the new institution of an advancing consumer economy; no longer the hybrid creation of popular experience, it was a prototype of mass commodity culture. After World War I it would be swept away by Hollywood cinema. Marinetti’s failure only makes more ironic the fate of the second endeavor that was planned by Pound and his colleagues in answer to the success that Marinetti had been enjoying in late 1913 and early 1914 – the invention of a new movement named Vorticism that was to be embodied in a review called *Blast*. The journal appeared scarcely two weeks after Marinetti’s fiasco at the Coliseum. Filled with belligerent manifestos and a typographical style that signaled its origins all too plainly, the journal was virtually a graphic counterpart to a music-hall performance. *Blast* was greeted with a revealing lack of critical acceptance; contrary to what later critics have urged, contemporaries were neither shocked nor provoked by it, but simply bored – and not because it represented an incomprehensible novelty, but because it was all too familiar: “Almost all the pictures reproduced are (like the typesetting of the first pages), Futurist in origin, and nothing else. And as for the productions of the literary Vortices, these are not even so fresh as that ... All it really is is a feeble attempt at being clever. *Blast* is a flat affair. We haven’t a movement here, not even a mistaken one.” And in perhaps the most cutting words of all, the same reviewer remarked:



Mr. Pound used to be quite interesting when he was a remote pass  eist and wrote about the Proven  al troubadours; but as a revolutionary I would rather have Signor Marinetti, who is at any rate a genuine hustler, whereas Mr. Pound assuming violence and ruthlessness is as unimpressive in his movements as a man who is trying to use someone else's coat as a pair of trousers.<sup>20</sup>

*Blast* was indeed a dull affair, also yielding poems that are among the dreariest that Pound ever produced. His attempt to address and provoke an audience through a programmatic polemical onslaught had proved a failure in economic, intellectual, and critical terms.

Initially, then, Marinetti's practical and theoretical activities in London during the period 1912–14 had two related effects on Pound and what has come to be termed the Anglo-American avant-garde. One was to reconfigure the relations among the institutions in which the discourse of art and poetry were produced, forcing intellectuals and artists to assay the potential role of new institutions of mass culture and their bearings on the place of art in a cultural marketplace being radically transformed. The other was to precipitate a collapse of the entire set of distinctions between art and commodity, to effect a perceptible, irreversible leveling of both within the single and amorphous category of the commodity. Further, by late 1914 it was clear that the principal attempts to address or resolve these dilemmas had been failures, whether it was the rearguard restoration effort of Imagism or the imitative gesture of *Blast*. But if one could neither go back to reconstruct the aristocracy of the salon nor rush forward to embrace the egalitarianism of the commodity, what solution was there? The answer, paradoxically, was to do a little of both – to reconstruct an aristocracy, but to reconstruct it within the world of the commodity. To accept, in other words, the status of art as a commodity, even as it was simultaneously transformed into a special kind of commodity, a rarity capable of sustaining investment value. Or to reformulate this, the answer to the leveling effect precipitated by a consumer economy was to defer consumption into the future, to transform it into investment; which is to say, to encourage or even solicit the ephemeral allure of the consumer economy, acknowledging the status of art as commodity, but to postpone and sublimate its consumption by turning it into an object of investment whose value will be realized only in the future. "Art," we might say, becomes "news that stays news."

In concrete terms, this meant that what had once been an aristocracy of patron-saloniers would now be replaced by an elite of patron-investors. For the Anglo-American avant-garde, the future lay in the new patronage provided by a small group of people such as John Quinn; Harriet Shaw Weaver; Scofield Thayer; and James Sibley Watson, Jr. The actualization of this new space within the commodity economy was achieved primarily through the new and unprecedented use of two institutions that had already existed for some time, but which now became central to an emerging apparatus of cultural production: the little review and the limited or deluxe edition, venues located in a

profoundly ambiguous social space, simultaneously sequestered and semi-withdrawn from the larger institution of publishing, situated instead within a submarket of collecting. It was in the little reviews – among them the *Little Review*, the *Egoist* and the *Dial* – that the principal masterpieces of the Anglo-American avant-garde would first be published. Likewise, their second appearance was almost uniformly in limited editions of 200 copies (such as *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*) or 254 copies (Eliot's *Ara vos prec*), or the 1,000 copies of *Ulysses* – editions at the farthest possible remove from the 35,000 copies of *The Futurist Poets*. And in this new social space, the kind of publicization that had once been aimed at a mass audience along the lines pursued by Marinetti and imitated by *Blast* was no longer of use. Asked by Margaret Anderson in 1917 how best to announce his collaboration on the *Little Review*, Pound now replied: “if it is any use for advertising purposes, you may state that a single copy of my first book has just fetched £8 (forty dollars).” Similarly, seven years later when William Bird was drafting the prospectus for the first edition of *A Draft of XVI. Cantos* (a limited edition of ninety copies), Pound would urge the same argument: “Your best ad is the quiet statement that at auction recently a copy of Mr. P's [first book] ‘A Lume Spento’ published in 1908 at \$1.00 (one dollar) was sold for \$52.50.”<sup>21</sup> These remarks, far from advancing assertions of intrinsic and autonomous aesthetic value, offer straightforward claims about the performance record of investments within a commodity economy: by 1917 *A lume spento* was increasing in value at more than 50 percent a year, by 1924 at 28 percent a year, and the same should now prove true of the *Little Review* or *A Draft of XVI. Cantos*. The reason to buy these was not necessarily to read them, but to be able to sell them – perhaps at a substantial profit. Readers, in short, were giving way to an uneasy mixture of patron-investors, collectors, speculators on the rare-book market, all situated within a complex and highly unstable institutional space.

What the patron-investors provided with their subsidies and endowments was an institutional space momentarily immune to the pressures of the larger market economy, partially removed from the constraints of an expansive and expanding mass culture. Yet that same space was simultaneously being transformed by its proximity to the small (and hence malleable) submarket for rare books and deluxe editions, a submarket just then being “modernized,” just then becoming aware of the potential value of works by authors still living, in part as a result of its own interconnections with collecting in the visual arts. Accepting the collapse of art and the triumph of commodity culture, Modernism created a new distinction within commodity culture itself, distinguishing between commodities whose value is exhausted in immediate consumption and those whose worth is deferred or sublated into the future as investment. Doing so, Modernism gained for itself – for an evanescent moment – a breathing space within the present, a space from which it could formulate its often powerful critique of commodity capitalism, even as – and at the same time as – it mortgaged that critique in the future, mirroring the very system that it damned. But the consequences of this precarious and unstable compromise could not be forever deferred. For it was an inevitable outcome of this situation that the avant-garde's distaste for the dictates of the marketplace should ultimately be revealed as disingenuous

precisely because, and insofar as, the works of the avant-garde began to command ever more significant prices within the larger open market. After that it was only a matter of time before we should see the emergence of forms of art that were already “precommodified,” art that ironically and even nostalgically acknowledges its own exchange function, art that finds its richest moments – in several senses – in the works of Andy Warhol. Here the dwindling isles of authenticity welcome their own commodification as objects of tourism, producing the ennui of “postmodernism.”

Early in January, 1922, T. S. Eliot brought a disorderly sheaf of manuscripts to Paris, planning to ask his colleague Ezra Pound for a critical assessment of his work in progress. Leaving Paris a few weeks later, his manuscript now heavily marked by Pound, Eliot departed with the poem that we know as *The Waste Land*, a work that not only differed from what he had originally brought, but that would soon require an institutional venue through which to address a public, however defined. In the next eight months, from February to September, Eliot and Pound would engage in elaborate negotiations with the editors of three US periodicals, or in some cases with their friends or associates, in the hope of finding an appropriate American publisher.<sup>22</sup> (Evidently they assumed that the poem would appear in Britain in Eliot’s own journal, later the *Criterion*, although in January, 1922 it had neither acquired a name nor announced a publication date.) Taken together, the three journals present a spectrum of Modernist publishing and trace the contours of an institutional structure crucial to Modernism’s success, an ensemble of agents, practices, and protocols that gave Modernism its distinctive character.

The three journals that were candidates to publish *The Waste Land* in the USA were the *Little Review*, the *Dial*, and *Vanity Fair*. Undoubtedly the easiest way to distinguish them is by the size of their readerships: the *Little Review* had the smallest circulation, the *Dial* was a significantly larger concern, and *Vanity Fair* was the largest of them all. But however useful as a mnemonic device, circulation was only one aspect within a much larger complex of features that constituted these journals’ identities.

The *Little Review* was founded in March, 1914 in Chicago by Margaret Anderson. In late 1916 she moved the journal to New York, where it would remain until 1922 when Anderson moved to Paris. Also in late 1916, Anderson received an offer of collaboration from Ezra Pound, who proposed that he be allowed to edit at his discretion a certain number of pages per issue; contributors to these pages would be paid from a fund of £150 (\$750) per year provided by John Quinn, a prominent New York corporate lawyer and cultural patron, with Pound himself distributing the funds, including a small allotment for his own salary (£60 per year). Anderson agreed and the new section appeared for the first time in May, 1917 and continued until March, 1919; among other works, it contained the serial version of *Ulysses*. It was not long before Quinn’s role in supporting the *Little Review* expanded to include an additional subsidy of \$1,600 per year (\$1,200 provided by a coterie of donors who were his friends). Pound ceased collaborating with the *Little Review* in early 1919, going on to become Paris correspondent and talent scout

for the *Dial* in 1920.<sup>23</sup> The *Little Review*, meanwhile, continued publishing episodes of *Ulysses* until the number for July–August, 1920, which was seized by US postal authorities and charged with obscenity in September. Five months later the journal was convicted. Lacking further support from Quinn, it was forced to cut back from monthly to quarterly publication. After 1923 even its quarterly appearances grew irregular, though with occasional subsidies it continued to publish until 1929.

The ongoing support of Quinn and his coterie of patrons meant that the *Little Review* existed in a special space that was semi-isolated from the direct demands of the larger market economy. Though Pound and Quinn repeatedly urged that the journal be more careful in its book-keeping, no one truly expected the *Little Review* to be profitable and its editors remained largely indifferent to such issues. The total circulation of the *Little Review* was just over 3,000. Of this figure, 2,500 were subscribers, while between 500 and 600 copies were sold at a handful of retail outlets – in New York, for example, at the Washington Square Bookshop, the Sunwise Turn, and Brentano's.<sup>24</sup> These stores, however, sold the journal less as a periodical competing with others available in the wider marketplace, more as a rarity complementing a collection of contemporary literature and art, one that might also prove a good investment. As we have seen, when Anderson asked Pound how best to announce his collaboration with the *Little Review*, he advised her to cite the increase in value likely to accrue to each issue of the journal in the years ahead. The *Little Review*, in other words, cannot really be viewed as a form of publication opposed to the dominant magazines of the mass market, for in practice it did not compete within that market, but bypassed it. Instead, it was the periodical counterpart to the deluxe edition, a rarity potentially liable to rise in value on the collectors' market, a market just beginning to view contemporary literature as a field of interest.

The role of the patron, therefore, became radically more ambiguous, an ambiguity reflected in Pound's uncertainty concerning the noun to use when describing those whose money would underwrite the Modernist venture. Corresponding with Margaret Anderson, for example, he oscillated between "guarantors" and "investors."<sup>25</sup> The terminological uncertainty merely recapitulated a confusion already epitomized in the little review: presented as "pure" art inimical to the demands of the marketplace, it was also being resituated within the economy of rare-book collecting, a world of deluxe editions and little reviews that increasingly overlapped with the domains of art galleries and dealers. The interconnections linking this intricate network are mapped in an almost casual suggestion by Pound, delivered to Margaret Anderson in 1917, concerning an advertiser in the *Little Review*: "If I didn't say so before, I will say now, that the Mod[ern] Gallery ought to pay for half a dozen reproductions a month, simply cost of blocks and printing. It would add to us, and advertise their painters." Pound was referring to the Modern Gallery, which first opened in 1916 and lasted until late 1921. Marius de Zayas, its owner, was a minor artist and journalist who had previously been associated with Alfred Stieglitz and the "291" Gallery; but whereas "291" had provided

only an exhibition space, de Zayas opened his new gallery in order, as he put it, “to do business.”<sup>26</sup> The gallery’s principal clients were Eugene and Agnes Meyer, Arthur B. Davies, Walter Arensberg, and John Quinn. Few indeed, though fit enough. In 1920 alone Quinn purchased nearly \$24,000 worth of works from de Zayas, and even after returning two paintings in early 1921, the sum of his 1920 purchases totaled almost \$13,000. The figure should not be underestimated. Throughout the 1920s, for example, the executive secretary to Frank Crowninshield, editor of *Vanity Fair*, earned but \$1,144 per year; if the same position today would earn roughly \$35,000, Quinn’s purchases would equal a figure around \$390,000.<sup>27</sup> And Quinn, of course, was also the primary guarantor of the *Little Review*. Thus, it is Quinn who buys the paintings from the gallery that advertises in the journal that, also supported by Quinn, writes the art criticism that praises and increases the value of the paintings purchased ... well, by Quinn. Success, even survival, could depend on a small nucleus of patron-investors of just this sort.

The *Little Review* maintained a low ratio of advertising to circulation revenues, roughly 1 to 10.<sup>28</sup> This figure is important because it flew in the face of conventional wisdom in periodical publishing as it had evolved between 1890 and 1910, the period when it was first appreciated that one could sell a magazine for less than it actually cost to produce it by shifting the cost away from subscribers and onto advertisers. To do so, however, required a mass audience whom advertisers would pay to address. The *Little Review*, instead, earned the bulk (89 percent) of its revenues from circulation (apart from its subsidies, of course), and above all from subscriptions, which means that it survived by maintaining a direct rapport with a restricted group of readers. To put it differently, the *Little Review* represented a return to the kind of direct relationship with readers that had typified literary magazines in the genteel tradition of elite bourgeois readership.

The *Dial* was in some respects a publication quite different from the *Little Review*. Its two owners and coeditors were both from wealthy backgrounds. Scofield Thayer was heir to a fortune made in the manufacturing woollens in Worcester, Massachusetts, while James Sibley Watson, Jr. was the scion of families who were among the original investors in the Western Union Telegraph Company. The two men had purchased the *Dial* in late 1919, a journal that came with a venerable history but troubles in its recent past. Begun in Chicago in 1880 and unaltered until 1913, when its founder and first editor died, the *Dial* had at first been continued by the founder’s sons (1913–16), then purchased and managed by Martyn Johnson (1916–18), who had enlisted financial backing from Thayer in late 1918 in order to expand the journal and move it to New York. Finally it had been purchased outright by Thayer and Watson, who published their first issue in January, 1920, issuing it monthly until 1929.<sup>29</sup>

The wealth of Thayer and Watson enabled them to support the *Dial* with patronage that was truly massive. From 1920 to 1922, the journal’s annual deficits were respectively \$100,000; \$54,000; and \$65,000: a cumulative shortfall of \$220,000 that Thayer and Watson each supplied at the rate of \$4,000 per month. (Recall the \$2,350



per year that John Quinn and his syndicate provided the *Little Review*.) Not surprisingly, the *Dial* was also a significantly larger operation. Its total circulation in 1922 was 9,500, and its number of subscribers was 2.5 times larger than the *Little Review*'s: 6,374, compared with 2,500 for the *Little Review* in 1917. Its ratio of advertising to circulation revenues was not 1 to 10, but 1 to 3 (specifically, \$9,320 to \$31,400) – to be sure, a figure still below that expected of a commercial periodical, but significantly above the level reached by the *Little Review*.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, as in many others, the *Dial* stood midway between the *Little Review* and *Vanity Fair*, and in its efforts to break even it consistently imitated the practices of both its rivals. Thus, throughout the early 1920s Thayer and Watson discussed plans for what they termed a “millionaires’ number” of the *Dial*, one to be printed on special paper as a deluxe or limited edition of the journal itself, an issue that they planned to circulate among potential patrons in order to raise funds and reduce the *Dial*'s deficit.<sup>31</sup> Yet simultaneously they insistently pursued a campaign of publicity and struggled to increase retail sales in order to raise circulation and hence advertising revenues. The *Dial*, in other words, remained perennially uncertain about its status and aims: was it a commercial publisher seeking profitability or a vehicle of disinterested patronage free of commercial considerations? This was also the question that haunted the journal's discussions with Eliot over *The Waste Land*. When Eliot learned that another author had received a payment much higher than the figure offered to him, he withdrew the poem. As Pound explained to Thayer:

That being the case I can hardly reprove Eliot – if you have put the thing on a commercial basis, for holding out for as high a price as he can get. [Added in autograph in margin:] (*i.e. if The Dial is a business house, it gets business treatment. If The Dial is a patron of literature T. contends it should not pay extra rates for “mere senility” ...*)<sup>32</sup>

In many respects, the *Dial* mediated between the *Little Review* and *Vanity Fair*. The *Dial*, for example, repeatedly published material that had previously appeared in the *Little Review*, such as Wyndham Lewis's painting *Starry Sky* or a photo of Ossip Zadkine's *Holy Family*.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, at times all three journals were publishing the same material: the spring, 1922 issue of the *Little Review* was devoted to works by Brancusi, the May number of *Vanity Fair* showed photographs of the same works, while the November issue of the *Dial* reproduced Brancusi's *Golden Bird* for a third time in the same year. Its mediating role was also apparent in editorial policy. While the *Little Review* boasted its intransigent aestheticism on the masthead (“no compromise with the public taste”), the *Dial* was more cautious: in a letter of November, 1922 Thayer told his managing editor that he wished to publish works that “have *aesthetic value* and are not *commercially suicidal*” (Thayer's emphases). “Not commercially suicidal,” when translated into ordinary prose, means *might be successful*. Its official policy was also a compromise: it invoked the philosophical idealism of Benedetto Croce to justify eclectic

aestheticism and patrician urbanity, the conviction that “one must confine one’s self to works of art” independent of social or moral considerations.<sup>34</sup> The *Dial* differed from the *Little Review* and *Vanity Fair*, not in substantive ideology, but in its tone of gravity.

Yet the *Dial* did not just borrow from the *Little Review*. In other respects it strove to imitate *Vanity Fair*, owned by Condé Nast. Editorially it copied *Vanity Fair*’s practice of offering a regular “London Letter” and a “Paris Letter,” and it imitated *Vanity Fair*’s institution of so-called “service departments,” which offered the reader advice and arrangements for the purchase of books and travel. Its layout and design were also conspicuously similar, and by 1922 the *Dial* was even sharing the same printing operations. It also attempted to integrate editorial and advertising functions in ways reminiscent of *Vanity Fair*: its monthly listing of gallery exhibitions took pains to praise its own advertisers. And like *Vanity Fair*, too, its management stressed publicity, advertising revenues, and street sales (as opposed to subscriptions). It developed displays to be set up at newsstands, and it aggressively cultivated a larger metropolitan public. (Eliot counseled Thayer to pursue the same course in Britain, urging him to “arrange for the paper to be visible and handy on every bookstall, at every tube station.”)<sup>35</sup> Again, when the *Dial* published *The Waste Land* and announced that he would receive the journal’s annual Dial Award, Thayer ordered the staff to keep track of every reference to these events in the press, an early form of market testing.<sup>36</sup> Above all, the *Dial* imitated the central principle which lay behind the success of *Vanity Fair* and its sister journal *Vogue*: in an era when most publishers were attempting magazines aimed at a mass market, Condé Nast and *Vanity Fair* deliberately appealed to a select, restricted audience.

Indeed, the *Dial* was acutely conscious of its competition with *Vanity Fair*, a theme that recurs in letter after letter by Thayer. To his mother he complained that contributors and staff members of the *Dial* were writing too frequently for *Vanity Fair*. To his managing editor he lamented: “If we have no aesthetic standards whatever in what respect are we superior to Vanity Fair which in other respects gives more for the money?” A month later Thayer urged him to hasten the printing of a new photograph “lest ‘Vanity Fair’ get ahead of us on this point too.” And four months later he ordered him to secure rights to a new painting by Picasso: “Otherwise Vanity Fair will be getting it.” How closely the market for the two journals overlapped became clear when the *Dial* issued its special art folio in mid 1923. Eager to stimulate sales, Thayer begged Seldes to intervene: “Cannot you get Rosenfeld to write the thing up for Vanity Fair, which is our most important selling possibility?”<sup>37</sup>

To be sure, the *Dial* and *Vanity Fair* were not twins. By comparison the *Dial* was a modest operation. Its \$9,320 in advertising revenues was tiny when compared to the \$500,000 per annum generated by *Vanity Fair*. Paid advertising also occupied less space: in the November, 1922 issue, which printed *The Waste Land*, 27.5 of 156 pages (or 17.6 percent) were taken up by advertising. Compare this with the July, 1923 issue of *Vanity*

*Fair*, which contained a selection of Eliot's earlier poems: 76 out of 140 pages were devoted to paid advertising (54 percent), and many articles offered fashion and automobile reviews that were advertising thinly disguised. In 1922 the *Dial*'s circulation stood at 9,000 copies per month; in the same year *Vanity Fair*'s reached 92,000.<sup>38</sup>

Yet this latter figure should not mislead us into confusing *Vanity Fair* with mass-circulation periodicals such as the *Saturday Evening Post* or *McClure's*, whose circulations were numbered in millions, not thousands. *Vanity Fair* shared with those magazines a recognition of the primacy of advertising, but it adapted that principle to different ends. Condé Nast, *Vanity Fair*'s owner and publisher, was a pioneer in what is now called niche marketing. He recognized, in other words, that a variety of luxury consumer goods required not a mass audience, but a more select one of well-to-do readers. His task was to capture that audience and sell its purchasing power, its large amounts of disposable income, to advertisers. "Anything high-priced," Nast contended, "is better advertised in a periodical with readers of a special type – people of breeding, sophistication and means."<sup>39</sup> Nast began *Vanity Fair* after he had already been successful with magazines covering fashion (*Vogue*) and interior decoration (*House and Garden*), and in his third venture he adopted the same approach to the topic of arts and leisure: ideas were to be treated as matters of style, as intellectual fashions, not as eternal verities. *Vanity Fair*, whose first issue appeared in September, 1913, might well be defined as a periodical counterpart to the Coliseum: it appealed to the same audience increasingly defined by consumption, by the purchase of luxury consumer goods, and by stylishness in all things.

Eliot, as we know, elected to publish *The Waste Land* not in the *Little Review* or *Vanity Fair*, but in the *Dial*. There were several reasons for this. One was a simple matter of personal finances. The *Dial* offered to give Eliot the annual Dial Award of \$2,000 as a price for the poem, even though officially it would pay only its standard rate of \$150. And because Eliot had already reached an agreement for book publication with Horace Liveright, raising the possibility that sales of the *Dial* might detract from sales of the book version, the *Dial* also agreed to purchase 350 copies of the first printing. *Vanity Fair* could not match such sums; the highest price it ever paid to any contributor was \$100, given to F. Scott Fitzgerald for a short story. The *Little Review*, cast adrift by Quinn, could no longer pay contributors at all. The massive patronage provided by Thayer and Watson created an artificial space in which it was possible, on some occasions, to earn more money by publishing for fewer readers. Another reason, no doubt, was the intangible issue of status and popularity. *Vanity Fair* was not a popular magazine of the same sort as the *Saturday Evening Post*, but its substantial circulation and light-hearted tone could not sound the note of aesthetic gravity associated with the *Dial*. Eliot wanted his poem to be successful, but not too successful.

The relationship between the three journals was partly a synchronic or structural one, partly a diachronic or temporal one. Each represented a moment in the growth and triumph of Modernism. When Eliot suggested the *Little Review* as a potential publisher



in early 1922, his proposal looked back to the world of Modernism's past, to its origins in an exiguous coterie and the heady days of 1917–18 when his poems and articles had appeared in the rebellious journal. When Pound suggested in midsummer, 1922 that *The Waste Land* be published by *Vanity Fair*, his proposal looked forward to Modernism's future, to the ease and speed with which a market economy, and in particular an economy of luxury consumer goods, could purchase, assimilate, commodify, and reclaim as its own the works of a literature often deeply inimical towards its ethos and cultural operations. The *Dial*, in 1922, represented Modernism's present. Yet the future was fast approaching, as is illustrated by the fate of Eliot's own work shortly after the publication of *The Waste Land*. Only seven months later, in June, 1923, *Vanity Fair* devoted an entire page to reprinting earlier poems by Eliot: among them were "Sweeney among the Nightingales" (first published in the *Little Review* in 1918), "A Cooking Egg" (first published in a tiny journal named *Coterie* in 1919), and "Burbank with a Baedeker" (first published in the short-lived *Art and Letters* in 1919). Linking the poems was an editorial box in the center of the page, presumably composed by Edmund Wilson (*Vanity Fair*'s managing editor), which lucidly articulated the journal's assumptions and aims:

Since the publication of *The Waste Land*, Mr. T. S. Eliot has become the most hotly contested issue in American poetry. He has been frequently attacked for his unconventional form and what many readers consider his obscurity. But if one has read Mr. Eliot's earlier poems ... from which the present selection is made, one gets the key to both his technique and his ideas.

In subsequent months *Vanity Fair* conducted an intense campaign, printing essays by Eliot in July, 1923; November, 1923; and February, 1924; while in September, 1923 it published a study of Eliot's work by Clive Bell. Eliot had indeed become "the most hotly contested issue in American poetry" – *Vanity Fair* and the *Dial* had said so themselves.<sup>40</sup>

Despite their diversity, one set of interests did bind together the *Little Review*, the *Dial*, and *Vanity Fair* – their involvement with the visual arts. All three journals were copious in publishing photographs of contemporary painting and sculpture. More important, however, was the affiliation that this signaled with the world of contemporary art collecting. John Quinn, who was patron of the *Little Review*; Scofield Thayer, who was co-owner, patron, and editor of the *Dial*; and Frank Crowninshield, who was the editor of *Vanity Fair*: all were major buyers of contemporary art. Quinn's purchases, as we have seen, totaled \$24,000 in 1920 alone. In 1923, to give only one example, he purchased Cézanne's portrait of his father; a huge still-life interior by Matisse, six by eight feet; *The Jungle* by Rousseau; five Picassos, including the magnificent *Portrait of William Uhde*; two small works by Braque; and three major works by Brancusi. Thayer was almost as active: after residing in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin, and acting under the influence of Herwarth Walden, owner of the famous *Der Sturm* gallery, Thayer gathered

a judicious collection of pre-World War I German expressionists, including Kokoschka, along with a substantial number of works by Picasso, Matisse, and others, and at his instigation the *Dial* published a lavish collection of contemporary art reproductions titled *Living Art*. Frank Crowninshield was also a collector: his penthouse flat housed eighteen paintings by Segonzac, five Modiglianis, seven Pascins, a large collection of African art, and one work by virtually every major painter in Paris. Often he drew upon his own collection for works to be reproduced in the magazine, also writing captions for photographic art features himself.<sup>41</sup> In 1929 he became one of the original seven-member board of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), and when Alfred Barr first announced the formation of the museum in 1929, he did so, revealingly, with an essay in *Vanity Fair*. Quinn himself also published two essays in *Vanity Fair*, one on the sculptor Jacob Epstein and another on Joyce, a selection that suggests the extent to which contemporary art and literature might be paired. And when Quinn held a private party in 1923 to unveil his new Seurat, the great *Le Cirque*, he invited only his immediate family and Frederick James Gregg, the lead writer on art for *Vanity Fair* and an old friend.<sup>42</sup>

These patterns of collecting and patronage can help us better understand the rationale that informed the discussion about where to publish *The Waste Land* – and a pattern that emerges in the publishers’ deliberations for the poem. When one emissary from *Vanity Fair* wrote from Paris to urge that the New York office acquire the poem, he had not yet read a word of its text. “Pound says [*The Waste Land* is] as fine as anything written in English since 1900,” wrote the agent. When Horace Liveright first advanced his offer to publish the poem in book form in January, 1922, he too had not read a word of the poem; he based his decision on Pound’s judgment that, “Eliot’s *Waste Land* is I think the justification of the ‘movement,’ of our modern experiment, since 1900.” And in an especially arresting formulation, Pound urged Scofield Thayer to acquire the poem for the *Dial* on the grounds that it was “as good in its way as *Ulysses* in its way.”<sup>43</sup> To Thayer, these were resonant terms, for the *Dial* office had ordered nine copies of the first edition of *Ulysses*, Thayer himself taking two of the most expensive copies. Likewise, when his coeditor Watson visited Pound in Paris in mid July, he was treated to the same arguments just at the moment when the first edition of *Ulysses* had sold out. Little wonder that Watson and Thayer should decide, one week later, to pay Eliot more than \$2,000 for a poem that neither of them had yet read. For Watson and Thayer, acquiring *The Waste Land* was essential to their battle to secure the hegemonic status of the *Dial*. The announcement of the award would constitute the poem’s status, which in turn would redound to the credit of the *Dial*. Their decision was based on a shrewd assessment of the interaction between aesthetic value, publicity, and money in a market economy.

In an important sense, the question of aesthetic value is inseparable from commercial success in a market economy, a difficulty that beset every argument for the intrinsic merit of literary Modernism. By 1922 literary Modernism required a financial-critical success that would lend it the kind of prestige already acquired by Modernist painting;

yet every step in this direction was hampered by market constraints less amenable to the kinds of pressures from elite patronage and investment that crystallized in the collections of Quinn, Thayer, or Crowninshield. The legal definition of intellectual property – it continues to belong to the author after its purchase by the consumer, in contrast to a painting or statue, which become the property of the purchaser – posed a series of intractable dilemmas. Patronage could nurture literary Modernism only to the threshold of its confrontation with a wider public; beyond that it would require commercial success to ratify its viability as a significant idiom. That was the question that haunted discussions about *The Waste Land*: assuming that the poem epitomized the investment of twenty years in the creation of a collective idiom – “our modern experiment, since 1900” – the protagonists were obliged to find a return on their investment in modernity.

The ambiguity of the *Dial*’s position is revealing here. For while Thayer scorned *Vanity Fair* and its apparent commercialism, he too was actively engaged in purchasing works of modern art and sculpture, and he too was an investor in a market commodity whose value was rapidly rising in large part through the efforts of the publicity apparatus that he himself owned and controlled. Literary Modernism, by analogy, was now courting the risk of becoming “smart art,” an investment that might pay and pay well if successful in the expanding market for modernity. But pay whom?

When *The Waste Land* was published, it did not enter a conduit that received and reproduced a natural image of its original, but a multiplicity of social structures driven by conflicting imperatives: it became part of a social event in a discontinuous yet coherent process, an unprecedented effort to affirm the output of a specific marketing-publicity apparatus through the enactment of a triumphal and triumphant occasion. It was not simply the institutions that were the vehicle of the poem, but the poem that became the vehicle of the institutions – inseparable, finally, from the contradictory utilizations that had constituted it historically.

T. S. Eliot, we recall, had arrived in Paris on January 2, 1922. One month later, at 7 o’clock in the morning, Sylvia Beach hurriedly took a taxi to the Gare de Lyon to greet the morning express train from Dijon. As it slowed beside the platform, she later recalled, a conductor stepped down and handed her a small bundle that contained two copies of the first edition of *Ulysses*. Beach, proprietor of an English-language bookshop in Paris named “Shakespeare and Company,” was elated. She hastened to the hotel at which Joyce was residing and personally handed him his own copy, a present for his birthday; then she hurried back to her store and placed the second copy in the window. Soon a crowd of onlookers gathered to celebrate the august event and admire the volume’s handsome blue cover.<sup>44</sup>

This account, Beach’s own, confirms widespread if unstated assumptions about the publication of *Ulysses*, and so also about literary Modernism. Joyce and Beach are cast into saintly roles, heroes who succeed despite a benighted legal system and the philistine

masses; and their efforts are promptly appreciated by a small yet discerning circle of readers whose insight will later be confirmed by critics and scholars, eventually resulting in the book's canonical status. In reality, however, individual readers played only a limited role in shaping the success that greeted the first edition of *Ulysses*; on the whole, their importance was slight, and it remained decidedly secondary to that of another group, the dealers and speculators in the rare-book trade who bought the overwhelming majority of copies of the first edition. Paradoxically, the publication of *Ulysses* had the effect not of confirming the importance of discerning readers, but of demonstrating that readers might be superfluous. How did such a state of affairs come about, and what does it tell us about the ambivalent question of Modernism and its public?

Plans for the first edition of *Ulysses* were made in April, 1921, days after Joyce learned that the *Little Review* had been convicted in New York of publishing obscenity for having issued the Nausicaa episode, an outcome that effectively eliminated any chance of finding an American publisher to undertake the book. Joyce and Beach agreed swiftly on the kind of publication they wanted. It would be a deluxe edition of 1,000 copies to appear in three issues, i.e. printed on three different grades of paper with corresponding prices.<sup>45</sup> Each copy would be numbered, with copies of the most expensive issue autographed by Joyce. (Table 1 gives prices in francs, pounds sterling, and US dollars.)

**Table 1** *The first edition of Ulysses (1922)*

Issue	Type of paper	Price in francs	Pounds sterling	US dollars
Copies 1–100	Holland hand-made	350 francs	£7 7s	\$30.00
Copies 101–250	Vergé d'Arches	250 francs	£5 5s	\$22.00
Copies 251–1000	Linen paper	150 francs	£3 3s	\$14.00

Beach was acting partly under the guidance of Adrienne Monnier, the proprietor of a French bookstore located near her own. Monnier, who deemed her shop a “half convent” and herself a “nun of other times,” had already published five deluxe editions, and, as Beach later recalled, she now “initiated me into the mysteries of limited editions.”<sup>46</sup> The difference between a limited and an ordinary edition was more than a matter of paper quality. It extended to every feature of the book: price, royalties, discount structure, audience, and authorial control. The cheapest issue of the deluxe edition was priced at five to seven times the normal book price. Royalties, too, were arranged differently. An ordinary edition would have given Joyce royalties of 15 to 20 percent on gross sales; the royalties on a deluxe edition were much larger, typically 50 percent, and Beach herself proposed that Joyce receive 66 percent of net profits. Equally notable were differences in the discount structure. An ordinary edition was normally offered to booksellers at a discount of roughly 30 or 33 percent. A deluxe edition, in

contrast, had an extremely modest discount, typically around 10 percent. The small discount was a direct function of another and more important difference – a change in audience. While an ordinary edition was primarily addressed to individual readers, a deluxe edition was directed partly to a small corpus of well-to-do collectors, but principally to dealers and speculators. Dealers, in other words, were more than simple conduits who sold whatever they had in stock to collectors upon demand: they were also active participants in shaping the market for a specific title; they would sell some copies to preferred clients, but they would also hold others until an edition was exhausted and its value on the collector's market had doubled or tripled.

Beach, following Monnier's lead, conceived her edition along lines that followed protocols of the Parisian trade in deluxe editions. But the circumstances surrounding *Ulysses* were different. The principal audience for the book was located in the USA and the UK, rather than in France; and while Britain had a highly developed infrastructure of export agents who catered to the US book markets, France possessed nothing of comparable capacities. Beach, therefore, needed access to the UK market in order to reach the US market. Moreover, Beach and Joyce had first conceived her edition in response to the collapse of plans for American publication, leaving unresolved the question of a potential British edition. That presented a special problem because Joyce's publisher in the UK was Harriet Shaw Weaver, and Weaver was also Joyce's patron, furnishing him with his only regular income. Weaver had long assumed that she would be publishing an ordinary edition to be released in the UK in tandem with an American edition, just as she had done earlier with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; already in late 1920 she had announced such an edition and by January, 1921 she had collected more than 150 orders for it.<sup>47</sup> When plans for Beach's edition were announced in April, 1921, and described to her solely as a replacement for the American edition, Weaver assumed that she was still free to proceed with her own edition. But a British ordinary edition posed an insuperable obstacle to Beach's project. No one, after all, would want to pay the hefty price of the deluxe edition when a few months' wait would procure the same book at one-fifth or one-seventh the price. By July, 1921 Beach was forced to ask Weaver to cancel the projected UK edition in order to stop the loss of potential orders. Weaver reluctantly agreed.<sup>48</sup> Though she probably thought that she was doing a personal favor for Beach, or for Beach and Joyce, she was also acknowledging the inalterable logic that structures a limited edition. For a limited edition is inherently monopolistic: it presupposes that one can exploit a market by manipulating the ratio of supply and demand, and its fundamental premiss is that supply be issued from one source alone. Only thus can its price be in balance with the modest demand to which it appeals.

A second problem soon arose, again in connection with Weaver. Though Weaver herself was a publisher who had issued seven books between 1916 and 1919, she was wholly ignorant of limited editions, and when she learned that Beach was planning to allow a discount of only 10 percent to booksellers she was shocked: "I have had no



experience of limited expensive editions and it had not occurred to me that booksellers make a practice of buying copies to hold up and sell at double or treble the original price.” Reluctantly, Weaver again assented to Beach’s proposal, but in the months that followed she repeatedly begged her to make exceptions for particular stores or agents who were “not the kind of firm which would be likely to buy copies to hold up and sell at an advanced price.”<sup>49</sup> By midsummer, 1921, as Beach was growing increasingly nervous about the paucity of advance orders – at the same time she was persuading Weaver to cancel plans for the ordinary edition – she at last relented and increased the discount to 20 percent. Her decision had a paradoxical effect: it made the edition more accessible to a wider audience, enabling a modest number of bookstores to place orders on behalf of individual readers; but it also made the edition far more attractive to speculative booksellers, who could now rest assured of a small profit even if they sold it only at the published price, rather than holding the edition in the hope of greater profits.

Orders from dealers and agents soon mounted. Consider only the London firm of William Jackson.<sup>50</sup> On July 7, 1921 the firm ordered eight copies. In August its order was increased to twenty copies, accompanied by a note from Mr. Jackson, adding: “I shall probably want more yet.” In September the order was increased again to thirty-five copies; and in early January, 1922 to seventy copies. On January 19 Jackson wrote to enquire “when the book will be ready,” and after learning that copies would be available in two weeks, he increased his order to eighty copies. Finally, on February 1, he raised his order to a hundred copies. It is an astounding figure, accounting for 10 percent of the entire edition, and for 13 percent of the issue at 150 francs. Of the cheaper copies most likely to be purchased by ordinary readers, nearly one in seven was purchased by a single dealer.

The purchases by Jackson were representative of a broad trend. Of the 1,000 copies of the first edition, 59 percent were purchased by dealers, agents, and stores, while only 41 percent were purchased by individual buyers. Moreover, many of those individual buyers were publishers, journalists, or individual booksellers who also received a 20 percent discount extended to “members of the trade.” When these are subtracted, it turns out that only some 35 percent of the first edition was actually purchased by ordinary readers.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, dealers consumed such a large proportion of the first edition that individual readers could scarcely learn that the book was published before it was sold out. On March 5, 1922, only four weeks after the book’s publication date, Sisley Huddleston published a glowing review of *Ulysses* in the *Observer*, a Sunday newspaper with 200,000 subscribers that appealed to a cultivated audience of upper-middle-class readers. Two days later Beach received orders for 136 copies, and by March 14 she had exhausted the entire supply of cheaper copies at 150 francs.<sup>52</sup> Thereafter readers were obliged to buy the more expensive copies, whether they wished to or not. Many, quite simply, could not afford them. By June 16 the entire edition was sold out, eighteen weeks after publication.

The market dynamics of the limited edition, while forging an opposition between dealers and ordinary readers, also worked to transform the role of the common reader, soliciting him or her to take on some of the functions of the collector and patron. Because the author received 50 percent of the book's sale price (or in Joyce's case 66 percent of net), buyers were effectively turned into patrons directly supporting the artist, a new rapport of seeming immediacy that was restaged in the book itself, which embodied authorial presence in its every feature. Joyce controlled every aspect of the book's production: his approval was required for decisions about paper, typography, cover design, color, even the choice of printing inks. The book was no longer an industrial product shaped by publisher's conventions and production considerations; it was a token of the authorial self.

The market dynamics of the limited edition also worked to transform the reader into an investor of sorts. For a reader of moderate income especially, to purchase the first edition required a considerable aesthetic investment, an assent to strong claims about the work's value. Yet insofar as those claims seemed to be contradicted by a considerable body of critical and public opinion, buyers inevitably appealed to the workings of the marketplace as the final arbiter and guarantor of values in a capitalist economic order. "Most of those who are troubling to seek it out," wrote an anonymous critic in April, 1922, "are buying it as an investment – they flatter themselves that a first edition of this remarkable author will bring them a handsome profit within a few years."<sup>53</sup> It was a deliberately harsh assessment, but it identified a mode of thinking made all but inevitable by the logic of the deluxe edition. That thinking, in turn, bore witness to a much broader phenomenon, the collapse of shared confidence in the notion of aesthetic autonomy and the independent coherence of aesthetic value – a collapse that had been precipitated partly by the theoretical and institutional onslaught that Marinetti and the avant-garde had launched, and partly by the relentless and ever-increasing penetration of capitalist relations into every dimension of life, including the aesthetic. Readers, no longer confident that they could appeal to the public sphere in support of their assertions about the aesthetic value of *Ulysses*, turned to the workings of the market itself, taking its outcomes to be confirmations, even justifications, of their claims.

In a most immediate sense, the market resoundingly gave them its approbation. The price of *Ulysses* soared in the months that followed its publication. In April, 1922, copies of the cheapest issue were already circulating in New York at \$20, a significant jump from the official price of \$14 or \$15. By mid June Adrienne Monnier was selling copies of the 150 franc issue for 500 francs. By August 5 the price of the cheapest issue in London had risen to £10 (compared with the original selling price of £3 3s); by August 15 the price had doubled yet again to £20; and by October copies were selling in London for £40.<sup>54</sup>

Participants in the making of the first edition hailed these results as a victory. "Many congratulations on your success as a publisher," Harriet Shaw Weaver wrote to Sylvia

Beach when she learned that the cheapest issue was sold out. “*Ulysses*,” Ezra Pound declared to an acquaintance, “is ... ‘out’ triumphantly.”<sup>55</sup> Yet the triumph may have been more ambiguous than such statements suggest – indeed, it may have been a Pyrrhic victory of sorts. For in forfeiting demands for public justification to the operations of the marketplace, the participants in the first edition of *Ulysses* encouraged a misunderstanding that has continued to reverberate in debate about the avant-garde and its public. For the marketplace is not, and never can be, free from systemic distortions of power, and its outcomes cannot be equated with undistorted participation in practices of justification, or with norms of equal and universal participation in discussions about cultural and aesthetic value. The operations of the market are not an adequate substitute for free agreement; indeed, they are not a substitute at all, insofar as they are operations of an entirely different order. The invisible hand of Adam Smith is not a moral or rational agent, nor can it be an aesthetic agent. It can never be a substitute for processes of mutual intelligibility and critical justification.

Strangely, and yet appropriately, it was the person who first “initiated” Sylvia Beach “into the mysteries of limited editions,” Adrienne Monnier, who alone among the original participants in the first edition of *Ulysses* came to perceive the immense tragedy that had occurred. Monnier was writing in 1938 and reflecting on the causes of what she now called “the scourge,” the devastation that had followed when the fragile economy of patron-investors lay in ruins and the Modernist experiment was now past.<sup>56</sup>

I have said that the scourge was just and it is true that for several years, even the ones called the years of “prosperity,” we all behaved ourselves rather badly. We made books objects of speculation; we made or let be made a *stock exchange* for books ... Myself, did I not often propose books, saying that in a month the price would have at least doubled? And it was true. And it was so easy to sell under those conditions. Now, repentance! Ah, it was well done!

Despite the apocalyptic note derived from the mystical vocabulary that Monnier loved, she had accurately identified key characteristics in the economy of literary Modernism. It is a commonplace of cultural history that literary patronage gradually vanished in the eighteenth century owing to changes in copyright laws, the spread of literacy, and the steady emergence of a popular market. Yet it is a fact that much of the literature that we now designate under the notion of Modernism was produced under the aegis of a revived patronage that flourished on a remarkable scale. For several reasons, however, the patronage of literary Modernism was rarely the pure, unqualified, or disinterested support that we typically associate with notions of patronage. The extension of capitalist relations into every dimension of life meant that both writers and patrons were uneasy about an institution so clearly at odds with the work ethic, the meritocratic ethos that subtends market relations. As Robert Louis Stevenson put it already in 1881, he would agree to forgo writing popular fiction provided that someone “give me £1,000 ... and at the same



time effect such a change in my nature that I shall be content to take it from them instead of earning it.”<sup>57</sup> Though Quinn quite plainly served as patron to Pound, he always arranged it in such a way that Pound was receiving a salary for some editorial function, whether as foreign editor of the *Little Review* or correspondent and agent for the *Dial*. Patronage, essentially a premodern form of social exchange, had to be disguised as something else if it were not to seem too at odds with the modern world.

One mask that it adopted was the concept of “investment.” Patrons were not just giving away money in misguided sentimentalism about the arts, they were investing in something that would increase in value in the future. But for literature, the question remained: what *was* that something? In March, 1922, only days after learning of the success that was greeting the first edition of *Ulysses*, Pound devised the Bel Esprit project, a proposal that thirty people agree to guarantee £10 (or \$50) per year to T. S. Eliot, so providing him with a guaranteed income of £300 per year. Bel Esprit, he explained to readers, was needed “because the individual patron is nearly extinct.”<sup>58</sup> But although conceived as a replacement for patronage, Bel Esprit was not merely patronage in a new form, a point that Pound stressed to John Quinn:

I can't come back too strongly to the point that I do not consider this Eliot subsidy a pension. I am puke sick of the idea of pensions ... For me my £10 a year on Eliot is an investment ... I put this money into him as I would put it into a shoe factory if I wanted shoes. Better simile, into a shipping company, of say small pearl-fishing ships, some scheme where there was a great deal of risk but a chance of infinite profit.<sup>59</sup>

Yet the metaphor of investment was only partially applicable to literature: normally one's return on a successful investment results in an increase in one's own wealth or property; but since literary property remains the author's, investment could hardly characterize the process Pound wished to describe.

To achieve more congruity between the metaphors of investment and the dilemmas posed by intellectual property, it was necessary to concretize the literary, to turn it into an object. Which is why the deluxe or limited edition acquired such prominence: it transformed literary property into a unique and fungible object, something that more nearly resembled a painting or an objet d'art with auratic presence, a “something” that could genuinely rise in value, at least on the collectors' market. Literary Modernism constitutes a strange and perhaps unprecedented withdrawal from the public sphere of cultural production and debate, a retreat into a divided world of patronage, investment, and collecting. Uneasiness concerning the ethical legitimacy of patronage, corresponding efforts to assimilate patronage to concepts of investment and profit, and the concomitant attempt to objectify literary value in the form of the rare book or deluxe edition – all these trace a profound change in the relations among authors, publishers, critics, and readerships. To a remarkable degree, Modernist literature was an experiment in adopting

exchange and market structures typical of the visual arts, a realm in which patronage and collecting can thrive because its artisanal mode of production is compatible with a limited submarket for luxury goods. Perhaps it is no accident that paintings repeatedly figure as metaphors for the literary work in this period, from *A Portrait of the Artist* to Lily Brisco's abstract portrait of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. A submarket of this sort is extremely responsive to pressures from a small nucleus of patron-collectors: even a single figure or institution can alter its dynamics, as attested by the effects of the Getty Museum in the market for old masters. Modernism required not a mass of readers, but just such a corps of patron-collectors.

The Great Depression devastated the fragile economy of Modernism, and in the absence of the patron-investors who had sustained it during the teens and twenties, Modernism turned to the university, welcoming its direct support (T. S. Eliot gives the Clark lectures at Cambridge in 1926, the Norton lectures at Harvard in 1933) or assenting to its canonization, so guaranteeing a new market of pliant students, rather than unruly general readers. That protracted process has often been noted, usually in the form of a sardonic narration that depicts the academy as a site in which “the subversive, experimental energies of the avant-garde culture of the early part of the century have been formulated, controlled, contained, marketed and cancelled.”<sup>60</sup> Yet one may have doubts about the postulate of a golden age of “subversive, experimental energies” that are only belatedly ensnared in a postlapsarian world of containment and marketing. Modernism's traffic with the emerging world of consumerism and fashion was more complicated, more ambiguous than such narrations tend to assume – ambiguity that may itself account for Modernism's uncertainty regarding the nature of representation in art, its stress on the means by which illusions and likenesses are made. Its radical interrogation of the cultural repertoire that permanently altered the relations of the arts with society at large, may owe much indeed to its equivocal status as an institution that was simultaneously half-withdrawn from, yet half-nestled within, the larger apparatus of cultural production. Academics of today, in presupposing a schematic opposition between “subversion” and “containment,” bear witness only to the poverty of historical imagination with which they address the past. They may well believe that Modernism was once “subversive,” just as *The Times* of London once thought Marinetti guilty of “anarchical extravagance.” But Marinetti himself knew better: “In London,” he wrote to a friend, “our success has been colossal, increasing in a truly fantastic fashion!”<sup>61</sup>

## Notes

1 Charles Dickens, *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 155.

2 Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 47, 163, 161. See also James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger, eds., *Modernity and Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992); Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin, eds., *Modernism and Modernity* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), pp. 215–64.

3 On Pound as "troubadour" see Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters 1909–1914*, ed. Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1984), p. 70; hereafter cited as *EP/DS*. On Cravens see Omar Pound and Robert Spoo, "Introduction" to their *Ezra Pound and Margaret Cravens: A Tragic Friendship, 1910–1912* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988), hereafter cited as *EP/MC*. Income figures are from Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), pp. 23, 20.

4 Pound to Henry Hope Shakespear [March 12, 1912], in *EP/DS*, p. 87. Also in March, 1912, Dorothy Shakespear notes that Selwyn Image, Slade Professor of Art at Oxford, earns £400 per annum, in *ibid.*, p. 94.

5 See *ibid.*, pp. 89 (for the lecture program), 349 (for Lady Low).

6 On the Tennant dynasty, see Simon Blow, *Broken Blood: The Rise and Fall of the Tennant Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987). On Pamela Wyndham and her family, see Caroline Dakers, *Clouds: The Biography of a Country House* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 160–76; on the Tennants' country house, see Clive Aslet, *The Last Country Houses* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 245–55. On Queen Anne's Gate, see Montagu H. Cox and Philip Norman, eds., *The Survey of London*, 47 vols., vol. x, *The Parish of St Margaret, Westminster, Part IV* (London: London County Council, 1926), pp. 78–81, 101–3, 128–31. On 34 Queen Anne's Gate, see Department of the Environment, *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest: City of Westminster, Greater London*, Part 5, *Streets Q–S*, pp. 1333–7. For the collection of paintings housed in the "private gallery," see the catalog ascribed sometimes to Edward, sometimes to Pamela Tennant, *Catalogue of Pictures in the Tennant Gallery, 34, Queen Anne's Gate, S.W., ... Compiled from Various Sources by Various Hands* (London: privately printed, [1910]); and W. Roberts, "The Passing of the Tennant Collection," *The Queen*, 154 (October 18, 1923): 470–1. American libraries catalog Pamela's works under the name Grey, because of her later marriage to Sir Edward Grey; British under Tennant. Her chief works through 1912 are *Village Notes, and Some Other Papers* (London: Heinemann, 1900), a collection of essays; *Windlestraw* (London: printed at the Chiswick Press, 1905), a collection of her own

poems; and *The Children and the Pictures* (London: W. Heinemann, 1907), a work of prose fiction. On Pamela's place in London society, see anon., "In the Great World: Lord and Lady Glenconner," *The Sketch* (December 10, 1913): 298.

**7** Ezra Pound, "Psychology and Troubadours," *Quest* 4.1 (May, 1912): 37–53; reprinted in Lea Baechler, A. Walton Litz, and James Longenbach, eds., *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 10 vols., vol. I, pp. 83–99, here p. 86; hereafter cited as *EPPP*.

**8** See advertisements in *The Times* (March 19, 1912): 1 col. 6, and in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (March 19, 1912): 4 col. 3. Tickets, in four price categories (10s 6d, 5s, 2s 6d, and 1s) could be purchased at Bechstein Hall or the Sackville Gallery.

**9** "A nation of sycophants" is quoted from anon., "'Futurist' Leader in London," *Daily Chronicle* (March 20, 1912): 1 col. 3; "rewarded him" is from anon., "Futurism in Literature and Art," *The Times* (March 21, 1912): 2 col. 6; and "wildly applauded his outspoken derision" is from Harold Monro, "Varia," *Poetry and Drama* 1.3 (September, 1913): 263. See also anon., "Futurism in London," *Morning Leader* (March 21, 1912): 7.

**10** Dorothy Shakespear to Ezra Pound [March 19, 1912], in *EP/DS*, pp. 89–90.

**11** Ezra Pound, "Prefatory Note" to "The Complete Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme" (first published at the end of *Ripostes* in October, 1912), in *Personae*, revised edn. (New York: New Directions, 1990), p. 266; and Christopher Hassall, *Edward Marsh: Patron of the Arts. A Biography* (London: Longmans, 1959), pp. 189–93.

**12** Ezra Pound to Harriet Monroe, August [18], 1912 and [October, 1913], in Ezra Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1970), pp. 10, 11. "Editorial Comment: Status Rerum," dated December 10, 1912, *Poetry* 1.4 (January, 1913): 123–7; reprinted in *EPPP*, vol. I, pp. 111–13; all quotations here are from p. 112. The hostile remark concerning Futurist theory is found in anon., "Fine Art Gossip," *Athenaeum* 4402 (March 9, 1912): 289–90, here p. 290.

**13** F. S. Flint (though actually drafted by Pound and merely rewritten by Flint), "Imagisme," *Poetry* 1.6 (March, 1913): 198–200, reprinted in *EPPP*, vol. I, p. 119; and Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," *Poetry* 1.6 (March, 1913), 200–6, reprinted in *EPPP*, vol. I, pp. 120–2.

**14** F. T. Marinetti, “Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista,” in Luciano De Maria, ed., *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 2nd edn. (Milan: Mondadori, 1983), pp. 53–4; or in English translation in Lawrence Rainey, ed., *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 124. Anon., “Futurism in Poetry,” *The Times* (November 18, 1913): 5 cols. 5–6.

**15** Harold Monro, “Varia,” pp. 263–5. On Northcliffe, see Richard Bourne, *The Lords of Fleet Street: The Harmsworth Dynasty* (1990). The classic text for the Modernist distinction between poetry and journalism is Stéphane Mallarmé, “Crise de vers” and “Sur l’évolution littéraire,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque du Pléiade, 1956), pp. 360–8, 866–72.

**16** “The Variety Theatre” is the title by which the manifesto has since become best known. Originally the English translation was titled, “The Meaning of the Music Hall: By the Only Intelligible Futurist,” in *Daily Mail* (November 21, 1913): 6 col. 4. Page 6 also contained the lead editorial (cols. 2–3), giving the manifesto a prominent *mise-en-scène*.

**17** See the *Sketch* 1111 (May 13, 1914), cover page; and “futurist clothes. Man’s Suit in Single Piece. one button,” *Pall Mall Gazette* (May 28, 1914), 2 col. 3. The *Sketch* also reports that Marinetti “has been lecturing to very interested audiences.” See anon., “Futurist Music: ‘Noisy Tuners’ at a Rehearsal; Cracklers and Roarers,” *Pall Mall Gazette* (June 12, 1914): 1 col. 5.

**18** See Felix Barker, *The House that Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre* (London: Frederick Muller, 1957), here quoting Stoll, p. 11. See also Victor Glasstone, *Victorian and Edwardian Theatres* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), here quoting Stoll, p. 116.

**19** Anon., “art and practice of noise: Hostile Reception of Signor Marinetti,” *The Times* (June 16, 1914): 5 col. 4.

**20** Solomon Eagle [i.e., J. C. Squire], “Current Literature: Books in General,” *The New Statesman* 3.65 (July 4, 1914): 406. Compare anon., “The Futurists,” *The New Statesman* 3.66 (July 11, 1914): 426:

One can forgive a new movement for anything except being tedious: *Blast* is as tedious as an imitation of George Robey by a curate without a sense of humour ... to make up of the pages of *Blast* a winding-sheet in which to wrap up Futurism for burial is to do an



indignity to a genuine and living artistic movement. But, after all, what is Vorticism but Futurism in an English disguise – Futurism, we might call it, bottled in England, and bottled badly? ... the two groups differ from each other not in their aims, but in their degrees of competence.

**21** Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson, May 10, 1917, in Thomas L. Scott, Melvin J. Friedman, and Jackson R. Bryer, eds., *Pound/The Little Review* (New York: New Directions, 1988), p. 46, hereafter cited as *P/LR*; and Ezra Pound to William Bird, May 7, 1924, in Bird Manuscripts, Lilly Library, University of Indiana.

**22** On these negotiations see Lawrence S. Rainey, “The Price of Modernism: Publishing *The Waste Land*,” in Ronald Bush, ed., *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 90–133.

**23** See Ezra Pound to John Quinn, February 8, 1917, in Timothy Materer, ed., *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 95–7, hereafter cited as *EP/JQ*. On Pound’s relations with the *Little Review*, see Thomas L. Scott and Melvin J. Friedman, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, pp. xiii–xxxiv; on the *Little Review* see Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 5 vols., vol. v, *Sketches of 21 Magazines 1905–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 166–78. On Quinn’s syndicate, see B. L. Reid, *The Man from New York: John Quinn and His Friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 343.

**24** Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, vol. v, p. 171, considers it “unlikely that the circulation ever rose to much over a thousand.” His figure is intended to correct the earlier estimate of 2,000 given by Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Caroline F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 57. However, Margaret Anderson in 1917 told Ezra Pound that the total circulation was 3,100, of which 2,500 were subscriptions. Her figures are reported in a letter from Pound to John Quinn, February 8, 1917, in *EP/JQ*, p. 95.

**25** For example, Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson, December 30, 1917 and [? January or February, 1918], in *P/LR*, pp. 170–1, 202.

**26** Pound to Margaret Anderson [November 6, 1917], in *ibid.*, p. 142. “Our object in opening a new gallery is to do business not only to fight against dishonest commercialism but in order to support ourselves and make others able to support themselves” (Marius de Zayas to Alfred Stieglitz, August 27, 1915, Alfred Stieglitz Archive, Beinecke Library, Yale University). See also Douglas Hyland, *Marius de Zayas: Conjuror of Souls*

(Lawrence, KS: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1981), p. 46, who urges that de Zayas sought to make a gallery “which would be a commercial venture in a way that Stieglitz’s had never been.” On de Zayas’s gallery see pp. 46–52.

**27** On Quinn’s purchases, see Hyland, *Marius de Zayas*, p. 48; and Reid, *The Man from New York*, pp. 471–2. For the salary of the executive secretary, see Martha Cohn Cooper, “Frank Crowninshield and *Vanity Fair*,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1976), p. 48.

**28** One way of estimating this figure is by extrapolation from the *Egoist*, a comparable journal. In the second half of 1915 the *Egoist* earned £37 (\$185) in sales and subscriptions, and one surmises that its advertising revenues were around £5; see Jane Lidderdale and Mary Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver: Harriet Shaw Weaver, 1876–1961* (New York: Viking, 1970), p. 99. Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, vol. v, p. 171, estimates that advertising revenues for the *Little Review* “seldom or never exceeded \$500 a year.”

**29** See Nicholas Joost, *Scofield Thayer and “The Dial”* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), pp. 3–20; and *The Dial 1912–1920* (Barre, MA: Barre Publishers, 1967).

**30** All figures are from the annual financial reports of the *Dial*, conserved among “The *Dial Papers*,” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

**31** Joost, *Scofield Thayer and “The Dial,”* pp. 39–40, briefly discusses “the millionaires’ number.” The topic recurs throughout the correspondence between Thayer and Watson in “The *Dial Papers*.”

**32** Ezra Pound to Scofield Thayer, April 23, 1922, “The *Dial Papers*,” Beinecke Library, Yale University, Series 4, Box 38, Folder 1922.

**33** Lewis appeared in the *Little Review* of November, 1918 and the *Dial* of August, 1921; Zadkine in the *Little Review* of December, 1918 and the *Dial* of October, 1921.

**34** Scofield Thayer to Gilbert Seldes, November 28, 1922, in “The *Dial Papers*,” Beinecke Library, Series 4, Box 40, Folder 1922. See [Scofield Thayer], “Comment,” *Dial* 73.1 (July, 1922): 119. Thayer draws on Joel Springarn, *Creative Criticism: Essays on the Unity of Genius and Taste* (New York: Henry Holt, 1917), a work that is

dedicated “to my friend Benedetto Croce, the most original of all modern thinkers on Art.” For Springarn’s influence on the *Dial*, see William Wasserstrom, *The Time of The Dial* (Syracuse, NY: University of Syracuse, 1963), pp. 17–19.

**35** T. S. Eliot to Scofield Thayer, January 1, 1921, in Valerie Eliot, ed., *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, 2 vols., vol. 1, 1899–1922 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1988), p. 429.

**36** Scofield Thayer to Gilbert Seldes, October 12, 1922, in “The *Dial* Papers,” Beinecke Library, Yale University, Series 4, Box 40, Folder 1922. The practice was a regular one at the *Dial*, and newspaper clippings from 1920 to 1929 fill three boxes: Series 2, Boxes 16–18.

**37** Scofield Thayer to Mrs. Edward D. Thayer, December 16, 1922, “*Dial* Papers,” Series 4, Box 43, Folder 1922; and Scofield Thayer to Gilbert Seldes, December 26, 1922, “*Dial Papers*,” Series 4, Box 40, Folder 1922. In this second letter Thayer also complains that “Mr. Burke’s review [in the *Dial*] interested me, but I do not find it so good as his recent article developing more or less the same theme in *Vanity Fair*.” Scofield Thayer to Gilbert Seldes, January 18, 1923; May 28, 1923; and June 8, 1923, “*Dial Papers*,” Series 4, Box 40, Folder 1923.

**38** See Kitty Hoffman, “A History of *Vanity Fair*: A Modernist Journal in America,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Toronto, 1980); and Cynthia L. Ward, “*Vanity Fair* Magazine and the Modern Style, 1914–1936 (New York City),” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1983). Also see Caroline Seeborn, *The Man who Was Vogue: The Life and Times of Condé Nast* (New York: Viking, 1982). On the contemporary magazine industry see Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), who discusses *Vanity Fair*’s advertising revenues, p. 271. For the journal’s circulation figures see *N. W. Ayer & Son’s American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer, 1922), p. 1225, reporting figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulation. On advertising as “an integral part of the magazine,” see Cohn Cooper, “Frank Crowninshield and *Vanity Fair*,” p. 42.

**39** Condé Nast, quoted in Edna Woolman Chase and Ilka Chase, *Always in Vogue* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1954), p. 66. Nast stated in the first issue of *Vanity Fair*: “Our ambition is not towards a popular magazine with a big subscription list. We don’t expect everybody to be interested in *Dress and Vanity Fair* [the journal’s name for its first four issues] and, frankly, we shall not try to interest everybody.” Condé Nast, “In *Vanity Fair*,” *Vanity Fair* 1.1 (September, 1913): 19.



40 “A Group of Poems by T. S. Eliot: A Selection from the Dramatic Lyrics of a Much Discussed American Poet,” *Vanity Fair*, 20.4 (June 1923): 67.

41 On Quinn’s collecting in 1920, see Reid, *The Man from New York*, p. 594; less is known about Thayer’s collecting, but see Joost, *Scofield Thayer*, pp. 23–36. On Crowninshield see Nicholas Fox Weber, *Patron Saints: Five Rebels who Opened America to a New Art* (New York: Knopf, 1992), p. 56; and *The Frank Crowninshield Collection of Modern French Art*, Auction catalog, Parke-Bernet Galleries (October 20–1, 1943).

42 Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “An American Museum of Modern Art,” *Vanity Fair* 33 (November, 1929), 79, 136. John Quinn, “Jacob Epstein, Sculptor,” *ibid.* 9 (1917), 76, 114; and “James Joyce, a New Irish Novelist,” *ibid.* 8 (1917), 49, 128. On Crowninshield and MOMA, see Ward, “*Vanity Fair* Magazine and the Modern Style,” 91–2, 100–1; on Quinn and Gregg, see Reid, *The Man from New York*, p. 580 and *passim*.

43 John Peale Bishop to Edmund Wilson [managing editor, *Vanity Fair*], August 5, 1922, Beinecke Library, Yale University, Edmund Wilson Papers, Series 2; Ezra Pound to Felix Schelling, July 13, 1922, in *Selected Letters*, pp. 178–9; Pound to Scofield Thayer, March 8, 1922, “The *Dial* Papers,” Box 40, Folder 2019.

44 Sylvia Beach, *Shakespeare and Company* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1980), p. 84. See also Noel Riley Fitch, *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983); and Lawrence Rainey, “Consuming Investments: Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 33.4 (September, 1996 [but February, 1997]): 531–67.

45 James Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, April 10, 1921, in James Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert, 3 vols, vol. 1 (New York: Viking Press, 1967), pp. 161–3.

46 Adrienne Monnier, quoted by Richard McDougall, in Adrienne Monnier, *The Very Rich Hours of Adrienne Monnier*, ed. and trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1976), p. 13; and Beach, *Shakespeare and Company*, p. 48.

47 Lidderdale, *Dear Miss Weaver*, p. 176.

48 Harriet Shaw Weaver to Sylvia Beach, July 8, 1921, Princeton University, Beach

Papers, Box 232, Folder 2: "I am much concerned at hearing, first from Mr. McAlmon and then from you, that the announcement of the cheaper English ordinary edition of *Ulysses* has been affecting adversely the chances of the Paris limited edition." "The cheaper prospective edition," she now concedes, "is doing harm," and to redress it she would "send out to all shops on our lists (and to any people I hear of who are waiting for the cheaper edition) the notice" that the English edition was postponed "indefinitely."

**49** Harriet Shaw Weaver to Sylvia Beach, April 27 and July 19, 1921, Princeton University, Beach Papers, Box 232, Folder 2.

**50** Jackson's orders are in Princeton University, Beach Papers, Box 132, Folder 12.

**51** Beach's sales records for *Ulysses* form an immense body of documentation. Most of the correspondence and order forms are housed at Princeton University, Beach Papers, Boxes 132–3, but a small group of order forms (fifty-seven of them) are found at Capen Library, State University of New York at Buffalo, Poetry Collection, Beach Papers, Folder "Ulysses Subscriptions, 1st Edition." In addition, Beach kept four different record books, now located in Princeton University, Beach Papers, Box 63. Finally, Beach also maintained a "Calepin de vente," now in the Maurice Sallet Papers, Carlton Lake Collection, Harry Ransom Research Center for Research in the Humanities, University of Texas, Austin. I have collated the materials at Princeton, Buffalo, and Austin.

**52** Sisley Huddleston, "Ulysses," *Observer* (March 5, 1912); reprinted in Sisley Huddleston, *Articles de Paris* (London: Methuen, 1928), pp. 40–7; and Robert Deming, ed., *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols., vol. I (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 213–16. Circulation figures for the *Observer* are from David Ayerst, *Garvin of the "Observer"* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 70, 128, 229; and David Griffiths, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the British Press* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 444. Ezra Pound to Homer Pound [March 10, 1922], Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL 43.

**53** Anon., "A New Ulysses," *Evening News* (April 8, 1922): 4; reprinted in Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, vol. I, p. 193.

**54** Prices in the New York market are reported in John Quinn to Sylvia Beach, March 27, 1922; Buffalo, Poetry Collection, Beach Papers. The early August price in London is reported by Mitchell Kennerley to Sylvia Beach [August 4, 1922], Princeton University, Beach Papers, Box 132, Folder 5. The London price from August 12 is from Mitchell Kennerley to John Quinn, reported in Reid, *The Man from New York*, p. 533. The

October price reported by Joyce is from James Joyce to Mrs. William Murray, October 23, 1922, in Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 1, p. 190.

**55** Harriet Shaw Weaver to Sylvia Beach, March 17, 1922; Princeton University, Beach Papers, Box 232, Folder 3; Ezra Pound to Alice Corbin Henderson, March 12, 1922, in Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound to Alice Corbin Henderson*, Ira B. Nadel (Austin: University of Texas, 1993), p. 224.

**56** Monnier, *The Very Rich Hours of Adrienne Monnier*, p. 141.

**57** Robert Louis Stevenson, quoted in Jenni Calder, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 172.

**58** On Bel Esprit see Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), pp. 409–12; and *EP/JQ*, pp. 8–10. Ezra Pound, “Paris Letter,” *Dial* 73.5 (November, 1922): 549–54; reprinted in *EPPP*, vol. IV, pp. 259–63, quotation on p. 261.

**59** Ezra Pound to John Quinn, July 4–5, 1922, in *EP/JQ*, p. 213.

**60** Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 12.

**61** *The Times* (March 21, 1912): 2; and F. T. Marinetti to F. B. Pratella, April 12, 1912, in Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, eds., *Archivi del Futurismo*, 2 vols. (Rome: De Luca, 1959–62), vol. 1, pp. 237–8: “A Londra, il successo colossale aumentò in modo fantastico.”



### 3 The Modernist novel

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David Trotter

To write about the Modernist novel, as opposed to the Victorian novel, say, or the Edwardian novel, is to write not only about the possibilities of the genre, but about its perceived impossibility. The possibilities were evident enough. From about 1890 to about 1930, the novel was as popular as it had been during the Victorian period, and newly diverse. According to Henry James, in 1899, it was a universally valid form, “the book *par excellence*”; according to Ford Madox Ford, in 1930, it was indispensable, “the only source to which you can turn to ascertain how your fellows spend their entire lives.”<sup>1</sup> And yet there was also a feeling, more prevalent among writers than among critics, that the novel as traditionally conceived was no longer up to the job: that its imaginary worlds did not, in fact, correspond to the way one’s fellows spent their entire lives. The feeling was most fully and influentially articulated by T. S. Eliot, when he argued, in “*Ulysses*, Order and Myth” (1923), that the novel had effectively “ended” with Flaubert and James: that the very formlessness which had once made it the adequate “expression” of a previous age, an age not yet formless enough to require “something stricter,” now prevented it from expressing a modernity characterized above all by the loss of form.<sup>2</sup> Before considering Eliot’s solution, it would be as well to examine further the dimensions of the problem. Those dimensions are most evident, I believe, in two novels which have always been regarded as quintessentially Modernist: Ford’s *The Good Soldier* (1915), and Wyndham Lewis’s *Tarr* (1918).

#### The end of the novel: Ford and Lewis

Ford’s book *par excellence* was not quite the same as James’s. In his faith that novels produce knowledge, in his insistence that every last detail in a novel should be at once explicable and explanatory, Ford was entirely Jamesian, and Jamesian in a way that would not have offended Tolstoy or George Eliot. And yet he also claimed that he had always sought in his own writing to render “the impression not the corrected chronicle”.<sup>3</sup> that is, experience as it happens, not as it is subsequently conceptualized. Experience as it happens cannot very well be said to amount to reliable knowledge about the way our fellows live their lives. Ford’s Impressionism, a refinement of narrative techniques developed by his immediate precursors, James and Conrad, thus had radical implications for the novel’s supposed intelligibility and usefulness.

Whatever is described in the most innovative fiction of the period is described in relation to, and only in relation to, a perceiving mind. James’s later novels – *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1904) – create centers of

consciousness through which the apprehension of events is filtered. Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Heart of Darkness* (1902) pair the narrator, Charlie Marlow, a much-traveled sea captain, with figures (Jim, Kurtz) whose volatile mixture of idealism and corruption at once fascinates him, and reveals the limitations of his own view of the world. Ford's *The Good Soldier* represents a further turn of the Impressionist screw. Dowell, the narrator, is himself as volatile a mixture of idealism and corruption as his friend and rival Edward Ashburnham, whose serial philanderings have destroyed several marriages and driven a young woman mad. He says that he cannot help us to understand the sad story he has to tell because the "whole world" is for him like "spots of color" on an immense canvas; if this was not so, he would have "something to catch hold of" (a determinate identity).<sup>4</sup> Dowell, in short, suffers from Impressionism.<sup>5</sup> his inability to tell a straight story is an aspect of his inability to know and be himself.

Dowell has tried to reconstruct the sequence of events which makes up his narrative by talking to Edward Ashburnham and his wife, Leonora. As far as we can tell, however, he had no such talk with Nancy, the young woman seduced by Ashburnham, before she lapsed into madness. Some of his remarks about her conduct are accordingly circumspect. But he does presume to describe her most intimate thoughts ("Nancy had, in fact, been thinking" [p. 195]), as well as one of her drunken fantasies about Ashburnham. This presumption leaves us in "an interpretative quandary to which the openly avowed speculations of Marlow produce no equivalent."<sup>6</sup> Dowell may have gone mad. His obsession with Nancy may have led him to invent her thoughts and feelings. The narrative's over-determination, at this point, inspires even less faith in Dowell than his own frequent admissions of uncertainty.

Marlow tells his tales to groups of men rather like those assembled at the beginning of Kipling's soldiering stories, James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895): men whose very unremarkableness, soon to be stimulated, perhaps, by exposure to the unknown, embodies a last hope for social and moral consensus. Dowell, by contrast, has only the eerily abstract "idea of being in a country cottage with a silent listener" (p. 167). The silent listener (or silent reader) cannot very well hope to embody consensus of any kind. The Impressionism from which Dowell suffers threatened the genre's traditional claim to extend and revise a shared knowledge of the world which might yet constitute the basis for community.

There was another threat to the novel's intelligibility and usefulness, the most absolute then and least understood now. This was the threat posed by Futurism's advocacy of modernization in all its forms (economic, technological, social, political). F. T. Marinetti, the Futurist poet and theorist, rejected literary tradition in the name of the dynamism and inhumanity of the machine age. Marinetti's proselytizing visits to London between 1910 and 1915 provided the catalyst for Anglo-American Modernism. To his dissemination of energies, Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis opposed the Vortex, an energy articulated by form; to Marinetti's hatred of the past, they opposed the distancing effect of temporal disjunction (the layering of historical moments); to his belief in technology, they opposed

a belief in art.<sup>7</sup> Such formulations, it is generally assumed, soon saw off the excitable Italian. Less often noticed is Marinetti's return, in Lewis's *Time and Western Man* (1927), to haunt the very idea of a Modernist fiction.

*Time and Western Man* is, among other things, an attack on "the whole 'revolutionary' position" in contemporary politics and culture: "however 'revolutions' may begin," Lewis argued, "they always end in what Marinetti termed *passéism*." Marinetti's amnesiac Futurism is used as a stick with which to beat representation itself. Even the most original ideas, Lewis seems to say, become imitations as soon as they are represented (in words, images, deeds). The *passéism* of representation itself is the main obstacle to the artist or writer who would "make it new." Lewis was particularly hard on Joyce. The main "figures" in *Ulysses* are all "walking clichés," he maintained, and the narrative technique which renders them is primly orthodox, for all its evident virtuosity. Stephen Dedalus is a "lifeless" prig, while Leopold Bloom possesses "all the recognized theatrical properties of 'the Jew' up-to-date."<sup>8</sup> That Lewis misconstrues Joyce's method should not be allowed to conceal the radical implications of what is in effect a critique of the novel as a genre. Figures in narrative fiction do tend towards cliché because they have to be made continuously recognizable despite internal and external alterations.

The opening chapters of *Tarr* (1918), in which the hero, an English artist in Paris, challenges and insults the walking clichés who pass for his friends and colleagues, are Lewis's most raking assault on the genre which was to sustain his career as a writer. What Tarr loathes in them is their instant and unbroken recognizability. But there are limits to his own ability to avoid recognition. Tarr puts all his asceticism (that is, his imagination, his resistance to cliché) into his art; his taste in women remains, as a consequence, thoroughly derivative. Having trashed enough cliché for one morning, he visits his mistress, Bertha Lunken, only to discover that he himself has become something of a cliché in the eyes of at least one person. "This familiar life, with its ironical eye, mocked at him, too." Bertha and Tarr mirror each other. "Bertha's numb silence and abandon was a stupid *tableau vivant* of his own mood. In this impasse of arrested life he stood sick and useless."<sup>9</sup> Arrested life is precisely what Lewis was later to find, and deplore, in Stephen Dedalus. Arrested by sex, Tarr gradually becomes a figure in a novel. He puts more and more of his asceticism into sex, less and less into art. The novel's concluding paragraphs sardonically catalog a series of thoroughly novelistic impetuosities and entrapments.

After Tarr has been halted in his tracks by Bertha's silence and abandon, the focus shifts to Otto Kreisler, a German sculptor and bourgeois bohemian, who becomes his chosen antagonist. Kreisler puts all his asceticism into sex; his sculpture is correspondingly lifeless. A creature of representation, such originality as he can lay claim to lies in the vehemence of his gestures, his humiliations. In an essay on "Inferior Religions" published in the *Little Review* in 1917, Lewis argued that the "chemistry of personality" working deep within a person throws off "carnival masks" which we can



“photograph and fix” into an identity.<sup>10</sup> Kreisler is a set of masks. Desire for the equally fixed and photographed Anastasya Vasek converts his customary “dullness” into “mechanical obstinacy.” “He was a machine, dead weight of old iron, that started, must go dashing on” (p. 100). And dash on he does, as wild a body as the “great comic effigies” hoisted in Lewis’s early short stories, through flirtation, rape, accidental murder, and suicide. Kreisler’s fate is to be a figure in a novel. Tarr, having set out to challenge and insult Kreisler, becomes more and more like him. Lewis set out to challenge and insult, through Tarr’s asceticism, the novel as a genre. The genre won. His later remark that the book should have been called *Otto Kreisler* rather than *Tarr* was a confession that it was after all a novel.

It has been said that Lewis’s work exists in a “special antagonism” to Ford’s.<sup>11</sup> Ford threatened the novel with too much mind. Lewis threatened it with too much body. According to Ford, all that can be represented is the pattern of impressions striking a disembodied and isolated consciousness; according to Lewis, all that can be represented is the sound of collisions, the impact made by one comic effigy upon another. Neither view does much for the novel’s traditional claim to extend and revise a shared knowledge of the world. Yet Dowell, by identifying with Ashburnham, as Marlow identifies with Jim and Kurtz, at least recognizes his own desire for an identity based on moral choice, and so cancels his self-confessed “faintness.” Furthermore, the punctiliously mimetic syntax with which Lewis renders Kreisler’s death – “He hung, gradually choking, the last thing he was conscious of, his tongue” (p. 301) – suggests that he was on occasion prepared to let a figure in a novel be a figure in a novel, if only at the moment of its vanishing.

## The search for stricter form: Joyce and Lawrence

Eliot wanted to make the novel possible again by instilling into it a stricter form. He admired Joyce’s use of Homeric myth as “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”<sup>12</sup> The solution to literature’s inadequacy in the face of futility and anarchy was *more* literature: the novel would render itself less “novel,” less abjectly the expression of an abject age, if it began to associate with epic. This tendency in Modernist theory and practice might be thought of, by analogy with Nietzsche’s will-to-power and will-to-life, as a will-to-literature. Modernism was one of the fiercest campaigns ever mounted in favor of literature.

The terms in which Modernism’s will-to-literature made itself known had been established in nineteenth-century debates about Naturalism and Symbolism. Emile Zola had sought to modernize literature by making it less literary: writers should not flinch from unpoetic subject matter, and should treat whatever they wrote about with scientific exactitude and objectivity. Symbolism, on the other hand, modernized literature by making it more literary. Symbolism’s indeterminacies preserved literature from science



and common sense. Literature, according to Arthur Symonds's influential *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), had become a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of sacred ritual. Naturalism and Symbolism might be said to have embodied its most extreme tendencies, towards mimesis and towards poesis. Should the work of art be judged, as Roger Fry put it in *Vision and Design* (1920), by its "conformity to appearance" or by "purely aesthetic criteria"?<sup>13</sup> In Modernist writing, mimesis is not so much an end in itself as an occasion for the triumph of poesis. Both novelists and poets invoked through their choice of subject matter and technique a resistance to literature which they knew would yield only to the excess literature at their command.

The dialectic between Naturalism and Symbolism is nowhere more apparent than in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), which Eliot regarded as Joyce's farewell to the novel. Stephen Dedalus devises Symbolist poems, and Symbolist theories which have often been taken out of context as Modernist doctrine. Having rejected the church's sacred ritual, he makes a sacred ritual out of art. According to him, beauty precludes emotions such as desire and loathing which are kinetic rather than static, and directed towards a physical rather than a spiritual end. Yet his exposition of this theory, which takes the form of a dialog with his friend Lynch, as they walk through the Dublin streets, is itself both kinetic and physical. One of his speeches is interrupted by a "harsh roar of jangled and rattling metal," when a dray laden with old iron turns the corner.<sup>14</sup> Stephen's response to interruptions is to evolve a literary style capable of abstract order. He derives less pleasure from the reflection of external reality in language than from "the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose" (p. 181). When, a few minutes later, he dedicates himself to the creation of beauty, he dedicates himself to a style, a theory, rather than to a subject matter, in a periodic prose which mirrors the emotion, and which we can sense him admiring. Joyce just as evidently does not endorse this rampant will-to-literature, since he punctuates the reverie with the sound of young men bathing: "O, cripes, I'm drowned" (p. 183).

Stephen's devotion is rewarded, towards the end of Chapter 4, by the sight of a young woman gazing out to sea: a figure his lucid supple periodic prose immediately converts into a symbol. Chapter 5 opens with Stephen's breakfast. "The yellow dripping had been scooped out like a boghole and the pool under it brought back to his memory the dark turf-coloured water of the bath in Clongowes" (p. 188). The sentences which describe this scene are notably plain and notably faithful to appearance. Here, in the sad decline of the Dedalus family into squalor, is a story Zola might have written. In an early essay, Joyce had praised Henrik Ibsen for portraying "average lives in their uncompromising truth."<sup>15</sup> The Naturalism of *A Portrait*, its attention to the uncompromising truth of the lives which surround Stephen's, establishes a powerful resistance to literature. All five chapters conclude with a moment of self-transcendence; four times, the next chapter opens with a harsh reversion to squalor and to a plain style. The fifth and final chapter

peters out in Stephen's inconsequential diary. Although the diary's conclusion invokes the promise of achievement encrypted in his surname, it can hardly be said to resolve the dialectic between Naturalism and Symbolism. *A Portrait* is Modernism in a state of suspended animation.

Curiously enough, the writer who most summarily resolved the dialectic was Joyce's antithesis, D. H. Lawrence, whose vitalist philosophy decreed that a work of art should be judged neither by its fidelity to appearance, nor by purely aesthetic criteria, but by its tendency to intensify or diminish the will-to-life. In a 1913 review of *Death in Venice*, Lawrence characterized Thomas Mann as the "last too-sick disciple" of Flaubert, a writer who had "stood away from life as from a leprosy."<sup>16</sup> His own work up to and including *Sons and Lovers* (1913) certainly did not stand away from the squalors and intimacies of a Midlands mining community. But the letters he wrote to his friend and mentor Edward Garnett in 1914 announced a change of emphasis. He now insisted that he was going "a stratum deeper" than anyone else had ever gone in writing that was "all analytical – quite unlike *Sons and Lovers*, not a bit visualised." Going deeper meant abandoning the "old stable ego," the traditional concept of character.<sup>17</sup> The first fruit of these labors, which are generally thought to have made Lawrence a Modernist, was *The Rainbow* (1915). In its portrayal of the impact of social change on a Midlands family, the Brangwens, *The Rainbow* is in fact quite extensively visualized. Furthermore, it invokes Naturalism as a way of seeing, indeed a way of living. The "homogeneous amorphous sterility" of the industrial landscape, its "Zolaesque tragedy," appalls Ursula Brangwen, but fascinates her corruptible companion, Winifred Inger.<sup>18</sup> By marrying Tom Brangwen, the colliery manager, Winifred chooses to live a Zolaesque tragedy. But mimesis, in this novel, is the occasion for the triumph of poesis. The marriage tests Ursula's will-to-life. It strengthens her determination not to succumb to the sterility of modern life. Zola, meanwhile, or Zola's shadow, tests Lawrence. Ursula owes her regeneration, at the very end of the novel, not to new thoughts or actions, but to a new sight, a sight seen, like Stephen Dedalus's sight of the young woman, through Symbolist rather than naturalist eyes. "She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the whole world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the overarching heavens" (p. 459). The Truth emblazoned in the rainbow is a tribute as much to the reassertion of Lawrence's will-to-literature as to the reassertion of Ursula's will-to-life. Her brave new world fits not to the over-arching heavens gradually made visible by the development of the narrative, but to the overarching symbol incorporated from the outset in its title, and now, at last, understood. Rainbows of one kind or another were to arch over a number of novels published in the 1920s which have since become Modernist classics.

## Mythical methods: Lawrence, Fitzgerald, Woolf

In November, 1915, in the middle of a catastrophic war, and after the suppression of *The*

*Rainbow*, a defiantly optimistic novel, Lawrence gave up on England's "collapsing" civilization.<sup>19</sup> The book he embarked on in April, 1916, *Women in Love*, a "potential sequel" to *The Rainbow*, was his most brutally apocalyptic (at one point he thought of calling it *Dies Irae*, "Day of Wrath"). Apocalypse was one of the things Modernist writers imagined most fondly.<sup>20</sup> They saw themselves as inhabitants of a social and cultural system which had stagnated to the point where it was no longer susceptible to reform, but could only be renewed through total collapse or violent overthrow. Without apocalypse, Yeats, Eliot, and Pound would not have had careers. Yeats, Eliot, and Pound sit rather more easily together than the writers I shall consider in this section: Lawrence, Fitzgerald, and Woolf. But these, too, found in the literature of crisis a formula which enabled them to investigate at one and the same time a collapsing civilization and a collapsing genre.

*Women in Love* (1920), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) share an interest not only in the continuous purposeful violence generated by an extraordinary event like World War I, but in the random incidental violence sometimes shaken loose from ordinary existence. In a time of crisis, the fabric of meaning wears thin in places, and meaninglessness shows through: the stories we tell about experience, the symbols which offer themselves from within it, no longer suffice. Where meaninglessness does show through, it often takes the form of injury, because injury disturbs or negates the familiar shape human beings take. Injury was one of Lawrence's great subjects, and *Women in Love* is so full of it that it soon ceases to be incidental. When the Brangwens arrive for the water party at Shortlands, in Chapter 14, they find that Gerald Crich has hurt his hand, which he carries, bandaged, in his jacket pocket. Gudrun Brangwen feels relieved that no one asks him about it (the routine explanations no longer seem adequate). By the time Winifred Crich's rabbit has got its claws into them, in Chapter 18, they have become specialists in injury. In *The Great Gatsby*, it is people in motorcars who take the greatest toll, with people on foot a close second. Tom Buchanan breaks the arm of one mistress, when his car crashes, and the nose of another when he hits her. Ordinary violence arrives unannounced, and has gone before story or explanation can close around it ("Then there were bloody towels upon the bathroom floor, and women's voices scolding").<sup>21</sup> It is characteristic of Mrs. Ramsay, in *To the Lighthouse*, that she should take an interest in a one-armed bill-sticker, victim of a farming accident; but the circus his posters advertise soon makes her "forget her pity."<sup>22</sup>

The literature of crisis seeks out concentrations (it is often an urban literature, because cities compress both time and space by multiplying encounters). It finds in the nodes and clusters where rottenness accumulates the portents of the catastrophe which will validate its apocalyptic fantasies. Walking down the main street of Beldover, in the first chapter of *Women in Love*, Gudrun Brangwen wonders why she should have chosen to subject herself to "this amorphous ugliness of a small colliery town in the Midlands."<sup>23</sup> The chapter does not offer a description of Beldover which might enable us to identify the

very specific ugliness she has in mind. In the absence of such information, the associations of intimacy and relatedness embedded in the demonstrative come into play. Suspending his narrative for a moment, with Gudrun immobilised by “revulsion,” Lawrence summons us to inspect “this” particular concentration of rottenness, just as, in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, a voice calls the prophet in under the shadow of “this red rock” to witness fear in a handful of dust.

Gudrun’s revulsion is the prelude to commitment (the story will soon advance her to a position already marked out by Lawrence’s rhetoric). Chapter 9 describes her growing “nostalgia” for Beldover. “She felt herself drawn out at evening into the main street of the town, that was uncreated and ugly, and yet surcharged with this same potent atmosphere of intense, dark callousness” (p. 116). The surcharge, indicating concentration, a saturated node, acquires, in Lawrence’s description of the main street, narrative as well as rhetorical substance. Gudrun is drawn despite herself into the embrace of Beldover, and of Beldover’s virtual owner, Gerald Crich, whom she first kisses under the bridge where the colliers kiss their sweethearts (pp. 330–3).

Gudrun and Gerald are specialists not only in injury but in fructifying revulsion. When Gerald dives again and again into the lake at Shortlands in a futile attempt to rescue his drowning sister, in Chapter 14, Gudrun wants to plunge in with him, “to know the horror also” (p. 181). When Gerald first comes to Gudrun, by way of his father’s newly dug grave, whose cold and sticky clay repels him, he plunges and sinks into her soft warmth, burying his head between her breasts (p. 344). Together, Gudrun and Gerald seek out surcharged concentrations of rottenness, until they themselves become surcharged concentrations: Gerald in suicide, Gudrun in subjection to the comprehensively rotten Loerke.

Ursula Brangwen and Rupert Birkin, on the other hand, live to a different rhythm, not that of fructifying revulsion, but that of desire satisfied, and thereafter at intervals lost and rediscovered. Ursula, unlike her sister, is “inured” to Beldover (p. 12), as Birkin is to London bohemia. It is Birkin who finally persuades Gerald to stop diving; like Ursula, he remains “callous” about the accident, unmoved, unabsorbed (p. 190). For them, desire satisfied produces “anguish” that there cannot be some other kind of relationship, which in turn renews desire.

The division of attitude between the two pairs of protagonists divides the novel. Gerald and Gudrun inhabit a naturalist degeneration plot: progressive exposure of an inherent moral flaw drives them down through boredom and despair to subjection or death. They are described metonymically, as they would be in a Naturalist novel, by means of an inventory of dress, appearance, habit and occupation. Birkin and Ursula, on the other hand, inhabit what a Symbolist regeneration plot would look like, if Symbolism had ever gone in for plots. They have no history (Ursula is barely recognizable as the forthright heroine of *The Rainbow*). Their only embodiment is metaphor (Ursula as a strange unconscious bud of womanhood, and so forth), and they renew themselves by

yet further disembodiment (they quit their jobs). Ursula and Gudrun belong to different novels. When they go sketching by the lake, in Chapter 10, Gudrun is both fascinated and repelled by the water plants: “she could feel their turgid fleshy structure as in a sensuous vision, she *knew* how they rose out of the mud.” She has found a node of rottenness. Ursula, by contrast, “rose and drifted away, unconscious like the butterflies” (p. 119).

At times, the two plots seem about to fuse, as Ursula is paired momentarily with Gudrun, Birkin with Gerald. But in the end they diverge, and Lawrence’s inability to prevent this divergence does produce a certain strain: the naturalist degeneration plot proves such a stiff test for his will-to-literature that when it reasserts itself, as it must do if he is to finish his novel, it does so in a somewhat erratic fashion. The danger at such moments, David Bradshaw argues, is that the writer will impose his own anxieties and aspirations on the characters in a “coercive form of wishful or wilful thinking.”<sup>24</sup> When Birkin looks at Gerald’s corpse, he remembers “the beautiful face of one whom he had loved,” and feels momentarily restored. “No-one could remember it without gaining faith in the mystery, without the soul’s warming into new, deep life-trust” (p. 471). Where, Bradshaw asks, does this restoration come from? Not from the narrative, since we have no idea which beautiful face Birkin, the man without a history, is talking about. It comes from Lawrence’s own determination to warm at least one soul, if only for a moment, before the last day (and literature’s last day) is finally done.

Tom Buchanan, in *The Great Gatsby*, has something of Gerald Crich’s bull-like presumptuousness, and something of his gullibility where social theory is concerned. There are times, such as the description of the Valley of Ashes, when Fitzgerald seems to envisage a crisis novel on a Lawrentian scale. But Tom Buchanan is also an American “good soldier”: like Edward Ashburnham, he is a “national figure in a way” (p. 12), and one who gets caught in compromising situations with servant girls. When the rumor goes around that Tom’s wife, Daisy, is a Catholic, we might almost suspect her of modeling herself on the staunchly Catholic Leonora Ashburnham. Nick Carraway makes a not un-Dowell-like narrator. Fitzgerald’s affiliations were not with Lawrence, but with Ford and, especially, Conrad.

Carraway’s first sight of the great Gatsby is of a man stretching out his arms to the “dark water” in a “curious way” (p. 27). We have been here before. Gatsby is Kurtz or Lord Jim to Carraway’s Marlow: a man at once stronger and weaker than his chronicler, potent in and through his dreams, but fallible. Carraway’s tale, like Marlow’s, is of westerners going east into the heart of darkness. His last sight of Gatsby, a bright spot of color against white steps, dreamer still of an “incorruptible dream” (p. 160), recapitulates Marlow’s last sight of Jim, a white figure against a dark background, incurably “romantic.” Not surprisingly, Fitzgerald found it harder to instil enigma into palpable wealth than Conrad had to instil it into the outposts of empire. When Carraway contrasts his own provincialism with the “vast carelessness” of the Buchanans (p. 186), we may suppose that while Fitzgerald had seen the carelessness for himself, it was Conrad who

made him think of it as vast.

Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), was the story of a Stephen Dedalus-like "romantic egotist," Amory Blaine, who writes Symbolist poems and assesses his Princeton acquaintances by inspecting their private libraries. It is Symbolism which renders (by failing to render precisely) the inexhaustibleness of the "inexhaustible charm" of wealth. Thus Carraway hears, beyond Gatsby's sentimentality, "an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago" (p. 118). Indeed, Gatsby's car, "terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns" (p. 70), would not have been altogether out of place in a poem by Mallarmé. The problem, again, is wishful or willful thinking. Fitzgerald's yearning for a deep life trust is almost as urgent as Lawrence's. On his last night on West Egg, Carraway sits in the moonlight by Gatsby's empty house, and urges his soul into warmth: "I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the world" (p. 187). Where does *this* come from?

It is a question that might also be asked about the "vision" which enables Lily Briscoe to complete her portrait of Mrs. Ramsay, in *To the Lighthouse*, and, since it coincides with Mr. Ramsay's long-deferred arrival at the lighthouse, Woolf to complete her novel. "Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (p. 281). Is the vision the product of abilities and experiences rendered in and by the narrative? Or has the author wished or willed it on Lily's behalf? Woolf, I think, anticipated the question. Lily, baffled by her inability to reimagine Mrs. Ramsay, warns herself against wishful or willful thinking. "But one got nothing by soliciting urgently" (p. 261). Woolf's answer to the question lies in the structure of her novel.

Part I of *To the Lighthouse*, "The Window," takes place on a September evening at a holiday home in the Hebrides, and describes the various activities and preoccupations of the Ramsays, their eight children and six guests. The main focus is on the family as an institution whose stability is at once creative and constricting. Families guarantee personal immortality through lineage and affiliation. But the centrality of this institution in society's self-furtherance has led it to arrogate powers and values which do not necessarily belong to it. Established as the primary medium of symbolic exchange, it expands or reduces all anxieties and aspirations to its own size, converting any stray ambition into itself. Woolf's point seems to be that while everything in the family is reproduction (of powers, of values), not all reproduction is in the family. To the personal immortality made more likely by lineage, though not guaranteed, since children sometimes die young, Woolf opposed the personal immortality made more likely by art, though not guaranteed, since paintings sometimes get stuffed in attics.

The family's arrogation of powers and values encourages arrogance. The egotism displayed by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay is insufferable, and compelling, because it is displayed on behalf of an institution. This impersonal egotism, behind which, or interleaved with which, the person occasionally appears, or can be made to appear by a



hopeless love, manifests itself as an absurd reduction of everything to the family, on Mr. Ramsay's part, and an absurd expansion of the family until it becomes everything, on Mrs. Ramsay's part. Mr. Ramsay behaves to his wife, his children, his startled guests, as though he were a gallant soldier, a castaway, the leader of a doomed polar expedition. Observing him, the resolutely unfamiliar Lily Briscoe and William Bankes wonder "why so brave a man in thought should be so timid in life" (pp. 62–3). Mrs. Ramsay, by contrast, turns bravery in life into thoughts which are timid because their only term is replication. She wishes to replicate her bravely fertile marriage by pairing off Lily and William, Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley.

In "The Window," powers and values are arrogated not only on behalf of the family, but on behalf of literature. There is a kind of literary megalomania in the imperiousness of the proliferating metaphors: "the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male" (p. 53), and so forth. Some of these metaphors belong to the characters; others have been wished or willed on their behalf by the author (does James really see his father as a beak of brass?). In part I, *style* solicits urgently. That Woolf should so frankly summon poesis to the aid of mimesis would not have surprised her first readers. Her career had already included one decisive shift of emphasis, from the orthodox realism of *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1917) to the lyrical experimentation of *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). On June 27, 1925, at a time when she was planning *To the Lighthouse*, she recorded in her diary an ambition to substitute poesis for mimesis. "I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant "novel." A new—by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?"<sup>25</sup> The new—by Virginia Woolf did indeed prove to be an elegy, for her father, Leslie Stephen, the literary critic and biographer, notoriously short-tempered and dependent on his wife, and for her mother, Julia, a legendary Pre-Raphaelite beauty. The style of part I urgently solicits, through its elaborate expansiveness, elegiac feeling: it is already a elegy, long before anyone has died. If Joyce, in Eliot's eyes, renewed the novel by associating it with epic, Woolf renewed it by associating it with elegy.

The pivotal part II, "Time Passes," boldly reduces the crisis novel's crisis to parentheses embedded in a description of the house's abandonment and decay during a period of ten years. The parentheses flatly inform us of the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, her daughter Prue (in childbirth), and her son Andrew (in battle): the predictability of the last two making the first even harder to explain and endure. Events no longer obtrude, to be enshrined in metaphor. "There was the silent apparition of an ashen-colored ship for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath." These apparitions do not flower into meaning. Indeed, they block meaning, disrupt, for the stroller on the beach, "a scene calculated to stir the most sublime reflections" (p. 182). The narrative is now a counterelegy, to the extent that it can recall the past ("how once the looking-glass had held a face"), but not the future in the past. Seventy-year-old Mrs. McNab, creature of experience rather than aspiration, fingers the gray cloak which had once provoked

sublime reflections about Mrs. Ramsay's beauty (p. 184).

Part II hollows out the world constructed in part I: an empty house, an empty style. It is this emptiness which makes possible the redemptions of part III. Mrs. Ramsay is still loved, and greatly missed, but it is only in her absence that Mr. Ramsay can reach the lighthouse (he would surely not have gone except as reparation) and Lily Briscoe complete her painting. Only when Mrs. Ramsay has receded, only when her beauty has ceased to still and freeze life, only when she has been supplanted by the life which goes on without her, can she become the object of Lily's painting, of Lily's love. The steps where Mrs. Ramsay had once sat fill elegiacally and then empty again. Only when she convinces herself that they really are empty and will remain empty for ever can Lily complete her painting. "She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished" (p. 281). By emptying the steps, Woolf emptied her own will-to-literature. Not completely, though. For, just as the shape of the person who once occupied the steps remains in Lily's memory, so the conclusion of the novel's other story, with Mr. Ramsay's arrival at the lighthouse, validates the hint of sacred ritual in its overarching title. Woolf thus belongs, at a slight distance, with writers like Lawrence and Fitzgerald, like Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann, who were moved by a formidable will-to-literature.

## Scorch marks: Joyce and Faulkner

The most enduring of the mythical moments of origin proposed for Anglo-American Modernism is the first postimpressionist exhibition in London in December, 1910. My (equally mythical) choice would be the June, 1918 issue of the *Little Review*, which included "Calypso," the fourth episode of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Mr. Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liver slices fried with crusecrumbs, fried hencod's roes. Most of all he liked grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine.<sup>26</sup>

Up to the moment when those inner organs appeared, it would have been reasonable to suppose that *Ulysses* was a sequel to *A Portrait*. The Stephen Dedalus of its first three episodes is recognizable as the Stephen Dedalus of *A Portrait*, now back from self-exile in Paris, and different only in the degree of self-doubt to which he is subject, and to which a new interior monologue technique gives us unprecedented access. The self-doubt makes him even *more* of a Prufrock, a Symbolist *manqué*, than he was in *A Portrait*. However, readers turning the pages of the June, 1918 issue of the *Little Review* would have encountered, in Mr. Leopold Bloom and his idiosyncratic palate, something else altogether. Bloom has a way of thinking, feeling, acting, and speaking every bit as



distinctive, and every bit as compelling, as Stephen's. Joyce responded to Ezra Pound's suggestion that Stephen should be brought forward at Bloom's expense by saying that Stephen interested him less because his "shape" could not now be changed. The age of Prufrock was over.

The first six episodes of *Ulysses* ("Telemachus," "Nestor," "Proteus," "Calypso," "Lotos-eaters," "Hades") are written in what Joyce called, in a letter of 1919, an "initial style".<sup>27</sup> they combine third-person, past-tense depiction of events with first-person present-tense depiction of the thoughts of the two main characters. The initial style devotes itself, as few literary styles had ever done before, to the mimesis of individual acts of apprehension: what we "see" is in general what Stephen and Bloom are conscious of. This degree of identification was too good (too reassuring) to last. When Joyce revised the *Little Review* version of the seventh episode, "Aeolus," which brings Stephen and Bloom separately to the central Dublin premises shared by the *Telegraph* and the *Freeman's Journal*, he added a set of newspaper-style subheadings ("THE GRANDEUR THAT WAS ROME") whose trite phrases comment obliquely on the dramatic action and mock the eloquence of the pundits assembled in the editorial office. The arbitrariness of these subheadings disrupts an initial style patently and reassuringly motivated by fidelity to appearance. Bloom's palate may be the first real surprise in *Ulysses*, but it is by no means the last.

However, the initial style makes a rapid recovery, to render for us Bloom's search for an enabling lunch, in "Lestrygonians," and Stephen's search for an enabling aesthetic theory, in "Scylla and Charybdis." The honeymoon between author and reader resumes, as a glimpse into the Burton restaurant neatly epitomizes Naturalism – "Spaton sawdust, sweetish warmish cigarette smoke, reek of plug, spilt beer, men's beery piss, the stale of ferment" (p. 215) – while Stephen's sardonic identification with "the druid priests of Cymbeline, hierophantic" (p. 280) neatly epitomizes Symbolism. The first nine episodes of *Ulysses* consign *A Portrait* to history by invalidating its solipsism. But, despite the "Aeolus" subheadings, they have not yet consigned literature to history because they still operate within the limits marked by literature's alternating self-representations as Naturalism (or extreme mimesis) and Symbolism (or extreme poesis).

On the last page of the fair copy of "Scylla and Charybdis," Joyce wrote "End of the First Part of 'Ulysses.'" The next five episodes ("Wandering Rocks," "Sirens," "Cyclops," "Nausicaa," "Oxen of the Sun") reveal a significant change of emphasis, from a preoccupation with character and realistic detail to a preoccupation with symbolic correspondences and stylistic elaboration. In "Wandering Rocks," Joyce for the first time used the initial style to depict the thoughts of characters other than Stephen and Bloom; in "Sirens," he distorted it beyond recognition by filtering it through a musical structure which reconfigures Bloom's stream of consciousness to fit its own patterns; in "Cyclops," he abandoned it altogether in favor of a narrative persona (a barfly) whose salty monolog is punctuated by parodies of various literary and subliterate styles; in "Nausicaa," it returns temporarily, although only in the context of a more extended

parody (of popular fiction); in “Oxen of the Sun,” parody (of English literary styles) becomes the book’s exclusive narrative technique, a screen through which the dramatic action, set in a hospital ward, can dimly be perceived. Joyce referred to this rapid appropriation and abandonment of styles as his “scorching” method: “each successive episode, dealing with some province of artistic culture (rhetoric or music or dialectic), leaves behind it a burnt-up field.”<sup>28</sup> The burnt-up field was the field of his own will-to-literature.

The definitions of Modernist writing produced in Anglo-American criticism from the 1930s to the 1970s – from Edmund Wilson’s *Axel’s Castle* (1931) to Hugh Kenner’s *The Pound Era* (1971) – were primarily literary–historical in emphasis: their purpose was to distinguish literature written during the first three decades of the century, in formal and philosophical terms, from what came before, and, to a lesser extent, what came after. The terms did not always stick. Was *Ulysses* the last word in modern novels? Or the first word in modern poems? Some critics regretted that as a novel it ends after “Scylla and Charybdis,” others that as a poem it does not begin until “Wandering Rocks.” Few of these literary–historical accounts acknowledged the full implications of Joyce’s commitment to parody. In “Sirens,” for example, which describes Bloom’s late lunch in the Ormond Bar, the book begins to quote, or to parody, itself. “Leopold cut liverslices. As said before he ate with relish the inner organs, nutty gizzards, fried cods’ roes” (p. 347). *As said before*: few novels draw attention so brazenly to their own artifice, while few poems advance with such self-dismissiveness towards Symbolism.

Since the 1960s, *Ulysses* has to a large extent been read not as a novel or a poem, but, in the wake of deconstruction, as a “text.” Textual readings suggest that the stylistic elaborations developed in the middle episodes expose the limits, not of literary genre, but of the symbolic order in and through which identity is constructed. These readings derive from deconstruction’s emphasis on the difference *within* a text, or a person’s identity, rather than on the difference *between* texts or identities. Where Modernist fiction is concerned, they might be said to work best, not when they substitute “difference within” for “difference between,” as a definition both of the field of study and of aesthetic and political value, but when they set the two concepts in relation. For Modernism could be understood as an attempt variously to exclude either difference-within or difference-between from definitions of aesthetic and political value. Of the “Men of 1914,” Eliot, Pound and Lewis all evolved doctrines whose main function was to convert difference-within into difference-between. Their insistence on impersonality, and on the primacy of the “world of objects,” in Eliot’s phrase, was an effort to control the unsettling drift of desire, and to preempt the messy sexual and political coalitions into which its compulsive mimeticism, its insatiable “herd instinct,” might lead it: the autonomy of art would ensure the autonomy of the self. “The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art,” Eliot argued, “is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion.”<sup>29</sup> Joyce’s appeal, by contrast, is that he made the search for objective correlatives his subject matter rather

than his doctrine: “Circe” exposes the differences-within which Anglo-Irish culture has repressed in order to construct differences between men and women, rich and poor, Catholic and Jew, Englishman and Irishman. To put it another way, deconstruction has shown that Joyce had good moral and political reason to disable through parody the genre whose conventions his book began by observing. Of the other writers who also made differences-within their subject matter, the most significant, Kafka apart, was William Faulkner.

Faulkner did not need to begin by writing about a Symbolist poet. He *was* one (*The Marble Faun*, 1924). His decisive departure from literary tradition came with his fourth novel, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), where he took the step Joyce had taken in the June, 1918 issue of the *Little Review*: he placed his Stephen Dedalus figure, Quentin Compson, in relation to other consciousnesses. Indeed, this Prufrock ushers *himself* into history, by committing suicide on June 2, 1910: the rest of the story, narrated successively by his two brothers, Benjy and Jason, and an omniscient narrator, takes place on three days in April, 1928.

*The Sound and the Fury* is framed by exclusions: to begin with, an impossible interiority which excludes all difference-between; to end with, an impossible exteriority which excludes all difference-within. Benjy converts externally differentiated time and space into internally differentiated mood. When a golfer cries “Here, caddie,” he thinks only of his beloved lost sister, Caddy, feels sad, and starts to bellow. Benjy presses up against boundaries – the fence through which he watches the golfers, the gate where he waits for Caddy, the fence across which he delivers Mrs. Patterson’s letter, the piece of wood Dilsey places down the center of Luster’s bed, the fence along which he follows the girls going home from school – which have for him no meaning, indeed no reality. It is others who notice that his clothes have snagged on the fence, or tell him to keep his hands in his pockets in cold weather. His words brush against the world of objects without grasping the distribution within it of cause and effect, or of racial and social characteristics. His narrative, unlike those of the other protagonists, does not differentiate black speech from white by its use of idiom (Dilsey says “Yes, sir” to his father, not “Yessuh” or “Yes, suh”). Benjy, in short, is Eliot’s worst nightmare: a gigantic, blubbering subjective correlative.

Quentin Compson is a student at Harvard, and roughly the same age as Stephen Dedalus. Unlike Benjy, he knows all about differences-between; but he cannot live them. His interior monologue, which occupies the day of his suicide, thus recurs incessantly to difference-within. Stephen Dedalus, in “Proteus,” remembers a time in Paris when he tried on a woman’s shoe, and muses about “Wilde’s love that dare not speak its name” (p. 62). Quentin finds in his friends’ chaffing an insinuation about his own protean sexuality (“Calling Shreve my husband”).<sup>30</sup> A ritualized exchange with a poor black man at a railway crossing in Virginia may confirm momentarily his identity as a privileged white man. But observation of the Deacon, at Harvard, who has one social and racial identity for his familiars – “See you again, fellows ... glad to have chatted with you” –

and another for new arrivals from the South – “Right dis way, young marster, hyer we is” (p. 83) – only serves to confuse the issue. Confusion is worse confounded when a young boy he encounters while killing time on the day of his suicide says that he “talks like a coloured man” (p. 103). Authority deserts him as surely as it deserts K., in Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925), another man arrested for a crime he is not aware of having committed.

Jason Compson, who has never left the South, and who has acted as head of the family since his father’s death, establishes *his* authority through reiterated paranoid assertions of the difference between himself and a series of rapidly conceived sexual or racial antagonists. His anti-Semitism, for example, is as blatant, and as abrupt, as that of Mr. Deasy, the headmaster of the school at which Stephen teaches, in the “Nestor” episode of *Ulysses*. What appalls Jason about Caddy’s daughter, Quentin, is her promiscuity, her “slip[ping] around.” In his eyes, to slip around is to behave like a “nigger wench” (p. 163): to sacrifice racial as well as moral integrity. His interior monologue seeks out the objective correlatives which will secure forever the differences between black and white, men and women: “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say” (p. 155). It thus represents the speech of a black woman like Dilsey as densely idiomatic: “Can’t you liv in de same house wid you own blood niece without quoilin?” (p. 219)

Jason’s efforts to impose himself fail miserably, and his failure appears to invoke, in the novel’s concluding section, an exaggeratedly imposing omniscient narrator who harbors no illusions about the feebleness of those efforts. This omniscience forces us to acknowledge discrepancies between event and meaning. In the opening paragraph, we encounter, not Dilsey’s words, as in the previous sections, but her flesh, as the wind needles laterally into it, “precipitating not so much a moisture as a substance partaking of the quality of thin, not quite congealed oil” (p. 229). The words which needle this flesh as emphatically as the wind does, tattooing it with discursive elaboration, are evidently the narrator’s. What does Dilsey know about precipitation? Luster, carrying a pile of logs, is invisible “within and beyond his wooden avatar” – but not to Dilsey, who, unmindful of symbolism, guides him across the kitchen with a firm hand. As the flesh weakens, in this final section, blundering to a halt, or succumbing to migraine, or seduction, so the word flourishes and the discrepancy between event and meaning widens.

It is the omniscient narrator who produces, by way of a conjuring trick, the book’s one authentic (pure, complete) identity, that of the Reverend Shegog. When Shegog, a shabby, insignificant little man, rises to preach, he speaks at first “like a white man” (p. 254). “I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb!” (p. 255) Gradually, however, his voice rises above the shabbiness and insignificance, until it provokes a response, “a woman’s single soprano: ‘Yes, Jesus!’” (p. 255). The response transforms him. His “intonation” and “pronunciation” become “negroid,” his words a glimpse of the power and the glory of God. He has been remade across and by means of the difference between man and woman, black and white. The narrative retranscribes his refrain: “I got de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb!” (p. 256) Shegog’s sermon, the most densely

idiomatic passage in the book, is its narrative other (what “Penelope” is to *Ulysses*). The sermon’s full black identity mirrors the full white identity of the impersonal narrator’s omniscience. Both are conjuring tricks.

The fable of the emergence of white heterosexual identity, through Benjy’s perpetual childhood and Quentin’s protean adolescence to Jason’s imitations of patriarchy, has been completed only by a supplement which reveals the lack at its center. For the discrepant exteriority of the omniscient narrative, far from gathering the pieces together and filling in gaps, as Faulkner himself suggested it did, merely reverses the discrepant interiority of Benjy’s monologue. Both views are impossible: Benjy’s words could not be his own; the omniscient narrator’s words could go omnisciently on forever and still not touch Benjy’s experience. Faulkner’s fable about what is possible by way of identity (in Mississippi in 1928) shuttles fretfully backwards and forwards between those impossibilities.

## **Equivocations: Hemingway, Richardson**

One might characterize Faulkner’s subsequent career as a movement away from Joyce and Kafka back towards Conrad: *Light in August* (1932) has sometimes been compared to *Nostromo* (1904) in terms of its scope and to *Under Western Eyes* (1913) in terms of its treatment of salvation (or release) through suffering. The later sagas, which develop the fictional history of the American South inaugurated by *Flags in the Dust* (1928), extend and deepen his analysis of the construction of identity in or across racial and sexual difference. Joe Christmas, in *Light in August*, tries desperately to convert difference-within into the difference between himself and a series of lovers: he acts black when with white women, and white when with black women. But the only result of these encounters is to reopen the equivocation in himself, which he must then overcome through violence, and the identificatory retribution that violence brings down on him.

Ernest Hemingway, disciple of Gertrude Stein, started a lot closer to the center of Modernism than Faulkner, and moved away from it more rapidly. Hemingway became, after Joyce had conclusively demonstrated his ineradicable perversity in the later episodes of *Ulysses*, the poets’ favorite prose writer. Ezra Pound approved. No prose writer stuck more closely to Imagist principles: terseness, impersonality, attention to the world of objects. But objective correlatives were, for a brief period during the early 1920s, his theme rather than his method. When, in *In Our Time*, the dissatisfied wife in “Cat in the Rain” decides to feminize herself by letting her hair grow – “‘I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel,’ she said”<sup>31</sup> – the phantom knot is *her* objective correlative, not Hemingway’s.

In *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), the bullfighter Pedro Montero, emblem of masculinity, wants Brett Ashley to let her hair grow – “He said it would make me more womanly” (p. 181) – and then marry him: “After I’d gotten more womanly, of course” (p. 182). Her

refusal is a refusal of gendered identity, and it keeps her in the orbit of the narrator, Jake Barnes, whose war wound has destroyed his manhood. This relationship is of its essence mediated, equivocal, inauthentic. The novel's tripartite structure marks out the three stages of the rite of passage which might restore Jake to immediacy, and through immediacy to manhood: separation from the banal, purposeless, inauthentic Paris life described in book I; a liminal phase, described in book II, during which identity can be stripped down and rebuilt, in Spain, at the festival in Pamplona; and a return, transfigured, to ordinary existence, in book III. The map of Europe becomes a gigantic objective correlative. To cross the border between France and Spain is to move from a mundane into a sacred realm. But Jake disavows the *aficion*, the passion for the bullfight, which might have remasculinized him and rendered him whole again, when he introduces Brett to Pedro Montero; after that betrayal, the *aficionados* will not even speak to him. The sacredness of Spain, its restorative power, is compromised by the network of boundaries and checkpoints which divide one part of it from another: a *carabineer* asks for fishing permits; a customs officer in Pamplona searches baggage; a verger stops Brett from entering a church because she has no hat. An elsewhere thus divided from itself is no longer elsewhere, no longer the crucible of psychic restoration. Jake is always looking into things, into the cage where the bulls are penned, into the runway down which the bulls will chase the crowd. But, for him, unlike Gerald Crich or Gudrun Brangwen, to look into things is to look through them. It is after one of his inspections that Jake meets the *aficion*-free waiter who believes that bullfighting is bullshitting. On his way back into France, at the start of book III, he gets no further than Bayonne, before doubling back into Spain, and into Brett's doubling back from the arms of Montero.

Hemingway soon became, in his books, at any rate, the Hemingway of legend: the man who, enraged by Max Eastman's jibe about false chest hair, marched into the *New Republic* offices and bared all (or part). His fullest and least tragic exploration of androgyny, *The Garden of Eden*, was not published in his lifetime. During the 1920s and 1930s, androgyny – psychic, sexual and, so to speak, textual – was largely the province of women writers. Their explorations, for the most part published in their lifetimes, though frequently neglected by readers and reviewers, have over the last twenty years been richly and extensively reclaimed by feminism: reclaimed, more often than not, in the name of critical difference, of psychic and textual slipping around.

Female Modernism was an answer to the relentless conversion of difference-within into difference-between which had for so long sustained patriarchal ideology in general, and literary representations of women in particular. That is why Virginia Woolf insisted on the disabling exteriority of literary realism, in "Modern Fiction" (1919) and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924). In *Hilda Lessways* (1911), she complained, Arnold Bennett tries to make us believe in the reality of his heroine by describing the house she lives in, and the houses she can see from the house she lives in. "House property was the common ground from which the Edwardians found it easy to proceed to intimacy."



Woolf thought that writers should proceed to intimacy from a different ground (the ground of difference-within itself): the “pattern” which each incident or impression “scores upon the consciousness.”<sup>32</sup> Identity was to be grasped by means of a poetic of awareness: the more aware a person is, the more representable he or she becomes; and, by implication, the more representable, the more aware. Female Modernism might thus be understood as a program for the conversion of difference-between into difference-within.

The efficacy of this poetic of awareness was a matter of dispute from the outset, even, or especially, among women writers. Dorothy Richardson tested it to the limit in *Pilgrimage*, a sequence of thirteen novels (or “chapters”) beginning with *Pointed Roofs* (1915) and concluding with *March Moonlight*, published posthumously in 1967. *Pilgrimage* describes the experiences of Miriam Henderson, a woman forced out of the stifling security of middle-class family life by her father’s bankruptcy. In a 1918 essay on the first three volumes which Woolf read with approval, May Sinclair, whose own *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919) was distinctly Richardsonian, noted that Richardson had abandoned the objective method and “taken Miriam’s nature upon her.”<sup>33</sup> As the distance between author and protagonist collapsed, so did that between protagonist and world. This much merging was not to everyone’s taste. Katherine Mansfield, reviewing *Interim* (1919), where the shocks of “inward recognition” are produced by “such things as well-browned mutton, gas jets, varnished wallpapers,” wondered whether the systematic dissolution of the differences between self and world had not merely produced *indifference*. Miriam’s closeness to life, she concluded, “leaves us feeling, as before, that everything being of equal importance to her, it is impossible that everything should not be of equal unimportance.”<sup>34</sup>

This is, I think, a significant disagreement, whose implications can be grasped by comparing Mansfield’s description of a sojourn in Germany in *In a German Pension* (1913) with Richardson’s in *Pointed Roofs* (1915). Mansfield’s cousin, Elizabeth von Arnim, had already made a successful literary career out of witty assaults on German arrogance, philistinism, boorishness, and misogyny. She herself chose the same targets, in stories about appalling table manners (soup spilt on waistcoats, ears cleaned with a napkin, and so on) and the unwelcome intimacies made possible by umbrellas. The catalog of differences between England and Germany, men and women, is a little too relentless, as she herself later recognized, but it does sometimes produce a change of attitude: an encounter with a German feminist, for example, forces the narrator to reconsider and reaffirm her own, differently formulated convictions.

Germany proves less of an ordeal for Miriam Henderson, who has gone there to teach English, than might have been expected, and certainly not the land of soup-stained ties and umbrella harassment depicted by Mansfield. The success of her first class is said to be important not in itself but because it removes “an obstacle to gladness which was waiting to break forth.”<sup>35</sup> Gladness breaking forth is very much the subject of the early



volumes of *Pilgrimage*, and Germany counts only insofar as it hinders or encourages the breaking forth. Sitting in a *delikatessen*, surrounded by the girls from her school, she feels “securely adrift” (p. 88). In Mansfield’s stories, no one is ever *securely* adrift.

## The mind grows rings: Joyce, Woolf, Ford

Deconstructive criticism has done greater justice to the aesthetic and political power of parody and self-parody, in *Ulysses*, than literary history ever did. But the preoccupation with textual and psychic splitting, like all preoccupations, has its limits. Critical difference becomes an absolute value, to be teased out from within the text, and then celebrated either as a pleasure or as an ideological unmasking. Attridge, for example, claims that his reading of “Sirens” does not so much explain the episode’s “linguistic adventures” as participate in them, “enjoying and learning from them at the same time.”<sup>36</sup> Joyce, however, reported that after completing “Sirens” he found it impossible to listen to music of any kind. There was a price to be paid for the pleasures of scorching.

Michael Levenson has most astutely assessed the cost of the book’s commitment to parody and self-parody by associating it with the figure of Buck Mulligan, the mocking blasphemer whom Stephen names “Usurper.” “The ear for verbal absurdity, the eye for moral weakness, the insatiable appetite for pun and paradox, the willingness to amuse until amusement irritates, the incessant unrepentant theatricality – these central features of Mulligan’s sensibility become dominant features at the centre of *Ulysses*.”<sup>37</sup> To the extent that the book endorses parody and self-parody, it endorses the actions of its two melodramatic villains, its two usurpers, Mulligan and Blazes Boylan: for it is Boylan’s “erotic arousal” which the “linguistic adventures” of “Sirens” ensure, not Bloom’s. Deconstruction cannot describe the moral and emotional cost of parody.

Modernist writers, on the other hand, could, and did. Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* (1947) is both a novel and an essay on Modernism. It is the life of a brilliant young composer, Adrian Leverkühn, as told, during the first years of World War II, by his older friend and critic, Zeitblom. As a student, Leverkühn convinces himself that traditional forms have been exhausted. “Why does almost everything seem to me like its own parody? Why must I think that almost all, no, all the methods and conventions of art today *are good for parody only*?”<sup>38</sup> Leverkühn’s own music combines extreme formal austerity with the depiction of a universe in which humankind has been displaced by the elemental and the primal. Zeitblom, whose allegiance is to the “human and articulate,” finds this combination “daemonic.” Zeitblom’s humanism is subjected to ironic treatment, but there can be no mistaking the pain which Leverkühn’s commitment to parody causes him. Similarly, there can be no mistaking the pain which Buck Mulligan’s Faustian pact causes Stephen Dedalus, or the pain which Blazes Boylan’s rather more visceral Faustian pact causes Leopold Bloom.

The last four episodes of *Ulysses* (“Circe,” “Eumaeus,” “Ithaca,” “Penelope”) exceed

all others in length and range of reference. Rather than placing further stylistic screens around events, these episodes treat what has already happened during the day as a set of narrative elements to be endlessly combined and recombined. This final stage could be seen as a return from the fields burnt up by parody to the house of domestic fiction. With Stephen and Bloom united, then safely installed at 7 Eccles Street, while Molly sleeps upstairs, surely the book's "odyssey of style" is also complete?<sup>39</sup> Hugh Kenner has rightly drawn attention to "a governing rhythm of the book, whereby impression in the first half is modified by knowledge in the second."<sup>40</sup> "Penelope," an episode regarded as extramural by many, including Joyce himself, none the less provides more information about the Blooms than any other. But what prevents stylistic as well as thematic completion or return is a new emphasis, in the final episodes, on possibility rather than (usually the novel's sustaining convention) probability. In "Ithaca," when Bloom turns on the faucet, the question "Did it flow?" elicits a lengthy explanation of how and why the water flows (pp. 782–3). This explanation is a thought which could have occurred to Bloom as he turns on the faucet. Since we do not know whether it did or not, we are not much the wiser about his state of mind at that particular moment. But we have learned something about the kind of topic which would interest a person like him. This is virtual Bloom, if you like, rather than actual (novelistic) Bloom.

Virtual Bloom is actual Bloom's adjunct: neither conjoined, nor disjoined. Virtual Bloom has attracted relatively little attention, either from literary historians, who favour conjoining, or from deconstructionists, who favor disjoining. And yet he is surely amplified in our minds by the thoughts he may or may not have had. By dealing not in probability, but in possibility, Joyce renewed the genre of the novel. Seen from this point of view, his book's epic correspondences are another of its virtual realities (another way of conceiving virtual reality), rather than, as Eliot supposed, an ordering principle. In "Ithaca" and "Penelope," the question we ask of Leopold, Molly and Stephen is not "Who are they, finally?" but "What might they yet do for each other, in each other's lives?" The technique which supervenes on parody, in *Ulysses* and a number of other Modernist novels, is a process of psychic and textual additiveness (a proliferation of virtual realities).

Virginia Woolf's notably disjunctive *The Waves* (1931) sets in parallel series the reflections of six characters, in such a way as to suggest the permeability or friability of selfhood. The elderly Bernard, whose Marlow-or Gerontion-like address to an unnamed dinner companion concludes the book, observes that it is not "one life" he looks back on: "I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis: or how to distinguish my life from theirs."<sup>41</sup> But it is striking that while he does speak of the dissipation or streaming away of identity, he also speaks of its accumulation, accretion, acceleration, augmentation and sedimentation. Jinny, Susan, and the rest are, among other things, his adjuncts, his virtual selves. "The mind grows rings; the identity becomes robust; pain is absorbed in growth" (p. 198). Sometimes, as he is well aware, the growth is halted, the pain breaks through. But

Bernard, simply by surviving, has won his glimpse of “eternal renewal.” In that respect, he begins to seem less like Marlow or Gerontion, and more like a character in a novel by Arnold Bennett.

Many, if not most, plots, and certainly those favored by the great nineteenth-century realists, turn on moments of revelation, recognition scenes, when the illusions nurtured by timidity, prejudice, or habit fall away, and a naked self confronts a naked world. These are the moments when identity is begun, renewed, or completed. French Naturalism added a different plot, in which the revelation is gradual, and of something already known, but concealed: a moral or physical flaw, an organic “lesion.” Both kinds of plot favor awareness. Illusions are there to be stripped away. There can be no personal freedom until they have been stripped away. Bennett was less interested in crises, and the comic or tragic awareness they bring, than in the illusions that remain. His protagonists are incapable of or do not want awareness. They advance their hollowness into a world which, as they age, becomes ever more crowded, ever more impenetrable. They feel the changes in pressure within them, but the shell of their nescience neither cracks nor fills with hard-earned wisdom, with love. Edwin Clayhanger, hero of the Clayhanger tetralogy (1910–18), is motivated in his youth by a fierce hatred of Methodism. But by the time he is asked, in middle age, to serve as District Treasurer of the Additional Chapels Fund, he does not even have enough animosity left for a contemptuous refusal. Ambition goes the same way: “his life has become a life of half-measures, a continual falling-short.” Yet he is in his way fulfilled, even assertive. He has accumulated an identity. Bernard, in *The Waves*, knows something about epiphany, about rupture; but also something about the half-measures which may add up to eternal renewal. I do not mean to suggest that Woolf had abandoned her belief in moments of being, in not falling short: Miss La Trobe, the heroine of *Between the Acts* (1941), is about as un-Bennett-like a protagonist as one could possibly imagine. But I do think that she, like a number of other Modernist writers, was more interested in cumulative models of selfhood than her most recent critics have supposed. “We all begin well, for in our youth there is nothing we are more intolerant of than our own sins writ large in others and we fight them fiercely in ourselves; but we grow old and we see that these our sins are of all sins the really harmless ones to own, nay that they give a charm to any character, and so our struggle with them dies away.” That might quite plausibly have been an extract from a review of the Clayhanger novels. In fact, it is the fourth sentence of *The Making of Americans*.<sup>42</sup>

One writer whose reputation would probably be enhanced by a new interest in cumulative models of selfhood is Ford Madox Ford. Ford is known today primarily as the author of the elliptical *The Good Soldier*, as Modernism’s most influential literary editor, at the *English Review* and the *Transatlantic Review*, and as one of its shrewdest theorists, whose contempt for arch medievalism is said to have saved Ezra Pound three years’ work. His masterpiece, *Parade’s End* (1924–8), although comparable to *Pilgrimage* or the earlier episodes of *Ulysses* in its rendering of interiority, has suffered a

certain neglect: largely, I suspect, because the conception of identity it develops rests neither on difference-between nor on difference-within. The protagonist, Christopher Tietjens, statistician, soldier, and cuckold, is, above all, long-suffering: not for him the pain of abrupt recognition suffered by a Quentin Compson or a Nora Flood; not for him Miriam Henderson's long gladness.

The best way to demonstrate the idiosyncratic modernity of *Parade's End* is to compare it with Violet Hunt's *The Last Ditch* (1918), a novel from which, I believe, Ford learned a great deal. Hunt, Ford's quondam lover and companion, regarded herself as the model not only for Tietjens's sadistic wife, Sylvia, but for Valentine Wannop, the young suffragette he falls in love with in *Some Do Not* (1924) and settles down with in *The Last Post* (1928). She made her name as the author of ghost stories and somber studies of the New Woman. *The Last Ditch* has no pretensions to Modernism. Hunt's friend and best critic, May Sinclair, dismissed it out of hand, and it has since escaped critical comment altogether. The parallels with *Parade's End* suggest that it deserves better. Both novels are set immediately before and during World War I, and are concerned with the destiny of a class (the landed gentry) to all appearances damaged beyond repair by slaughter in the trenches and democratization at home. This class finds itself, at parade's end, in the last ditch. And yet it endures and adapts.

*The Last Ditch* consists of letters written by a cultured aristocrat, the Lady Aries, and one of her daughters, Lady Venice St. Remy, later Lady Venice Bar, to another daughter, Mrs. Laura Quinney, who has married an American and now lives in Newport, Rhode Island. After a brief engagement to Percy Gregson, a Labour Member of Parliament and decent, Godfearing man of the "new order," Venice marries a very faintly indecent man of the old order, Sir Audely Bar, who has generally been regarded as her mother's property. Audely Bar is a model for Christopher Tietjens. He has Tietjens's impassive bloneness and cold blue stare. Like Tietjens, he is lazy and supine, but invariably competent when called upon to act, and possessing a wide range of knowledge. When Venice writes an article about "war babies" (she's in favor), Bar points out that there are no war babies to speak of; Tietjens disabuses Valentine's article-writing mother of the same notion. Both men are in their early forties; both volunteer for active service even though they are over age, and, when confined by injury or illness to administrative tasks, perform them with exemplary, fruitless dedication. Both end up with younger women.

The main difference between Bar and Tietjens is physical. Though lazy and supine, Bar is slim. His shapeliness makes him an English type, a regulation "good soldier." Tietjens, on the other hand, is decidedly stout, and his lack of shape is a continued affront to identities founded on social, moral, or sexual distinctions. When he and his brother Mark stand facing each other, Mark suggests carved wood, Christopher wheat sacks.<sup>43</sup> It is Mark who cracks up, while Christopher adapts. Christopher strikes Sylvia as physically and morally "lymphatic." "How, she said to herself, could she ever move, put emotion into, this lump!" (p. 406) But the shapelessness is not a dispersal, a proliferation of differences-within. Tietjens does not slip around. He bulks and looms. He

occupies space, and minds. He is described as “ballooning slowly” (p. 261) from a doorway, or “lumping opposite” (p. 294) a fellow officer at the mess room table, or “splurging heavily down” (p. 342) on to his camp bed. Ford’s book is more modern than Hunt’s because it adapts (“ballooning,” “lumping”) or improvizes (“splurge”) until it has found terms for an identity founded neither on difference-within nor on difference-between. So assertive is Tietjens’s presence, so massively accumulated, so vivid in other people’s minds, that he dominates the final volume of the sequence, *The Last Post*, without appearing in it at all. *The Last Post* introduces us to virtual Tietjens.

Both narratives subside rather than end. Audely will as usual will “fall soft,” remarks Lady Aries, with his imminent marriage to Venice in mind; and he does. “It did not seem possible,” Sylvia Tietjens reflects, “that Christopher should settle down into tranquil devotion to brother and mistress after the years of emotion she had given him.” And *he* does, too. “It was as if a man should have jumped out of a frying pan into – a duckpond” (p. 792). These soft landings, neither affirmation nor catastrophe, neither comedy nor tragedy, are something new in fiction.

Landings of any kind, soft or hard, presuppose a leap or a fall, such as the years of emotion Sylvia has given Tietjens: a discontinuity, a departure, a crisis. For a moment (a long moment, perhaps), everything is in the air. Hence, no doubt, the enduring symbolic potential of leaps and falls. But soft landings differ from hard in that they need not involve a change for the better or a change for the worse. They may leave things more or less as they were. Having dusted ourselves off, we go about our business. Soft landings partake neither of the meaningfulness we attribute to continuity nor of the meaningfulness we attribute to discontinuity. Tietjens’s completeness emerges in that suspension at once of meaningful continuity and of meaningful discontinuity.

Soft landings are not a courtesy Conrad extends to Lord Jim, whose tumbles into water (from the bridge of the *Patna*) and mud (from Rajah Tunku Allang’s compound) tend if anything to break him up. Jim violently resists such softness as there is in landings, and I would suggest, tentatively, that Conrad does a certain violence, by means of Marlow’s fretting, to his representation of Jim’s engulfment. “He reached and grabbed desperately with his hands, and only succeeded in gathering a horrible cold shiny heap of slime against his breast – up to his very chin. It seemed to him that he was burying himself alive, and then he struck out madly, scattering the mud with his fists.”<sup>44</sup> Jim’s gathering of slime is eerily enforced, or it may be eerily preempted, by Marlow’s gathering of adjectives: not just horrible, not even just horrible and cold, but horrible, cold, and *shiny*. Marlow cannot allow the experience to be anything for Jim but a meaningful discontinuity, a death and resurrection. “It seemed to him that he was burying himself alive” (p. 230). The madness would appear to be as much Marlow’s as Jim’s, as much Conrad’s as Marlow’s. Conrad, I think, a traditionalist at heart, found it hard to imagine a nonviolent rupture.

Ford is modern because he lets Tietjens land softly, rather than breaking him up. He



was not alone in his forebearance. Nick Adams, pitched off the train on to the cinder track by a “lousy crut of a brakeman” (p. 292) in “The Battler,” halfway through *In Our Time*, manages to alight in a less bruising fashion in the concluding story, “Big Two-Hearted River” (p. 340). Leopold Bloom, about to enter his house via the area, allows his body to move freely in space by “separating himself from the railings and crouching in preparation for the impact of the fall.” He, too, lands softly. Regaining “new stable equilibrium,” he rises “uninjured though concussed by the impact” (pp. 799–80). Bernard’s investment in the lives of his friends, Tietjens’s presence even when absent, the thoughts Bloom might have had: these are as much the note of Modernist fiction as Ursula Brangwen’s rainbow and the equivocations of Miriam Henderson.

## Notes

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- 2 T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 177.
- 3 Ford Madox Ford, *Critical Writings*, ed. Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 41.
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- 5 Michael Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 111–12.
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- 8 Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), pp. 52, 112–18.
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- 11 Levenson, *Modernism*, p. 129.
- 12 Eliot, *Selected Prose*, p. 177.
- 13 Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*, rev. edn. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), p. 12.
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- 22** Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Margaret Drabble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 18.
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## 4 Modern poetry

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James Longenbach

Not long ago, modern poetry – Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Stevens – seemed to occupy an enormous territory on the literary–historical map. But as the twentieth century comes to an end, the Modernism that once loomed so large now seems startlingly diminished. Beginning in the late 1950s, critics began to see through the smoke screen of New Critical antiromanticism, uncovering the important affiliations between romantic, Victorian, and modern poetics. Today, in the wake of pioneering work by Frank Kermode, Robert Langbaum, and especially Harold Bloom, Eliot not only seems indebted to Tennyson; his Modernism makes most sense when we understand it as part of a continuum beginning with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>1</sup>

And if the historical integrity of Modernism has been encroached on by romanticism, an increasingly powerful postmodernism has exerted equal pressure from the opposite side. Certain modern poets – for Marjorie Perloff, Pound but not Stevens – are claimed as proto-postmodernists, leaving the impression that the remaining Modernists are a hapless, ineffectual lot.<sup>2</sup> And what makes this remapping of the moderns all the more complicated is that the various cartographers narrow the Modernist field in different ways. For some, Stevens is in while Pound is out; for others, H. D. or Gwendolyn Brooks hold our attention at the expense of both Stevens and Pound.

What is most remarkable to me about Modernism's shrinking visibility, however, is that the historical record justifies it. In saying so, I do not mean to undermine the importance of modern poetry in the stories we tell about literary history. But in order to register that importance effectively, we need to recognize that as early as the 1930s, Modernism seemed to poets such as Randall Jarrell (born in 1914) to be a thing of the past – something to which they could respond but in which they could no longer participate. “Who could have believed that modernism would collapse so fast?” asked Jarrell in “The End of the Line” (1942), an essay that remains one of the subtlest accounts of Modernism we have. Even at this early date, modern poetry looked to Jarrell as it appears to us today – squeezed on the one side by its romantic precursors and on the other by its postmodern inheritors (Jarrell himself first used the word *postmodernist* in 1947). Flying in the face of his New Critical teachers (and foreshadowing the work of Bloom or Kermode), Jarrell insisted that modern poetry was nothing but what romantic poetry “wishes or finds it necessary” to become: “Romanticism holds in solution contradictory tendencies which, isolated and exaggerated in Modernism, look startlingly opposed both to each other and to the earlier stages of romanticism.” Jarrell explained that any qualities associated with modern poetry – violence, disorganization, obscurity – are themselves romantic phenomena. And having uncovered this continuity, he wondered

what modern poetry could possibly become in turn: “How can poems be written that are more violent, more disorganized, more obscure more – supply your own adjective – than those that have already been written?”<sup>3</sup>

Many other poets besides Jarrell were asking this question. Elizabeth Bishop was asking it in essays published around the same time; Robert Graves and Laura Riding’s *Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1928) was written with a clear sense that Modernism could only be described retrospectively.<sup>4</sup> Edward Mendelson has recently characterized W. H. Auden as one of the first postmodern poets, and in saying so, he was preceded by Jarrell, who said as much in the early 1940s: “Auden at the beginning was oracular (obscure, original), bad at organization, neglectful of logic, full of astonishing or magical language, intent on his own world and his own forms; he has changed continuously toward organization, plainness, accessibility, objectivity, social responsibility.”<sup>5</sup>

Jarrell was describing a transformation in Auden’s career as it was happening. Having begun by taking Eliot and Yeats as his models, Auden turned in the late thirties to a poetry of more Augustan, civic virtues. A poet who began his career sounding like this

Who stands, the crux left of the watershed,  
On the wet road between the chafing grass  
Below him sees dismantled washing-floors,  
Snatches of tramline running to a wood,  
An industry already comatose,  
Yet sparsely living.<sup>6</sup>

now wrote with a kind of talky, discursive ease that violated almost every Modernist precept for good writing (as they were articulated, for example, in Ezra Pound’s Imagist “Don’ts”: “Go in fear of abstractions” – “compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome”).<sup>7</sup>

We hoped; we waited for the day  
The State would wither clean away,  
Expecting the Millennium  
That theory promised us would come:  
It didn’t. Specialists must try  
To detail all the reasons why;  
Meanwhile at least the layman knows  
That none are lost so soon as those  
Who overlook their crooked nose,  
That they grow small who imitate  
The mannerisms of the great,  
Afraid to be themselves, or ask

What acts are proper to their task.

(p. 175)

For Auden, this stylistic transformation was impelled by political as much as aesthetic considerations. The kind of poetry he wrote as a young man was inextricably linked with what came to seem to him the impossibly utopian political goals of the 1930s. At the end of the thirties, in the wake of the Nazi–Soviet pact, Auden could only conclude, as he put it in his elegy for Yeats, that “poetry makes nothing happen” (p. 197). He meant, even more precisely, that the kind of poetry he himself had written made nothing happen – that poets had forgotten what acts are proper to their task. Auden realized that the modern poets, like Shelley before them, had thought of themselves as “unacknowledged legislators.” And in the face of a world that had gone so tragically wrong, Auden could no longer sustain what now seemed to him such a romantic delusion. The result was a poetry of strategically circumscribed ambition; a poetry of civic rather than apocalyptic designs; a poetry that to Randall Jarrell seemed (at least for a moment – his opinion would change) to offer some hope for what poets might be able to do at the end of the line.

I have put the cart before the horse by discussing the first wave of postmodern reaction before discussing modern poetry itself. But it seems to me that the story of Jarrell’s and Auden’s negotiations with Modernism – their sense of its debt to romanticism, their sense of its quickly diminishing viability as the twentieth century wore on – highlights the very issues that ought to shape our reading of modern poetry today, more than half a century after Jarrell published “The End of the Line.” In other words, Auden’s and Jarrell’s reaction to Modernism repeats a tension that was already embedded within modern poetry. The issue of poetic ambition – what the social effectiveness or responsibility of poetry might be – seems to me particularly crucial. In the story I tell, modern poetry grew from a sense (already highly developed by the Victorians) that the great claims made for poetry by the romantics were no longer viable. If Thomas Hardy, Marianne Moore, the Imagist Pound, and the Yeats of *The Wind Among the Reeds* have anything in common, it is a desire to limit poetry’s terrain. But few of the modern poets could remain content with this small world (Ezra Pound would go so far as to insist that poets ought to be considered *acknowledged* legislators). And by the time that Auden and Jarrell came of age, the great modern poems – *The Waste Land*, *The Tower*, the *Cantos* – seemed as ambitious, for better and for worse, as their romantic antecedents. Some modern poets (Hardy, Moore, Stevens) resisted the twentieth century’s epic challenges, hanging on to a strategically circumscribed world, but all poets felt them.

These challenges are not particularly Modernist, but they may be thought of as a distinguishing aspect of modernity, understood as a phenomenon beginning in the Enlightenment. Gazing upon this much larger field, a field of which modern literature is only a part, Jürgen Habermas has suggested that modernity is distinguished by the

development of “autonomous spheres” of science, morality, and art. As art came to seem divorced from the culture at large, the work of the ivory tower rather than the community, artists paradoxically put greater pressure on art to perform substantive social work. This is the dilemma that the modern poets inherited – the dilemma that Pound tried to embrace and that Auden tried to reject. As Habermas points out, the dilemma often leads to a “false negation” of culture: everyday life “could hardly be saved from cultural impoverishment through breaking open a single cultural sphere – art.”<sup>8</sup> (Or, as Kenneth Burke put it in 1931, speaking as someone who wanted to honor the social responsibilities of poetry, “one cannot advocate art as a cure for toothache without disclosing the superiority of dentistry.”<sup>9</sup>) Growing out of romanticism, growing into postmodernism, this hope for the power of poetry was both the dream and the nightmare of the Modernist.

“If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved,” said Hardy, “the Inquisition might have let him alone.”<sup>10</sup> The novelist weathering the publication of *Jude the Obscure* turned to poetry precisely because nobody paid much attention to it, and far from lamenting poetry’s marginal status, Hardy embraced it – harnessed it. As much as he admired Wordsworth and Shelley, Hardy felt that their ambitions for poetry were no longer plausible, given (among other things) the prominence of the novel. Hardy did not simply feel dwarfed by his romantic forebears; as James Richardson has suggested, he “felt even more strongly the necessity of his diminution, perceiving their styles, aspirations and modes of thought were, for him, not only impossible but also inappropriate.”<sup>11</sup> The Pre-Raphaelite poet D. G. Rossetti once complained about Shelley hatching “yearly universes,” and, like Hardy, he embraced a “diminished” romanticism, focusing his poems on a tiny world of which he could be relatively certain. Spiritual consolation is hard to come by in such a world, and small objects, carefully detailed, become increasingly important. In the calculatedly antivisionary poem “The Woodspurge,” Rossetti takes in the sublime grandeur of the natural world only to conclude one very particular thing: “The woodspurge has a cup of three.”<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, in “Shelley’s Skylark,” Hardy explains that the bird that had flown “higher still and higher / From the earth” for Shelley had died for him:

Maybe it rests in the loam I view,  
Maybe it throbs in a myrtle’s green,  
Maybe it sleeps in the coming hue  
Of a grape on the slopes of yon island scene.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of rising to sing of a grander world, Hardy focuses on the concrete particulars of everyday life: the ground on which he walks, the myrtle’s green, the ripening grapes. Spiritual presences have retreated from Hardy’s landscape, and his world often seems ominously blank, untouched by divine or human agency: “a few leaves lay on the



starving sod; / – They had fallen from an ash, and were gray” (1).

Yet Hardy was (to borrow the words of a late poem) someone who never expected much, and he consequently seems content with his diminished world. “The Darkling Thrush” recalls Keats’s nightingale, but refuses any effort to merge the human soul with the bird’s song: Hardy can imagine that “Some blessed Hope” *might* tremble through the bird’s song, but he is in any case certain that it is something “whereof he knew / And I was unaware” (p. 33). It is not pessimism but caution that makes contentment possible – just as it is for Robert Frost, the American poet who published his first important poems in England, sharing Hardy’s fruitfully skeptical relationship to the romantic landscape. In “Come In,” Frost stands at the edge of the woods (always a tempting threshold for him), and hears the thrush’s song; but he refuses not only the invitation but the effort to hear the song as invitation: “I would not come in. / I meant not even if asked, / And I hadn’t been.”<sup>14</sup>

Frost’s refusals of the pathetic fallacy are even craftier than Hardy’s. In “The Need of Being Versed in Country Things” he plays on the word “verse” when he concludes that “One had to be versed in country things / Not to believe the phoebes wept” for human loss (p. 242). Frost believed that we need to learn how to live in metaphor, and in poems like “Once by the Pacific” he tests our ability to do so: gazing at a frightening storm, Frost says that it looks *as if* the “shore was lucky in being backed by cliff” – *as if* “a night of dark intent / Was coming, and not only a night, an age” (p. 250). An apocalyptic threat is not essential to the landscape but is imposed on it through metaphor. This skepticism is Frost’s way of resisting easy pessimism. When he gazes into a well in “For Once, Then, Something,” repositioning his head so that he sees neither the reflection of the clouds nor of his face, he cannot be certain of what he finally sees: “Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something” (p. 225). That something – the one, particular thing he sees, however insignificant – is all the consolation he requires. The very title of this poem, says Richard Poirier in *Poetry and Pragmatism*, “indicates a willingness to celebrate not a gift of meaning but only an inconclusive promise of it.”<sup>15</sup>

Rossetti’s woodspurge, Hardy’s grapes, Frost’s something: in their different ways these poets focused on a world of little things, eschewing epic ambition and spiritual consolation. And in the relationship to their romantic forebears, these poets may be aligned with modern writers with whom they might otherwise seem to have little in common: the Symbolist Yeats of *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), the Imagist Pound of *Lustra* (1916), the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, and even the studiously modest poems of the Georgians (among whom Edward Thomas, close friend of Robert Frost, stands prominently). Early in his career, Yeats set out to write (as he put it in “The Autumn of the Body”) “a poetry of essences, separated one from another in little and intense poems.”<sup>16</sup> Yeats never forsook the ambition to plumb the world beyond (and neither did Pound), but he believed that the ambition had to be focused not in long poems but in self-contained, one-sentence poems like “The Fish.”

Although you hide in the ebb and flow  
Of the pale tide when the moon has set,  
The people of coming days will know  
About the casting out of my net,  
And how you have leaped times out of mind  
Over the little silver cords,  
And think that you were hard and unkind,  
And blame you with many bitter words.<sup>17</sup>

Yeats would remake his style over and over again throughout his career, but his pristine syntax, fulfilling the formal demands of the poem effortlessly, would remain constant. It has often been said that in the second decade of the twentieth century, Ezra Pound “modernized” Yeats’s style, toughening his attitude and roughening his diction. (This story was determined at least in part by a New Critical prejudice against the nineteenth century: having begun his career as an accomplished Victorian, Yeats supposedly needed to be rerouted into the modern world.) But it now seems clear that Yeats was far more influential in determining the direction of Pound’s career. Pound began as a deep admirer of Browning and Yeats, and one way to understand his development of the Imagist aesthetic is to see that he purged himself of Browning’s gregariousness by embracing Yeats’s purity of syntax and diction. In some ways, Pound’s Imagist program (the influential “Don’ts”) seems poised against certain aspects of literary Symbolism; but the two lines by Robert Burns that Yeats presents as “perfectly symbolical” in “The Symbolism of Poetry”

The white moon is setting behind the white wave,  
And Time is setting with me, O!<sup>18</sup>

employ a pristine diction that prefigures “In a Station of the Metro,” the most famous of Pound’s Imagist poems.

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.<sup>19</sup>

Neither do they seem unrelated to “Hermes of the Ways,” the first poem to be published above the name *H. D.*, “*Imagiste*.”

Hermes, Hermes,  
the great sea foamed,  
gnashed its teeth about me;  
but you have waited,

where sea-grass tangles  
with shore-grass.<sup>20</sup>

Many other influences came together to produce Imagism, but whatever else they are, the poems are the work of diminished romantics – poets who needed to condense the universe of poetry into a space so small that it threatened to seem almost precious (as do many of the poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds*). But for H. D., that preciousness became a kind of weapon. “Large epic pictures bored her,” she wrote in her novella *Paint It Today*. “She wanted the songs that cut like a swallow wing the high, untainted ether, not the tragic legions of set lines that fell like black armies with terrific force.”<sup>21</sup> Erected during World War I, when militarism and masculinity seemed to go hand in hand, H. D.’s lyric world was a strategic rejection of an epic imperative. Marianne Moore once admitted that H. D.’s work seemed “non-public and “feminine.” But she went on to explain (in terms that elucidate her own work as well) that there is “a connection between weapons and beauty”: “Cowardice and beauty are at swords’ points and in H. D.’s work, ... we have heroics which do not confuse transcendence with domination.”<sup>22</sup>

The Imagist Pound, in contrast, was surely the most self-consciously ambitious poet since Milton: he decided in his youth that he would write the epic of the West (as he once boasted) and, like Milton, he prepared himself assiduously for the task. The most influential aspect of Imagism was its scrupulous devotion to the craft of poetry; Pound never abandoned those values. But almost from the start, he was impatient with Imagism’s studiously miniature world: “I am often asked whether there can be a long imagiste or vorticist poem,” he wrote in 1914; at this time and Pound was already at work on the *Cantos*, the long poem that would preoccupy him nearly until his death in 1972.<sup>23</sup>

But how can a diminished aesthetic – one that eschews discursive breadth for obsessive precision, radical condensation, minute objects – produce a long poem? To approach an answer to this question, we should first notice that it is difficult to maintain a scrupulously diminished aesthetic. In some ways, Rossetti seems at the end of “The Woodspurge” to reject all visionary knowledge for the material world; yet the woodspurge’s “cup of three” cannot help but evoke Christian iconography. Similarly, Hardy could never stop entertaining the possibility of a spiritually animated landscape, no matter how utterly he faced the earth’s stark otherness. This tension produces the awkward final stanzas of “Shelley’s Skylark,” in which Hardy retreats from his catalog of the particular world, the skylark’s resting place, commanding the “faeries” to “find / That tiny pinch of priceless dust, / And bring a casket silver-lined” to be its tomb (p. 15). More often, however, this tension produces Hardy’s greatest poems, poems in which we are assured that the landscape is devoid of spiritual presences at the same time that we are tempted, if only by metaphor, to search for those presences. In “The Voice,” one of the “Poems of 1912–13” (a group of elegies for his first wife) Hardy cannot be sure if he

hears a ghost's voice calling him or "only the breeze, in its listlessness / Travelling across the wet mead to me here, / You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness." And the poem ends with the question undecided (and with Hardy's brilliantly irregular rhythms reinforcing the poem's sense of inconclusiveness).

Thus I; faltering forward,  
Leaves around me falling,  
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward  
And the woman calling.

(p. 87)

But if it is relatively easy to see how spiritual presences reenter Hardy's diminished aesthetic, it is more crucial to see that those presences are always animating Pound's Imagist poems. In his prose statements about Imagism (which have probably been more influential than the poems themselves), Pound usually makes the poetry sound stubbornly materialistic: "Direct treatment of the 'thing.'"<sup>24</sup> This was the kind of advice Pound wanted to give other writers, but as far as Pound himself was concerned, Imagism was an often visionary enterprise. In his less programmatic statements, such as the prose poem "Ikona" (published in 1914 in a spiritualist journal called the *Cerebralist*), Pound's justification of Imagism sounds much like the Symbolist Yeats: "It is in art the highest business to create the beautiful image .... And if – as some say, the soul survives the body; if our consciousness is not an intermittent melody of strings that relapse between whiles into silence, then more than ever should we put forth the images of beauty" (p. 251). After reading these sentences, one can not help but feel that "apparition" is the crucial word in "In a Station of the Metro." After reading H. D.'s "Notes on Thought and Vision" (1919), one can not help but feel that her invocations of the gods are something more than literary: "you will come, / you will answer our taut hearts, / you will break the lie of men's thoughts, / and cherish and shelter us."<sup>25</sup>

Even with this visionary undercurrent, however, Imagism quickly became a dead end for Pound. Describing Yeats's development, Paul de Man argues that *The Wind Among the Reeds* was a dead end because the book's language became completely self-referential; the words seemed only to invoke other words, other associations, having relinquished their referential power.<sup>26</sup> Yeats would go on, in the first decade of the twentieth century, to attempt to recapture that power: the line "Colder and dumber and deafer than a fish" (p. 98) *seems* – a crucial word, since all poetic language is conventional, none of it closer to the heart or to the world than the other – to invoke the physical world more successfully than "The Fish." This is exactly what the Imagist Pound needed to learn, for his Imagist aesthetic would not allow him to speak meaningfully of contemporary culture.

Over fair meadows,  
Over the cool face of that field,  
Unstill, ever moving,  
Hosts of an ancient people,  
The silent cortège.

(p. 110)

These are the final lines of “The Coming of War: Actaeon,” the first poem that Pound published about the Great War (which began on August 4, 1914). To say that the poem is “about” the war hardly seems adequate, however, since Imagist notions of poetic decorum seem to prevent Pound from making the kind of statement he wants to make. His prose of the period overflows with social commentary; Pound would subsequently credit the world war with instigating all of his later economic and political interests. But his poetry could not yet contain those interests. In “1915: February,” a revealing poem that Pound himself never published, we can see Pound grappling with this dilemma. The poem builds to a violent rant against the war, suggesting that it has nothing to do with poets: “This war is not our war, / Neither side is on our side: / A vicious mediaevalism, / A belly-fat commerce.” Yeats said basically the same thing – much more calmly – in “On Being Asked for a War Poem” (originally entitled “A Reason for Keeping Silent”), but Yeats was not struggling to develop an idiom capable of addressing public events. Pound’s poem retreats completely from its own violent rhetoric, ending with a perfect Imagist couplet – as if to suggest that he would continue writing in this way if only he could.

We have about us only the unseen country road,  
The unseen twigs, breaking their tips with blossom.

(p. 254)

These lines could only have been written by Pound, but Pound’s wartime predicament is paradigmatic: a generation of studiously diminished lyric poets was confronted with an epic subject, one that seemed to cry out for the power and scope of the kind of poetry that Wordsworth wrote in the wake of the French Revolution. The results were the *Cantos*, *The Waste Land*, *Spring and All*, *Observations*, and *The Tower*: all the most ambitious work of the modern poets, coming in the twenties, was at least in part the result of the social and aesthetic challenge of the war. And as H. D.’s distaste for wartime “epic” suggests, the poets were all, to varying degrees, suspicious of their own achievement.

A comparison with Wordsworth is inevitable, for modern poetry’s response to World War I plays out a drama that was enacted by romantic poetry’s response to the French Revolution. As the utopian dreams inspired by the Revolution were demolished by the Reign of Terror, Wordsworth (like many of his contemporaries) lost faith in the power of

political action to effect social change; the result was (as M. H. Abrams and Jerome McGann have demonstrated in different ways) that poets looked to poetry to carry the burden of spiritual and cultural enlightenment.<sup>27</sup> As Habermas would say, art was called upon to perform work for which it is not particularly well-suited.

Since Wordsworth, major public events have provoked poetry's "internalization" of practical politics time and time again. We can see Melville, in the wake of the American Civil War, feeling that literature must perform what political culture as such could not. And we can see that after the death of Charles Stewart Parnell (the parliamentary leader who seemed nearly to make Irish home rule a reality), Yeats felt that poetry had no choice but to accomplish the work that liberal politics had failed to achieve: "The fall of Parnell had freed imagination from practical politics, from agrarian grievance and political enmity, and turned it to imaginative nationalism, to Gaelic, to the ancient stories, and at last to lyrical poetry and to drama."<sup>28</sup> In a sense, all romantic poems are (to borrow the title of Yeats's 1913 pamphlet) poems written in discouragement.

I have suggested that *The Wind Among the Reeds* was an aesthetic dead end, but Yeats's style had to change (like Pound's) because he felt compelled to grapple more openly with contemporary events. As an Irish poet, Yeats felt this imperative well before his American and English contemporaries were jolted out of a diminished aesthetic by the war. The first decade of the twentieth century was a difficult period for Yeats. In 1903 Maud Gonne, his lifelong obsession, married John MacBride (whom Yeats would later call a "drunken, vainglorious lout" [p. 181]). In 1904 Yeats founded the Abbey Theatre, and he would spend much of the following decade preoccupied with what he would later denounce as "Theatre business, management of men" (p. 93). He worried that he had lost his "lyric faculty."<sup>29</sup> And when his *Collected Works* was published in 1908, the rumor was that Yeats was finished.

History conspired to keep Yeats going. When he reprinted his *Poems Written in Discouragement* in *Responsibilities* (1914), Yeats added a note explaining that three public controversies had stirred his imagination: the fall of Parnell, the riots over John Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, and Dublin's refusal of Hugh Lane's gift of his important art collection. These events deepened Yeats's discouragement with "practical politics," but they provoked more ambitious poems, poems no longer content to traffic in discrete essences. In "To a Wealthy Man," Yeats spoke out sternly against the notion that Hugh Lane's paintings should not be supported unless the people wanted them: "What cared Duke Ercole, that bid / His mummers to the market-place, / What th' onion-sellers thought or did?" In "September 1913," surveying failed social policy and self-serving mercantilism, Yeats could only conclude that "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone." "You had enough of sorrow before death," he told the ghost of Parnell in "To a Shade," "Away, away! You are safer in the tomb" (pp. 107, 108, 110).

The more expansive and aggressive music of *Responsibilities* would become an important example to younger poets, who would soon grapple with the social

discouragement that grew throughout World War I (both Pound and H. D. wrote stirring reviews of the volume).<sup>30</sup> Yeats himself was, at least at first, studiously tight-lipped about what seemed to him England's war, not Ireland's. But in the midst of the war, the Easter Rebellion of 1916 exploded every conclusion Yeats had come to about his fellow countrymen: romantic Ireland, in all its recklessness, seemed reborn – even in John MacBride (one of the organizers of the rebellion who was summarily executed).

Was it needless death after all?  
For England may keep faith  
For all that is done and said.  
We know their dream; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead;  
And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died?  
I write it out in a verse –  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

(pp. 181–2)

Having taken on this public voice, Yeats did not relinquish a more intimate lyric voice (the luminously quiet “Wild Swans at Coole,” with its “All’s changed” [p. 131], offers the private version of “Easter 1916”). And he would go on, in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), and *The Tower* (1928), to write poems of extraordinary power, both public and private. The impetus behind these poems was, in part, Yeats's marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees and their subsequent communications (through automatic writing) with the spirit world. But the pressure of the worsening war, especially when it was reinforced by the Anglo-Irish war in 1919, was inescapable. Poems such as “The Second Coming” have seemed to several generations of readers to be completely idiosyncratic, bound up with Yeats's occult vision of the afterlife, and at the same time an expression of horror in which an entire culture could participate.

The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

(p. 187)



To a reader versed in Robert Frost, however, these lines might also seem suspiciously uncritical of their own apocalyptic metaphors: has Yeats, following the pattern Wordsworth established, internalized public events so completely that he eschews any responsibility for them? Yeats himself wondered the same thing. “A Prayer for my Daughter” follows “The Second Coming” in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, and the apocalyptic cradle is suddenly domesticated: “Under this cradle-hood and coverlid / My child sleeps on.” Yeats wonders here if his own fury has been determined less by unmanageable events than by “the great gloom that is in my mind” (p. 188).

Yeats did write several poems more explicitly engaging the war after the son of his close friend Lady Gregory was killed in Italy. But Yeats himself was notoriously unsympathetic to the enormous amount of poetry that the war provoked; he defended his exclusion of Wilfred Owen’s popular poems from *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* by maintaining that “passive suffering is not a theme for poetry.”<sup>31</sup> Another way to explain Yeats’s lack of sympathy would be to say that the most successful war poetry (especially Owen’s) continued to be written out of a studiously diminished aesthetic, while Yeats himself had been prodded on to much more aggressively ambitious poems, hatching universes as brilliantly as Shelley.

In his study of the modern elegy, Jahan Ramazani shows how Owen made the elegy “a more disconsolate and discordant genre – a genre less contaminated by its likeness to the compensatory discourse of patriotic propaganda.”<sup>32</sup> Owen did this partly by following Hardy’s example; and though Owen had no connection with the Imagist movement, his poems reinforce T. E. Hulme’s dictum that modern poetry “no longer deals with heroic action” but with “momentary phases in the poet’s mind.”<sup>33</sup> In “Dulce Et Decorum Est” Owen juxtaposes Horace’s well-known wisdom (“it is sweet and fitting to die for the fatherland”) with a horrifying account of a soldier being gassed: “Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light, / As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.”<sup>34</sup> Heroism (or what Yeats might have called active suffering) can enter Owen’s poems only through irony.

Owen’s turn on Shelley’s “Adonais” in “A Terre” is even more revealing of his “diminished” stance than his turn on Horace.

“I shall be one with nature, herb, and stone,”  
 Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned:  
 The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.  
 “Pushing up daisies” is their creed, you know.

(p. 65)

Considering the pantheistic consolation offered in “Adonais,” Owen responds as Hardy did to Shelley’s skylark, refusing to accept anything more than the vagaries of earthly

experience. And in poems like “Anthem for a Doomed Youth,” Owen’s refusal to animate the natural world is as stern as Hardy’s or Frost’s: “What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? / Only the monstrous anger of the guns” (p. 44). Refusing the consolations of the pathetic fallacy in the face of mass death, Owen reanimates the engines of destruction instead: guns are more human than nature.

Owen’s are the poems of a combatant; he was killed in France in 1918. Wallace Stevens, who for most of his life worked as an insurance executive in Hartford, Connecticut, existed as far from action as could be; yet his first publications were war poems, and, as in Owen’s poems, nothing in the natural world commemorates the unprecedented slaughter of the war:

Death is absolute and without memorial,  
As in a season of autumn,  
When the wind stops,  
When the wind stops and, over the heavens,  
The clouds go, nevertheless,  
In their direction.<sup>35</sup>

Harold Bloom sees in “The Death of a Soldier” (first published in 1918 as part of a sequence, inspired by the letters of a French soldier, called “Lettres d’un Soldat”) the “emergence of the poet’s most characteristic voice.”<sup>36</sup> And it is true that, throughout his career, Stevens returns almost obsessively to a vision of the world that is untouched by human feeling, a world in which the otherness of the world grows not only stark but oddly compelling. In “The Snow Man” (collected along with “The Death of the Soldier” in *Harmonium*) Stevens emphasizes the difficulty of achieving this vision, insisting that one “must have a mind of winter” if one is

not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,  
Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing the same bare place  
For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

(p. 10)

Stevens is surely relying on a literary topos here; Robert Frost reveals a similar interest in the wintry blankness of the natural world in poems like “Desert Places”: “The woods around it have it – it is theirs. / All animals are smothered in their lairs. / I am too absent-

spirited to count; / The loneliness includes me unawares” (p. 296). But it is important to register the fact that Stevens’s “most characteristic voice” first came to him when he attempted, like Owen, to account for a kind of death which made any elegiac consolation seem thin. Stevens is well known as a poet who built an entire world from words, and he partly is such a poet: his poems often seem to weave one giant “endlessly elaborating poem” (as he put it in “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” [p. 486]). But Stevens is also a poet who, like his contemporaries, was pushed into song in the aftermath of the social debacles of his time. It is especially revealing that, after publishing *Harmonium* in 1923, Stevens did not write poems again until a decade later, when the Great Depression prodded him to write some of the most intelligent poems we have about the strengths and limitations of poetry in a time of social strife.

“The Snow Man,” characteristic as it is, reveals only half of Stevens’s sensibility. For as often as Stevens wrote about the pressure of reality on the vacant mind, he wrote about imagination exerting an equal pressure on the recalcitrant world. He thought of “Tea at the Palaz of Hoon” as a companion to “The Snow Man”:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw  
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;  
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

(p. 65)

Between these two extremes (he often spoke of them, somewhat blandly, as reality and imagination) Stevens wove his endless elaborations, first emphasizing the mind’s ability to fabricate metaphors or structures of belief and then cautioning us to remember that those structures will always inevitably collapse in the face of events that even our most cherished beliefs cannot encompass. Stasis and enclosure are what Stevens fears most; change and uncertainty are his highest values.

In “Esthétique du Mal” (1944) Stevens confessed that the “death of Satan was a tragedy / For the imagination.” This is the diminished poet’s lament: there are no more universes to be hatched. But Stevens was also adamant that this tragedy was also “the imagination’s new beginning”: we require “another chant” to replace the outmoded fictions in which we no longer believe (pp. 319–20). In many ways the title of the long poem *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* (1942) may stand for Stevens’s poetry at large: throughout his career (though less systematically at the beginning of it) he was attempting to satisfy the will-to-believe in the midst of a skeptical age. The supreme fiction was, for Stevens, something to which we assent while knowing it to be untrue; like William James, the American pragmatist philosopher, Stevens was interested in the usefulness of the stories we tell ourselves rather than their singular truth. Various poems, from the early “Sunday Morning” to the late “To an Old Philosopher in Rome,” seem to offer a fiction in which we might believe. But the only thing of which we can be certain in Stevens is that the fiction must change – the palaz of Hoon giving way to the snowman – since the

world for which the fiction accounts is changing too. “It can never be satisfied, the mind, never,” insisted Stevens (p. 247), because he was scrupulously aware of the imperatives of an historical world that will not allow us to languish in satisfaction.

It was Stevens’s cautiousness, his inability to believe anything for certain or for long, that made him seem evasive to certain readers. Taken out of context, his response to a 1939 *Partisan Review* questionnaire (“A war is a military state of affairs, not a literary one”) might suggest that Stevens was not interested in military affairs.<sup>37</sup> On the contrary, it was precisely Stevens’s interest in such affairs that made him uneasy with assertions of poetry’s social clout. Although Stevens eventually wrote some of the most ambitious poems of the century, he rarely surrendered the diminished poet’s carefully circumscribed sense of his own knowledge and power. Neither did Marianne Moore, who (like Stevens) was for a long time considered a lesser poet than Pound, Eliot, or Yeats because her poems did not seem to engage the crises of the modern world. But what may first appear to be a refusal to engage is really something far more intelligent, far more cognizant of the difficulties that poets since Wordsworth have faced whenever they have asserted poetry’s power.

Stevens was well aware, embracing a diminished aesthetic during World War I, that he was also embracing an aesthetic that his literary culture thought of as feminine; Virginia Woolf once explained that the feminine sensibility, as it is commonly conceived, “ranged among almost unknown or unrecorded things; it lighted on small things and showed that perhaps they were not small after all.”<sup>38</sup> Stevens was often threatened by the gendered implications of diminishment, especially at a time when even his own sister was working for the Red Cross in the battlefields of France. Writing as a woman, Marianne Moore had an even more overdetermined relationship to an aesthetic that valued little things over epic ambitions. Sandra Gilbert has argued (much as Moore herself said of H. D.) that Moore became a “female female impersonator”: by translating “the ‘handicap’ of ‘femininity’ into an aesthetic advantage,” she deployed femininity “as both defense and offense – defense against trivialization, offense against masculinism.”<sup>39</sup> And throughout Moore’s early poems, as in H. D.’s, masculinism is often linked with wartime aggression and epic ambition.

The vestibule to experience is not to  
be exalted into epic grandeur. These men are going  
To their work with this idea, advancing like a school of fish through  
still water – waiting to change the course or dismiss  
the idea of movement, till forced to. The words of the Greeks  
ring in our ears, but they are vain in comparison with a sight like this.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout this poem – “Reinforcements” – Moore plays with the implications of her title, suggesting that the language of an eagerly ambitious poetry might, like additional

troops, become a “reinforcement” of war. The words of Homer ring in our ears; we see a vast war and feel that poets ought to exalt it with epic grandeur – offer major statements about it. Speaking as a self-consciously marginal poet in “Phases,” his 1914 sequence of war poems, Stevens made a similar point: “The crisp, sonorous epics / Mongered after every scene.”<sup>41</sup> But Moore harnessed the power of her feminized position. Her response to the war was to write self-consciously little poems rather than ambitious (and, for Moore, masculine) poems that answer an epic challenge.

Throughout her long career, Moore would continue to embrace humility and understatement as her highest values, transforming them into weapons more potent than aggression. But Moore was a notorious reviser and winnower of her own work, and in her early poems, collected in *Poems* (1921) and *Observations* (1924), the ironic edge of her position seems more pronounced. This change in her work was partly temperamental, but it was also due to the fact that these early poems were written during a time when World War I gave a great deal of cultural weight to Moore’s analysis of masculine aggression. In “Sojourn in the Whale” (published soon after the Easter Rebellion) Moore presents Ireland as an example of the “feminine temperament” that, underestimated by men, merely “seeks its own level.” Moore’s rejoinder is stern: “‘Water is motion is far / from level.’ You have seen it, when obstacles happened to bar / the path, rise automatically.”<sup>42</sup> Moore seems to be describing herself when she praises “feigned inconsequence” at the end of “In This Age of Hard Trying”: in contrast to those who do “not venture the / profession of humility,” who speak the “uncompanionable drawl / of certitude,” there is one whose

by-  
 play was more terrible in its effectiveness  
 than the fiercest frontal attack.  
 The staff, the bag, the feigned inconsequence  
 of manner, best bespeak that weapon, self-protectiveness.

(p. 34)

Moore feigned inconsequence for strategic purposes, much as Hardy embraced inconsequence in poetry in order to express more freely the sentiments for which, as a novelist, he was condemned. But Moore’s purposes were of course different from Hardy’s, as H. D. recognized in her essay of 1916 on Moore’s poems: however “frail” they might appear, the poems are intended to “endure longer, far longer than ... the world of shrapnel and machine-guns in which we live.”<sup>43</sup>

Moore’s formally distinctive poems (which, depending on one’s point of view, can seem either archly fastidious or recklessly arbitrary) are often organized syllabically; they frequently incorporate quotations from a wide variety of sources, challenging the usual decorum of poetic language (“nor is it valid / to discriminate against ‘business documents

and / school-books,” she says in “Poetry” [p. 267]). Inclusiveness, or what Moore calls, quoting Henry James, “accessibility to experience” (p. 54) is the hallmark of her poetry, both formally and thematically. Moore would never write the kind of inclusive long poem that her male contemporaries all published in the 1920s. But her *Observations* ought to stand beside *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, *The Waste Land*, *Harmonium*, *Spring and All*, and *The Tower* as a postwar book that ventures a major statement and simultaneously questions the ways in which major statements are made. “She is not, she seems to suggest, writing anything so grand as a poem,” says Bonnie Costello of Moore.<sup>44</sup> *Observations* is a collection of short poems (“The Octopus” and the astonishing “Marriage” are the longest) that seems to diffuse any sense of a culminating achievement; yet Moore indexed the volume, suggesting that a different kind of coherence, more metonymic, more tenuous, underlies its strategically circumscribed ambitions.

Pound’s *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), a long poem made by juxtaposing shorter poems and fragments, certainly challenges conventional notions of poetic wholeness and closure. But inasmuch as Pound’s effort to write a long poem was coterminous with his effort to write a poem addressing the social catastrophe of the war, *Mauberley* adopts the kind of rhetoric Moore wanted to avoid in “Reinforcements”:

There died a myriad,  
And of the best, among them,  
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,  
For a botched civilization.

(p. 188)

*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is at times a moving elegy for the world of artistic and social possibility that the war seemed to obliterate; Pound looks back with a delicate combination of affection and irony at earlier vanguard movements in the arts (especially the Pre-Raphaelites and the Rhymers’ Club, with which Yeats was associated in the 1890s), noting their inadequacies but excoriating the culture that rejected their energies. But *Mauberley* also offers glimpses of the obsessions with crack-pot economics and Jewish financiers that would more often mar Pound’s later work: “usury age-old and age-thick / and liars in public places” (p. 188).

Devoting the rest of his life to the *Cantos*, Pound became the most exaggeratedly romantic poet of his generation. The *Cantos* is a poem written out of an aesthetic that stresses condensation, concrete expression, and lyric intensity but which attempts simultaneously to forge a mythopoeic “multiverse” as expansive and idiosyncratic as Blake’s. Added to this irreconcilable pair of ambitions is Pound’s desire to be the acknowledged legislator of the world. “All values ultimately come from our judicial sentences,” he said in 1922. “This arrogance is not mine but Shelley’s, and it is absolutely true.”<sup>45</sup> But while Shelley thought of the poet as the servant of humanity,



Pound thought of himself as an inflated version of the Confucius to whom princes came for schooling or the Flaubert who said that his *Education Sentimentale* would have prevented the Franco-Prussian War. Unlike Moore or Stevens, who in different ways stressed the limitations of the poet's social function, Pound saw few limits to his responsibilities. And with this kind of pressure on every line, the *Cantos* was probably doomed to rhetorical excess and increasing fragmentation: "Usura slayeth the child in the womb / It stayeth the young man's courting." Paradoxically, yet understandably, the most persuasive moments in the poem occur at those points (such as the *Pisan Cantos*, written while Pound was incarcerated at the end of World War II, waiting to be charged with treason) when Pound accepts his diminished possibilities and remembers his place in a very small world.

When the mind swings by a grass-blade  
an ant's forefoot shall save you.  
the clover leaf smells and tastes as its flower.<sup>46</sup>

In retrospect, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* seems like a watershed not only in Pound's career but in modern poetry at large. Pound solved the problem of writing a long poem for himself, and, more importantly, he provided an example for his contemporaries. *The Waste Land* would have been inconceivable without the precedent of *Mauberley*, and the long poems of Williams and Stevens (with the exception of "The Comedian as the Letter C") would also be constructed through the juxtaposition of discrete poetic moments. Of course Tennyson did much the same thing in *In Memoriam*; but the technique needed to be reinvented for the world after World War I.

*Mauberley* was itself the product of a moment of particularly close collaboration between Pound and Eliot. Like most of the poems in Eliot's *Ara Vos Prec* (1920), *Mauberley* was written in crisply rhymed quatrains: working side by side, Pound and Eliot decided that the Imagist movement had gone too far and that a "counter-current" to free verse needed to be established.<sup>47</sup> This decision was provoked in part by aesthetic concerns, but it was also determined by Pound's inability to remain content with Imagism's implicitly feminized aesthetic – especially after Amy Lowell took a more active role in the movement. At the particular time at which *Mauberley* was written, Pound could offer a major (which is to say, in some sense, manly) statement in poetry only by adopting a poetic decorum resolutely at odds with Imagism.

While Eliot was writing his poems in quatrains, he was also writing the essays that would be collected in *The Sacred Wood* (1920), perhaps the most influential volume of literary criticism published in the century. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot advocated a poetry that was "impersonal" and profoundly historical, written out of a self-conscious awareness of "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer."<sup>48</sup> Poems such as "Whispers of Immortality" were the result of such thinking.



Donne, I suppose, was such another,  
Who found no substitute for sense,  
To seize and clutch and penetrate;  
Expert beyond experience,  
He knew the anguish of the marrow  
The ague of the skeleton;  
No contact possible to flesh  
Allayed the fever of the bone.<sup>49</sup>

Honoring John Donne and implicitly depreciating Wordsworth (by recalling “Intimations of Immortality”), these lines seem designed both to discuss and embody Eliot’s notion of the “dissociation of sensibility,” which he described in his 1921 essay on metaphysical poetry: “When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary.” This sentence makes the dissociation of intellect and emotion seem like a problem that could arise at any moment, but Eliot also maintained that the dissociation was a specifically historical phenomenon –“something which happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne” and the time of Tennyson.<sup>50</sup>

Eliot’s early criticism is interestingly (perhaps even productively) paradoxical, since on the one hand he insists on a kind of scrupulous formalism, criticizing Matthew Arnold for his social concerns; but on the other hand, Eliot’s critical formulations are predicated on historical and political agendas, however implicitly. It is as if Eliot wants simultaneously to say that his concern is *only* with poetry but not *merely* with poetry: discussing Donne, he is discussing the fate of western culture. This is another version of the diminished poet’s dilemma: Eliot wants to assert the kind of powers Shelley claimed for poetry without sounding like Shelley. And this dilemma would ultimately help to determine the shape of *The Waste Land*, a poem that has never been read comfortably as *both* a lyric poet’s personal lament *and* a sage’s pronouncement on the fate of post-war Europe.

When Pound met Eliot in 1914, one month after the war began, he exclaimed that Eliot had actually “modernized himself *on his own*.”<sup>51</sup> Pound was talking about the diction, structure, and sensibility of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table

(p. 3)

but Eliot’s modernity was nurtured not in prewar London but at Harvard University, where (like Stevens and Frost) Eliot studied in the philosophy department of William James and Josiah Royce. Like Stevens and Frost, Eliot absorbed from his teachers a

stringent sense of the contingency of human values: we must think of the world not as “ready made,” insists Eliot in his Ph.D. dissertation (written several years after “Prufrock”), but “as constructed, or constructing itself.”<sup>52</sup> And when Eliot says in “The Metaphysical Poets” that the poet’s mind is “always forming new wholes,” he is aware that the mind has no choice but to do so; wholeness and order are not inherent in the world we experience – and certainly not in the world Prufrock experiences. But Eliot was never as comfortable with such a world as Stevens, Frost, or Moore were: what seems like business as usual to them (the making of fictions or metaphors) more often seems to Eliot like a problem that must be solved. As Michael North suggests, Prufrock “recoils equally from fragment and whole,” unable to “find a mediation between them.”<sup>53</sup> The same could be said about Eliot, who feared the democratizing force of totality as much as he feared chaos.

Reading *The Waste Land*, Michael Levenson has drawn attention to Eliot’s comment that “the problem of the unification of the world and the problem of the unification of the individual, are in the end one and the same problem.”<sup>54</sup> *The Waste Land* may be understood as a sequence of attempts to unify the world through the unifications of individuals, as Eliot suggests in his note on Tiresias: he is “the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias” (p. 52). This sentence offers a highly idealized and overly schematic account of the poem, but it nudges readers in the right direction: to borrow the language of “The Metaphysical Poets,” Eliot is attempting (especially through his highly developed use of allusion) to “form new wholes” throughout the poem, merging not only individuals but different cultures and different moments in history. Still, however successfully the poem constructs a provisional sense of wholeness, its thematic content remains at odds with its structural goal: that is, no matter how convinced we become that Tiresias does come to embody the unification of the world, Tiresias sees only the failure of individuals to achieve any sense of unity. Throughout *The Waste Land*, social fragmentation is suggested most powerfully by the fact that (whatever the note on Tiresias says) the sexes never truly meet:

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,  
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,  
Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.  
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
His vanity requires no response,  
And makes a welcome of indifference.  
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all

Enacted on this same divan or bed;  
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)  
Bestows one final patronizing kiss,  
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit ...

(p. 44)

Pound persuaded Eliot to cut the concluding lines to this passage (“And at the corner where the stable is, / Delays only to urinate, and spit”), commenting that they were “probably over the mark.”<sup>55</sup> Just how far over the mark they are suggests how difficult it was for Eliot to believe in his effort to construct a whole world from the stuff of mere human beings.

Eliot could never insure that the problem of the unification of the world and the problem of the unification of individuals would remain the same problem, no matter how hard he worked to find the solution to social problems in lyric poetry without necessarily talking about society as such. This is why it was inevitable that, after he declared himself “classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion” in 1928, Eliot would insist that literary criticism could no longer be exclusively literary.<sup>56</sup> In his later career, Eliot was more apt to confuse tradition (a process of becoming) with authority (a steady state). And he consequently attempted – almost as soon as the poem was published – to give *The Waste Land* a much clearer sense of order and wholeness than it really had. Early in 1922, Eliot handed over a sheaf of poetic fragments (which he had provisionally entitled *He Do the Police in Different Voices*) to Pound, who, fresh from the experience of writing *Maunderley*, gave *The Waste Land* its final shape, excising narrative and emphasizing discrete moments of intensity. The myth of the Holy Grail, invoked by the poem’s final title, had almost nothing to do with the poem’s composition. But Eliot would imply in “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*” that he had written *The Waste Land* according to a “mythical method,” something that would give “a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”<sup>57</sup> Surrounded by critical comments like these, *The Waste Land* was inevitably read as a pronouncement on the problem of cultural unity – not the evidence of the state of one poet’s mind.

But like any other postromantic poet, Eliot was made nervous by large claims for poetry, even when he provided the terms with which those claims were made. Consequently, he also felt the need to diminish the scope and design of *The Waste Land* severely, dismissing it (much like Yeats looking back at “The Second Coming” in “A Prayer for my Daughter”) as the result of a bad mood, “a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling.”<sup>58</sup> As more information about Eliot’s sordid personal life has become available (along with his uncollected critical writings), readers of *The Waste Land* have tended to agree with this

assessment. But readings of the poem tend to repeat the struggle of the poem itself: a sense of the poem as a diminished account of one poet's sensibility is often bought at the expense of any sense in which the poem remains one of the most ambitious assessments of culture in poetry since Wordsworth or Tennyson.

Having so quickly distanced himself from *The Waste Land* and *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot became a far more explicitly social critic (sometimes an intolerant one) in *After Strange Gods* (1934) and a far more explicitly Christian poet in *Ash Wednesday* (1930). His *Four Quartets*, published between 1936 and 1942, are at least as important an achievement as *The Waste Land*, but however much Eliot's work changed in his later career, the poet-critic of the years 1918–22 continued to cast the longest shadow over his contemporaries. And since *The Waste Land* was read so quickly and powerfully as a work of social criticism, poets writing in its wake needed to diminish the achievement. Stevens did so in much the same way that Eliot himself later would: "If it is the supreme cry of despair it is Eliot's and not his generation's."<sup>59</sup> Decades before it became fashionable to do so, Elizabeth Bishop would argue that Eliot's poem is "'about impotence.' Not symbolic impotence – it's about the thing."<sup>60</sup>

In contrast, Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams, who conceived their long poems *The Bridge* (1930) and *Spring and All* (1923) at least in part as responses to Eliot, tended to accept and even to strengthen the typical reading of *The Waste Land* in order to distinguish their own efforts. Williams said in his autobiography that *The Waste Land* "wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it," and he set out in *Spring and All*, a book-length poem built from both poetry and prose, to prove that April is not the cruelest month.<sup>61</sup>

They enter the new world naked,  
cold, uncertain of all  
save that they enter. All about them  
the cold, familiar wind –  
Now the grass, tomorrow  
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf  
One by one objects are defined –  
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf.<sup>62</sup>

The poems of *Spring and All* are focused intently on American localities ("rooted they / grip down and begin to awaken" [p. 183]); yet the work feels far more French, far more infused with the playful, dadaist spirit of Marcel Duchamp (with whom Williams was in contact during the war years), than anything Eliot or Pound ever wrote. In the 1918 Preface to *Kora in Hell*, a book of prose improvisations, Williams censured Eliot for betraying American poetry. Responding to Williams (who was after all a first-generation American), Pound said this: "you haven't a drop of the cursed [American] blood in you,

and you don't need to fight the disease day and night; you never had to. Eliot has it perhaps worse than I have – poor devil.”<sup>63</sup>

Williams would come to agree with this assessment (“The pure products of America / go crazy,” begins one of the great poems in *Spring and All* [p. 217]), but his early dialog with Eliot and Pound suggests how difficult it is – even today – to write a clearly oppositional story about moving beyond *The Waste Land* (or beyond Modernism at large). If we accept too unequivocally the idea of Eliot encouraged by Eliot's more programmatic critical statements, it paradoxically becomes easier to provide evidence showing that Eliot's poetry is in fact (to focus on values important to Williams and Crane) personal, American, optimistic, or democratic. And whatever Crane's more programmatic statements might have implied, Crane himself knew this was true. One of his favorite passages in Eliot's criticism came from “Reflections on Contemporary Poetry” (1919), an uncollected essay that offers metaphors for the “historical sense” that are wildly at odds with those of “Tradition and the Individual Talent”:

This relation is a feeling of profound kinship, or rather of a peculiar personal intimacy, with another, probably a dead author ... We may not be great lovers; but if we had a genuine affair with a real poet of any degree we have acquired a monitor to avert us when we are not in love ... We do not imitate, we are changed; and our work is the work of the changed man; we have not borrowed, we have been quickened, and we become bearers of a tradition.<sup>64</sup>

In the last two decades, these sentences have become as central to discussions of Eliot as chatter about impersonality and the mythical method once was. Hart Crane, who like Auden may be thought of as one of the earliest postmodern poets – a poet who came of age with a strong sense that Modernism was behind him – was aware of this hidden aspect of Eliot all along.

We do not necessarily need to uncover Eliot's uncollected prose to be reminded of the vast multiplicity of aesthetic and ideological positions that coexist in modern poetry: simply returning to Yeats, after reading Williams, will do the job. It is chastening to remember that the modern poets are a wildly various lot, and I have told a coherent story about them at my own risk.

Yet it is instructive to remember that Ezra Pound could as easily befriend and support Yeats as he could Williams. And like so many of his contemporaries, like so many of his forebears, Yeats was still grappling with the contradictions of a diminished romanticism up until his death in 1939. His posthumously published *Last Poems* ended with “Under Ben Bulbin,” in which Yeats assumes an aristocratically prophetic voice, chanting of personal and political destiny. But a more recently discovered table of contents reveals that Yeats intended the volume to begin with “Under Ben Bulbin” and to end with these lines from a little poem called “Politics.”

And maybe what they say is true  
Of war and war's alarms,  
But O that I were young again  
And held her in my arms.

(p. 348)

Yeats wanted our vision of his career to conclude with this severely, touchingly diminished sense of a poet's vocation. But the fact that these lines allude to "Westron Wind," probably the oldest lyric poem in the English language, suggests that Yeats also wanted to claim the grandest possible heritage for a thing so small.

"Politics" does not negate the distasteful bombast of "Under Ben Bulbin" ("Send war in our time, O Lord!" [p. 326]), but each poem qualifies the other. Marianne Moore, who was nobody's fool, once said that if one is "tempted to think harshly of [Yeats] in his tower, one may well recall what he says about the death of Henley's daughter; or read those retrospective words in which, having been a trouble to parents, grandparents, and himself, he wonders if he is to make a success of his life."<sup>65</sup> Moore is reminding us that Yeats's finest quality is his capacity for self-criticism, his willingness to entertain divergent points of view. I would add that this is the finest quality of modern poetry at large: reading the moderns, we need to remain open to their variousness, their duplicities, their contradictions. I find it harder to achieve this openness when reading Eliot or Pound, easier when reading Hardy or Stevens, but I nonetheless believe that it is crucial, given that Modernism passed into literary history so long ago, that we guard against a strategically limited reading of modern poetry – a reading that emphasizes certain qualities at the expense of others, forcing us to choose between the poets, rather than from among them.

Consider again Randall Jarrell's response to the New Critics' strategically limited reading of romanticism: "Romanticism holds in solution contradictory tendencies which, isolated and exaggerated in Modernism, look startlingly opposed both to each other and to the earlier stages of romanticism." The relationship of Modernism and postmodernism must be seen in a similarly dialectical way. So if it seems that Auden was turning against Yeats, turning against a Modernist hope for literature's intervention in society, by saying that "poetry makes nothing happen," it is important to remember that Yeats, at least in some moods, said pretty much the same thing. It would be an oversimplification (but a telling one) to say that Auden's career transforms a tension within Modernism into a linear trajectory. One could say the same thing about Robert Lowell – the poet about whose poetry Randall Jarrell first used the word *postmodernist* in 1947: Lowell's career is often presented as a movement from a closed, modern sensibility to an open, postmodern sensibility. But such enticingly linear narratives (more attractive to those of us who tell the stories of literary history than those of us who live them) always depend on an artificial segregation of aesthetic and ideological principles. Fifty years from now, whatever postmodern poetry will appear to have been, it will not have been other than



what modern poetry wished or found it necessary to become.

## Notes

**1** See Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (New York: Macmillan, 1957); Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Norton, 1957); and among Harold Bloom's many writings, see "Reflections on T. S. Eliot," *Raritan* 8 (Fall, 1988): 70–87.

**2** See Marjorie Perloff, "Pound/Stevens: Whose Era?" and "Postmodernism and the Impasse of Lyric," in *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 1–32, 172–200.

**3** Randall Jarrell, *Kipling, Auden & Co.* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1980), pp. 81, 78, 81. Jarrell's opinion on Auden's later work would change; see the essays on Auden collected in Randall Jarrell, *The Third Book of Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1965). For Jarrell's first use of the word *postmodernist* see Randall Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age* (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 195.

**4** See Elizabeth Bishop, "Dimensions for a Novel," *Vassar Journal of Undergraduate Studies* 8 (May, 1934): 95–103; and Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (New York: Doubleday, 1928). See also James Longenbach, "Elizabeth Bishop and the Story of Postmodernism," *Southern Review* 28 (1992): 469–84.

**5** Jarrell, *Kipling, Auden & Co.*, p. 36. Mendelson says in his introduction to W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (New York: Vintage, 1979) that except in Auden's earliest poems, "there is virtually nothing modernist about him" (p. xi). Mendelson offers a richer version of this argument in *Early Auden* (New York: Viking Press, 1981).

**6** W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 41. Further page references will be given in the text.

**7** Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 5, 3.



- 8** Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity – An Incomplete Project,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), p. 11.
- 9** Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 90.
- 10** Florence Emily Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1930), p. 58.
- 11** James Richardson, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Necessity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 2.
- 12** See David Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 113, 57–8.
- 13** Thomas Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: A Selection of his Finest Poems*, ed. Samuel Hynes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 15. Further page references will be given in the text.
- 14** Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Lathem (New York: Holt, 1967), p. 334. Further page references will be given in the text.
- 15** Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 145.
- 16** W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 193–4.
- 17** W. B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. Richard Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1989), p. 58. Further page references will be given in the text.
- 18** Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, p. 155.
- 19** Ezra Pound, *Personae*, ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990), p. 111. Further page references will be given in the text.
- 20** H. D., *Collected Poems*, ed. Louis Martz (New York: New Directions, 1983), p. 39.

- 21** H. D., *Paint It Today*, ed. Cassandra Laity (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 11. See also Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *H. D.: The Career of That Struggle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 19–20.
- 22** Marianne Moore, *Complete Prose*, ed. Patricia Willis (New York: Viking Press, 1986), p. 82.
- 23** Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 94.
- 24** Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 3.
- 25** H. D., *Collected Poems*, p. 31. See also *Notes on Thought and Vision* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1982).
- 26** See Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 162–72.
- 27** See M. H. Abrams, “English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age,” in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 90–118; and Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). McGann is more critical of this aspect of romantic poetry than Abrams.
- 28** W. B. Yeats, *Explorations* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 343.
- 29** W. B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. Denis Donoghue (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 172.
- 30** See Pound, *Literary Essays*, pp. 378–81. H. D.’s previously unpublished review appeared in *Agenda* 25 (Fall/Winter, 1988): 51–3.
- 31** W. B. Yeats, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. xxxiv.
- 32** Rahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 71. On Hardy’s crucial influence on war literature generally see Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 3–7.

- 33** T. E. Hulme, *Further Speculations*, ed. Sam Hynes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), p. 72.
- 34** Wilfred Owen, *Collected Poems*, ed. C. Day Lewis (New York: New Directions, 1965), p. 55. Further page references will be given in the text.
- 35** Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1954), p. 97. Further page references will be given in the text.
- 36** Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 48.
- 37** Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton Bates (New York: Knopf, 1989), p. 310.
- 38** Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929), p. 96.
- 39** Sandra Gilbert, "Marianne Moore as Female Female Impersonator," in *Marianne Moore: The Art of a Modernist*, ed. Joseph Parisi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1990), pp. 31, 43.
- 40** Marianne Moore, *Poems* (London: Egoist Press, 1921), p. 13.
- 41** Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, p. 11.
- 42** Marianne Moore, *Complete Poems* (New York: Viking Press, 1981), p. 90. Further page references will be given in the text.
- 43** H. D., "Marianne Moore," *Egoist* 3 (1916): 118.
- 44** Bonnie Costello, "The Feminine Language of Marianne Moore," in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Barker, and Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980), p. 225.
- 45** Ezra Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New

York: New Directions, 1950), p. 181.

**46** Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1975), pp. 230, 533.

**47** Pound described this moment in “Harold Monro,” *Criterion* 11 (July, 1932): 590.

**48** T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Methuen, 1972), p. 49.

**49** T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1971), pp. 32–3. Further page references will be given in the text.

**50** T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), p. 247.

**51** Pound, *Selected Letters*, p. 40.

**52** T. S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1964), p. 136.

**53** Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 76.

**54** T. S. Eliot, “Religion without Humanism,” in Norman Forester, ed., *Humanism and America* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1930), p. 112. See Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908–1922* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 197.

**55** T. S. Eliot, “*The Waste Land*”: *A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 47.

**56** See T. S. Eliot, Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), p. ix.

**57** T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 177.

**58** See Eliot, *"The Waste Land": A Facsimile*, p. 1. Critical studies that have made this remark meaningful include Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

**59** Alan Filreis, ed., "Voicing the Desert of Silence: Stevens' Letters to Alice Corbin Henderson," *Wallace Stevens Journal* 12 (Spring, 1988): 19.

**60** See Gary Fountain and Peter Brazeau, *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: An Oral Biography* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 153.

**61** William Carlos Williams, *Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 174.

**62** William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems*, vol. 1, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), p. 183. Further page references will be given in the text.

**63** Pound, *Selected Letters*, p. 158. See also A. Walton Litz, "Williams and Stevens: The Quest for a Native American Modernism," in *The Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 180–93.

**64** T. S. Eliot, "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry [IV]," *Egoist* 6 (July, 1919): 39. See also Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 117–44.

**65** Moore, *Complete Prose*, p. 296.



## 5 Modernism in drama

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Christopher Innes

At first sight it might seem contradictory to include drama in a discussion of Modernism. As a movement “Modernism” has been defined in artistic terms through the sculptures of Jacob Epstein or Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky or Wyndham Lewis, while in literary terms its usage has been restricted to the work of poets and novelists: pre-eminently T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein. Indeed, in the various critical studies of the movement, drama is seldom mentioned, and then generally dismissed as following a different – even antimodernist – agenda.<sup>1</sup> This may be partly due to the specifically English and American focus of studies that site the defining moment of literary Modernism in the Pound–Eliot nexus. By contrast, drama in the twentieth century has been highly international, with English-speaking playwrights and directors responding to innovations from Europe, and having their experiments picked up in turn. It is also true that theatrical developments over the century do not fit the same chronological frame as for poetry or the novel, where the two decades from 1910 to 1930 are generally held to mark the boundaries of the movement. By comparison, drama had already staked out a distinctively Modernist territory by the turn of the century with a work like August Strindberg’s *A Dream Play* (1902). But perhaps the main explanation for the omission of drama from the history of Modernism up to this point is that, for various reasons connected with the nature of theatre itself, on the stage the movement has produced extremely diverse work. Directors and dramatists, several of whom were primarily poets and made significant contributions to Modernism in their poetry, may have had the same artistic aims and have been responding to the same perception of twentieth-century realities. But their plays and productions use a wide range of stylistic solutions to express this. So any discussion of dramatic Modernism must take a wide focus in following a multi-faceted development.

Any stage has a preset architectural frame, which conditions dramatic material. Even an alternative space outside the format of mainstream theatre establishes specific actor–audience relationships that automatically become interpreted in conventional terms, as the example of the Dadaists indicates. Nothing could have been more iconoclastic than their Zurich performances during World War I, which assaulted bourgeois sensibilities through sound-poetry and nonsense dialog, musical cacophony, and deliberately tawdry nonrepresentational costuming in mini-dramas that parodied any aesthetic expectations. Yet even these aggressive, anti-art presentations became codified in the cabaret form.

As a public event, performances are not only more open to censorship, but subject to normative pressures from the spectators as a group. There are also other basic elements



of theatre that compromise innovation. By contrast with other forms of authorship, playwrights cannot communicate directly with those being addressed, and so retain only a limited control over their creation. Their work becomes literally interpreted by actors whose techniques are normally already established, and therefore liable to mould the final product in traditional ways. Indeed, this problem was recognized as so crucial that several of the leading Modernist theatre-artists either trained actors in their own theatre companies, like Artaud and Brecht, or used untrained amateurs, like Gordon Craig, who ended up by rejecting actors altogether.

Although such generalizations may seem obvious, they need to be taken into account since all these factors inhibited the experimental freedom that characterizes the Modernist movement in other artistic fields. In addition, the nature of theatre as both a group activity and to some degree a mass medium contradicts such significant facets of Modernism as its stress on the individual egoism of the artist and its elitism.

At the same time, the theatre's intrinsic connection to physical reality and social existence (communicated at a minimum through the bodies of the actors and their relationship to each other) make some of the key Modernist principles inapplicable. On the stage art could not assert itself as an autonomous activity, independent of external experience, nor aspire to pure form. In sharp contrast to the Modernist drive in poetry or painting, imitation was always present, being the essential basis of acting. Simply presenting a sequence of actions in a temporal and spatial frame evoked the "narrative method" that Eliot rejected, along with Kandinsky, whose declaration that "the literary element, 'storytelling' or 'anecdote' must be abandoned" was picked up by Pound and the Vorticists.<sup>2</sup> Abstraction too proved possible to only a very limited degree. Both the Dadaists and the Futurists attempted to distort or disguise the human element by using sharply focused lighting to fragment the performer's figure and geometrical costumes to reduce bodily shapes to cones, globes, cylinders, or straight lines. The Dada cabaret tended to grotesque deformation, while Marinetti called for "The Anti-Psychological Abstract Theatre of Pure Forms and Tactilism" (the title of a 1924 Futurist manifesto). Corresponding to Gaudier-Brzeska's antirepresentational concept of Modernist art – summed up as "the appreciation of masses in relation ... the defining of these masses by plane" – this abstract tendency was taken to its purest extreme in the *Triadic Ballet* of the German Bauhaus (1922): a "clinically isolated concentration of action on the stage," explicitly "without purpose" or even dramatic situation, let alone storyline, designed to investigate the phenomena of form and space, as well as the process of human perception. But the effect of these experiments was either (unintentional) self-parody, or restricted movement so much that the performance became static. Even at its most abstract and mechanistic, theatre was incapable of responding to a call like that of Pound's early collaborator, Wyndham Lewis, for "Dehumanization" as "the chief diagnostic of the Modern World."<sup>3</sup>

Despite this, several of the leading Modernist poets – in particular W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden, Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot – turned to the theatre, as did the novelist D. H.

Lawrence. Even the painter Wyndham Lewis wrote plays, as did the Austrian painter Oskar Kokoschka. And, with the possible exception of Lewis's *The Enemy of the Stars*, all their dramatic scripts were specifically written for performance. One of the defining characteristics of the movement is an explicit attempt to formulate a unified theory of modernity. To be complete this would have to include drama, although taking into account the nature of the theatre as an artistic instrument and as a social institution, the qualities displayed are rather different than in poetry or painting, even though theatrical performance includes both forms. What in those types of art might count as traditionalist, even a reaction against Modernism, may be an expression of the Modernist spirit in the theatre.

As a close associate of Joyce, Eliot, and above all Ezra Pound – whom he extolled as “a born revolutionary, a Trotsky of the written word and the painted shape” – Wyndham Lewis was at the forefront of the Modernist movement in England. It is therefore significant that he chose a dramatic form to experiment with in translating the qualities of his Vorticist painting into words, and equally significant that this was among his very first literary attempts. Published as an artistic manifesto in the first issue of the Vorticist journal *Blast*, *The Enemy of the Stars* is a composite of fragmented Cubist “visions from within.” The text is a treatise on the egoistic philosophy of Modernism. Stirner appears, together with his book “The Ego and Its Own,” which Pound had adopted as a key text of the movement, and the action illustrates that “Self, sacred act of violence, is like murder on my face and hands. The stain won’t come out. It is the one piece of property all communities have agreed it is illegal to possess.” The titanic and perpetual conflict of the twin characters, Arghol and Hanp (representing mind and body: “humility and perverse asceticism opposed to vigorous animal glorification of self”), ends with one murdering his alter ego then leaping off a bridge to drown himself, “his heart a sagging weight of stagnant hatred.” These inseparable, antagonistic figures are progenitors of Joyce’s Dedalus–Bloom duo in *Ulysses*, and – being presented as circus clowns, one of whom is attacked by anonymous booted figures every night – even more clearly foreshadow Samuel Beckett’s double pairings of Didi and Gogo (clowns), and Pozzo and Lucky (physical versus intellectual existence) in *Waiting for Godot*. At the same time, Lewis’s play is hardly conceivable in terms of the stage, being not only a “dream of action,” but indeed a dream specifically within a dream, within a circus performance where the spectators are “posterity ... silent, like the dead, and more pathetic.” The perspective is deliberately impossible: “audience looks down into scene, as though it were a hut rolled half on its back, door upwards, characters mounting giddily in its opening.” The scale is superhuman and the script, almost without dialog, calls for effects quite beyond the range of theatre:

The night plunged gleaming nervous arms down into the wood, to wrench it up by the roots. Restless and rhythmical, beyond the staring red-rimmed doorway, giddy and expanding in drunken walls, its heavy drastic lights shifted.

Arghol could see only ponderous arabesques of red cloud, whose lines did not stop at door's frame, but pressed on into shadows within the hut ...<sup>4</sup>

Violent, subliminal, this drama of the mind might stand as the epitome of Modernism with human figures expanded to puppet-like monsters in a technologically conceived universe where the stars are "machines of prey" and the imagination determines reality. Needless to say, it has never been produced.

However, Lewis's experiences as an artillery officer in the war led him explicitly to repudiate the revolutionary artistic violence of *The Enemy of the Stars* in his next play, *The Ideal Giant*. Written in 1918, this short piece is set in 1914 – significantly the year when Vorticism had first been proclaimed in *Blast* and just after the publication of *The Enemy of the Stars* – and it focuses on the issue of art versus action in the context of the "Great War." Its protagonist is an avant-garde writer, who mouths the principles that Lewis and Pound had been proclaiming at the time: "Reality is the 'thing which is not,' for the creative artists. An artist would have precisely that feeling of 'malaise' and disgust if he had put into another man's head ... the actual biological appearance of nature" – "Art is much the purer and stronger [than war], and against its truths and impositions we must revolt" – "Revolution is the normal state of things." But what happens in the play demolishes the concept of the avant-garde artist as "ideal giant": all that his slogans have led to is his female disciple's murder of her banker-father. The almost completely naturalistic discussion-play format of *The Ideal Giant* is a denial of the whole Vorticist approach; and when the woman is arrested by the police, the artist is left sitting "*with his white profile, and large eye distorted with shame and perplexity.*" In contrast to his earlier futuristic praise for "restless machines ... heavy insect dredgers / monotonous cranes ... steep walls of factories," after his exposure to the mechanistic slaughter of World War I Lewis denounced modern technology and its reflection in Modernist art as a tool of oppression.<sup>5</sup>

A quite different application of Modernist principles to the stage can be seen in the dramatic work of W. B. Yeats and Gordon Craig respectively. Yeats, of course, was pre-eminently a poet; but he experimented with drama as an organic development of his verse through most of his literary career, writing one series of plays between 1902 and 1908, and another between 1930 and 1938. The elements developed in the first grouping were given their clearest expression eight years later in *At the Hawk's Well* (1916); the second culminated in his last play, *The Death of Cuchulain*. His earliest play, *The Shadowy Waters* (written in 1895) echoed Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axel* from a year earlier. However, once Yeats turned to specifically Irish themes, his drama shifted from nineteenth-century Symbolism. Even though the Salome image – the emblem of *fin de siècle* romanticism – recurs in two of his later pieces, in articulating a Celtic mythology for the nationalist movement he moved increasingly to artistic autonomy and abstraction. Discarding his early technique of depicting superficially ordinary characters whose reality lies on a mythic plane (for instance, an old woman representing the spirit of Ireland in

*Cathleen ni Houlihan*), Yeats causes his figures to become pure images, divorced from social context and ultimately even human form. He also adopted the least representational mode of performance, the dance. These “plays for dancers” are subjective. The author identifies with his mythological hero, Cuchulain, and the underlying subject of the plays is art: the myths are recreated to illustrate the process of mythmaking. At first glance, the consciously archaic style derived from Japanese Noh drama is anything but Modernist. Even so, borrowing from oriental models in fact becomes a standard characteristic for the dramatic side of the movement. Craig and (more indirectly) Brecht draw on Chinese theatre; Artaud took Balinese trance drama as his ideal; and, like Yeats, Stravinsky in his *Les Noces* copies the Japanese Noh model. However traditional in their context, when transposed to the European stage the effect is a radical break with tradition; and as Yeats emphasized, the value of Noh stylization was its “strangeness.” Unconsciously based on the colonialist view of the East as “other,” oriental models assert opposition to western culture. This may be less explicit in Yeats, since *Japonisme* had become a popular cult with the turn-of-the-century theatrical tours of the Geisha dancer Sada Yakko, followed by Michio Ito, who danced as the bird-spirit in *At the Hawk’s Well*. Yet it was Ezra Pound who introduced Yeats to Noh drama, which from a European perspective incorporated key Modernist qualities of internal unity and antirealism. As Ernest Fenollosa, the first translator of Noh plays, described the form, “All elements – costume, motion, verse and music – unite to produce a single clarified impression ... elevated to the plane of universality by the intensity and purity of treatment.” And in the Noh Yeats found his model for a style of theatre “close to pure music ... that would free [the stage] from imitation, and ally [dramatic] art to decoration and the dance.”<sup>6</sup>

Yeats’s aim was to create a form of drama in which the dancer would be inseparable from the dance, in a total unity of theme and expression. The characters of *At the Hawk’s Well* mirror each other – the Old Man, who competes for the waters of eternal life with Cuchulain, being a projection of what the Hero might become. The hawk-girl guardian is not only the impersonal force of fate, but the immortal muse of poetry. The well is both the object of the heroic quest and the source of poetic creation. This internalization goes along with a simplification and deliberate restriction of the dramatic means. The original epic material is reduced in each of the “dance plays” to a single event, framed by the ritual unfolding of a cloth with an invocation “to the eye of the mind” and culminating in a formal dance diametrically opposed to “the disordered passion of nature.”<sup>7</sup> Scenery is pared down to a single blank screen at the back of the acting area, a square of blue fabric on the floor for the well; and in *The Death of Cuchulain* the central action itself – the beheading of the Hero – takes place behind the screen, while his severed head is abstracted to a black parallelogram. This is drama at its most minimal, and in the last play the presenter, who is both the Old Man from *The Hawk’s Well* and Yeats’s alter ego, acknowledges that such plays have not only become distanced from the modern experience (“this vile age” that overwhelms the mythic ideal)

but also represent a withdrawal from theatre: something implicitly recognized in the gap between the writing of *The Death of Cuchulain* and its first performance in 1949, over a decade after Yeats's death. Dance was to prove one of the defining qualities of Modernist drama, through Rupert Doone, the cofounder of the Group Theatre, who united the art of Henry Moore; the music of Benjamin Britten; and the poetry of Auden, Eliot, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice in experimental forms of theatre throughout the 1930s. This included Eliot's one completely Modernist play, *Sweeney Agonistes*, and Auden's *Dance of Death* (both 1934), where the "death inside" the middle classes is embodied in the figure of a silent dancer.

Yeats hailed Craig's first productions as "not drama but the ritual of a lost faith," and together with Ezra Pound in 1912 joined a committee "to promote the Art of the Theatre as interpreted by Gordon Craig."<sup>8</sup> A year before that Yeats had staged three of his own plays at the Abbey using a scenic system of moveable ivory-coloured screens designed by Craig. Indeed he even completely rewrote one of the pieces (*Deirdre*, first performed in 1906) to take full advantage of the abstract-impressionist effects that could be achieved through Craig's screens.

Craig's real strength was as a painter and designer, though in the 1890s he had won recognition as one of the leading young actors in England, and the series of Purcell and Handel operas that he directed between 1900 and 1902 were poetically simplified. After these productions, Craig progressively withdrew from the stage in search of pure form, anticipating Pound's commitment to "form, not the *form of anything*." This included rejecting actors, whose displays of personality and lack of physical precision Craig had come to see as irreconcilable with art. Instead he began experimenting with "Scene." Making the architectural stage itself the active expressive element through columns of various dimensions, rising out of the stage floor and descending from the flies, choreographed in continual progression with ever-changing flows and colors of light, this purely mechanical and architecturally abstract concept was iconically Modernist. Drawing an analogy to Bach's oratorios – which he saw as relying "on compact and simple *form* to move us" – Craig's vision was of an artist orchestrating all these elements in symphonic movement that would communicate a series of "moods," the aim being "*to represent the idea ... to endow with soul lifeless material*."<sup>9</sup>

If Yeats and Craig represent the Imagist line of Modernism, it might be logical to conclude that the movement was incompatible with theatre, since their artistic principles drove them to withdraw from the stage. Each in their own way is infected by the elitism inherent in much Modernist art – which in the form of a pseudo-aristocratic concept of passionless remoteness is the weakest aspect of Yeats's poetry as well as of his plays – and this inevitably conflicts with the populist quality of stage performance. Yeats expressed the wish to rehearse his actors in barrels, ruling out gesture to restore the sovereignty of words. Despite his central role in founding the Abbey Theatre and in promoting the plays of Synge and other Irish naturalists, Yeats turned his back on the public stage (preferring private performances in the houses of the elite) "to create for



myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society.” Craig cut out the actor completely, together with the spoken word, and effectively ceased performances for spectators at all. Both progressively discarded standard elements of theatrical communication to evolve their own types of minimalist drama. This has in fact proved the most valuable part of their art (being picked up respectively by postmodern artists like Samuel Beckett).<sup>10</sup>

However, the principles of Modernism were adopted by a wide range of other playwrights and directors, who explored alternative ways of expressing the Modernist vision. Yet even where there are clear parallels – say with the novel, which is perhaps the most similar in using characterization and narrative techniques – the theatrical forms of Modernism are distinct. For instance, from Proust through James Joyce and Virginia Woolf one major Modernist concern was the depiction of interior experience, where reality is the subjective apprehension of the world, and art is an “*impressionist*” record of “stream of consciousness.” In drama the equivalent is *expressionism*, which seeks to represent (and appeal directly to) the *subconscious*. While their plays tended to be equally autobiographical, the Expressionists’ focus on archetypes intrinsically denies the validity of both the individual ego and intellectual awareness. Thus the aim of the Expressionist actor was to “completely forget himself in his soul ... going onto the stage as someone sleepwalking” and the ideal form of communication was “a scarcely verbalized cry” signifying “the excess of a sensation – full of pathos because arising out of passion – solely with the aim of generating passion.”<sup>11</sup>

As Strindberg stated in his programmatic Author’s Note, the structure of *A Dream Play* transcribes “the inconsequent yet transparently logical shape of a dream. Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality the imagination spins, weaving new patterns ... The characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, condense, disperse, assemble. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all – that of the dreamer.” The recurring phrase “Alas for mankind ...” becomes a controlling motif in the dialog. Objects – a door, said to conceal the secret of life, which turns out to have nothing behind it; the doorkeeper’s shawl that becomes laden with glistening tears – are reused from scene to scene, taking on continually new symbolic connotations. The husband of the central female soul-figure (with a characteristically universal name: the Daughter) switches between an Army Officer, a Lawyer, and a Poet. The whole dramatic action, extended on one temporal plane, lasts scarcely an eyeblink in the time-frame of the opening and closing scenes. Catching sight of a chrysanthemum bud crowning the gilded roof of a growing castle that rises above a wall of gigantic hollyhocks, the Daughter asks “Won’t it flower soon? We’re past midsummer” – to which she receives the reply “Don’t you see the flower up there?”<sup>12</sup> Already unfolding as she first opens her eyes, the final tableau of the play – where the flower bursts into full bloom – follows straight on these opening lines, yet our perception is assumed to have been changed by the intervening experience. As the castle

flares up in an image of spiritual transcendence, the light of its flames transforms the hollyhocks into a wall of agonized human faces. The Poet/author-figure in the play may be able to see reality, since (as the Daughter tells him) poetry, dreaming, and reality are all synonymous. Yet the Poet is not the dreamer; and the religious imagery that imbues *A Dream Play*, which is typical of Expressionist drama, points to its underlying mythological theme. Prefiguring Joyce and Eliot, Strindberg is using myth as a controlling pattern that makes the apparent chaos and futility of the modern experience meaningful. But unlike Eliot, he was consciously borrowing from eastern mysticism, in which life itself is seen as the dream of a god trapped in material existence by desire. The psyches of human individuals are illusory projections of fragmentary impulses from this divinity, who can only regain full consciousness through the eventual destruction of the world, the catalyst for which is suffering that makes people's daily lives unendurable and so liberates the god from his love of physical being.

The rejection of Victorian orthodoxies, along with the logical and chronological structures of traditional narrative, may be standard for Modernist poets. The theatre took this to an extreme, following Strindberg in denying the whole of western civilization with its emphasis on rationalism and its materialism. The Expressionists reflected the same sense of a disintegrating culture, dissociated personalities, and fragmented consciousness, but went further in working for spiritual transcendence. Their themes also tended to be more extreme, intensified by the physicality of performance.

A good example of this is Kokoschka's *Murder, Hope of Women*. The play depicts "the fatal confrontation" between the opposing poles of existence that Kokoschka saw as "the basis of our dreams, Eros and Thanatos," through a sexual war-to-the-death between "the female principle" (identified with the moon) and the archetypal warrior male.<sup>13</sup> The dynamic rhythms of curvilinear shapes and symbolic use of colour that characterize Kokoschka's paintings were transposed into swirling, ritualistic choreography and emotive, imagistic phrases. The network of lines that dissolve the features in his portraits, when painted on the bodies of his almost nude actors, appeared as nerves and tendons, making it seem that surface individuality had been flayed away to primal (and physical) essence. Avoiding narrative progression, the action is composed of mythic elements linked by an erotic pattern of violence. Inverted Christian images – a cock crowing three times to announce a massacre, a woman's body spread into a white cross to be strangled by her rapist – form an extended orgasm with crucifixion as the sexual climax. Brutal and primitivistic, *Murder, Hope of Women* caused a riot when first performed in Vienna in 1909, but achieved the status of a Modernist classic, with five reprintings of the text between 1910 and 1920. It featured in the repertoire of Max Reinhardt (Germany's leading director and impresario) between 1918 and 1921, and was performed throughout the 1920s as opera, with a musical score by Hindemith.

This primitivism is one of the characteristic lines in theatrical Modernism, stretching from Wyndham Lewis, through Antonin Artaud in the 1930s, to the Living Theatre and the American avant-garde in the late 1960s. It was perhaps most fully realized in modern



ballet, where the evocative qualities of music and the symbolic abstraction of dance could create powerful emotional effects through rhythm, as exemplified in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. The physical energy of barbaric dancing, together with the polytonal dissonances, melodic repetitions and driving beat of Stravinsky's score, configure the pagan fertility ritual of prehistoric human sacrifice, connecting with sexual urges to produce an overwhelming sense of atavism. First performed in 1913, *Le Sacre du printemps* was immensely influential, and became part of the repertoire of dance groups throughout the 1920s. Perhaps the leading exponent of this primitivistic Modernism was Mary Wigman, whose dance-dramas gained a cult status in Germany – but the influence of Stravinsky's primitivism can also be traced in literary theatre.

Some of the same qualities carry over into the early plays of Eugene O'Neill, when he was setting out to create a Modernist theatre for America. Explicitly influenced by Strindberg, *The Emperor Jones* (1920) depicts a journey into the subconscious during which the black protagonist is stripped of his individuality in a journey back through racial history to an elemental unity with death, while *The Hairy Ape* (1921) extends the same theme into a condemnation of urban industrial civilization as a cage that deforms and destroys humanity. O'Neill – like the majority of Modernist playwrights – retains chronological narrative structures, although the time sequence is reversed in one play and the scenes of both have the brevity of snapshots. But he also exalts primitivism in Jones's atavistic reversion to savagery, as well as in his use of drumbeats running through the whole performance in increasing tempo to regulate the pulse rate of the audience and involve them emotionally in the visionary dream world of the protagonist's consciousness. By the end of the twenties Expressionism had also transferred to England and Ireland, appearing in Sean O'Casey's World War I play, *The Silver Tassie*, and conditioning the political verse-dramas of Auden and Isherwood in the mid 1930s.

It was a short step from the Expressionist realm of the collective unconscious to the Surrealists, whose belief that the free flow of imagination would liberate the deepest levels of the psyche led to experiments with automatic writing. André Breton's concept of "psychic automatism" was related to both the psychotherapist's tool of spontaneous speech and to the spiritualist seance: "A dictation of thought without any control of reason, outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupation."<sup>14</sup> Surrealist drama was capable of rising to delicate and evocative poetic fantasy, as in *La Place de l'Etoile* by Robert Desnos. The permutations of sexual desire, so characteristic of Surrealist plays because of the possibilities for emotional intensity, are here treated lyrically and grounded in inconsequential bar-room conversation where there are no boundaries between reality and illusion, consciousness and sleep, or even the living and ghosts. Passion ignites fires that burn down buildings; unconsummated longings cause starfish to proliferate all over Paris; a hallucinatory dream world is created, which has its own random logic.

However, the most significant and influential development of Surrealism in the theatre came with Antonin Artaud, who rejected everything ethereal in pursuit of "the truthful

precipitate of dreams ... imprinted with terror and cruelty.” Artaud’s principles are essentially Modernist – his aim being specifically “to return to the theatre that total liberty which exists in [contemporary] music, poetry, or painting, and of which it has been curiously bereft up till now”<sup>15</sup> – but the visionary path he took in realizing Modernist aims led in strikingly new directions.

Like many of his contemporaries in the 1920s and earlier, Artaud was hypersensitive to the destabilizing effect of modern conditions, of being faced with a period “when the world ... sees its old values crumble. Our calcined life is dissolving at its base.” His theatre was both a response, and a reflection in being designed to function metaphorically like “the plague” that ushers in “spiritual freedom” by causing “all social forms to disintegrate.” He attacked realism, and all traditional European forms of representation – going so far indeed as to junk all “masterpieces” as irrelevant – and instead sought “images that spring uniquely from themselves, which do not derive their meaning from the situation ... but from a kind of internal necessity.” Indeed, his underlying premise epitomizes the Imagist position: “what is important is not the objective drama of images, but the subjective drama of souls.” He worked for direct communication (in which the theatrical spectacle would affect the audience in the same way as acupuncture), and explored irrationality. He constantly stressed the significance of myths, being in his view “precipitates of the universal dream,” but valued them solely as a mode of experience, envisaging “a drama which, without resorting to the defunct images of the old Myths, shows it can extract the forces which struggle within them.”<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, in Artaud’s hands all these typically Modernist qualities were transmuted into elements of a unique vision that only became realized in the counter-culture avant-garde theatre of the late 1960s. Even the conclusions drawn from the sense of social breakdown and individual fragmentation that motivates the whole Modernist search were more extreme: “If confusion is a sign of the times,” Artaud declared, then at its root was “a rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representation.”<sup>17</sup> The ideal of direct communication that he developed in response was not subliminal, but intensely physical, with the audience surrounded by the action, their senses bombarded into overload, and all barriers between stage and spectator demolished. Instead of an ordering principle (as, say, for Eliot), myth offered Artaud a reservoir of anarchic extremity, in which the darkest forces of the human psyche were exteriorized. His primitivism was qualitatively different from the oriental borrowings of Yeats, Craig, or Strindberg. Those were stylistic or philosophical. Artaud’s model was the Balinese dance troupe that he witnessed at a colonial exhibition performing a Barong drama, which involved a mythical beast and trance states (during which at a similar performance filmed by Margaret Mead the dancers became invulnerable to the swords they turned against their naked chests). The Balinese ritual, with its archaic incantation and hieratic gestures, leading to mass hypnosis through contagious delirium, became his ideal for performance. Achieving “the automatism of the liberated unconscious,” actors would be “signalling through the flames” by using a

“concrete language, intended for the sense and independent of speech” in which “everything is ... regulated and impersonal; not a movement of the muscles, not the rolling of an eye but seem[s] to belong to a kind of reflective mathematics which controls everything.”<sup>18</sup> Following on his belief that “the images of thought can be identified with a dream which will be efficacious [i.e. induce a trance state in the spectators] to the degree that it can be projected with the necessary violence, he adopted “Theatre of Cruelty” as his title, declaring “Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that the theatre must be rebuilt.”<sup>19</sup>

Such ideas led to a theatre of passionate excess, dealing with “great crimes” as the most powerful emotional catalyst, embodied in hallucinatory images that were communicated through physical action. Although the only one of his own plays that Artaud produced was *The Cenci* (an exaggerated version of Shelley’s pseudo-Jacobean tragedy of a tyrannical father who rapes and is murdered by his own daughter), perhaps the clearest example of his drama is the short *Jet of Blood*. In this piece Artaud completely discards cause-and-effect narrative along with even chronological consistency, to create a dream world where modern figures mingle with divine apparitions, and with historical archetypes and grotesques such as a medieval Knight in a vast, over-sized suit of armour, who is in constant pursuit of a Nurse with immensely swollen breasts. The play also combines the breaking of primal taboos – incest and blasphemy – with surrealistic shock effects. A Whore and a Young Man eat each other’s eyes, the Young Girl (the Young Man’s sister/wife) is “*crushed flat as a pancake*,” but revives to cry out “The virgin! Ah, that’s what he was looking for.” The huge hand of God seizes the Whore’s hair, which “*bursts into ever-widening flames*”; and when she bites God’s wrist, the blood that spurts across the stage kills almost all the characters. The Knight stands transfixed as “*An army of scorpions comes out from under the Nurse’s dress and swarms over his sex, which swells up and bursts, becoming glassy and shining like the sun*.” Physical action overwhelms the scarcely 300 words of dialog, as when the statement “how well ordered this world is” provokes a long sequence in which fragments of human bodies and the detritus of western civilization (colonnades, temples) rain down “*with a vomit-inducing slowness*.”<sup>20</sup> Such visceral effects were intended to short-circuit rational responses and liberate the audience’s subconscious.

*Jet of Blood* is the dramatic equivalent of the surrealist Dalí–Buñuel film, *Un Chien Andalou*; and it is worth noting that Artaud himself wrote several screenplays. In 1928 he declared that his theatrical ideas could only be realized through the cinema – and indeed other Modernists were also clearly reaching towards effects that had become newly available through film, the most obvious example being Wyndham Lewis’s *The Enemy of the Stars* over a decade earlier. Perhaps as a result, even though it had been announced for the 1927 program of Artaud’s theatre, *Jet of Blood* remained unperformed until 1964. After a bare handful of productions between 1927 and 1935, Artaud abandoned the stage; and the most effective part of his work became his incendiary essays and manifestos.

In some ways T. S. Eliot's first play, *Sweeney Agonistes* (written in 1925–6 and first performed in America in 1933), is comparable to the Surrealists. Unlike his other drama, this deals with unsavory lower-class, even underworld “furnished flat sort of people.” An explicit attack on “the conventionalities of modern behaviour with its empty code and heartiness – immoral, but never immoral enough – decaying, but so long in dying,” the vestigial action is presented as a nightmare dream. All the other characters are seen as projections of the title figure's agonized consciousness, and indeed an early title had been *The Marriage of Life and Death: A Dream*.<sup>21</sup> Specifically Sweeney's dream is a grotesque nightmare of murder, with Sweeney himself as the notorious wife-murderer Dr. Crippen (with whom Eliot might have identified, since Crippen was an American from St. Louis – Eliot's birthplace – transplanted to England, like Eliot, who had buried his wife's dismembered body in his London basement). In the text Sweeney, for whom “life is death,” merely expresses the desire to “do a girl in,” telling the story of a man – perhaps himself – who kept his butchered female victim's body for months in a bathtub, preserved in lysol, while he goes about his daily routine. But in the 1934 London production, with which Eliot was directly involved, this became more than fantasy. The performance ended with Sweeney brandishing a cut-throat razor as he chased a prostitute, a police whistle then pounding on the door, and a girl's scream in the final blackout: a gruesome dance of death. As blind (in moral terms) as Samson Agonistes, Sweeney is the modern equivalent of Milton's heroic biblical avenger, who has been degraded to Jack the Ripper under the corrosive pressures of the twentieth-century world. In this production too, the gap between performers and audience was broken down, by setting the acting-area – distinguished only by a pool of light – in the middle of the spectators who, with the actors seated among them when “off stage,” were implicitly cast as a chorus of accomplices.

Eliot was possibly the greatest of the Modernist poets; and the figure of “apeneck Sweeney” surfaces recurrently in his poems, representing degraded and aggressive sexuality. Found “Among the Nightingales” (a slang term for prostitutes), in “Sweeney Erect” he is reduced to little more than a phallus, as the title of the poem indicates. He reappears in *The Waste Land*, perverting the lifegiving urges of spring by resorting to a brothel, while one of the whores from the play also carries over into the poetry, giving her name to “Doris's Dream Songs” (published in 1924, with one of the poems becoming Part III of *The Hollow Men*). Eliot recognized drama as the logical development of his poetic aims, since in his view “The most useful poetry, socially, would be one which could cut across all the present stratifications of public taste – stratifications which are perhaps a sign of social disintegration. The ideal medium for poetry ... and the most direct means of social ‘usefulness’ for poetry, is the theatre.”<sup>22</sup> And the continuum between his poetry and his plays is nowhere clearer than in *Sweeney Agonistes*.

The play is a literal transcription of his principle that “the music of poetry ... must be a music latent in the common speech of its time,” using jazzrhythms in the dialog and

including a parody of a Bob Cole's hit "Under the Bamboo Tree." In addition, one of the gangster figures is ironically characterized as a traditional role in the Negro minstrel show – "Snow as Bones" (a double death-figure) – and in his notes for the director of the 1933 American production Eliot suggested that the chorus should sound like a street drill. *Sweeney Agonistes* is also the most unequivocally Modernist of his plays. An accompaniment of drumbeats (paralleling O'Neill's use of a drum in *The Emperor Jones*) emphasizes its ritualistic basis, which is also implicit in the music-hall elements: the music hall being in Eliot's eyes "one of the few surviving rituals in modern life."<sup>23</sup> Following Yeats, he wanted performances of the play stylized like a Noh drama; and the actors were to be masked. Narrative structure was consciously avoided, with the play being arbitrarily split into two halves, both incomplete and explicitly composed as a "Fragment of a Prologue" and a "Fragment of an Agon": an Expressionistic montage that the 1934 London production emphasized by blackouts between each small segment of the action.

Yeats saw the performance – as did Bertolt Brecht, who was greatly impressed – and *Sweeney Agonistes* was picked up by the avant-garde after World War II in an early Living Theatre production that also featured Picasso's *Desire* and Gertrude Stein's *Ladies' Voices*. This grouping confirms the position of *Sweeney Agonistes* as a key example of Modernist drama. but it also points to the ongoing significance of Gertrude Stein, whose work was with one exception largely ignored by the theatre during her lifetime, yet has become a recurrent focus for the avant-garde right up to the present.

Indeed Stein could be said to be the single high Modernist author to even want, let alone achieve, a truly popular success. That was *Four Saints in Three Acts*, which at its opening in 1934 was the longest-running opera ever on Broadway and a New York sensation, inspiring shop windows at Bergdorf's, puff pieces in *Vanity Fair*, and national awareness of the libretto's catchphrase, "Pigeons on the grass alas." All this despite a completely abstract text, without settings, discernable action, or even character-designations for the lines. Not even the title is an accurate description, since there are four acts and over twenty saints. Virgil Thomson, composing the music for the opera, had to get a scenario created (with Stein's permission) for the otherwise purely verbal text, which did not even have standard syntactical connections, on which the staging – by the young John Houseman with Frederick Ashton's dance choreography – could be based. This presented living pictures of the life of Saint Teresa in Ávila, a garden party, a vision of the Holy Ghost and a storm presaging the Last Judgment, and finally the saints in heaven recalling their lives on earth. And Thomson's apparently simple, very American music, echoing fragments of fairground and circus tunes, the rumba, and a phrase from the national anthem, gave a folksy familiarity to Stein's libretto. Like other Modernist works, *Four Saints* is a self-reflexive vision of art and artistic inspiration. Speaking of Stein, Thomson noted: "we viewed a saint's life as related to our own," and that the "consecrated artist" could "just possibly, through art, make 'miracles.'"<sup>24</sup>

In all, Stein wrote over thirty Cubist theatre-pieces, which are presented in terms of spatial perspectives rather than sequential progression, landscape instead of the standard



dramatic chronology. Even so, the language has its own structuring principles, as can be seen in an example from *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (1938), which directly reflects Stein's working methods:

FAUSTUS. It is all to me

Ah I do not like that word me,

Why it does not even rhyme with she. I know all the words that rhyme with bright  
with light with might with alright, I know them so that I cannot tell I can spell but  
I cannot tell how much I need to not have that, not light not sight, not light not  
night not alright, not night not sight not bright, no no not night not sight not bright  
no no not bright<sup>25</sup>

The internal rhymes and alliteration stress sound instead of conventional meaning, but this together with the repetitions and circularity are also standard features of opera, particularly *bel canto* singing, which on one level helps to explain the public appreciation of *Four Saints in Three Acts*. For similar reasons, W. H. Auden turned to opera in the 1940s and 1950s, most effectively with the libretto for Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, performed in Venice in 1951 and at the Metropolitan in 1953, which superimposes on Hogarth's famous series of etchings the biblical expulsion from Eden, and the Faust legend, echoing Stein in positioning this as an archetypal myth for the modern age.

Despite the huge popularity of *Four Saints*, the only other one of all Stein's dramatic works actually staged during her lifetime was another opera, *The Mother of Us All*, celebrating the life of the famous American suffragette, Susan B. Anthony (again with music by Thomson), and even *Four Saints* was not revived. Like most of the other cases examined so far, then, this transposition of the Modernist vision to the stage had only a brief theatrical life.

Even Expressionism, the most widespread aspect of the movement, only flourished in its ecstatic form for about five years, from 1919, when Strindberg's concepts became adopted in Germany, to 1924. Only two of O'Neill's plays are fully Expressionistic; and when O'Casey adopted the approach in 1928 his work was rejected by the Abbey. Artaud's drama had little influence when it was staged, although some of his techniques were picked up by Jean Louis Barrault, who became a central figure in French theatre. After only four years as a director Craig retreated into pure theory, finding it impossible to get his ideas accepted by the turn-of-the-century theatre, while Wyndham Lewis never attempted to get his drama staged at all. Some of their plays and ideas were to be the basis for avant-garde performances thirty to forty years later. Yet, apart from Strindberg, in their own time they had little influence. Extremism marginalized their work.

Compromises had to be made if viable work was to be produced for the stage; and in drama the most influential practitioners of Modernism are defined by the infusion of a Modernist spirit into standard theatrical forms. This had been begun by George Bernard

Shaw, whose refurbishing of traditional melodrama and romance offers a basic example. All Shaw's plays have standard narrative structures and retain the semblance of a naturalistic surface, as well as being (notoriously) intellectual. Yet Shaw uses the intellectual qualities of inversion and paradox to an extent that undermines their apparent rationalism, and conceived his plays as "musical performances" in which the "long rhetorical speeches" were consciously written "like operatic solos." Thus in *Man and Superman* (1903), although the plot as such is a standard three-act marriage comedy – doubly reversed in that it is the woman who pursues, and the object of pursuit is not emotional fulfillment but an idea of existence – the essence of the play is an interpolated dream sequence. This comprises well over half the length of the total script, and takes place outside space and time where the devil appears along with figures from the Don Juan legend. While unlike other Modernist dream plays, since there is no attempt to reproduce the illogic or symbolism of the unconscious, this hell scene has a significant degree of abstraction. The figures are archetypal projections of the characters in the outer play (implicitly exposing their individualized personalities as illusory) inhabiting "the void" and corresponding to motifs from Mozart's operas (*The Magic Flute* as well as *Don Giovanni*).<sup>26</sup> Emphasizing the musical quality of the dream, Shaw annotated the speeches with different musical keys, quarter-notes, and crescendos as a guide for the actor playing Don Juan.

Other plays by Shaw reveal equally Modernist concerns. For instance, in *Misalliance* (1910) the destabilizing effect of technological advance and cultural disintegration is given concrete shape in the airplane piloted – incongruously – by an elegant female Polish acrobat, which crashes through the glass roof of the conservatory in an English country mansion, literally shattering both commonplace realities and established social structures. Though the tone is comic, this rupture of normalcy exposes the fragility of the twentieth-century psyche as a timid clerk, representing the completely conditioned personality, turns revolutionary, leaping out of a portable Turkish bath with the cry "Rome fell. Babylon fell. Hindhead's turn will come." Although here the pistol-waving revolutionary is easily disarmed and the social order – however tenuously – reimposed, in *Heartbreak House* the inevitable armageddon occurs. Writing in the depths of World War I, Shaw envisages the self-destruction of England, and by extension the whole of western civilization since this "fantasia in the Russian manner" is modeled on Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. The characters are the social elite who have abdicated responsibility. They exist in a hell of unreality where, as the disillusioned heroine discovers, all intellectual, economic and political powers are illusory:

ELLIE. Marcus's tigers are false; Mr. Mangan's millions are false ... The one thing that was left to me was the Captain's seventh degree of concentration: and that turns out to be –

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER. Rum.



For these “heartbroken imbeciles,” the only hope of escaping the lunatic society they inhabit is through the destruction of the “madhouse” – “This soul’s prison we call England” – and at the end, after German bombs have killed the tycoon and a burglar (“the two practical men of business”) the survivors turn on all the lights in the house as a beacon for the bombers.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, *Heartbreak House* is the most poetic of Shaw’s plays, with the dialog progressing along nonlogical, musical lines and at times breaking into pure stream of consciousness or verse. Insistent symbolism fragments the naturalistic surface, and the structure is openly symphonic. Indeed, a “fantasia” (the genre indicated by Shaw’s subtitle) is a musical composition in which form is subservient to fancy, a dream vision. The play is designed as the theatrical equivalent, with Shaw affirming that it “has more of the miracle, more of the mystic belief in it than any of my others.”<sup>28</sup>

None of Shaw’s other work moves as far from standard dramatic forms, but the same elements are present in most of his later plays. Beneath his social polemics lies an awareness of irrationality, even mysticism, together with a tendency to abstraction. However, it was his claim of a direct social influence for theatre, together with the naturalistic elements of his drama of ideas, that had the most influence – and simply through longevity and the sheer volume of his work Shaw dominated the British stage from the opening of the modern period up to his death in 1950 – with the result that the main stream of “serious” drama in England is still political and largely naturalistic.

Not all compromises were as traditional as Shaw’s. When linked with Marxist ideology, Futurism proved a vital catalyst; and the theatrical styles developed during the 1920s by Vsevolod Meyerhold in Russia and Erwin Piscator in Germany, each represent different applications of Futurist principles. Meyerhold’s system of “biomechanics” applied industrial technology directly to performance, based on the analysis of production-line workers by Frederick Taylor (the inventor of time-and-motion studies) and Pavlov’s behaviorist psychology. This was combined with “constructivist” nonrepresentational scenery. On Meyerhold’s stage figures became types, and the actor’s role was turned into a construct of movements, while the action became a montage of independent images. Following his colleague Eisenstein – who intriguingly had planned to film *Ulysses* even before Joyce found a publisher – Meyerhold isolated each beat in a production, every “episode” being played as an independent “turn,” which produced highly exciting performances that emphasized “theatricality.” Although on one level the equivalent of Pound’s dislocated syntax and Imagism, these abstract qualities were translated into the physical, performative aspects of presentation. “Theatricality” in itself could be seen as the equivalent of the formalism that characterizes more literary expressions of Modernism, but in the theatre this led to the foregrounding of technology, not to abstraction, as Piscator’s “documentary” drama demonstrates. Piscator used modern technology and mechanization as the controlling image for contemporary

existence. For instance in his 1927 production of *Rasputin, the Romanoffs, the War, and the People who Rose up against Them*, Piscator's staging (as his choice of title indicates) was the outline of an era, "condensing reality" and giving concrete shape to such sociological abstractions as "Capitalism" or "the class struggle" through the integration of film with acted scenes and a mechanized stage construct. A metallic half-globe that almost filled the stage, divided into multiple acting spaces behind hinged flaps, this rotated or opened up into segments. Film could be projected onto its curving surface as well as surrounding screens, which together with a mobile "calendar" screen at one side of the stage juxtaposed different levels of reality. The fluidity and movement of the "globe" made a panoramic treatment of the epic sweep of events possible; and swivelling like a tank-turret from scene to scene, it served as a graphic image of the modern technology that gave World War I its scope and intensity.<sup>29</sup> However, both "biomechanics" and "documentary drama" were short-lived. Piscator was only able to sustain his own theatre for two years before the exorbitant cost of such technological productions forced it into bankruptcy, while Meyerhold fell victim to Stalin, and his censored work only started to become known over thirty years after his murder.

Even so, their ideas were carried forward – in a very changed shape – by the most influential dramatist of the century, Bertolt Brecht. It was while he was working with Piscator that Brecht developed his concept of an "epic theatre"; and in many ways his unrepresentational form of staging, which broke down characterization by emphasizing the act of acting and separated out the various elements of presentation, echoed Meyerhold. Brecht had also admired Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes*, and since his first plays were Expressionist, his work effectively gathered together the major streams of theatrical Modernism.

Brecht dismissed both "Aristotelian" dramatic forms and "culinary" commercial entertainment, and in 1929 posed a question that remains the fundamental challenge for contemporary theatre: "Can we speak of money in iambs? ... Petroleum resists the five-act form; today's catastrophes do not progress in a straight line but in cyclical crises ... Even to dramatize a simple newspaper report one needs something much more than the dramatic technique of a Hebbel or an Ibsen." It is a typically Modernist question; and for Brecht the only solution was political: to represent the world "as being capable of transformation."<sup>30</sup> That formed the thesis of *Man Is Man* in 1926, which demonstrates that personality is completely changeable, indeed interchangeable, being the product of social conditioning. Carried into the dualistic, even schizoid figures of his mature plays, where instinct conflicts with the dictates of class or wealth, this creates a radically different type of dramatic character from the coherent individual of naturalism. Thus in *The Good Person of Setzuan* the kind-natured, but poor and helpless female protagonist takes on the persona and appearance of a ruthless male capitalist to protect her unborn child. Brecht's actors were also trained to present their roles objectively: for instance through rehearsing speeches replacing the first-person "I" with "s/he said ..." Frequently masked, his actors were required to demonstrate the act of acting instead of pretending to

“be” the characters, an approach derived partly from Chinese theatre. Although the aim of such techniques was to prevent empathy, the effect was a precise theatrical rendering of the fragmented and dissociated personality that preoccupied Modernist poets and painters.

The type of structure that Brecht developed was just as much a departure from the naturalistic norm. In deliberate contrast to the linear plots of standard “dramatic” theatre, Brecht used techniques to present events as narrative – hence his label of “epic theatre” – creating discontinuous action from a montage of scenes. Linked primarily by their illustrative relationship to a central political theme (though in practice Brecht’s plays also provide other through-lines, with the same central figures occupying each scene, and developing situations) the sequences proceed “in curves/jumps.”<sup>31</sup> Thus in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* each half of the play starts at the same point, and covers the same time-frame from completely opposed perspectives. The double action then fuses together in the final scene to provide a solution to the apparently very different type of problem raised in the Preface, which is not only set in another century but presented in a radically different style. With the exception of his first play, *Baal* (an Expressionistic exploration of a poet’s vision) Brecht’s approach is the opposite of stream of consciousness. Yet his “epic” play-construction echoes the “curvilinear” forms of Modernist painting, as well as the discontinuity and montage of Modernist literature.

In addition to fragmenting traditional plot lines and characterization, the various elements of theatre were to be separated: speech from gesture, voice from music. Again, although explicitly designed as an antidote to the Wagnerian synthesis that included the audience in an emotional unity (which Brecht saw as inherently reactionary), such disconnection and diffraction have identifiable correlatives in other Modernist art. This complication of the actor’s function was accompanied by extreme simplification in staging. Brecht’s settings are stripped down, and placards indicate the scene or give information to remove suspense. Machinery and lights are exposed to prevent illusion; stagehands work in full view, and instrumentalists playing the music for the songs that punctuate Brecht’s plays are visible to the audience. A “half-curtain” replaces the solid drapes that customarily close the proscenium arch to emphasize that the stage is not a special or magical space, but part of the everyday world. However, removing pretended illusion has the effect of emphasizing performance. Rather than “metatheatre” – a traditional technique where theatre is used as a metaphor through references to the stage in a play text (for instance the appearance of actors and the “Mousetrap” play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*) – Brecht’s overt theatricality highlights the form of presentation purely as a means of communication. The few metatheatrical moments that occur in his work are parodistic – as with the mounted messenger bringing the Queen’s pardon just as Macheath is about to be hung at the close of *The Threepenny Opera* – and in general the exposure of stage mechanisms and of the actor behind each character carries no added signification. It is the theatrical equivalent of Modernist formalism.

At the same time, for all the extreme positions taken in his theory – and in the number

of manifestos and essays accompanying his plays too Brecht is typically Modernist – Brecht’s work mediates between antitraditional form and conventional dramatic content almost to the same degree as Shaw (whom Brecht in fact saw as sharing many of his own aims). Despite all the avoidance of empathy through “distancing” techniques, objectification, and “clinical” lighting, Brecht’s theatre is by no means purely rational, as he continually claimed. On the stage his plays have an exceptionally strong emotional charge, which is actually intensified by “factual” presentation. Spectators fainted in 1929 when a giant clown was sawn apart limb from limb in the *Baden-Baden Cantata of Acquiescence*, even though the dismemberment was clearly unrealistic, being carried out by other clowns on a grotesque figure with obviously wooden arms and legs. Later plays like *Mother Courage* or *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* contain moments of tear-jerking melodrama or nail-biting suspense. A dumb girl sacrifices herself to save the children of a besieged town, beating a drum despite the rifles of the assaulting troops leveled at her. A desperate flight, babe in arms and brutal pursuers at heels, over a rickety bridge, rivals such spectacularly melodramatic sequences as the escape over the ice in the nineteenth-century classic of melodrama, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Even Brecht’s principle of montage has an inherent effect of intensification, since in practice it focuses exclusively on the “high points” of an action. Indeed, corresponding to the distinction McLuhan pointed out between “cool” and “hot” mediums of expression (where the less emotion in the way an image is presented, the more powerfully it affects the spectators who read in their own feelings), the restraint of Brecht’s techniques and the purely denotative quality of presentation make for more audience involvement than the most rhetorical and emotive of traditional performances.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps as a result, Brecht is the only dramatist to translate the principles of Modernism to the stage and at the same time create strikingly successful theatre. His plays almost immediately attained the status of modern classics, and unlike most Modernist experiments have become as much a part of the theatrical mainstream as Shaw’s work. However, in contrast to all other Modernists, Brecht gained his own, state-supported theatre where for the last decade of his life he was able to set the style of presentation for his plays. Even in the 1920s he had gathered a group of actors committed to his ideas, and at the Berliner Ensemble, with a whole troupe trained specifically in his method as well as complete control of productions, Brecht created definitive performances of his major works. Where the other Modernists were relegated to the theatrical fringes, or (like Shaw) found that the commercial theatre distorted their work, Brecht was unique in having the ability to set his own artistic agenda.

As one novelist and poet put it, the key quality defining Modernist art was the “unflinching aim – to register my own times in terms of my own time”; and in their very different ways each of the playwrights and directors in the movement follow this underlying principle. Given the public and social nature of stage performances, however, almost all had strong and overt political motivation. Practically the only exceptions are

the early Imagists, Yeats and Craig – although Yeats too was highly political in the Irish nationalism of a play like *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and together with Eliot has been accused of Fascist tendencies. Shaw embraced Fabianism; Brecht and Meyerhold were committed Marxists. Even Dada and the Surrealists adopted Communism – despite the fundamental contradiction between their aims and the materialist ideology of Marxism – while many of the Futurists turned to Fascism, with Marinetti becoming Mussolini's minister for culture. Artaud too declared that “our present social state is iniquitous and should be destroyed. If this fact is a preoccupation for theatre, it is even more of a matter for machine-guns” – and this anarchic extremism also led to Fascist tendencies, with Artaud dedicating a poem to Hitler. Even O'Neill, who in one early poem had compared himself to a submarine with his words as torpedoes that would explode the American social structure, writes as a revolutionary socialist in his early Modernist plays. In the first draft of *The Hairy Ape*, for instance, his eponymous hero Yank ends by joining the International Workers of the World (IWW) – and it is noticeable that this political commitment vanished as his drama moved away from Modernism.

By contrast, there was no such open ideological commitment among Modernists writing in other forms. However political Eliot's views or the implications of the theories expounded in his essays, his poetry speaks in universal and religious terms. The singular exception is Ezra Pound, with his embrace of Fascism. In general the principles of Modernism, as expressed in poetry and painting, deny the validity of politics. But in drama, stylistic and social revolution went together.

Drama is also distinct from other forms of Modernism in that Modernist principles are still active. Although the main creative period of Modernist theatre occupied the first thirty years of the century, arguably it has not yet been completely superseded by postmodernism in drama. In a sense, Samuel Beckett's plays represent a decisive new breakthrough, as does Robert Wilson's work. Yet Wilson in particular is influenced by the early Modernists, specifically Gertrude Stein:

In the early sixties I began to read Gertrude Stein's work and I also heard the recordings of her speaking. That was actually before I began to work in the theatre and it changed my way of thinking forever. I felt a creative dialogue with her, especially with her notion of seeing a play as a landscape. The architecture, the structure, the rhythms, the humour – they invited mental pictures.<sup>33</sup>

Wilson has staged several of Gertrude Stein's works, most notably *Four Saints in Three Acts* (Houston and New York, 1996) plus a variation, titled *Saints and Singing* (Berlin, 1997). He has also staged Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*: a piece that has been staged repeatedly by a who's who of American avant-garde figures, starting with the Living Theatre, in 1951, just five years after Stein's death, when Judith Malina chose it as the first piece she directed. And since then *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* has made its mark in almost every decade. The New York Judson Poets' Theatre – who had

first come to prominence with another Stein piece, *What Happened*, which they performed in 1963 – staged *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* in 1979. Richard Foreman staged it first in Paris, in a French version (as *La Fête électrique*) in 1982, and again in Berlin in 1993. Indeed there was a positive incandescence of performances leading up to the end of the millennium: by Robert Wilson at the Hebbel Theatre, Berlin in 1992 – a production that then went to the Lincoln Center in New York – and by the Wooster Group (in a multimedia staging, as *House/Lights*) in 1999.

In fact, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* is familiar enough for significant variations on the text to be staged, as in the Wooster adaptation of *House/Lights*, where Stein's text was further fragmented, intercut with a 1964 sexploitation film, and both Faustus and Mefistophilis were played by women – giving a specific lesbian focus to the emancipation of Stein's doubled/fragmented female hero – Marguerite Ida and Helene Annabel. Indeed it has become such a standard piece that even drama schools have begun picking it up, with the Center for Contemporary Opera performing *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* in 2002; Fordham University in spring, 2004; and City College of San Francisco in 2008.

What all this indicates is the degree to which Gertrude Stein anticipates, and even presents, the elements of postdramatic theatre. Her plays and operas from the 1930s deconstruct character, mirroring fragmented subjectivity through discontinuities. She removes plot, and substitutes spatial relationships for causal connections and time. Her overwhelming verbal focus destabilizes the conventional dramatic balance between speech and action, attenuating dialog, and creates a poetic soundscape out of words separated from syntax. Polysyllabic games revolving round presence and absence inject irony; while the way Stein uses pre-existing icons (particularly in *Four Saints* and *Faustus*) contains a strong element of pastiche. All these are quintessential postmodern as well as postdramatic. Indeed in the Cubist light of Gertrude Stein's work, the gap between historical and contemporary avant-garde vanishes: instead we see a direct continuum of artistic values and styles.

Similarly Brecht's theatre gained fresh influence in the late fifties and through the 1960s, while Artaud became the ideal of American radicals in the late sixties and through the 1970s, as well as conditioning the work of Peter Brook. An example of the way in which Modernism continues to inform contemporary developments can be seen in the work of Harold Pinter, who is usually seen as a follower of Beckett. Pinter not only subverts realistic sets and rational structures, particularly in his "memory plays" of the 1970s he creates a drama of the mind, which directly corresponds with Walter Pater's principle in aspiring to the condition of music through the emotionally evocative, rhythmic patterning of the dialog and the associative repetition of images. Indeed Pinter openly acknowledges a relationship to one of the leading Modernists in *Old Times* (1971). All his "memory plays" build on Eliot's lines, "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future ... And all time is unredeemable" from *The Four Quartets*; and in *Old Times* one of the soliloquies is full of allusions to Eliot's poetry, in particular *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.



Pinter has become a standard feature on the commercial stage as well as in the National Theatre; and his example demonstrates the degree to which Modernism has become the norm for drama. The inherently conservative nature of the stage may have meant that the adoption of Modernist principles was delayed in mainstream drama. However, these are now diffused everywhere, even if the Modernist enterprise is no longer clearly identifiable, and even though in the theatre Modernism has become merged with other approaches.

## Notes

- 1 For example, Peter Faulkner, *Modernism* (London: Methuen, 1977) glances at drama in one brief paragraph, to disqualify the genre from the movement as tending “towards the direct representation of social experience rather than the complexities of Modernism” (p. 21).
- 2 T. S. Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order and Myth,” *Dial* (November, 1923): 483; Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Morgan Press, 1972), p. 71.
- 3 Wyndham Lewis, *Blast* 1 (June, 1914): 141; Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, “Vortex: Gaudier-Brzeska,” *ibid.*: 155.
- 4 Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937), p. 285; and *A Soldier of Humour and Selected Writings*, ed. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Signet, 1966), pp. 86, 83, 101, 105, 104, 74, 76, 84.
- 5 Lewis, *A Soldier of Humour*, pp. 118, 121, 122, 129; and *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p. 49.
- 6 Ernest Fenollosa, “Fenollosa on the Noh,” in *The Translations of Ezra Pound* (London: New Directions, 1953), pp. 279–80; and W. B. Yeats, *Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 178.
- 7 W. B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 400; and *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 230.



- 8** W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore, *W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901–1937*, ed. Ursula Bridge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 156.
- 9** E. G. Craig, cited in Maurice Magnus, unpublished typescript (Humanities Research Center, Austin, TX, 1907). For a full discussion of Craig's art, see my book *Edward Gordon Craig* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 10** W. B. Yeats, *The Irish Statesman* (November 29, 1919).
- 11** Erwin Kalser, program note to Georg Kaiser, *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, Lessingtheater Berlin, 1916; and Stefan Zweig, *Das neue Pathos* I (1913): 2.
- 12** August Strindberg, *Six Plays of Strindberg*, trans. Elizabeth Sprigge (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 193, 199.
- 13** Oskar Kokoschka, *My Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), pp. 26–7.
- 14** André Breton, *Manifestes du Surréalisme* (Paris: Pauvert, 1962), p. 40.
- 15** Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove, 1958), p. 92.
- 16** *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 23, 85. Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961–74), 13 vols., vol II, p. 37; vol. III, pp. 22–3; and *Cinémagazine* (September 9, 1927).
- 17** Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 7.
- 18** *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 87, 54, 57–8.
- 19** *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 85.
- 20** Michael Benedikt and George Wellworth, trans., *Modern French Theatre* (New York: Dutton, 1966), pp. 223–6. For a full discussion of Artaud's drama, see my *Avant Garde Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 59ff.

**21** T. S. Eliot, cited in Arnold Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett, 1921–29* (London: Cassell, 1933), p. 52; and Richard Doone, producer’s note in the program for the Westminster Theatre production, October 1, 1935.

**22** T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), pp. 152–3.

**23** T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 31; and *Dial* (December, 1922): 659. For a full description of the 1934 and 1935 Group Theatre productions of *Sweeney Agonistes*, see Michael Sidnell, *Dances of Death* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 100ff.

**24** Notes by Virgil Thomson, MS 29–29A, The Virgil Thomson Papers in the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University.

**25** Gertrude Stein, *Last Operas and Plays* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 111.

**26** G. B. Shaw, *Shaw on Theatre*, ed. E. J. West (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), p. 220; *Letters*, ed. Clifford Bax (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1942), p. 43.

**27** G. B. Shaw, *Misalliance*, in *The Works of Bernard Shaw* (London: Constable, 1930–50), p. 7; *Heartbreak House*, in *ibid.*, pp. 106, 96, 90.

**28** Paul Green, *Dramatic Heritage* (New York: Samuel French, 1953), p. 127. For a fuller discussion of *Heartbreak House*, and an alternative view of Shaw’s “Modernism,” see my *Modern British Drama: 1890–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 14ff.

**29** For a full treatment of Piscator’s work and a discussion of Brecht’s involvement, see my *Erwin Piscator’s Political Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

**30** Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 30, 275.

**31** *Ibid.*, p. 37.

**32** Although this has all too frequently not been the case when directors approach Brecht's plays through his theoretical writings, his own productions created a high degree of emotional involvement. Indeed, at the climax of a 1989 Berliner Ensemble performance of *Chalk Circle* in North America many of the spectators actually wept at the small boy's cry as he is torn from the arms of the loving peasant girl to be given to the biological but unnatural mother who abandoned him as a baby.

**33** Robert Wilson, production notes to Virgil Thomson, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, Brown Theater, Houston, USA, January 26, 1996.



## 6 Modernism and the politics of culture

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Sara Blair

Since its inception as a category of literary study during the 1930s, Modernism has proven notoriously resistant to definition. This resistance has been one of its hallmarks as an object of literary enquiry; nowhere is it more pronounced than with respect to the relation of Modernist art to politics. How does Modernist literary activity stand in relation to the political ideologies and the epoch-making modes of power that were its informing context? What purchases does Modernism have on the social experience of modernity's subjects and citizens? Key texts of canonical Anglo-American Modernism vex the question and make it urgent when they offer up their own gorgeous artifice as a form of expression distinct from the rough-and-tumble of everyday social life, as in W. H. Auden's admonition that "Art is not life and cannot be / A midwife to society." But even this way of understanding – indeed, constituting – literature, as a mode of willed withdrawal, amounts to a political stance; and only a certain cadre of English-language Modernist writers and texts subscribe to this view. In fact, students of literary history will find the storied makers of Anglo-American Modernism spread all over the political map of twentieth-century Europe, England, and the USA (not to mention the Soviet Union, civil-war-era Spain, and other sites of political turmoil): running with Reds; making state broadcasts in the service of Mussolini; militating against the Ku Klux Klan no less than the effects of mass immigration; arguing for free speech and free love as well as free verse. Modernists, it would seem, had a hand in (or at least an eye on) virtually every political formation of the era, from radical socialism, official Communism, and home-grown liberalism through militant nationalism, nascent liberation movements, and Fascism outright.

In a volume titled *The Politics of Modernism* (1989), the influential British cultural historian Raymond Williams offered a useful way to think about the eponymous problem. Pointing to a common heritage for Modernism's progressive and conservative thinkers – a radical skepticism about the industrial, bourgeois, market-centered modernity that its critics perforce called home – Williams describes Modernism as "a very complex set of attachments" that historically could "go either way": towards the privileging of "art as a sacred realm above money and commerce" (hence Auden) or towards "the revolutionary doctrine ... of art as the liberating vanguard" of a collective consciousness – or, to name the options differently, towards "social democracy" or "conservatism and the cult of excellence."<sup>1</sup> But even this clear-eyed understanding of the dynamics of Modernism as a response to structural changes in social and economic life proves limited when we consider a broader range of projects in the British and US contexts that were dedicated to the act and art of making it new. In interwar Harlem, certain proponents of the New Negro Renaissance committed themselves quite self-consciously to the ideology

of art's "sacredness," but they understood the latter as a power via which African American citizens might prove their fitness for urban modernity and earn the cultural citizenship they had been so long denied. The bohemians and avant-gardists of the interwar USA understood their experimentation with literary forms – free verse, Expressionist drama, narrative collage – not as a retreat from but a further exploration of new possibilities for sexual, gender, and class liberation. Even such supposed arch-aesthetes as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf employed their strenuous commitment to literary form to affirm the imaginative and psychic richness (rather than the impoverishment or failures) of modern experience and the social forms of everyday life. The understanding of Modernism as a project with only two logical endpoints – a people's revolution or the gas chambers of Auschwitz – ultimately encompasses a narrow version of its histories, one that fails to account for the broader range of experimentation in which responses to modernity were tried.<sup>2</sup>

Yet Williams provides us nonetheless with a key, or more accurately a key word, for opening a view of the politics of this more extensive Modernism; that word is *culture*.<sup>3</sup> If, as he eloquently argues, by the end of the nineteenth century – i.e., at the moment of inauguration of Modernism as a distinctive project or series of movements – "culture" comes to signify for the first time "a whole way of life," with all its attendant "material, intellectual and spiritual" implications, it is no wonder that it also became a contested ideal, "a word that often provoked either hostility or embarrassment."<sup>4</sup> Responding to the emergence and coalescence of that new social power, the culture industry (the new array of institutions dedicated to the production of mass entertainment), Modernists of all stripes attempt through their practices to shape ideals being forged in the name of culture. In this sense, Modernist texts and institutions of the right, of the left, of a shifting or ambivalent middle, not only mimetically reflect but in turn contribute to social experience. And they participate, willingly or no, in a definitively new kind of political struggle. To proffer any notion of culture – as the highest expression of the best that has been thought and said; as the organic expression of the authentic life of the masses; as the barbaric yawp or the blab of the pave – was inevitably to implicate oneself in the era's ongoing debate about the import of the structural changes in social life that were defining modernity, and human beings within it. If, to paraphrase Williams, culture acquired a politics in this era, no commitment to culture could be absent political meaning. What Modernism bequeathes us, ultimately, is not a canon, or even a set of debates about what belongs in a canon, but the fact of what we have come to experience as culture wars: fraught, consequential contests over the values, historical understanding, and self-representation of social life and the times, fought explicitly on the grounds of the best and worst and most representative of what has been thought and said.

To view the politics of Modernism in this way, as the problem of the politics of culture, allows for a broad mapping of the whole range of political operations and events in which canonical British and US Modernists assist, from militarist right-wing propagandizing to progressive labor, feminist, and race struggles, mounted from Paris to

Paterson to post-revolutionary Mexico City. And to understand Modernism as, in effect, a series of struggles to define culture – and to make the definition stick – is to enrich our sense of how experimentation with literary genres and forms creates and conveys social meaning. Reading with respect to the politics of culture, we necessarily develop a clearer sense of what it means to constitute Modernism as a literary field, and of how the problem of “culture” continues to inform our readings of the very texts that invent and reinvent the social meaning of the term in the first place.

By way of overviewing Modernism’s politics of culture, I want to map the field of Modernist activity in a specific way. Rather than rely on traditional political or social markers – the death of Victoria in 1901; the Great War of 1914–18; the inauguration of Prohibition and the so-called Jazz Age in 1919 – I want to examine the political engagements of Anglo-American Modernists on both the right and the left with respect to the commitments they exercise under the banner of culture, art, and the literary. This kind of summary not only forces a certain rethinking of Modernist texts that have long been canonized as hermetic literary machines, indifferent or hostile to contemporary experience: it also reanimates fierce contests over the social meaning of culture, and in particular literature, that constitute the most salient politics of Modernism. During the Modernist era, however we locate its origins and ends, “culture” itself – what constitutes it, whose property it is, how it identifies or legitimates national, racial, ethnic, class-marked, and other persons and beings – is a powerfully political issue. And this fact is Modernism’s most important contribution to the politics of its moment, and to the ongoing politics of our own.

## Modernism on the right

We would do well to begin with the most often-noted, most problematic version of Modernism and its politics: its notorious engagements with Fascism. What kind of sense can be made – what kind of sense do we want to make – of Modernism’s flirtations and fascinations with militarism, xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism, in all their shifting forms? How should we read the engagement with Fascist ideology and leadership of such canonical figures as Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and other Anglo-American “men of 1914”? And to what extent is it possible – or desirable – to distinguish aesthetics from politics in a reading of Pound’s *Cantos*, or of T. S. Eliot’s pronouncements on Christian order and Christian society? Although numerous studies have been made of Modernism’s alliances with an extreme political right, it is worth rehearsing some of the most infamous episodes, with a view to the way in which literary ideology – notions of tradition, poetic value, and form – are entangled with more conventionally political ideologies of culture, nation, modernization, and race.

For a baseline sense of the political designs of Modernist aesthetics we have only to recall the titles of some of the projects associated with its traditionalist wing: *Blast*, the aptly named, startlingly unconventional journal produced by Wyndham Lewis and Ezra



Pound in 1914–15; *Ripostes*, the title of Pound's 1912 collection of verse; the *Enemy*, a review of art and literature edited from 1927 to 1929 by Lewis (whose autobiography, published in 1937, he titled *Blasting and Bombardiering*). In these projects, as in the agenda-defining polemics of T. E. Hulme, the energy of formal and narrative experimentation is explicitly understood as a political force – in particular, as a salvo directed against Victorian humanist social ideals and the contemporary versions of populism, individualism, and liberalism they were thought to inform. Hulme, the movement's most effective advance man and influential formulator of Modernist polemics in such essays as "Romanticism and Classicism" (1913), pungently dismissed liberal conceptions of human nature and the literary practices of romanticism alike as "spilt religion"; the only cure for these linked ills, he argued, was a return to centralized authority, managed social orders, and "har[d]," "dry," "definite" forms of literary expression that would delineate them.<sup>5</sup> These kinds of social commitments, it must be noted, are continuous with Pound's well-known Imagist dicta (brevity, precision, antisentimentality); they bear more than a family resemblance to idioms of militant nationalism emerging in Anglo-American politics. In a kind of cultural militancy, both Hulme and Lewis cultivated relations with Fascist movements: for Hulme, the prewar *Action française*, a cadre of French right-wing intellectuals led by Charles Maurras, committed to guerrilla action against so-called "degenerate" cultures and thereby to the "salvation" of European cultural institutions for their rightful white inheritors; for Lewis, Nazi Berlin and Hitler, whom he celebrated in a 1930 study as a figure uniquely positioned to unify "white Europe" and provide an "antidote" to the debilitating social effects of both corporate capitalism and Soviet socialism.<sup>6</sup> If Hulme and Lewis directed their considerable intellectual and narrative energies to proselytizing for aesthetics as a distinct realm of human activity, those energies derived powerfully from the radicalism of the contemporary right, and they promoted versions of culture that were – at least in their moment of inception – closely linked to ideals of racial fitness and purity.<sup>7</sup>

The acknowledged master of this high Modernist milieu, T. S. Eliot, likewise fashioned his poetics in increasingly conservative, if less militant, lineaments. He labeled himself – only partly in jest – "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion," and his landmark essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917) would make a cultural politics of tradition central to the canons of English-language poetry for decades to come.<sup>8</sup> (Notably, this tradition was itself being reinvented by Eliot himself – e.g., in his privileging of the "metaphysical poets," whose ability to synthesize "thought and feeling" embodies some feature of the historical "mind of England," over the "unbalanced" and "ruminat[ive]" poetry of his nearer Victorian predecessors.<sup>9</sup>) Eliot became increasingly preoccupied with what he would call the idea of a Christian society (the title of a collection of essays appearing in 1939); after his formal conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, he became fully invested in the church as the premier source of political and social authority. By 1933 he would pronounce in *After Strange Gods*, the published (never republished) version of his lectures at the University of Virginia, on the

dangers of “free-thinking Jews” – a trope, for Eliot, for cultural “adulterat[ion]” and Europe’s “inva[sion] by foreign races” – to the continuity of that western cultural tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Eliot alone of this group had no formal ties to English or European Fascist groups. But his poetry and poetics during the 1920s turn on some of the least apologetic, most virulently anti-Semitic images in all of that same western tradition.<sup>11</sup> In “Burbank with a Baedeker, Bleistein with Cigar,” Eliot’s signature preoccupation with the decadence and enervation of modernity takes the form of a Jew-baiting all too common to right-wing critiques of modernity’s social forms. The ubiquitous Bleistein – “Chicago Semite Viennese” – “Stares from the protozoic slime” at monuments of western civilization, whose talismanic power fails to protect against the ravages of retrogression and “Declin[e]”: “The rats are underneath the pile, / The Jew is underneath the lot.” Here, as in Fascist propaganda and a rhetoric of racial supremacy variously and powerfully in play in Germany, England, France, and the interwar USA, the Jew could conveniently be invoked to signify all the worst excesses of modernity: the unchecked spread of capitalism and the appetite for money; spurious production divorced from a realm of human value, sexual degeneracy, and impotence; the perversion of “true” cultural/racial characters, histories, and ideals.

If such figures for the corruption of an ostensibly unified, organically western culture are themselves “underneath the lot” of Eliot’s oeuvre, critics have often felt able to bracket or excise them in readings of individual texts.<sup>12</sup> (Such poems as “Burbank” rarely appear in anthologies of Eliot, Modernism, or twentieth-century poetry; nor have his “Columbo” and “King Bolo” poems, verses portraying the European settlement of the Americas as an orgy of deviant sexuality involving primitive figures of blackness, been widely published.<sup>13</sup>) But the same gesture is virtually impossible to make in the case of Ezra Pound. Tireless promoter, literary midwife, editor extraordinaire, and apologist for Italian Fascism, he would be described by *Time* magazine in a suitably flippant homage as “part despot, part poet, part press agent.”<sup>14</sup> His *Cantos* began appearing in 1917; by the mid 1920s they already smack of the strange brew of Chinese ideograms, Jeffersonian agrarianism, and populist poetics – a mishmash of political, economic, and aesthetic theories and pseudo-theories – that would be more elaborately recorded in his *A B C of Economics* (1933) and *Fifth Decade of Cantos* (1937). The result was political notoriety: to date, Pound is the only author entrenched in the American canon – and indeed one of very few US citizens ever – to have been indicted for treason. Throughout World War II, he inveighed live on Rome Radio against then-president Franklin Roosevelt, the USA, and Jews (whose extermination he publicly approved), preaching the Fascist social order installed by Mussolini and Hitler.<sup>15</sup> Excoriating “twenty years of Judaic propaganda, Lenin and Trotsky stuff,” Pound attempted to rally “real” Americans under the banner of militant racial purity and cultural authenticity.<sup>16</sup> His appeals to extremist anxieties of “liberty” are all too familiar in historical context:

And how much liberty have you got, anyhow? And as to the arsenal – are you the arsenal of democracy or of judeocracy? And who rules your rulers? Where does public responsibility end and what races can mix in America without ruin of the American stock, the American brain? Who is organized? What say have you in the choice of your rulers? What control of their policy? And who does own most of your press and your radio? E. P. asking you.<sup>17</sup>

Based on these performances, Pound was indicted for treason in 1943 and confined in a US Army stockade in Pisa, where he wrote some of his most technically accomplished, emotionally complex verse. In 1945 he was flown to Washington, DC for legal proceedings, but judged unfit to stand trial by court-appointed psychologists, who testified that Pound suffered, technically speaking, from “delusions of grandeur.”<sup>18</sup> The unofficial poet laureate of high Modernism was confined to St. Elizabeth’s Hospital for the Criminally Insane until 1958, when such influential (and iconically American) writers as Robert Frost, Ernest Hemingway, and Archibald MacLeish successfully lobbied for dismissal of the charges. In the interim Pound’s literary reputation grew stronger – in 1949 he was awarded the first Bollingen Prize by the Library of Congress (a highly coveted honor; recipients in his wake included Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, W. H. Auden, John Berryman, and James Merrill). The result was a political firestorm, raging not only in elite cultural circles but throughout the popular press. Supporters contended that the award valorized the cultural offices of “pure” poetry; protestors deplored the racism and political intolerance of his anti-“usury” gospel.<sup>19</sup>

What makes this episode emblematic for our purposes is precisely the questions it raises about what has been taken to be Anglo-American Modernism’s definitive ideology: the belief that art is, and should be, radically distinct from life; that aesthetics and politics constitute entirely separate spheres of action, value, and consequence. As Pound’s performances suggest, the question of whether that ideology ever adequately described Modernist texts is a moot (or at very best vexed) one; equally fraught is the question of how that ideology continues to inflect notions of what literature is and how it makes sense, makes ideals, for its readers. In the case of Pound, scholars continue to debate the relative aesthetic merits of those moments in the *Cantos* that blast false monetary systems, the reign of “Rothschild,” and the “Eunited States uv America,” while perversely exalting ancient Greek rites, the highly dubious “social credit” theories of contemporary economist C. H. Douglas, and images of natural fertility.<sup>20</sup> Is there, finally, any way of considering Pound’s famous “ideogrammatic method” – what he himself would call the *kinema* or movement of his art, with its charged energy of presentation and critique – in isolation from its venomous, if often puerile, images of racial and cultural threat? Do we read such towering poems rightly if we insist on their status as merely poetic documents, whose investments in political and social experience can be justifiably ignored? In such moments, in such texts, can aesthetic intention or effect ever be distinguished from politics – specifically the politics of culture – at all?

To ignore the problem, as some critics have done, with respect to Pound or Eliot – or indeed any of Anglo-American Modernism’s right-leaning writers – is hardly satisfactory. Any attempt to read Modernist texts “neutrally,” as purely aesthetic objects, itself constitutes a political act, not least in that it values formal expression as such over social commitment. Nor is the out-of-hand dismissal of such texts as politically corrupt or offensive a sufficient gesture, since it forecloses possibilities for closer investigation of how literature, in its distinctive forms, ideals, and performances, means variously in contexts beyond those of its immediate production. Literary theorists Fredric Jameson and Julia Kristeva – well known respectively for their Marxist and feminist/poststructuralist intellectual commitments, and writing respectively on the Fascist engagements of Wyndham Lewis and of the French novelist Céline – have powerfully argued that certain Modernist literary performances undercut, exceed, or problematize the explicit commitments of their authors.<sup>21</sup> In so doing, these theorists tend to minimize the problem posed for latter-day readers by Modernism’s vigorous flirtations with Fascism. But they productively point the way towards recognition of the much more varied political and social work being done in the early twentieth century by literature, in particular by Modernist play with expressive codes and form.

For high Anglo-American Modernism, with its embrace of ideals of cultural unity and organicism, hierarchy and social order, is only one of many Modernisms – only one, that is, of many historically linked attempts to reformulate the conditions under which literature was being produced, experienced, and made party to cultural life. The vaunted energy, formal experimentation, and psychic shock of Modernist texts in the moment of their appearance (much of which is, of course, lost to us through the force of familiarity and canonization) were hardly the sole property of culturally conservative writers, nor were their effects limited to the circles associated with those figures. In a wide array of contexts and places, writers during the era of high Modernism and beyond adapted its formalism and techniques, even its defining idioms, and often so as to contest its political commitments. This was especially true for certain women, African American, and socialist writers – what we can cautiously, with qualification, term writers on the left – attempting to open new public spaces or spheres for the expression of varied responses to modernity, and various political and social claims on its defining conditions.<sup>22</sup> By considering the broader contexts of Modernism, and of literary production more generally, we gain a clearer view of these efforts, of their successes and their limits – and of the ways in which distinctly literary experimentation participated in the matrix of modern social and political life.

## **The challenges of modernity**

Until fairly recently, the circumference of “politics” had been quite narrowly drawn in readings of Modernism and its era. The traditional critical focus on Modernists as Fascists – while certainly important, especially as a historical corrective – has obscured

the much broader range of commitments to which Modernist projects, polemics, and concerns were being harnessed. If the burden of Modernist experimentation was the imperative to “make it new,” as Pound’s mantra would have it, the project of renewal encompassed a vast array of social traditions, norms, and gestures. Across numerous geographic and political divides, writers in the English-speaking world of 1900–30 were participating not only in right-wing politics, or even politics in the usual narrow sense, but in the very grounds of their emergence: seismic shifts in the organization of cultural and political life, largely in the direction of increased mobility, technological complexity, and social heterogeneity. To grasp more fully how the concerns of high Modernism inform literary engagements on the left, we need to consider those shifts in some detail.

In Britain, the second decade of the twentieth century ushered in the accession of George V to the throne (1910), increasingly visible public demonstrations mounted by militant suffragists and labor leaders, and the rise of the Labour party in national politics, culminating in the formation of the first Labour government in 1923. All were evidence of a definitive break with Victorian norms of sobriety and social control. If that kind of break was at least partly threatening for cultural conservatives, it was celebrated as a felt turning point in the realm of everyday life by such differently committed writers as Virginia Woolf, who would describe the shift in characteristically domestic (and high bourgeois) terms:

[O]n or about December 1910, human character changed ... In life one can see the change if I may use a homely illustration, in the character of one’s cook. The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; the Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing-room, now to borrow *the Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat.

Do you ask for more solemn instances of the power of the human race to change?<sup>23</sup>

Woolf’s local image usefully suggests the entanglement of what we call politics and what we call culture, perhaps especially the culture of everyday life, as forms of experience; and it evidences the way in which writers committed to socialist, Fabian, feminist, and other leftist platforms insisted on that connection. Under the sway of new, mass cultural organs of entertainment and information (like the *Daily Herald*, founded in 1912 as the first mass daily “workers’ paper”<sup>24</sup>), of the forms of fashion and style they promoted (like the fetching new hat), and of consumer desire at large (promoted by newly available mass-produced goods that held out promises of material fulfillment to all), traditional and rigidly hierarchical codes of class and national identity, social distinction, and cultural value were being rapidly undermined. For all her vaunted aestheticism – her husband Leonard once called her “the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition”<sup>25</sup> – Woolf, along with English and Irish novelists as diverse as H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, D. H. Lawrence, and James Joyce – would make the newly visible materiality of this everyday, middle- and working-class life-world central to her



aesthetic.<sup>26</sup>

To the process of social transformation, to be sure, other more narrowly political projects were also crucial. Some, it is worth pointing out, were explicitly concerned with the power of culture – and especially literature – to promote citizenship and civic pride. Progressive reformers in early-twentieth-century Britain successfully campaigned for increased opportunities for public education for working men and women; in the same era, the elite universities grudgingly opened their doors more widely to women students (although the latter were still refused the benefit of substantial endowment support at Oxford and Cambridge throughout the 1920s). Both educational reform campaigns traded heavily on claims about the specific value of English literature and literary history for these social groups – unlike their male and upper-class opposite numbers, who were still expected to school themselves in the “higher” disciplines of classical studies and history.

More broadly, British political life would be altered by the extension of suffrage to women in 1919, after intense and decades-long political activism led by such household names as Sylvia and Christabel Pankhurst, and by the aftershocks of the General Strike of 1926, the culmination of a half-century of socialist, union, and other forms of protest against the traditional concentration of the country’s wealth in the hands of an oligarchy.<sup>27</sup> Even the politically and culturally conservative project of empire would contribute to the full-tilt modernization of British social life, as striving members of the bourgeoisie availed themselves of new opportunities for professional service and distinction opened up by Britain’s military-bureaucratic-colonial missions in South Asia and Africa. (Among them was Leonard Woolf, who served with distinction in the colonial mission in Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon.) If what Woolf somewhat anachronistically called “human character” – not only consciousness per se, but the private self in social relations, implicated in myriad forms of leisure and work – decisively “changed” in Britain during the Modernist epoch, that change registers as simultaneously political and cultural in its scope and effects.

An even more drastic reordination of cultural life was taking place during the teens and twenties in the USA, and with decided consequences for the activities we call literary. By 1920, for the first time in US history, the majority of the country’s 105 million citizens lived in urban centers. There, the effects of a new economic and social structure, monopoly capitalism, and of new technologies of leisure and entertainment, like radio, the movies and sound recording, were being felt with an unstable mixture of enthusiasm and trepidation. If the America metropolis brought the shock of the new to bear on individuals with unprecedented power, it also served as a site for the eruption of anxieties about the social, psychic, and spiritual effects of modernity and modernization. Throughout the era of Modernism, the city symbolized the challenges of confronting not only the new but also the culturally “other” (other, that is, to “native” Anglo-European, Protestant culture and norms). Between 1880 and 1920 approximately 28 million immigrants – mainly of southern and eastern European origin, and hence of the so-called

“darker races,” who historically included millions of the Jews categorically reviled in the rhetoric of the right – entered the USA, the vast majority settling in New York City, where by 1920 only one of every six inhabitants was white, US-born, and Protestant. These new Americans in the making were joined by millions of African Americans migrating from the rural south, where the grim code of segregation known as Jim Crow was a matter not just of custom but of law, to industrial northern and midwestern centers, seeking economic and social opportunities attendant on the new status of the USA as world industrial leader.

These kinds of cultural dislocation produced much of what we now count as American culture of the first decades of the century, including Tin Pan Alley, ragtime, jazz, and early Hollywood, and they contributed immeasurably to varied styles of avant-garde, bohemian, and high literary performance.<sup>28</sup> They also produced seething ethnic and racial tensions: white-on-black violence in cities as far flung as East St. Louis, Houston, and Chicago, culminating in so-called “race riots” in 1919 that necessitated armed self-defense by African Americans;<sup>29</sup> the rise of black nationalism, promoted by such figures as Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, whose Universal Negro Improvement Association advocated complete separation from white culture through return to Africa; the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, which reached its political apogee in the mid 1920s in terms of membership and political influence (think here of the pronouncements of *The Great Gatsby*’s Tom Buchanan about the “Rise of the Colored Empire,” a veiled reference to T. Lothrop Stoddard’s 1922 fear-mongering screed on racial infiltration, *The Rising Tide of Color*). Most ignominious were such political causes célèbres as the 1914 lynching of Atlanta businessman Leo Frank, a Jew, for the supposed murder of an employee; the dubious conviction in 1921 of decidedly “foreign” anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti for bank robbery and murder; and the 1931 incarceration in Alabama of nine African American youths, the Scottsboro Nine, on trumped-up charges of the rape of two white women.

No wonder, then, that making it new could simultaneously mean the open embrace of modernity’s opportunities and the defensive rejection of its challenges. For every figure of high anxiety, racial mastery, and loathing of modernity – the primal native woman in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, D. H. Lawrence’s fetishized primitives, Eliot’s Bleistein – we encounter equally assertive figures of curiosity, identification with the new aesthetic and social possibilities opened up by facts of mass production, urbanization, and cultural heterogeneity. If Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1943) seek a space in which time can be made static, present, and eternal, Gertrude Stein’s famously experimental prose playfully explores modernity’s new “space of time that is filled always filled with moving.”<sup>30</sup> Even as Pound blasted industrial, monopoly capitalism as a state of “botched civilization” and looked definitively elsewhere – to sixteenth-century Italian architecture, traditional Provençal lyrics, Confucian philosophy, and medieval economic history – for cultural and political models, William Carlos Williams would dismiss such antimodernity as blinkered and profoundly limiting. His own epic poem *Paterson* (1946–58) concurs with Pound’s



Modernist dictum of exhaustion, arguing that “The language is worn out,” but works to renew it through commitment to the American now – the language of modernity, in which “noble has been / changed to no bull” and “things ... lie under the direct scrutiny of the senses, close to the nose.”<sup>31</sup> Even that arch-aesthete Wallace Stevens, often taken in such landmark poems as “The Idea of Order at Key West” and “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” to inscribe Modernism’s most hermetic impulses, wrote privately in his journal that all his poetry ultimately concerns the shared realities of its moment: the hard and sobering and tantalizing facts of “What one reads in the papers.”<sup>32</sup>

Modernism – that is, the canonical or high Modernism with which this volume is primarily concerned – can with qualification be understood as a unified movement promoting a distinct set of concerns, foremost among them a commitment to experimenting with the cultural power of literary traditions and forms. But to understand that commitment as necessarily or in itself linked with conservative, Fascist, or right-wing political ideals is to miss the contestatory nature of Modernism’s investments in form, technique, and literary value. If the landscape of modernity reads to Eliot and company as a symbolic waste land, it appears for other writers to be a Mecca, a metropolis of multiple social and aesthetic possibilities. Against the powerful vision of the Unreal City, we must accordingly counterpose actual sites of literary production and engagement in which writers, adopting Modernist devices and concerns, relate themselves quite differently to the challenges of modern experience and being. I want thus to conclude by considering briefly two such sites, and some of the writers who inhabited them: Greenwich Village and Harlem. Although we might justifiably focus on other sites of Modernist activity, as scholars have recently done, both of these epicenters of Modernist cultural politics emerged in New York, which can justifiably be called – after Walter Benjamin’s famous description of Paris as the capital of the nineteenth century – the first city of the twentieth.<sup>33</sup> Both Greenwich Village and Harlem fostered literary practices and engagements understood in continuing, sometimes tense dialog with Modernism in the more restricted sense. The results – aesthetic, cultural, and in consequence social or political – may have been uneven and short-lived, but they nonetheless remind us how variously the ideals of formalism, tradition, and literary commitment could be negotiated and put to work.

## **Literary spaces: Greenwich Village and Harlem, USA**

Every self-respecting American bohemian knows Greenwich Village; for most of the twentieth century, the name was a virtual synonym for cultural rebellion, poetry readings, Beat happenings, the doings of a self-styled avant-garde. This association was especially resonant during the teens and twenties, when literary and social experimentation were explicitly conjoined with political activism. At the very heart of the Village’s social life during these decades were flamboyant literary salons, sponsored by the likes of wealthy socialist-cum-radical Mabel Dodge. Such writers as Edmund Wilson and Malcolm

Cowley – who later became extremely important critics of Modernism – Edna Millay, Theodore Dreiser, and Sinclair Lewis drank, opined, and recited poetry with such Village figures as the radical labor organizer Big Bill Heywood; Communist John Reed (a classmate of Eliot’s at Harvard, he was the only US citizen ever to be buried in the Kremlin); birth-control pioneer Margaret Sanger, whose first clinic opened in 1916; and anarchist writer Emma Goldman, deported from the USA during the anti-Communist Red Scare of 1919. This fluid interpenetration of literary and political avant-gardes within Village bohemia would produce several important cultural projects and artifacts. There were the energetic “little” magazines like the socialist *Masses* (“Bible of the radical”<sup>34</sup>), the Dada-inspired *Broom*, the urbane *Smart Set*, and the highly influential *Little Review*, housed in the Village during its glory years of 1917–22.<sup>35</sup> And there were such cognate mass-cultural spectacles as the February 17, 1913 Armory Show, which introduced postimpressionist art to an American public, and the June 7, 1913 Paterson Strike Pageant, lavishly staged by 1,500 striking textile workers in Madison Square Garden (at that time still an elite venue for leisure-class pleasures). Both exhibitions were organized by Village radicals for whom aesthetics and politics were virtually inseparable. If the shock for bourgeois viewers confronted with Marcel Duchamps’ *Nude Descending a Staircase* involved very different cultural stakes than the battle for workers’ rights, it nonetheless was felt to have the effect of “a political revolution,” a shattering even[t] ... for the purpose of recreation.”<sup>36</sup>

Such all-purpose radicalism, Daniel Aaron remarks in his landmark study of American writers on the left, reflected a generic “hostility of the artist to a world that holds his [*sic*] values in contempt.”<sup>37</sup> Emerging political realities – including the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927; the stock market crash of 1929; the uses of intimidation, terror, and state violence against striking workers across the USA in the early 1930s – would occasion a split among Village intelligentsia between “pink,” or progressive, and deep-dyed Red. In a climate of increasingly bitter ideological opposition between liberal and radical, labor and management, white and “other” Americans, the porous boundaries between aesthetic and political agendas hardened; committed Communist Edmund Wilson would charge the young poets of the 1930s with adopting the “Gerontian pose” (after T. S. Eliot’s elegantly attenuated persona in his poem “Gerontion”) and having “no stake in society.”<sup>38</sup>

But even those writers most closely associated with hard-left politics of the obvious kind – including E. E. Cummings, whose flirtation with Communism waned after a 1931 pilgrimage to the USSR; Theodore Dreiser, who followed up his novelistic masterpiece, *An American Tragedy* (1925), with investigative trips to the Soviet Union and to Pittsburgh mining country; and John Dos Passos, who like Dreiser was charged with “criminal syndicalism” (labor agitation) for his investigative work on behalf of workers and Communists – remained indebted to many of the techniques and formal interests Wilson’s comment was clearly meant to deride. In his USA trilogy, which included *The*

*42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936), Dos Passos renders urban life through the lens of “Camera Eye” and “newsreel,” precisely by adapting the formal techniques of literary naturalism, Joycean impressionism, and Modernist collage. Cowley, literary critic, novelist, poet, and the most important historian of the Village generation, would virtually define his cohort in such texts as *After the Genteel Tradition* (1937), *Books that Changed Our Mind* (1939), and *Exile’s Return* (1951) against the cultural performances of Eliot, Joyce, and high Modernism – yet often with the same polemical energy and manipulation of personae he identifies as its signature expressive characteristics. With respect to an evolving Village vanguard, the hard-and-fast distinction between Modernism and radicalism, between a self-reliant aesthetics and an active, engaged politics, looks quite inadequate after all. In muckraking journalism and Modernist blank verse, in experimental prose and manifesto alike, we find a shared commitment to the value of literature and literary language as an active, fundamentally social power.<sup>39</sup>

Above 125th Street in Manhattan, across color lines and cultural divides, very different kinds of links between aesthetic activity and political activism were being forged during the same tumultuous era. Like the Village, Harlem in its 1920s heyday as the culture capital of Black America boasted a spectacular salon life (not to mention club life and nightlife as well). Pacesetter A’Lelia Walker – nicknamed “the Great Black Empress,” she had inherited a substantial fortune from her mother, who sold hair-straightening products to striving African Americans – sponsored high society gatherings whose guest lists read “like a blue book of the seven arts.”<sup>40</sup> Black and white frequenters, royalty and racketeers alike, enjoyed extravagant hospitality in her Harlem mansion, dancing on the parquet floor or adjourning to the top-floor library, stocked with volumes of African American poetry, autobiography, and fiction; she even had the verses of Langston Hughes’s “Weary Blues” (1917) inscribed on a marble façade. At novelist and critic Jessie Fauset’s decidedly soberer salon, where conversations were often conducted in French, such political leaders as the quintessential black intellectual W. E. B. DuBois, Harlem Renaissance progenitor Alain Locke, and the charismatic labor activist A. Philip Randolph could be found engaging in such pointedly genteel activities as poetry recitation, oration, and discussion of current books of note. For such self-styled “race men,” this polite literary activity had heightened social force in the moment of modernity. “No race,” the writer James Weldon Johnson would proclaim, “can ever become great that has not produced a literature.”<sup>41</sup> African American aesthetic achievement – and particularly literary achievement – was strategically promoted by these cultural strategists as the clearest sign of fitness for the demands of modernity, themselves dominantly cultural; art as such would serve as a benchmark for political activism, activity, and propaganda. In the specific context of Harlem, and what has come to be called the Harlem or New Negro Renaissance, literary distinction served as a crucial index of political engagement and power.

This kind of ideology occasioned serious disagreement among the Renaissance’s

leading lights. If culture czar DuBois – progressive, elitist, and high bourgeois – espoused an aesthetic of didacticism, by which the “Talented Tenth” (the leaders of the race) “rises and pulls all that are worthy of saving up to their vantage ground,” younger writers like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston would vigorously oppose his ideology of uplift with an investment in black vernaculars and in such “low” forms as folktales, lying contests, and the blues.<sup>42</sup> In his most influential poems – “The Negro Speaks of Rives,” “The Weary Blues,” and those collected in *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) – Hughes wedded reigning formal conventions of Anglo-American verse to blues rhythms and idiom with remarkable results; Hurston’s notoriously unclassifiable ethnographies, short stories, and prose works – including *The Eatonville Anthology* (1926), *Mules and Men* (1935), and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) – similarly insisted on the power of traditional orality to define and sustain African American community in the face of ever-present threats to its health, empowerment, and survival. As ardently as DuBois, Locke, and other race leaders, Hurston vociferated for the power of aesthetic forms to enhance the self-imagination of black people – and to remake the larger culture they inhabited and shaped: “the world and America in particular,” she argued, “need what this folk material holds.”<sup>43</sup>

These kinds of investments, uptown and down, in literature as a resource for the renewal, transformation, or reanimation of collective life, may seem naive or misguided when retrospectively viewed in the shadow of the century’s defining political realities: the Nazi Holocaust, bloody Stalinist purges of intellectuals and dissidents in the Soviet ranks, the rising tides of nativism and xenophobia during the 1920s and 1930s in the USA, England, and throughout the West. But they nonetheless reveal how insufficient is any reflexive assumption about literature in the earlier decades of the twentieth century as a self-enclosed activity, a defensive institution for warding off the new realities of modernity. In specific cultural locations, literary experimentation responsive to Modernist ideals served as a social act, in and through which cultural value was constructed and contested. Its political effects were felt not (or not only) in the recognized mode of Fascist or liberal or even liberationist ideology, but in its promotion of collective activity, political enfranchisement, and increased access to cultural and civic institutions – especially for such historically unrepresented communities as African Americans, immigrants, workers, and women. In this historically specific sense, Modernism has political ramifications far beyond those legible in conventional histories of its canonical texts and forms. Reading with a heightened sense of these ligatures, we can productively cultivate a sense of how variously the aesthetic and the political mean in the earlier twentieth century. And we may also begin to understand the distinction between aesthetics and politics – the felt sense of the incompatibility of these modes – as itself a product of Modernist texts, history, and ideals, the legacy of a Modernism that continues to have moment beyond its time.

## Notes

- 1 Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 58, 34, 55.
- 2 In this sense the reading that follows registers accepted consensus that the literary field indicated by the term “Modernism” comprises a series of variously situated projects, extending far beyond the traditional canon of high Modernist writers and implicating varied aesthetic and social concerns. This shift in critical understanding is instanced in the title of Peter Nicholls’s now standard survey, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), which explores the shifting questions raised by Modernist literary figures about the nature of modernity and the meaning of their art within it.
- 3 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1890–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. xvii.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
- 5 T. E. Hulme, “Romanticism and Classicism,” in *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), pp. 118, 126, 132.
- 6 Wyndham Lewis, *Hitler* (New York: Gordon Press, 1972), p. 121. Lewis, it should be noted, withdrew his support of Hitler in a 1939 treatise ironically entitled *The Jews: Are They Human?* in *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). Fredric Jameson has argued forcefully that Lewis is best understood not as Fascist but as “proto-fascist”; see especially pp. 14–15, 180–2.
- 7 Janet Lyon has persuasively advanced the argument that male high Modernists – the “men of 1914” – self-consciously appropriated the energy and form of suffragette discourse to create the rhetoric and high-art ideology of the avant-garde; the uses they make of these resources only highlight the political meaning and effects of their work. See Janet Lyon, “Militant Allies, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and Vorticists before the War,” in *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 92–123.



- 8** T. S. Eliot, Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), p. ix.
- 9** T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets (1921)," *Times Literary Supplement* (October 20, 1921), reproduced in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp. 281–91.
- 10** T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1933), pp. 20, 17.
- 11** Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- 12** Julius's determinedly "adversarial" readings of Eliot carefully outline arguments made by both detractors and defenders, noting that they have been equally misguided in attempting to bracket Eliot's anti-Semitic images and language: "Ignore the anti-Semitism," Julius argues, "and the poetry itself disappears" (*ibid.*, p. 33).
- 13** The most extensive publication of Eliot's "King Bolo" poems (sometimes referred to as his scatological verse) is in T. S. Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber and Faber, 1996). Jonathan Gill, "Protective Coloring: Modernism and Blackface Minstrelsy in the Bolo Poems," in John Xiros Cooper, ed., *T. S. Eliot's Orchestra: Critical Essays on Poetry and Music* (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 65–84, traces links between Eliot's verse and traditions of blackface minstrelsy; Gabrielle McIntire, "An Unexpected Beginning: Sex, Race, and History in T. S. Eliot's Columbo and Bolo Poems," *Modernism/Modernity* 9.2 (2002): 283–301, addresses the full complexity of Eliot's invocations of figures of race, ethnicity, and sexuality, and argues for the importance of this work as a corrective to the canonical high Modernist Eliot.
- 14** "Treason," *Time* (December 10, 1945), reprinted in William Van O'Connor and Edward Stone, eds., *A Casebook on Ezra Pound* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1959), p. 19.
- 15** On Pound's support for the extermination of eastern European Jews, and his warnings to American Jews that "their turn was coming," see George Orwell, "The Question of the Pound Award," reprinted in O'Connor and Stone, *Casebook*, p. 61.
- 16** Pound, broadcast on Rome Radio, February 26 and July 22, 1942, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 163, 164.

17 Pound, broadcast on Rome Radio, July 22, 1942, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 164.

18 “Pound Foolish,” *Newsweek* (February 25, 1946), reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 23.

19 The debate about Pound’s poetry as such has continued to be robust. Marjorie Perloff – one of his most influential critical readers – considers the issue in “On Pound’s Fascism,” *Paideuma* 16 (Winter, 1987): 7–22, and returned to it in an open discussion of “Pound and Fascism” on the online discussion forum POETICS@UBVM.CC.BUFFALO.EDU, where she characterized Pound’s anti-Semitism (or “most of it”) as “completely nonsensical, juvenile, and failing to understand how government works” (posting, December 9, 2004). Jerome McGann, “The Cantos of Ezra Pound, the Truth in Contradiction,” *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Fall, 1988): 1–25, reads the *Cantos* as the great tragic poem of the twentieth century, whose political investments and blindnesses are intrinsic to its aesthetic as well as its lost opportunities. Ronald Bush, “Modernism, Fascism, and the Composition of Ezra Pound’s *Pisan Cantos*,” *Modernism/Modernity* 2.3 (1995): 69–87, argues that a reading of the poetics of the *Pisan Cantos* must necessarily account for the political and ideological context of their construction, a practice that challenges longstanding claims for the unity of Pound’s project. Wendy Stallard Flory, “Pound and Antisemitism,” in Ira B. Nadel, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 284–300, considers the history of responses to Pound’s anti-Semitic broadcasts and writings, particularly in the context of broader confrontation with (and evasion of) the realities of the Holocaust; she considers the tenor and shifts in Pound’s political expressions with care, but ultimately frames Pound as a scapegoat for “all those individuals of the silent majority in Germany, in occupied France and Belgium, in Britain and the United States who, by quietly aiding or standing quietly by, made the Holocaust possible” (p. 300). The varied tenor of these readings suggests, again, how vital remains the problem of reading the relations of politics as such to cultural expression and forms.

20 Ezra Pound, “Canto XLVI,” in *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1971), pp. 233, 235.

21 Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*; Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

22 My caution concerns the problematic move to equate women writers with feminism or progressivism, African American and other minority writers with liberationist projects, solely on account of their identity or subject positions. Such classic accounts of the Harlem Renaissance as David Levering Lewis’s *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York



and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) detail the complex range of political commitments – high and low, black nationalist, ameliorist, and assimilationist – made by its foremost writers; likewise, Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) evidences the fitfully conservative and radical impulses of women's cultures in the new social relations of modernity – and simultaneously suggests how difficult it is, in their moment, to distinguish adequately between “merely” consumerist, bourgeois pursuits of pleasure, and “legitimately” intentioned forms of protest and self-affirmation.

In addition, there is the added difficulty of defining what counts as a political (versus an aesthetic) avant-garde, particularly with respect to the context of the USA during the 1920s and 1930s. Important treatments of writers' more narrowly political engagements and of the widening gap between high Modernism and socially engaged writing that purported to reject its tenets include Daniel Aaron's classic study *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1961); Ralph F. Bogardus and Fred Hobson, eds., *Literature at the Barricades: The American Writer in the 1930s* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982); Alan Filreis, *Modernism from Right to Left: Wallace Stevens, the Thirties, and Literary Radicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), which can be said to evidence through its readings of left-wing aesthetics how saturated they are with the formal concerns of Modernism. More explicitly, Michael Denning's magisterial study, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1998), provides a panoramic view of the participation and cultural activism of writers and artists across the left political spectrum, who refit the formal tools and gestures of high cultural expression so as to address urgent questions about the ends and the means of producing art, and in so doing transform American Modernism; Alan Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth-Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), focuses closely on the lives of a wide range of writers on the Communist-led left in order to explore the complex relations between their political commitments and their modes of literary expression; and Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), rereads US Modernism and its formal innovations as generated by writers' urgent concerns about the role of the artist in response to redefinitions within New Deal government of the relations between the individual, society, and the state. Collectively, these accounts will help provide correctives for my necessarily schematic treatment of leftist commitments, which vary considerably in different cultural contexts, decades, and even moments of particular writers' careers.

**23** Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 4 vols., ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986–94), vol. III, pp. 421–2.

**24** Michael Bell, ed., *1900–1930* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 111. Founding writers for the *Daily Herald* included Siegfried Sassoon, Osbert Sitwell, and W. J. Turner – all leading intellectuals variously known for their presence in prominent salons or movements (including Bloomsbury) defining the literary field.

**25** Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919–1939* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), p. 27.

**26** The matter of Woolf’s political positioning in class, racialized, and other social terms is a matter of considerable debate. A recent critical collection, Merry M. Pawlowski, ed., *Virginia Woolf and Fascism: Resisting the Dictator’s Seduction* (London: Palgrave, 2001), insists more or less uniformly on Woolf’s resistance as writer, intellectual, and political subject to Fascism in England and abroad. Most nuanced arguments, by Jessica Berman, “Of Oceans and Opposition: The Waves, Mosley and the New Party,” pp. 105–21, and Natania Rosenfeld, “Monstrous Conjugations: The Anti-Fascist Writings of Virginia and Leonard Woolf,” pp. 122–36, link specific experiments with voice and form to the context of Fascism’s emergence and to its forms of expression. These arguments are developed more fully in Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 139–56, and Rosenfeld, *Outsiders Together: Virginia and Leonard Woolf* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2001), 153–181. Erin G. Carlston, *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 135–86, argues in depth and detail for Woolf as an intellectual providing analysis of the origins of Fascism in the material disenfranchisement of women, and who – like more widely celebrated male cultural theorists – “signals to us the impossibility of escaping the fascism in modernity” more broadly (*ibid.*, p. 130). But as Maren Linett, “From Supernova to Manuscript Page: Circling Woolf,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.1 (2004): 224–40, points out, Woolf’s own casual, class-bound anti-Semitism is generally ignored in such readings of her politics, to the detriment of more nuanced notions of what counts as political expression and the links between such expression and art; for further reading along these lines, see Linett’s *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). By contrast, Sean Latham’s “*Am I A Snob?*”: *Modernism and the Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), takes on Woolf’s class privilege, reading it as generative of her aesthetics; Latham considers Woolf as one among several key figures of Modernism who offer a new model for literary and cultural innovation “premised as much on snobbery’s guilty pleasures and elitist anxieties as on aesthetic autonomy and formalist innovation” (p. 2). The logic of such self-conscious elitism, Latham argues, is ultimately critical: trading on histories of class, taste,

and social privilege, Woolf and other like-minded Modernists fundamentally understand the ideal of disinterestedness as an illusion, and thereby explore their vexed and alienated relations with capitalism as the condition of aesthetic production. Likewise affirmative, Anna Snaith's *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (London: Macmillan, 2000), accounts carefully and richly for the embeddedness of Woolf's work and projects in the overlapping spaces of feminist, socialist, and middle-class London, with emphasis on continuities between Woolf's writings and the production of more obviously social and political texts, including suffragist manifestos and novels, women's fiction, and the like. With respect to arguments about Woolf's formalism, Christine Froula's *Virginia Woolf and the Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) emphasizes the rhetorical construction within Woolf's major novels of her own audience, understood as a social public that has experienced war, political upheaval, and momentous changes in national life. In all these readings, and many current within Woolf scholarship, "politics" remains what we might call a term of art, whose scope and implications as a critical keyword are highly contested.

**27** Along similar lines, historian A. J. P. Taylor points out that in the 1920s, by which time the traditionally agrarian capital of land had already been radically transformed by industrial development, 20 percent of Britain's population had claim to almost 90 percent of its lands. A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 167.

**28** There is by now available a rich array of scholarly readings of the indebtedness of various forms of the US culture industry to these social histories, and to their intersection. Among the most rewarding are: Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Anchor, 1989); J. Hoberman, *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Jack Gottlieb, *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood* (Buffalo: State University of New York Press, 2004); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Michael Alexander, *Jazz Age Jews* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). On the indebtedness of Anglo-American Modernist poetics and ideology to African American cultural forms, see Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); David Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

**29** This history of black-on-white violence instanced what historian Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), pp. xii, 93, calls the “extensive and systematic expression of violence” against African Americans, in the process of being “modernized in its methods, and extended throughout the nation.” Prior to the widespread violence of 1919, the very term “race riot” had definitively denoted attacks on black Americans by whites; Shapiro comments in detail on this repressed history, noting that the term “race riot ... hides more than it reveals” (*ibid.*, p. 96).

**30** Gertrude Stein, “The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans” (1939), in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1972), pp. 239–58.

**31** William Carlos Williams, “A Poem for Norman Macleod,” in *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, ed. M. L. Rosenthal (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 321.

**32** Wallace Stevens, *Letters*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 308.

**33** Among sites that have figured prominently as such in important recent revisions of Modernist practice are Paris, read as a locus for the translation of African diaspora writing and political struggles across black francophone and anglophone worlds, and thus for the development of black Modernism and internationalism; Berlin, read as a generative site for Anglo-European women Modernists developing distinctive poetic practices responsive to the social realities of gender and its histories; Mexico, and particularly Mexico City, studied as a contact zone for the development of American Modernist projects and forms; and Prague, understood as a site of memory and historical erasure, of utopian connection to prewar European pasts and dystopian totalitarian regimes, and thus as emblematic of European Modernism’s logic. See, respectively, Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Cristanne Miller, *Cultures of Modernism: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, and Else Lasker-Schüler* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 101–48; Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory and the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). These projects participate in a broad ongoing attempt to reconfigure Modernist studies as a more transnational, transhemispheric, and/or intersectional venture, whose understandings of circuits of literary production, experimentation, and encounter can account more richly for the complex movement and location of writers, texts, and practices across national borders; imperial, colonial, and postcolonial configurations; and other social and temporal

boundaries. For pointed discussions of this aim, see Rebecca Walkowitz, “Introduction: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Modernist Narrative,” in *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 1–31; and Jahan Ramazani, “Preface,” in *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. ix–xiv.

**34** Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, p. 18.

**35** For extremely useful accounts of the histories and relations of such journals, see Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

**36** Hutchins Hapgood, cited in Martin Green, *New York 1913: The Armory Show and the Paterson Strike* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p. 184.

**37** Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, p. 15.

**38** Edmund Wilson, “The Muses Out of Work,” *New Republic* 50 (May 11, 1927): 321.

**39** Historian Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Owl Books, 2001) argues for the Village as the epicenter of US Modernism; its inhabitants and hangers-on, collectively known as bohemians, created America’s first effective alternative to an established cultural elite. Specifically, by rejecting the notion that culture was the domain of a social elite, they created unprecedented links between high and low culture, outsiders and insiders, women and men. In spite of their own inattention to matters of race, Stansell argues, Village bohemians thus made possible varied forms of cultural innovation defining twentieth-century experience.

**40** Anon., “Royalty and Blue-Blooded Gentry Entertained by A’Lelia Walker ...,” *Amsterdam Daily News* (August 26, 1931). Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, offers the standard – and often trenchantly critical – account of the Renaissance as a misplaced experiment in culture as a political ideal; George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997), offers a powerful counter-argument for the Renaissance as the first serious (and significantly successful) experiment in the project of cultural pluralism. For a useful account of Harlem social life and its myriad cultural networks during the Renaissance era, see Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920–1930* (New York: Pantheon

Books, 1995).

**41** James Weldon Johnson, *Opportunity* 3 (June, 1925): 176.

**42** W. E. B. DuBois, quoted in Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. DuBois* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 87.

**43** Zora Neale Hurston, application for Rosenwald Foundation Fellowship, December 14, 1934, cited in Robert Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Critical Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 207.





## 7 Modernism and religion

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Pericles Lewis

In February, 1928, soon after T. S. Eliot had converted to Anglo-Catholicism, Virginia Woolf wrote to her sister Vanessa Bell:

Then I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He has become an Anglo-Catholic, believes in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was really shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is. I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God.<sup>1</sup>

Seeing Woolf's unmistakable personal hostility towards God, certain critics have understood her work as distinctively atheist. Woolf's revulsion against Eliot's religious beliefs may seem part and parcel of her rejection of patriarchal authority: what better representative of patriarchy than God the Father? Yet, Woolf's putative atheism is complicated by her relation to her own father, Leslie Stephen, the most famous agnostic in Victorian England, against whom much of her work rebels. Although Woolf often expressed a certain distaste for religious belief, she also had her doubts about atheists, like Fraser the atheist in the British Museum Reading Room in *Jacob's Room* (1922), Mr. Carslake in "A Simple Melody" (1925), and "the little atheist" Charles Tansley in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). On the literary evidence, although Woolf disliked believers, she disliked atheists almost as much. Indeed, far from promoting an irreligious literature, she called for a more "spiritual" form of modern fiction, in contrast to the materialism of her Edwardian predecessors, and she sought to explore what she called "moments of being," the almost sacred moments at which vision is vouchsafed to the artist.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of *To the Lighthouse*, when three surviving members of the Ramsay family finally arrive at the lighthouse, James Ramsay observes his father: "He rose and stood in the bow of the boat, very straight and tall, for all the world, James thought, as if he were saying, 'There is no God.'"<sup>3</sup> Mr. Ramsay, a figure of Victorian patriarchy based closely on Woolf's father, seems to deny the existence of God, while his son James hopes to find some spiritual meaning in the slightest sensations of this world. James, the typical modern for whom "any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallise and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests," cannot accept his father's disenchanted view of this world (p. 7). Indeed, he suspects his father's militant atheism of masking authoritarian impulses; Mr. Ramsay seems to be setting himself up as an alternative to God.

*To the Lighthouse* undertakes to describe both the process of "disenchantment" of the

modern world (represented by Mr. Ramsay) and the possibilities for a re-enchantment (represented by James and by the artist Lily Briscoe).<sup>4</sup> It poses, and then retracts, the question of the “meaning of life” (p. 138). Woolf would not, I think, claim that art could answer the question of ultimate meaning, but she does, in *To the Lighthouse*, bring this question into focus through the use of explicitly religious images and plot elements.<sup>5</sup> Woolf draws equally on Christian and pagan religious imagery and often plays the two religious systems off against one another. The barest plot of the novel can be seen in religious terms. It is the story of a man who damns his wife, her death and subsequent haunting of the family, and his expiatory trip to the lighthouse. When Mrs. Ramsay challenges her husband’s pessimistic weather forecast at the beginning of the novel, he responds, “Damn you” (p. 30). The portrait of the Ramsays’ marriage revolves around this remark which, though it clearly has no real magical power for Mr. Ramsay as far as his conscious philosophy is concerned, is in religious terms a powerful performative act, condemning Mrs. Ramsay to hell. Several chapters later, though after probably just a few moments of novelistic time have passed, Mr. Ramsay approaches Mrs. Ramsay, and she wonders if he wants to apologize for saying “Damn you” (p. 59). He does not. In the second section of the novel, Mrs. Ramsay’s death is announced almost in passing, in parentheses: “[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before his arms, though stretched out, remained empty]” (p. 110).<sup>6</sup> The passage recalls certain classical images of mourning, notably two famous encounters in Hades that were well known to Woolf: Odysseus’ encounter with the ghost of his mother, and Aeneas’ with the ghost of his father. This ancient pagan image of the impossibility of resurrecting the dead sets up the problem of the remainder of the novel: how to achieve a meaningful resolution with the dead Mrs. Ramsay. In the novel’s concluding section, while Mr. Ramsay and his children undertake their voyage of expiation, a vision or ghost of Mrs. Ramsay appears to the artist-figure Lily Briscoe: “Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay! ... There she sat” (p. 171). The family’s trip to the lighthouse, and Lily’s artistic efforts to resurrect the dead, conclude with one of Woolf’s “moments of being” as Lily thinks: “I have had my vision” (p. 176). The reigning religious force at the end of the novel is the poet Mr. Carmichael, who resembles “an old pagan God, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand” (pp. 175–6). The figurative return to paganism is in fact a new phase in disenchantment, one in which the instrument of power wielded by the gods is reduced (again in parentheses) from a trident to “a French novel.” The remnants of religious vision are confided, in an ironic gesture, to novels that do not really have supernatural power. Yet, if the gesture is ironic, it also points to the ambitions of Woolf’s novel: to preserve a sense of sacred power in the modern, disenchanted world.

This brief account of Woolf’s most famous novel hints at the complex Modernist attitude towards the phenomenon of secularization and suggests, I hope, the limitations of some standard accounts of Modernism. Criticism of the Modernists tends anachronistically to read back into them a blithely secular point of view. In a simplified

retrospect, the Victorian era appears as the age of faith and its crisis – “the disappearance of God” (in the words of J. Hillis Miller) or “God’s funeral” (the title of a poem of Thomas Hardy’s and a recent study by A. N. Wilson) – while the twentieth century has already learned the lesson of the death of God and has no further need for Him.<sup>7</sup> According to this standard view, the Modernists have gotten beyond the crises of faith of the “eminent Victorians.”<sup>8</sup> Victorian earnestness gives way to modern irony and indifference.<sup>9</sup> I would like to suggest that the rigid distinction between the Victorians and the moderns masks important continuities. The Modernists’ own emphasis on their differences from the previous generation and the genuine originality of their formal experiments may blind us to the continuity of their central concerns. If the modern age has so comfortably dispensed with the supernatural, why do we continue to produce so much discourse about the need to abandon it, from Nietzsche and Freud through the existentialists to the poststructuralist critique of “grand narratives” and the “metaphysics of presence”?<sup>10</sup> What accounts for the persistence of popular and literary fascination with the supernatural? Why does secular modern society undergo so many vogues for eastern religions, spiritualism, or the New Age, from the 1880s down to the present? Why did the twentieth century produce so much religious fundamentalism in developing and developed societies alike? If God died in the nineteenth century, then he had an active afterlife in the twentieth. After announcing, through the character of a madman, the death of God, Friedrich Nietzsche himself wrote that “After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.”<sup>11</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century, the question of how to cope with this shadow became an important concern of modern novelists, poets, social scientists, and theologians.

To understand the new relation of Modernism to the sacred requires a brief re-examination of the “secularization hypothesis,” which was receiving its most influential formulations precisely during the high phase of literary Modernism, in such works as Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Emile Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), and Sigmund Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). The idea that modern civilization implies, demands, or depends upon the rejection of a belief in the supernatural or the sacred already fascinated the Victorians. Matthew Arnold wrote in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867–8) of the tendency of English civilization to become increasingly “mechanical and external” and thus to threaten spiritual values.<sup>12</sup> Secularization became a basic tenet of twentieth-century sociology, even among those who lamented it, from Thorstein Veblen to Thomas Luckmann.<sup>13</sup> Max Weber’s theory of rationalization at once justifies the connection between secularism and modernity and radically revises it, by demonstrating not just the rejection of supernatural beliefs but

their persistence (in transmuted form) in modern, apparently secular contexts. Weber emphasized “precisely the irrational element” in the development of capitalism, for example, and argued that “one may ... rationalize life from fundamentally different basic points of view and in very different directions.”<sup>14</sup> However, the unidirectional conception of modernization as secularization seems to dominate received understandings of the uniqueness of the “modern” age or the twentieth century, especially in literary criticism.

While accepting that the nature of the intellectual elite’s relationship to the sacred did change radically in the late nineteenth century, I believe that scholars of Modernism need to re-evaluate the nature of this change and its implications for Modernism. In particular, we should challenge two widely held corollaries of the “secularization hypothesis”: that the only alternative to the monotheistic God is a secular worldview, and that the Modernists celebrated the putative secularization of modernity. The Modernists were not the devout secularists that many critics portray; instead, they were seeking through their formal experiments to offer new accounts of the sacred for an age of continued religious crisis. Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus may shun the Catholic church and Woolf’s Mrs. Ramsay chastise herself for thinking, in an unguarded moment, “we are in the hands of the Lord”.<sup>15</sup> Yet, their creators continued to search for an adequate account of religious experience, a kind of essence of religion without God or church, and this search contributed to the development of literary Modernism. “Secularization,” I contend, is a misleading word for what happened to art’s relation to the sacred in the twentieth century.

The secularization hypothesis bears comparison with the “repressive hypothesis,” identified and criticized by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*. According to the repressive hypothesis, the late twentieth century still lived in the shadow of a repressive “Victorian regime” with its roots in the development of “the bourgeois order” since the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> Modern culture, with its more open acknowledgment of sex, was striking a blow against that regime. Rather than accept the sharp distinction between a repressive period from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and a liberated twentieth century, however, Foucault seeks to explore the rise of the “repressive hypothesis” as an episode in the continuing “putting into discourse of sex” (p. 13). What Foucault finds remarkable is the multiplication of discourse about sex from the Counter-Reformation, which (through its emphasis on confession) created a vast “scheme for transforming sex into discourse,” to the development of psychoanalysis, which transformed the “requirement of confession” into “an injunction to lift psychological repression,” and beyond (pp. 20, 130). While moderns imagined themselves liberated, they unconsciously reproduced in their discourses of liberation a structure of thought about the relationship between the body and subjectivity that showed continuities with the putatively repressive Victorian era. The secularization hypothesis shares some characteristics of the repressive hypothesis: it contrasts the knowing, sophisticated twentieth century with the naive nineteenth (or, more broadly, the modern with the premodern) and it may flatter the atheist’s sense of rebelling against an outmoded

authority (God). Perhaps it is less pleasurable to view the modern age in terms of secularization rather than liberated sexuality, but the same general psychological features give both hypotheses their appeal. If Freud is the prophet of the struggle against repression, Nietzsche is the prophet of modern secularism. Foucault's enquiry into the twentieth century's continued "putting into discourse of sex" suggests a parallel question about secularization. Without creating a grand, Foucauldian historical framework for the "discourse about God," it can be noted that discourse about God and the supernatural (whether for or against) continues to proliferate.

Opponents of secularization theory, who are legion, tend to note that in most of the world, outside western Europe, the twentieth century witnessed a great upsurge in religious fervor and that a majority of people even in apparently secular countries still claim to believe in God. An entirely different order of objection comes from those who observe the rise of "functional equivalents" of religion: that is, forms of social belonging (labor unions, ethnic groups, sports teams) or belief (nationalism, Communism, consumerism, liberalism) that supply the role in modern life once played by the church.<sup>17</sup> The critique of the secularization hypothesis most relevant to Modernism, however, involves a recognition of the increasingly private nature of religious belief and experience. While accepting that religion no longer plays its former role in the public sphere, the philosopher Charles Taylor has argued that the twentieth century witnessed a privatization of religious belief. With the decrease in church adherence among large groups of western Europeans and international elites, people came to define their religion in increasingly personal terms and thus turned away from the public ritual and sacramental functions of churches. The attitude of "expressive individualism," influenced by romanticism and by consumer culture, insisted that, in Taylor's words, "The religious life or practice that I become part of not only must be my choice, but must speak to me; it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this."<sup>18</sup> Modern spiritual life, then, is not secular per se, but the sacred no longer has its former public role. As Taylor puts it, "[O]ur relation to the spiritual is being more and more unhooked from our relation to our political societies" (p. 111). Religious pluralism and the sense that the individual can choose a religion as one among many "consumer options" seem closely related to this privatization of religion.<sup>19</sup> Whether or not we call this change in the center of religious life "secularization," it does not necessarily imply a rejection of all religion, but a transfer of authority in religious belief from public to private hands, a continuation of processes begun in the Reformation and with the liberalism of Locke.<sup>20</sup> The impact of this privatization of religious experience on intellectual and artistic life in the Modernist period can perhaps be seen in two phenomena: on the one hand, the increasing value given to intimate experience, and on the other hand a renewed intellectual and social interest in the very ritual functions that had previously been a central element of religious life but that were now losing their authority. The Modernist moment seems to have been the first in which this newly private character of religious experience was widely recognized, and its greatest philosophical expression was *The*



*Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) by William James, the brother of the novelist Henry James. Whether we consider this privatization of religious experience another version of secularization or simply a transformation of religious life, it does not imply a total triumph of the secular over the religious.

To question the secularization hypothesis in its more dogmatic forms is not necessarily to deny a dramatic change in the consciousness of large groups of people in the late nineteenth century. The intellectual history of this process in the Victorian age is well known. The literal and literary parents of the Modernist generation, men like Henry James, Sr.; Leslie Stephen; Ernest Renan; and John Ruskin; and women like George Eliot; underwent crises of conscience that led them either to agnosticism or atheism or to new forms of spiritual life. They were responding in part, no doubt, to broad social forces that allowed for increased toleration of unorthodox opinion, but also more directly to a series of scientific discoveries that had undermined belief in the literal truth of the Bible. As early as the 1830s, Charles Lyell found geological and fossil evidence that contradicted the time-span of the biblical creation narrative. The most significant blow to biblical literalism, however, came from the work of scholars who sought to explain biblical events through the techniques of modern historical scholarship and employed textual criticism to challenge traditional accounts of the authorship of the Bible. For example, the Pentateuch (comprising the first five books of the Bible), which had been attributed to Moses, was found to have multiple authors, as were the book of Isaiah and the letters of St. Paul. *The Life of Jesus* (1835) by the Young Hegelian David Friedrich Strauss, led many intellectuals, including the young Friedrich Engels, to question the biblical account of Christ. Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) provided the seed for a theory of religion as a projection of a social need. From it, Karl Marx, the grandson of a rabbi but son of an assimilated Jew, developed the notion of religion as "the opiate of the people," which in important respects anticipates the work of the sociologist Emile Durkheim, himself the son of a rabbi. George Eliot had spent her adolescence in religious enthusiasm during the heyday of the Evangelical movement. At the age of 22, after reading Charles Hennell's *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* (1838), Eliot lost her faith and refused to attend church with her father. She soon published translations of Strauss (1846) and Feuerbach (1854). Leslie Stephen, himself the son of Evangelicals of the Clapham Sect, was ordained as a deacon in the Church of England in order to fulfill the requirements of his fellowship at Cambridge, and later became a priest. In 1875, however, he left the church after realizing that "it was wrong for me to regard the story [of the Flood] as a sacred truth."<sup>21</sup> He became one of the most famous agnostics of his time; his daughter Virginia was brought up without religion and married a Jew. Such doubts became more widespread after the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). Benjamin Jowett's contribution to *Essays and Reviews* (1860); Renan's *Life of Jesus* (1863); and *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (1862–63) by John Colenso, the Anglican bishop of Natal; all challenged the literal truth and divine inspiration of the Bible, and in the last decades of the century many followed Eliot and Stephen into disbelief.

There were social preconditions too for the changing attitude to organized religion. Marx's atheism, along with the relaxed strictures of social life in rapidly urbanizing England, contributed to the decline in church adherence among the working classes. More relevant to the intellectuals under consideration here, institutional changes made it possible to hold minority or unauthorized religious beliefs while enjoying the full benefits of citizenship and participation in civil society. The religious tests that required dissenters to conform to the Church of England in order to study at Oxford or Cambridge or to hold government office were abolished during the course of the nineteenth century, partly through the efforts of Leslie Stephen. Similarly, religious disabilities for a Catholic like Joyce in Ireland were eliminated, although Ireland of course continued to lack Home Rule. In 1791, the revolutionary Constituent Assembly had declared the emancipation of the Jews of France, and a more gradual process in the Habsburg empire had led to the emancipation of the Jews there by 1867.<sup>22</sup> The major European Jewish Modernists were products of the subsequent migration of Jews to cities like Paris, Vienna, and Prague. However, new and often violent forms of anti-Semitism, evident in the Dreyfus Affair in France, riots in Prague, and the election of the anti-Semitic mayor Karl Lueger in Vienna in 1897, took the place of the old restrictions, foreshadowing the ultimate fate of the Jews of Europe.

Outright disbelief was by no means the only possible response to the decline of biblical literalism. Throughout the nineteenth century, in response to the challenges of modern science and shifting social norms, including the rise of democracy and working-class anticlericalism, religious liberals attempted to reconcile belief in God with faith in progress and the bourgeois state. Although many clergymen defended literal belief in the Bible, the mainstream Protestant churches of Britain, the United States, and Germany increasingly adopted views associated with theological liberalism, whose leading proponents were such theologians as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Ernst Troeltsch, a close friend of Max Weber's and another founder of the sociology of religion. These theologians emphasized private religious feeling and the historical development of Christian ethics. As the leading historian of secularization, Owen Chadwick, has written, in the long term, faith adjusted to the new knowledge offered by the sciences "without more than a hesitation and a backward glance of regret." Liberal Protestants discarded theological doctrines such as original sin and predestination in favor of broad ethical principles and sought an accommodation between traditional religion and modern intellectual developments, such as German idealism, biblical criticism, historicism, and evolutionary theory. Liberalism embraced the privatization of religious experience through what its critics saw as increasingly private and undemanding forms of religious observance that rejected specific religious dogmas in favor of broad ethical principles. Such trends were typified by Matthew Arnold's definitions, in "Literature and Dogma" (1873), of religion as "morality touched with emotion" and of God as "the Eternal not-ourselves that makes for righteousness."<sup>23</sup>

Around the turn of the century, in the fields of theology, sociology, and literature, the



privatization of religious experience came under attack. The liberal emphasis on religion as private, personal experience was increasingly replaced by a stress on the sacramental and ritual elements of religious life. In a famous phrase, the twentieth-century theologian H. Richard Niebuhr critically summed up liberal theology: “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without justice through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”<sup>24</sup> The attacks on the liberal consensus came from various directions, but a crucial feature of all of them was a renewed emphasis on the social functions of religion and on the search for new forms of sacred community. While theologians of many faiths criticized the merely ethical and private view of religion associated with theological liberalism, social scientists were seeking to understand the relationship between religious ritual and social power, and thus to offer their own alternatives to the liberal model, which seemed to them to have nothing to say about the social aspect of religion.<sup>25</sup> Rather than marking a further stage in the inevitable process of secularization, then, the early twentieth century witnessed a great deal of anxiety about the dangers of secularization and a search for alternatives to the privatized, liberal religion that had dominated the late nineteenth century.

In various ways, the new religious movements and ideas of the twentieth century rejected the notion that religious experience could be reconciled with nineteenth-century ideals such as historical progress and bourgeois culture, and that organized religions could, without tension, support the development of the liberal state. A renewed interest in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and in the novels of Dostoevsky, pointed to the sense of dissatisfaction with optimistic liberal theology. Within religious communities themselves, theologians began to criticize many of the premisses of nineteenth-century liberal religious thought. Karl Barth’s commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, published just after World War I, hit like a “bombshell on the playground of the theologians.”<sup>26</sup> Barth’s “theology of crisis” emphasized the “infinite qualitative distinction” between time and eternity, God and man.<sup>27</sup> Somewhat later, Reinhold Niebuhr, the leading figure in Neo-orthodoxy (and brother of Richard Niebuhr), criticized the “illusion of liberalism that we are dealing with a possible and prudential ethic in the gospel,” and argued that “The ethic of Jesus does not deal at all with the immediate moral problem of every human life ... It transcends the possibilities of human life ... as God transcends the world.”<sup>28</sup> Such theologians did not refuse to grapple with the modern world; they were respectful of the implications of historical scholarship and deeply aware of the problems raised for theology by the historical nature of human experience and the historicity of Christ. They did, however, provide a much more conflictual, and even tragic, account of religious life than that proposed by nineteenth-century liberals. Niebuhr was an active advocate for social justice, and Barth’s theology was given extra moral authority by the fact that he and his followers actively resisted National Socialism in the Barmen Confession, while other mainstream theologians tended to accommodate themselves to Hitler.

While movements within Protestantism challenged the liberal consensus, other religious traditions questioned the extent to which their own practice had come to resemble liberal Protestantism. The nineteenth-century movement towards liberalism in the Catholic Church and the rise of Reform Judaism suggested that other religions could be remade in the image of liberal Protestantism, with a diminution of the role of ritual, a certain freedom from traditional theological concepts and dogmas, and an increased emphasis on the individual believer's relationship to God and on ethical teaching. Despite the hostility of Pope Pius IX to all forms of liberalism, expressed in the syllabus *Errorum modernorum* of 1864, the church showed a more open attitude in the last decades of the century under Leo XIII, whose encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891) set out a progressive social vision for the church. In the twentieth century, such liberalizing movements came under attack. In Europe, the term "Modernism" itself, before being applied to literary or artistic experiments, referred to a liberal movement in the Catholic Church, modeled to some extent on nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism. The church excommunicated a number of Modernists, notably Father Alfred Loisy, who had applied textual criticism to the Bible, and Father George Tyrrell, who questioned the permanence of church dogma and the recently formulated doctrine of papal infallibility. Pope Pius X labeled these views heretical in the decree *Lamentabili* and the encyclical *Pascendi* of 1907, vigilance committees were formed to root out the heresy, and priests and theologians were required to swear an oath against "Modernism." The Neo-Thomist revival, whose most famous representative was Jacques Maritain, himself a convert from liberal Protestantism, moved decisively away from liberalism.<sup>29</sup>

For the emancipated Jews of the late nineteenth century, liberalism meant the conviction that one could retain one's Jewish identity, in a reformed or even secular mode, while also participating fully as a citizen of the French Republic or a subject of the Habsburg empire. Jewish liberals tended to identify with the values of French Republicanism and with the enlightened Habsburg monarchy, since these states had proclaimed the emancipation of the Jews. The thinkers of the Jewish Enlightenment, from Moses Mendelssohn to Hermann Cohen, defined Judaism in terms of its commitment to what Cohen called "ethical monotheism," which they saw as a purer form of the ethics preached by liberal Protestantism. The major Jewish philosophers of the early twentieth century, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, were students of Cohen. Buber tried to reconcile the western Enlightenment with eastern European Hasidic spiritualism; he had a direct impact on Kafka and his circle in Prague.<sup>30</sup> Rosenzweig's attitude towards Jewish Enlightenment was more hostile; he criticized Cohen's ethical monotheism as "the false Messiah of the nineteenth century," a form of historicizing liberal Protestantism, and proclaimed that "the battle against history in the nineteenth-century sense becomes for us the battle for religion in the twentieth-century sense."<sup>31</sup>

Within religious life, then, the early twentieth century was a period not of widespread

agnosticism and liberalism, but of heightened tension and conflict over the possibilities for a religious life in the modern world, conflict that cannot be dismissed simply as “reactionary” since it came from all parts of the political spectrum and included the most avant-garde as well as the most conservative religious thinkers. The sense of crisis evident in the new Protestant theology, the Modernism controversy in the Catholic Church, and the struggles over Jewish emancipation informed the work of the literary Modernists. The Modernists sought to understand religious experience anew, in the light of their own experience of modernity and of the theories of their contemporaries. It is clear, however, that where mid-Victorian grandparents might attend church or synagogue regularly and profess belief in a personal God, and possibly even in the literal truth of the Bible, many of their twentieth-century grandchildren no longer attended religious services or professed such belief.

Some of the major figures in literary Modernism are the product of this transformation, including the notoriously Christian “Tom Eliot.” Eliot descended from New England Puritans. His grandfather was a well-known Unitarian minister, trained at Harvard, who had helped to found Washington University in St. Louis. Eliot later left Unitarianism behind, and became fascinated with Buddhism and Hinduism. He gently satirized Christianity in such early poems as “The Hippopotamus” and “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service.” *The Waste Land* (1922) is suffused with spiritual longing but it also plays with the various registers of Christian and pagan myth. When Eliot writes that “April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land,” he is invoking both the Christian story of the young god who dies in order to give new life to the rest of us, and the many other versions of this myth chronicled by Sir James Frazer in his anthropological work *The Golden Bough* (1890) and Jessie Weston in her *From Ritual to Romance* (1920). Frazer and Weston explored the links among the mythology of the ancient Near East, the Christ story, fertility rites, folk customs like May Day, and degenerate modern forms of magic such as the tarot deck. What made Frazer’s and Weston’s discoveries shocking (and appealing) to some of their first readers was the evidence that many Christian myths and rituals had their origins in ancient, pagan forms of magic, a major theme of *The Waste Land*.

Many myths attribute the death of winter and the rebirth of spring to the death and rebirth of a god with human attributes, who in some ancient practices is a man ritually murdered and in others an effigy buried or thrown into the sea to guarantee fertility or to bring rain. In *The Waste Land*, however, the god himself is conspicuously absent, except in debased forms like the (missing) Hanged Man in the tarot pack, or the drowned Phoenician Sailor, who returns as “Phlebas the Phoenician” in the fourth section, “Death by Water.” Other, more modern versions of the Christ story find a place in the poem. *The Waste Land* echoes Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloomed” (1865), in which Whitman makes use of a similar mythology to commemorate Abraham Lincoln, who was assassinated at the end of the American Civil War on Good Friday, 1865. Eliot probably also had Rupert Brooke’s poem “The Old Vicarage, Grantchester”

(1912), in mind; it begins, “Just now the lilac is in bloom.” Brooke himself combined the roles of poet and martyr. His five war sonnets, published under the title *1914*, became immensely popular models of patriotic poetry. In 1915, while serving in the Royal Navy, Brooke died of an infection caused by an insect bite, and he became an almost mythical figure, England’s “poet-soldier.” Even more recently, W. B. Yeats had published “Easter, 1916,” celebrating the martyrs of the Easter rebellion: “All changed, changed utterly / A Terrible beauty is born.” Chaucer drew on this same mythological structure in the *Canterbury Tales*, which begin by invoking April’s “sweet showers.” Chaucer’s pilgrims are headed to Canterbury to pray at the shrine of “the holy, blissful martyr” Thomas Becket. Spring, the season of rebirth, is also a season for celebrating martyrs, and Eliot places the modern waste land in the context of such earlier martyrs as Christ, Becket, Lincoln, Brooke, and the dead of both the Civil War and World War I.

Yet there is little sign in the first four sections of the poem that all these martyrs will in fact redeem the waste land. Eliot adapts some of the crucial imagery of the poem – the rocky, deserted land; the drought; the dead or dying vegetation – from the biblical books of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Ecclesiastes. Only in the poem’s final section, “What the Thunder Said,” does Eliot allow for a return of life-giving water. Here, he offers a syncretic vision of apocalypse and redemption that, like Woolf’s later conclusion of *To the Lighthouse*, combines elements from disparate religious sources – in this case, the Hindu Upanishads, the teachings of the Buddha, and the story of Christ’s death and resurrection. Eliot glossed the Sanskrit words “Shantih Shantih Shantih” at the end of the poem with the biblical phrase “The Peace which passeth understanding.” He later complained that “approving critics ... said that I had expressed ‘the disillusionment of a generation,’ which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.”<sup>32</sup> Yet, the poem reads as a document of disillusionment, and this was probably one of the reasons that Woolf and others were so shocked when Eliot joined the Church of England at the age of 38 in 1927. After his conversion, Eliot wrote such major Christian works as “Ash Wednesday” (1930), *Four Quartets* (1935–42) and the pageant plays *The Rock* (1934) and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). Although the answers these poems provide are more orthodox than those of *The Waste Land*, it is clear that they emerge out of the same understanding and structure of feeling about the barrenness of modern spiritual life.

Unlike Eliot, many writers of the period who address theological themes directly often seem to be excluded from the Modernist canon. Around the margins of the canon lurk several explicit encounters with the supernatural, whether in the traditional form of the devil, in the more esoteric framework of elaborate literary myth, or in the exotic appeal of the East. A diverse group of authors in the period, many of them women, made religious or supernatural figures the focus of their novels. The best-selling sensationalist Marie Corelli, the conventional novelist of country life Sheila Kaye Smith, the mildly avant-garde feminist Sylvia Townsend Warner, the controversial lesbian Radclyffe Hall, and the meticulous realist Willa Cather have little in common other than their interest in

religious themes, but none of them belonged to the mainstream of Modernist literary experiment, and several were notably conservative in their formal concerns. Similarly, works by the (mainly male) authors of the Catholic revival of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Georges Bernanos, and François Mauriac, bear an uneasy relation to the term “Modernism.” In a number of more explicitly Modernist works influenced by Eliot, the grail myth plays a key role, as in Mary Butts’s *Armed with Madness* (1928), John Cowper Powys’s *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932), and David Jones’s *In Parenthesis* (1937) and *The Anathémata* (1952). Surrealists like André Breton and Louis Aragon concerned themselves with locating the “marvelous” or “divine” in modern life.<sup>33</sup>

Several prominent Modernists did remain relatively indifferent to religion. Raised a Catholic in Poland, Joseph Conrad had little to do with the church in later life and held a typically late-Victorian agnostic view of the world and the historical process as a giant “knitting machine,” that has “knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions – and nothing matters.”<sup>34</sup> As a child, Ezra Pound read the Bible daily and attended the Presbyterian church in suburban Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, but he showed little interest in religion later in life. He did, however, attack the Jews as the source of all the flaws of modern culture and later described his own anti-Semitism as “a suburban prejudice.”<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, the general tendency among the Modernists was to search for new forms of spirituality, whether these were to be found in traditional Christianity (as for Eliot and W. H. Auden), the occult (W. B. Yeats and D. H. Lawrence), a new paganism (which appealed to both Joyce and Woolf), or simply the sacred possibilities of fiction and poetry (Henry James, Wallace Stevens, and several others). Other Modernists, including H. D., Marianne Moore, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, and E. M. Forster, likewise addressed aspects of religious experience in their works.

My account of the Modernists’ spiritual and biological ancestors indicates that something that can rightly be called secularization certainly did take place during the late nineteenth century. However, the historical process of the “secularization of the European mind in the nineteenth century” should be distinguished from the sociological theories developed in the early twentieth century to show that this secularization was an inevitable aspect of modernization. These theories were themselves developed by members of the Modernist generation, such as Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud, whose families had undergone similar transformations over the preceding generations. The work of these social scientists deeply influenced twentieth-century thought and supplanted nineteenth-century positivism with a new attentiveness to the nonrational aspects of human behavior. Despite the theories advanced by Weber, Durkheim, and Freud, it is far from clear that the process of secularization was unidirectional or irreversible or that it was a necessary and universal concomitant of modernization, and it is uncertain that the Modernists themselves embraced the process. Furthermore, the actual direction of change in the early twentieth century was almost the reverse of what the more simplistic versions of the secularization hypothesis would

suggest. The moderns returned to the problems faced by their Victorian forebears in search of new, and less dogmatic, responses. To some extent, this is the story of the grandchildren's reaction against their parents' emancipation from the ways of the grandparents, but, apart from Auden, none of these figures sought simply to return to the religion of their grandparents (from the Anglo-Catholic perspective adopted by Eliot in middle life, his family's Unitarianism was a heresy). Rather, they sought some explanation of religious experience more adequate than that offered by the dominant liberal rationalism of their parents' generation.

The process took place in some cases over three or four generations, in others within a single generation. James Joyce's mother was a devout Catholic; after being educated by Jesuits and intending to enter the priesthood, he left the Catholic Church at the age of 16, "hating it most fervently."<sup>36</sup> Yet his works continually meditate on the miracle of the mass, and in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, his alter ego, Stephen Dedalus, declares himself "a priest of the eternal imagination."<sup>37</sup> The young Joyce sought to transmute the "daily bread of experience" into art through the experience of "epiphanies," moments of insight like those also described in works by Woolf, Eliot, and Proust. The case of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) shows the paradoxical character of Modernism's encounter with the sacred. Eliot interpreted *Ulysses* as struggling against the effects of secularization by establishing a "mythical method": "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history."<sup>38</sup> However, most critics have rejected Eliot's interpretation, and the predominant way of reading *Ulysses* has been to see it as a debunking or parody of myth. As George Orwell put it, "What Joyce is saying is 'Here is life without God. Just look at it!'"<sup>39</sup> Yet this eminently modern novel, presumably the secular product of a secular age, is peculiarly God-haunted.

Joyce's hero, Leopold Bloom, of Jewish heritage but baptized in both the Protestant and Catholic churches, spends much of June 16, 1904 contemplating religious mysteries. On a visit to a church in the "Lotos-Eaters" episode, Bloom observes a mass and attempts to explain its power. He arrives at a workable theory of the social function of the sacrament not all that far from the attitudes of contemporary social scientists:

Something like those mazzoth: it's that sort of bread: unleavened shewbread. Look at them. Now I bet it makes them feel happy. Lollipop. It does. Yes, bread of angels it's called. There's a big idea behind it, kind of kingdom of God is within you feel. First communicants. Hokypoky penny a lump. Then feel all like one family party, same in the theatre, all in the same swim. They do. I'm sure of that. Not so lonely.<sup>40</sup>

Some arcane knowledge is smuggled into the narrative under the guise of colloquial language. The phrase "hokypoky penny a lump," for example, refers to a late-nineteenth-



century children's rhyme about a type of ice cream, but "hokypoky" is also a variant of "hocus-pocus," a term for deception and false magic, associated by probably false etymology with anti-Catholic ridicule of the Latin mass: *Hoc est corpus*. In this apparently childish allusion, then, Bloom or Joyce combines the uncertain and largely forgotten reference to the mass in the name of the ice cream with the idea of the host as a sort of lollipop to make grown children happy.<sup>41</sup> Bloom himself tends to feel lonely, but he can appreciate in his own way the function of religion in encouraging social cohesion. For Bloom, the church and its sacraments seem to offer a model of such cohesion in which he would not mind participating, if only his nature and intellect tended that way ("Thing is if you really believe in it" [p. 66]).

Even though Bloom feels excluded from the mysteries of the church, however, *Ulysses* provides other sites of quasi-sacred ritual in which he can fulfill his religious impulses. As Robert Alter has put it, Joyce "sacralize[s] the profane."<sup>42</sup> Joyce of course begins the novel with a mock mass – Buck Mulligan treats his morning shave as a sacrament, his shaving bowl as a chalice, and intones "*Introibo ad altare Dei*" (p. 3). Yet Buck's mocking attitude towards the sacraments seems less adequate, ultimately, than the unconscious reverence of Bloom himself: when Bloom burns his breakfast kidney, he is unknowingly re-enacting ancient Hebrew rites.<sup>43</sup> Such allusions, though still ironic (especially since in this case it is a pork kidney), highlight the ritualistic character of many of our daily activities: cooking breakfast, reading the mail, feeding the cat, appeasing a grumpy spouse. The novel confers a sacramental quality on these mundane tasks. The listing in "Ithaca" of the rites in which Bloom has participated during the day suggests that *Ulysses* may be read in terms of a search for alternatives to the mass, from the mock mass of Buck Mulligan, through Bloom's unconscious "burnt offering" of the pork kidney, to the black mass of "Circe" (p. 599).

Like Eliot, Joyce experienced both the rejection of religion and the search for a substitute in his own lifetime. Many other Modernists were seeking for something they realized that they had not had as children. Crises involving faith in the literal truth of the Bible no longer animated the Modernists, but a new sense of religious crisis predominated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Wallace Stevens wrote that "to see the gods dispelled in mid-air and dissolve like clouds is one of the great human experiences."<sup>44</sup> The Modernists felt that the old gods had deserted them, and they sought new gods in unorthodox places – and sometimes even in orthodox ones. Works like *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and *To the Lighthouse* all share an impulse towards the re-enchantment of the world; they express the desire for a new form of spiritual experience independent of the Christian God and appropriate for the modern age.

## Notes



1 Virginia Woolf, letter to Vanessa Bell, February 11, 1928, no. 1858, in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975–80), vol. III, pp. 457–8. This edition cited hereafter as *Letters*.

2 Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” revised version of “Modern Novels,” in *Collected Essays*, 6 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), vol. II, p. 106.

3 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Susan Dick (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1992), p. 175. Further citations are to this edition.

4 The theme of the “disenchantment of the world” runs through the work of the sociologist Max Weber. See, for example, Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (1922), trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), Chapters 2, 11.

5 F. L. Overcarsh, “The Lighthouse, Face to Face,” *Accent* 10 (1950), offers the only extended treatment of the Christian symbolism of the novel that I have come across. Without much specific reference to Christianity, Martin Corner thoughtfully explores Woolf’s religious vision in the novel in “Mysticism and Atheism in *To the Lighthouse*,” *Studies in the Novel* 13 (1981): 408–23.

6 This sentence and the other parenthetical announcements of deaths were added by Woolf at a late stage of composition. In her memoir, it is Woolf herself who stretches her arms out on the night of her mother’s death: “My father staggered out of the bedroom as we came. I stretched out my arms to stop him, but he brushed past me, crying out something I could not catch; distraught.” Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* (Eastbourne: Sussex University Press, 1976), p. 91.

7 See A. N. Wilson, *God’s Funeral: A Biography of Faith and Doubt in Western Civilization* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999); and J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (1963), new edn. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

8 Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* (1918) is the classic statement of Modernist contempt for Victorian earnestness.

9 For a good general statement of the view of Modernist literature as motivated in part by “skepticism,” see Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and*

*Painting in Europe 1900–1916* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 1–4, 89–106. For Victorian earnestness, see Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 218–62.

**10** Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, ed. and trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 281.

**11** Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 167.

**12** Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, in William E. Buckler, ed., *Prose of the Victorian Period* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 462.

**13** For Victorian theories of secularization and the twentieth century’s self-identification as secular, see Alan D. Gilbert, “Secularization and the Future,” in Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils, eds., *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 503–21.

**14** Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–5), trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 78.

**15** Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 101.

**16** Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1980), 3 vols, vol. 1, pp. 1, 5.

**17** For debate on the secularization hypothesis, see Peter Berger, “Globalization and Religion,” *Hedgehog Review* 4.2 (Summer, 2002): 7–20; Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999); Andrew M. Greeley, *Unsecular Man* (New York: Schocken, 1972); and Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

**18** Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge,

MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 94.

**19** Andrew M. Greeley noted with some satisfaction in 1972 that “a man may be able to play the role of a consumer in the supermarket of religions”; Greeley, *Unsecular Man*, p. 15.

**20** Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 21–47.

**21** Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: His Thought and Character in Relation to His Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 47.

**22** For Jewish history of the period, see Paula E. Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), and *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

**23** Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 15 and *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, vol. vi, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), pp. 176, 189.

**24** H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, quoted in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 784.

**25** Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 5–9.

**26** Karl Adam, quoted in Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 934.

**27** Karl Barth, Preface to *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd edn., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 10.

**28** Reinhold Niebuhr, *Introduction to Christian Ethics* (1935), quoted in Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 942.

**29** On the Modernism crisis, see Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 325–35; Hans Küng, *The Catholic Church: A Short History*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Modern Library, 2001), pp. 171–6; and Alec R. Vidler, *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church: Its Origins and Outcome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).

**30** Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*, pp. 105ff.

**31** Quoted in Norbert M. Samuelson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 203; and Mark Lilla, “A Battle for Religion,” *New York Review of Books* (December 5, 2002): 61.

**32** T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Michael North (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 112. I have made use of this edition in my summary of the influences on the poem.

**33** See André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969); Louis Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris* (Paris: Gallimard, 1926); and Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

**34** Quoted in Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), p. 153.

**35** Humphrey Carpenter, *Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), pp. 21, 29.

**36** James Joyce, letter to Nora Barnacle, August 29, 1904, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 25.

**37** James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, corrected by Chester G. Anderson, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1964), p. 221.

**38** T. S. Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank

Kermode (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), pp. 178, 177.

**39** George Orwell, “Inside the Whale,” in *Collected Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), p. 136.

**40** James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe, and Claus Melchior (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 66.

**41** Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, rev. edn. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 93; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Hokey-pokey.”

**42** Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 162.

**43** On the burnt kidney, see Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 70 n. 1.

**44** Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Knopf, 1989), p. 260.



## 8 Modernism and mass culture

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Allison Pease

From its inception Modernism defined itself – and has been defined – by its relationship to mass culture. Aesthetic autonomy, the Modernist ideology that defined art as separate from culture, was a project that emerged unevenly and across most industrializing nations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The distinction between art and mass culture was central to artistic debates over Modernism in Great Britain, and offers an illuminating case study to be pursued within this chapter. Britain experienced rapid industrialization and new media as forces that exaggerated and simultaneously disrupted established class hierarchies. Modernist artists articulated their differences from mass culture to understand and explain themselves as a culturally distinct movement; critics of the period invoked these differences to justify their status as experts prepared to enlighten an under-informed public about Modernism's high purpose; and in recent decades a new generation of critics of British Modernism has distanced itself from artists' and critics' earlier claims of difference from mass culture by depicting Modernism and mass culture as historically related and dialectically interdependent. But whether critics articulate Modernism as separated by a "great divide" from mass culture or as mutually constitutive, they agree that one of the foundational contexts for understanding Modernism is its relationship to mass culture.

The first step in understanding the history of Modernism's relationship with mass culture in Great Britain is to examine the material phenomenon of mass culture and how the sudden proliferation of new media affected those who wanted to preserve aspects of traditional literate culture. After categorizing what mass culture was and how it was received, this chapter will survey contemporary criticism's current positioning of the dialectical interdependence of Modernism and mass culture as a reaction to one critic's apparent claims to the contrary. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate that the most vocal critics of mass culture were in fact the pioneers of university-based English programs, British Modernist critics, whose foundation for the study of literature was based on a repudiation of mass culture and mass-cultural consumptive practices.

### The phenomenon of mass culture

Mass culture did not, of course, magically appear at the threshold of the twentieth century. Rather, it signified a changing set of social and economic relations that had shifted profoundly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Until the eighteenth century in England, high culture *was* literate culture. In the nineteenth century vast reforms in education meant that many of those who previously had no claim to literacy, most



obviously the working classes and women, gained access to it. While less than half the population could read and write at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by the 1890s, almost 95 percent of Britain's citizens were literate. Increased educational opportunities in nineteenth-century Britain challenged literate high culture to distinguish itself from simple literacy.

Instead of fostering a shared culture, educational institutions played a significant role in acculturating their constituents differently. Middle- and upper-class boys were given a classical, public education and indoctrinated into the antimaterialist, agrarian, and Christian values of a superseded aristocracy. Middle- and upper-class women were most frequently educated at home or in small academies, where there was little overlap with the public school curriculum. The working classes received a more basic, state-sponsored education designed to prepare them for their stations in life. This stratified educational system prevented the rise of a unified national culture even as economic differences between the classes were slowly eroding. Mass culture, available to all, came to function as a dividing line between a social and intellectual elite, and everybody else.

Classically trained middle- and upper-class conservatives defined the problem of mass culture one way, liberals another. For conservatives concerned about increased literacy amongst women, the working classes, and the rising middle class, the new self-spawning mass culture proliferating in the form of newspapers, magazines, and cheap fiction represented and promoted values at odds with traditional culture. For liberals the trouble with mass culture was that it allowed capitalists to exercise an insidious form of social control by producing a debased substitute for locally produced popular culture.

Industrialism had created these problems by making mass production both cheap and easy. The invention of the rotary press and the Linotype machine, coupled with lower paper prices, now ensured that novels, newspapers, and magazines could sell to individual customers in the millions. The number of books issued by publishers more than doubled in 15 years, from 26 million in 1896 to 54 million in 1911; the number of lending libraries almost doubled from 480 in 1896 to 920 in 1911.<sup>2</sup> Newspapers and magazines, underwritten by a new culture of advertising, could be produced profitably and economically in staggering numbers. Alfred Harmsworth's 1896 publication of the half-penny *Daily Mail* set a new world circulation record that it sustained for over two decades. In 1910, 2,785 newspapers and close to 2,000 magazines were published in the British Isles.<sup>3</sup> Beyond print, new forms of mass communication altered the ways people experienced themselves and their communities. Radio blossomed in the 1920s: less than 1 percent of the population was able to listen to radio in 1922, but by 1932 almost half of Britain's population had access to radio.<sup>4</sup> Cinema was the fastest growing form of popular entertainment between the wars. There were already 3,000 cinemas in Britain in 1926; by 1938 there were 4,800, selling 987 million tickets that year.<sup>5</sup> On average, half of the population over the age of 14 went to the cinema once every week.<sup>6</sup>

Conservative and liberal critics alike were horrified by the growth of these new media.

They feared that a semi-educated public was spending increasing amounts of its leisure time and expendable income in consuming these mass entertainments. Art, they believed, should create a national culture of rational reflection in the public interest. Mass culture did the opposite, creating an uncritical public of individuals whose interior became, in Habermas's terminology, "deprivatized" and organized around the materialist principles of shock and sensation.<sup>7</sup> As one critic of the new education system commented in 1894, although reformers had expected that "the multitudes who hitherto had occupied their leisure with degrading excitements would find in reading a more agreeable and more elevating amusement," the result of increased literacy in the working classes appeared only to foster the growth of decadent fiction and "weekly papers of a scrappy character."<sup>8</sup> Though this assessment was not wrong in its explanation of the rise in sensationalist journalism and novels, it clearly over-emphasizes the value differences between literate culture and the newer mass-print culture, ignoring trends that might balance its assessment, such as the fact that publishers were also printing more classic literature than ever before.<sup>9</sup>

Literate high culture's anxiety about the increased production and consumption of mass cultural forms was a persistent theme of the first four decades of the twentieth century. Critics consistently devalued the language of the mass-cultural sphere. "The printed word," art critic Osbert Burdett commented in 1925, "is beginning to lose all distinction in newspapers and books that do no more than reflect the illiteracy of the mass of readers." "Words," Stephen Dedalus remarks in James Joyce's *Stephen Hero*, "have a certain value in the literary tradition and a certain value in the marketplace – a debased value."<sup>10</sup> The terms "distinction" and "value" speak to a sociological need to assert cultural primacy over the rapidly spreading mass that appeared to be extinguishing the antimaterialist values in which most high-art defenders had been schooled. On the one hand, the expanding market for cultural commodities allowed Modernists to produce and distribute economically viable little magazines and to create a "futures market" for Modernist works as rare commodities, as Lawrence Rainey describes in his contribution to this volume. On the other hand, the proliferation of literary products tended to erode a cultural consensus about aesthetic autonomy and aesthetic value that from the eighteenth century until the late nineteenth century had been based on shared upper-middle-class patterns of consumption.

## **Contemporary criticism: rethinking the great divide**

Considering the well-documented anxieties about mass culture that Modernists so often expressed, it may seem surprising that recent literary critics have worked assiduously to expose the ways early-twentieth-century artists engaged mass-cultural practices to enhance or advance their work. The work of Jennifer Wicke on advertising culture in Modernism, Lawrence Rainey on the promotional culture of Modernism, Mark Morrison on little magazines, David Chinitz on T. S. Eliot's use of jazz, Catherine Turner on

publishing culture's marketing of Modernism between the World Wars, John Xiros Cooper on capitalist practices of bohemian Modernism, Aaron Jaffe on the uses of celebrity to create unique value for Modernist artists, and my own work on the incorporation of pornography in Modernist novels are some of the recent explorations of how Modernist artists knowingly exploited the economics, publicity mechanisms, and content of mass culture.<sup>11</sup> The straw man of most of these arguments is the claim, in Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986), that "Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly engulfing mass culture."<sup>12</sup>

But in focusing on Huyssen's psychoanalytic terminology – the irrational, class-driven anxiety that can't be helped – critics have neglected the more supple aspects of Huyssen's argument. Going beyond problematic psychoanalytic categories, he not only describes Modernists' relationship to mass culture as "a conscious strategy," but also acknowledges repeatedly that although the Modernist–mass-culture divide *appeared* "in the guise of an irreconcilable opposition," there were in fact "attempts launched from either side to bridge the gap or at least to appropriate elements of the other."<sup>13</sup> The relationship between Modernists and mass culture, as Huyssen claimed and now so many others have shown, was always fluid and dynamic.

In light of the consensus among scholars that the Modernists were consistently engaged with mass culture, even as they expressed anxiety about its effects on the lower classes, the familiar metaphor of "the great divide" becomes problematic. If Modernists were deliberately appropriating the forms and strategies of the mass media that they also disparaged, how did this complex, dynamic relationship come to be imagined in such rigid and irreconcilable terms?

## Modernist critics: articulating the great divide

The idea of an unbridgeable gap between Modernist high culture and a debased mass culture has its origins with the earliest theorists of Modernism, Modernist critics. Modernist critics formed the first generation of professionalized literary critics speaking from the institutional vantage point of established universities. In articulating Modernism's difference from mass culture, Modernist critics shaped an agenda for Modernism and its readers that prevailed through much of the twentieth century.

Modernist criticism arose from the professionalization and enfranchisement of literary criticism within the university that began in the late nineteenth century with the creation of English literature programs. Fully establishing itself in the 1920s, Cambridge University's program dominated English literature studies. At Cambridge, I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, and William Empson, together with T. S. Eliot, created the intellectual basis that English literature studies followed in Britain and its former colonies for the greater part of the twentieth century. Not only were they the first, Modernist critical practices

were *the* formative practices of English literary criticism produced within the university.

Among the prominent critics at Cambridge, I. A. Richards was the leading critic of the 1920s and a founder of the “Cambridge School” of English. He pioneered a rigorous, analytic approach to literature that sought to ground its principles on a systematic, “scientific” basis. Along with Richards, his disciple F. R. Leavis is widely recognized for formulating the standards of university teaching in English.<sup>14</sup> T. S. Eliot, an honorary fellow of Magdalene College, declined an offer from I. A. Richards to teach at Cambridge, but was a celebrated force there. In 1926 he delivered the Clark lectures on metaphysical poetry at Trinity College, and throughout their careers, Richards and Leavis ensured that Eliot’s poetry and criticism were studied seriously. Leavis’s working-class background afforded him a tenuous relationship with Cambridge, which for many years placed him at its margins.<sup>15</sup> Yet Leavis’s own typically Modernist self-characterization as in opposition to the academic establishment belies the fact that by the 1950s, if not before, Leavis *was* the new establishment.<sup>16</sup>

Leavis, Richards, and Eliot not only contributed to making English literature a subject of serious study in universities, they made literature the moral touchstone of public debate about mass culture. The “problem” or “decline” of culture, as they articulated it, was not simply the abundance of poor-quality, mass-media entertainment that seemingly numbed its audiences into mechanical response, but, more importantly, the inability of most people to respond to challenging literature. Where Modernist artists complained about the broader market’s tendency to relegate their works to obscurity, Modernist critics faulted the passive consumptive practices inculcated by mass-produced works, which, they claimed, stunted the full humanity of its recipients. Modernist criticism proposed a remedy: training the critical faculties through rigorous reading, especially of the notoriously challenging Modernist works.

The defining impetus behind Modernist criticism, then, was the idea that mass-produced forms of entertainment, such as fiction, radio, and films, were destructive to the quality of individual lives, and hence the fabric of society as a whole. In the tradition of Matthew Arnold’s claims for the civilizing and spiritualizing effects of culture, the criticism of Richards, Eliot, and especially Leavis, attempted to define a rationale for concretizing and preserving, as Pamela McCallum has phrased it, “the ethical efficacy of cultural phenomena.”<sup>17</sup> But in order to claim that understanding a canon of literature was central to the social whole, they had to forge an argument against the force that appeared to endanger or work in opposition to these phenomena: mass culture.

Literary criticism of the 1920s and 1930s attempted to identify and attack mass-cultural incursions into the realm of literate culture through the rhetoric of high-cultural hysteria. *Scrutiny*’s 1932 “Manifesto” explained the rationale for starting the journal by claiming that “the age is illiterate with periodicals” and the “general dissolution of standards is commonplace ... Many profess to believe (though fewer seem to care) that the end of Western civilization is in sight.”<sup>18</sup> Part of the apocalyptic thinking expressed

here was provoked by T. S. Eliot's influential notion of the "dissociation of sensibility" expressed in his 1921 essay, "The Metaphysical Poets." Eliot's idea that "in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered" created a potent myth of decline.<sup>19</sup> F. R. Leavis's view of English literary and cultural history was heavily informed by Eliot's, and he supplemented Eliot's idea with his own notion that the Shakespearean era represented the last "organic society" England had known. Since then, according to Leavis, industrialized capitalism, or the "technologico-Benthamite society" as he called it, had begun to make irrevocable and damaging changes to the previously whole fabric of English culture. Mass culture was but one harmful symptom of this diseased whole.

The notion of the social fabric's lost wholeness rallied conviction in the power of literature and culture to restore that loss. Mass culture was framed as an enemy that, as a phenomenon, could not be defeated. Instead, defense against this phenomenon was conceived as having to originate from within the subject, whose sophisticated reading and viewing practices could protect against mass culture's cheapening, deadening effects. Teaching readers how to respond appropriately to cultural material, or, in the context of the study of English literature, how to "read" poetry and novels, was believed to ensure that a specific kind of response towards the text in question would be formulated. This response, in turn, would create a more complex, humane, and ethical citizen.

Modernist critics identified the problem of mass-cultural media as the low level of sensitivity and responsiveness required from its audience. In *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1925), Richards argues that "At present, bad literature, bad art, the cinema, etc. are an influence of the first importance in fixing immature and actually inapplicable attitudes to most things ... Against these stock-responses the artist's internal and external conflicts are fought, and with them the popular writer's triumphs are made."<sup>20</sup> In 1932 Q. D. Leavis, a student of Richards's at Cambridge who had become the wife of F. R. Leavis, published her thesis *Fiction and the Reading Public*, which expands upon Richards's ideas. She argues that writers of cheap, mass-produced fiction "work upon and solidify herd prejudice and ... debase the emotional currency by touching grossly upon fine issues." Further, they foster "cheap mechanical responses" to circumstances that ought, in her opinion, to be more finely discerned because "The training of the reader who spends his leisure in cinemas, looking through magazines and newspapers, [and] listening to jazz music, does not merely fail to help him, it prevents him from normal development partly by providing him with a set of habits inimical to mental effort."<sup>21</sup> To both Q. D. Leavis and Richards, mass culture was responsible for inculcating slothful habits of aesthetic consumption.

F. R. Leavis echoes these sentiments relentlessly in his critical writings. In his pamphlet "Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture," he says, "When we consider, for instance, the processes of mass-production and standardisation in the form represented by the Press, it becomes obviously of sinister significance that they should be



accompanied by a process of levelling-down.” The concepts of mass production and standardization apply “more disastrously” to films because, in Leavis’s view, their influence is more potent: “they provide now the main form of recreation in the civilised world; and they involve surrender, under conditions of hypnotic receptivity, to the cheapest emotional appeals, appeals the more insidious because they are associated with a compellingly vivid illusion of actual life.”<sup>22</sup> The characterizations above make clear that the typical consumer of mass culture in the 1920s and 1930s was understood to be an emotionally stunted, passive receptacle with an endless capacity to be filled with cheap, formulaic media. It was assumed that mass-cultural forms reproduced in their readers and viewers (in a nondialogical way) stock responses. According to this dominant strain in Modernist criticism, the mass-culture consumer was essentially the imprint of all he or she consumed.

The training of sensibility, or responsiveness to art, was I. A. Richards’s primary project, and his work informs the Leavises’ critical aims. Richards took a moral stand with regard to aesthetic reception by declaring, “Bad taste and crude responses are not mere flaws in an otherwise admirable person. They are actually a root evil from which other defects follow. No life can be excellent in which the elementary responses are disorganised and confused.”<sup>23</sup> Richards’s statement provides the attendant argument to Modernist criticism’s vituperation of mass culture. If the crude and vulgar are defined by their dulled consumptive practices as a result of mass culture, then the refined, indeed the morally superior, are given shape through a keen receptivity and organized response to the conflicting impulses of genuine art. Art is that which possesses the capability of raising and organizing one’s level of response.

If, through the onslaught of mass culture, art should disappear, Richards claims, “a biological calamity of the first order will have occurred ... the raising of the standard of response is as immediate a problem as any, and the arts are the chief instrument by which it may be raised or lowered.”<sup>24</sup> To Richards, mass culture impaired one’s ability to function both morally and biologically. Seven years later, the *Scrutiny* manifesto echoed Richards’s sentiments and declared, “there is a necessary relationship between the quality of the individual’s response to art and his general fitness for humane existence.”<sup>25</sup> In the same issue of *Scrutiny*, F. R. Leavis made his homage to Richards’s teaching overt by stating that with regard to the literary mind, “the defect of intelligence is a default on the part of sensibility; a failure to keep closely enough in touch with responses to particular arrangements of words.”<sup>26</sup> In order to avoid this defect, “Everything must start from and be related to the training of sensibility, the kind of training of which Mr. Richards has been a pioneer.”<sup>27</sup> To both Leavis and Richards, aesthetic consumption is a physical, emotional, and cognitive act, requiring the entirety of one’s being, one’s sensibility, to react.

Modernist critics located the class of the mass-culture consumer disparately, sometimes in the middle class, often in the working or lower classes. Factually, however,

mass culture in its various forms was reaching into pockets of all classes. T. S. Eliot, in an essay on the music-hall entertainer Marie Lloyd, definitely placed the passive consumptive habits of mass culture within the middle class, which he saw as slowly absorbing all classes of society:

With the decay of the music-hall, with the encroachment of the cheap and rapid-breeding cinema, the lower classes will tend to drop into the same state of protoplasm as the bourgeoisie. The working man who went to the music-hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with artist which is necessary in all art and most obviously in dramatic art. He will now go to the cinema, where his mind is lulled by continuous senseless music and continuous action too rapid for the brain to act upon, and will receive, without giving, in that same listless apathy with which the middle and upper classes regard any entertainment of the nature of art. He will also have lost some of his interest in life.<sup>28</sup>

Eliot's notion of culture, unlike that of F. R. and Q. D. Leavis and I. A. Richards, is inclusive of a broad variety of social practices at every level of society. His idealization of the working man's interactive aesthetic receptivity corroborates the notion that mass culture hypnotizes its audience into a state of pure receptivity. To counter this, Eliot suggests that all art is a necessary collaboration between audience and artist requiring mental effort.

Q. D. Leavis shared Eliot's preference for aesthetic interactivity, a cooperative reading practice that required effort on the part of the reader. As opposed to Eliot's, whose writings suggest that he viewed culture as the spiritual fabric that pervades and motivates all social practices, Q. D. Leavis's concept of culture was more closely allied with traditional literate culture and she preferred the time when the majority of the population was illiterate and uneducated. During this time, according to her, the masses "did not complicate matters by creating a separate semi-literate public to interfere with the book market." The advantage of such a time was that "the rate of absorption of the lowest class into the middle class was slow enough to prevent any lowering of standards."<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, her ideal era for literary culture was the eighteenth century. This was a time, she averred, before capitalist industrialism thoroughly penetrated subject formation, and when the bourgeois sector of the public assimilated itself to the dominant aristocratic culture by adopting and mimicking aristocratic, antimaterialist ideals:

The difference between the popular novels of the eighteenth century and of the nineteenth is that the new fiction instead of requiring its readers to co-operate in a sophisticated entertainment discovers "the great heart of the public." Whereas Sterne's successors may at any rate represent a cultivation of the emotions founded on a gentle code, Dickens stands primarily for a crude set of emotional exercises.<sup>30</sup>



The “gentle” or gentrified code that in organic cultural style is “cultivated” in the eighteenth century is replaced, in her mythology, by “crude” – i.e., lower-class – exploitation of the labile emotions through repetitive, as the word suggests, “exercises.” Gentle and crude signify the different classes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reading publics. With the expansive, vulgar reading public of the nineteenth century, she suggests, came the industrialized, formulaic machinations of mass-cultural literature.

More than other Modernist critics, Q. D. Leavis fulfills Huyssen’s suggestion that “to reduce all cultural criticism to the problem of quality is a symptom of the anxiety of contamination.”<sup>31</sup> Q. D. Leavis is particularly anxious about the circulation of cheap fiction. Acknowledging that the popular taste in the 1930s was for “thrillers,” she notes:

The reading habit is now often a form of drug habit. In suburban side-streets and even village shops it is common to find a stock of worn and greasy novels let out at 2d or 3d a volume; and it is surprising that a clientele drawn from the poorest class can afford to change the books several times a week, or even daily; but so strong is the reading habit that they do.<sup>32</sup>

Though here she addresses quantity, disdaining the continuous circulation of pleasure-inducing novels, it is notable that the qualities that disturb her most are the poverty of those reading the novels and the novels’ greasiness. Q. D. Leavis’s anxiety of contamination by mass culture is continuous here with an anxiety of contamination *by* the rising lower-middle class. Her solution to this problem is to raise the level of the lower-class man by giving him, through good literature, “access to a finer code than his own.”<sup>33</sup>

For Eliot, the development of sensibility through reading is a psychological process. Poetry, he remarked in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, “may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world.”<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Eliot suggests that poetry works on both a metaphysical and an empirical level, confronting readers with the realities of the sensible and psychological, or perhaps ontological, worlds they inhabit. The “self-realizing” capacity Eliot describes through accessing “real” art was central to Modernist criticism’s ability to persuade a generation of readers of the value of specific modes of “close” reading. Readers engaged texts in order to “know” themselves. This self-knowledge in turn might serve to counter what Eliot in a later essay described as “the steady influence which operates silently in any mass society organized for profit, for the depression of standards of art and culture.”<sup>35</sup> A renewed culture depended on the consciousness created through Modernist reading practices.

By applying specific reading practices to literature, readers engaged a process of

cultural distinction. It was the process, Modernist critics argued, that informed or gave shape to the subject. Reading oneself into distinction in the Modernist critical method is a circular and self-confirming process. While the readerly stance masquerades as a form of complete receptivity, a psychological void awaiting cultural fulfillment, its very proactive stance with regard to that form of receptivity belies the nature of reading as an already-formed performance of selfhood, a set of attitudes brought to the text under the name of “receptivity.”

When F. R. Leavis declares that “The education of sensibility implied in my phrase, “English” as a discipline of thought,’ aims at fostering the completest receptivity that can be attained,” his concept of receptive openness is not in fact a specular emptiness, as consumers of mass culture are conceived, but rather a “disciplined” vessel of sensibility, the twentieth-century reconfiguration of Kantian “taste.”<sup>36</sup> Where Kantian taste referred solely to the cognitive faculties, sensibility as described by Modernist critics refers to the entire person. “Sensibility,” Leavis said, “is more complex in its ambiguity than ‘taste.’”<sup>37</sup> Conceived as a reader’s full mental and sensual dialogic relation with a text, sensibility is supposedly “more complex” because it allows not only a fuller reciprocity between subject and object, but a more complete subject, whose aesthetic judgment is not confined to the cognitive faculties, but rather to a more complete “sensibility.” This theory, however, enforces a moral distinction between works of high and low literature, and privileges originality as that which can “shock,” rather than “lull,” a reader into fresh reception.

Modernist critics argued that through the “direct shock of poetic intensity,” as T. S. Eliot phrased it, “real” culture could revitalize not only individuals, but eventually the entire culture.<sup>38</sup> Ironically, by championing the “shock” to “sensibility” that could only be experienced by “true” or “high” culture, Modernist critics appropriated the very labels that had been reserved previously for mass-cultural practices. In doing so they made a place for modes of aesthetic reception attributed to readers of sensational thrillers or pornography, two much maligned forms of mass media in the early twentieth century. Sensation and feeling, once the province of mass culture, became its solution. For Leavis, Richards, and even Eliot, the critical project of valuing and responding to culture was one that promoted unity between citizens not on the basis of certain class affiliations or external coincidences, but rather on the understanding of their most intimate subjectivity, the emotions and thoughts produced in response to aesthetic objects. In a paradoxical construction, the problem of a deprivatized interiority produced by mass culture could be solved by a privatization that could be universally recognized as authentic.

Modernist critics demanded analytical rigor and moral seriousness in their critical enterprise. They shaped and institutionalized literary canons, specifically the Modernist literary canon, in opposition to mass culture, believing that the works they championed demanded interactivity and raised the level of an individual’s moral fitness for life. In

doing so, they set the agenda for literary studies throughout most of the twentieth century, placing their literary canon on the high side of the great cultural divide that they themselves had defined. As Aaron Jaffe has argued, the first generation of “academic professionals supplied Modernist discourse with a secure place in emerging institutions – a ‘market shelter’ in universities, specialized academic presses, and high culture canons.”<sup>39</sup> If Modernism found itself at odds with mass culture, Modernist critics created an effective counter-public sphere from which to influence generations of readers of Modernism’s worth.

## Notes

**1** Fredric Jameson argues in *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) that the ideology of Modernism (and by implication the separation of high from mass culture) is a post-World War II American phenomenon that also occurs throughout industrialized, capitalist European countries (see pp. 139–210). Seeing in the abstract expressionism of the 1940s and 1950s the ultimate manifestation of aesthetic autonomy, Jameson eschews earlier Modernists such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot as “tarnished by politics ... and ... extraliterary concerns” (p. 168). I would argue that British Modernism’s relationship to mass culture differs significantly from the models Jameson discusses because its critics never wholly embraced aesthetic autonomy; instead their project focused on the transformation of culture through the aesthetic.

**2** Derek Hudson, “Reading,” in Simon Nowell-Smith, ed., *Edwardian England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 309.

**3** *Ibid.*, p. 320. Interestingly, this figure seems to have peaked in the Edwardian period, and contracted thereafter. Another source, Andrew Thorpe’s *Britain in the Era of the Two World Wars, 1914–45* (New York: Longman, 1994), claims that in 1921 there were 1,654 newspapers printed in Britain, shrinking to 1,290 printed in 1945 (p. 71).

**4** Thorpe, *Britain in the Era of the Two World Wars*, p. 72.

**5** *Ibid.*; and Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith, *Cinema, Literature and Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 163–4.

**6** Miles and Smith, *Cinema, Literature and Society*, p. 164.

7 Following the legacy of Theodor Adorno's critique of mass culture, Jürgen Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) argues that the public sphere is controlled by mass media, which turn cultural consumption into "the deprivatized province of interiority" (p. 162).

8 Joseph Ackland, "Elementary Education and the Decay of Literature," *The Nineteenth Century* 35.203 (March, 1894): 412–23.

9 According to Hudson, "Reading":

The first titles in the World's Classics were published by Grant Richards in 1901, and by 1909 the Oxford University Press, which had taken over this series, was advertising 150 volumes ... The first ten volumes of Collins's Classics, published in 1903, sold 80,000 copies at a shilling each within six months. The triumph of Dent's ambitious, carefully planned Everyman's Library, of which the first fifty volumes were published en bloc in February 1906, was greater still, and by the time the second fifty had been produced Dent's were unable to cope with the demand ... In 1906 alone 152 volumes of Everyman were published; and by 1909 Cassell's, taking advantage of the trend, were able to announce that they had sold 900,000 copies of 85 titles in the People's Library of classics. (pp. 311–12)

10 Osbert Burdett, *The Beardsley Period* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1925), p.55; James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p. 33.

11 See Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement, and Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Mark Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); David Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism: Between the Two World Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); John Xiros Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Allison Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

12 Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture,*

*Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. vii.

**13** *Ibid.*, p. 16. Indeed, it would be more accurate for those critics who use Huyssen's book to set up their own arguments about Modernism's engagement with mass culture to posit Adorno, a late Modernist himself, as the true spokesperson for "the great divide." Adorno claims in "Culture Industry Reconsidered," in *The Culture Industry*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1991) that:

The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above. To the detriment of both it forces together the spheres of high and low art, separated for thousands of years. The seriousness of high art is destroyed in speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civilizational constraints imposed on the rebellious resistance inherent within it as long as social control was not yet total. (pp. 98–9)

In contrast, Huyssen critiques this point of view where he argues:

I am not denying that the increasing commodification of culture and its effects in all cultural products are pervasive. What I would deny is the implied notion that function and use are totally determined by corporate intentions, and exchange value has totally supplanted use value. The double danger of Adorno's theory is that the specificity of cultural products is wiped out and that the consumer is imagined in a state of passive regression. (Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p. 22.)

**14** Barry Cullen, "'I thought I had provided something better': F. R. Leavis, Literary Criticism and Anti-Philosophy," in Gary Day, ed., *The British Critical Tradition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 188.

**15** Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith note that to "the university-educated grammar-school product of mid-century Britain Leavis meant the possibility of participation in authority through a route which seemed dependent on mind and sensibility rather than class, inheritance or institutional background." *Cinema, Literature and Society*, p. 90.

**16** Pamela McCallum, *Literature and Method: Towards a Critique of I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, and F. R. Leavis* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Humanities Press, 1983) p. 155.

**17** *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

- 18 “Manifesto,” *Scrutiny* 1.1 (May, 1932): 2.
- 19 T. S. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets,” in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), p. 247.
- 20 I. A. Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1925), pp. 202–3.
- 21 Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), pp. 67, 74, 224.
- 22 F. R. Leavis, “Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture,” in *For Continuity* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1933), pp. 18, 20–1.
- 23 Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 62.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 234.
- 25 “Manifesto,” p. 5.
- 26 F. R. Leavis, “The Literary Mind,” *Scrutiny* 1.1 (May, 1932): 25.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 28 T. S. Eliot, “Marie Lloyd,” in *Selected Essays*, p. 407.
- 29 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 146.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 31 Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p. ix.
- 32 Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 7.

**33** *Ibid.*, p. 73.

**34** T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. 149.

**35** T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949), p. 32.

**36** F. R. Leavis, "Valuation in Criticism," in *Valuation in Criticism*, ed. G. Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 286.

**37** *Ibid.*, p. 285.

**38** T. S. Eliot, "Dante," in *Selected Essays*, p. 200.

**39** Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 19.





## 9 Modernism and gender

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Marianne DeKoven

Shifts in gender relations at the turn of the century were a key factor in the emergence of Modernism. The period from 1880 to 1920, within which Modernism emerged and rose to pre-eminence as the dominant art form in the West (it remained dominant until the end of World War II), was also the heyday of the first wave of feminism, consolidated in the woman suffrage movement. The protagonist of this movement was known as the “New Woman”: independent, educated, (relatively) sexually liberated, oriented more towards productive life in the public sphere than towards reproductive life in the home. The New Woman was dedicated, as Virginia Woolf passionately explained in “Professions for Women,” to the murder of the “Angel in the House,” Coventry Patmore’s notorious poetic idealization of Victorian nurturant-domestic femininity. This New Woman inspired a great deal of ambivalent Modernist characterization, from Hardy’s Sue Bridehead and Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler to Chopin’s Edna Pontellier and Woolf’s Lily Briscoe. But these famous characters, important as they are, constitute only the most obvious manifestation of turn-of-the-century feminism’s formative influence on Modernism.

The radical implications of the social-cultural changes feminism advocated produced in Modernist writing an unprecedented preoccupation with gender, both thematically and formally. Much of this preoccupation expressed a male Modernist fear of women’s new power, and resulted in the combination of misogyny and triumphal masculinism that many critics see as central, defining features of Modernist work by men. This masculinist misogyny, however, was almost universally accompanied by its dialectical twin: a fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine. The result was an irresolvable ambivalence towards powerful femininity that itself forged many of Modernism’s most characteristic formal innovations. This ambivalence was felt by female as well as male Modernist writers. While the male Modernists feared the destructive power of the radical cultural change they desired – egalitarian change often embodied in various figurations of empowered femininity – the female Modernists generally feared punishment for desiring that change.

Modernism, with its notoriously resistant complexity and its rarefied religion of art, is often thought of as the antithesis to representation of the threat/promise of radical political and cultural change: in fact, it is thought of as a retreat from, or rejection of, the failed, degraded, violent world of twentieth-century society and politics. Many Marxist critics, most importantly Lukács, have condemned Modernism not only as an evasion of the moral-political imperative of engagement with the life of society, but also as the ultimate representation of, or capitulation to, the alienation and dehumanization (“reification”) resulting from capitalism’s cultural distortions.<sup>1</sup> However, a closer look at

Modernism through its complex deployments of gender reveals not only the centrality of femininity, but also, again, an irresolvable ambivalence towards radical cultural change at the heart of Modernist formal innovation in the works of both male and female writers.

If we take a moment to define, briefly, the salient formal features of Modernism – the cluster of stylistic practices that, more than any of Modernism’s other describable features, we use intuitively to identify literary works as Modernist – it becomes clear that women writers were just as instrumental in developing these forms as the great male writers usually credited with inventing Modernism. In *Marxism and Modernism*, Eugene Lunz lists some of the most important of those features: aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflexiveness; simultaneity, juxtaposition, or montage (I would add fragmentation); paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty; dehumanization and the demise of subjectivity conceived as unified, integrated, self-consistent. Bradbury and McFarlane, in their influential *Modernism*, using a different kind of rhetoric, attribute to Modernist form “abstraction and highly conscious artifice, taking us behind familiar reality, breaking away from familiar functions of language and conventions of form ... the shock, the violation of expected continuities, the element of de-creation and crisis.”<sup>2</sup>

Using these formal descriptions as a neutral guide, we can displace the patrilineality of what, before second-wave feminist criticism’s revisions, had been the exclusively masculine Anglo-American high Modernist canon (James, Conrad, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence, Joyce). Modernism had mothers as well as fathers. In texts crucial to the feminist canon such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1891), Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* (1903–6), and Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* (1915), we can see that women writers produced Modernist form concomitantly with the men generally credited with inventing Modernism. *Three Lives* was composed at the same time as early versions of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (*Stephen Hero*). With its fluid, obtuse narration, detached, ironic tone, impressionist as well as spatial or synchronic temporal structures, and disruptions of conventional diction and syntax, *Three Lives* has just as valid a claim to Modernist “origination” as Joyce’s *Portrait*. Though Virginia Woolf’s first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was not published until 1915, she began working on it at about the same time as Stein was writing *Three Lives*. *The Voyage Out* initiates a number of Modernist formal practices, particularly the predominance of symbolism as conveyer of the novel’s central meanings, and an accompanying, pervasive sense of dreamlike unreality.

A decade earlier, *The Yellow Wallpaper* prefigures Kafka and the Surrealists, with its progressively deranged first-person narration and its use of dream structure as an ordering principle. *The Awakening* develops several Modernist formal strategies, such as ambiguous, shifting narrative stance; density and foregrounding of imagery; and passages of repetitive, incantatory, “poetic” prose. Though Chopin and Gilman did not continue as Modernist writers – Chopin died and Gilman turned almost exclusively to politics – Stein and Woolf must be central to any account of Modernism. Women writers continued, throughout the decades of Modernism’s dominance of Anglo-American high literary art,

to produce a large portion of its most important writing.

Despite the powerful presence of women writers at the founding of Modernism and throughout its history, and despite the near-obsessive preoccupation with femininity in all Modernist writing, the reactive misogyny so apparent in much male-authored Modernism continues in many quarters to produce a sense of Modernism as a masculinist movement. Instances of Modernist advocacy of firm, hard, dry, terse, classical masculinity, over and against the messy, soft, vague, flowery, effusive, adjectival femininity of the late Victorians, abound, and instances of male Modernist antifeminism and misogyny are legion. Some of the language of Ezra Pound's highly influential Vorticist manifesto, for example, is characteristic of male Modernism's self-imagination as a mode of masculine domination:

Mathematics is dull ditchwater until one reaches analytics. But in analytics we come upon a new way of dealing with form. It is in this way that art handles life ... The statements of "analytics" are "lords" over fact. They are the thrones and dominations that rule over form and recurrence. And in like manner are great works of art lords over fact, over race-long recurrent moods, and over to-morrow.<sup>3</sup>

However, contrary instances of male Modernist feminine identification, and support of the New Woman, are not difficult to find. The first issue of Wyndham Lewis's short-lived but influential Vorticist journal *Blast* contains Rebecca West's powerful feminist story "Indissoluble Matrimony," as well as an encomium of feminism, precisely as a radical movement opposed to the gender conventionality for which Victorian femininity was a code or metonym. In the characteristically ironic but at the same time heartfelt brief unsigned exhortation "To Suffragettes," feminists are addressed as "brave comrades" (p. 152), and told that "We make you a present of our votes," that "Nous vous aimons!" ("We love you!"), that "We admire your energy. You and artists are the only things (you don't mind being called things?) left in England with a little life in them" (p. 151). As the male Modernists intermittently realized, feminists were in fact just as committed to overthrowing the Victorian ideal of closeted, domesticated, desexualized, disenfranchised femininity as they were to overthrowing its attendant cultural ideal of high moral insipidity.

The oeuvre of William Butler Yeats constitutes an exemplary instance of the undecidably contradictory juxtaposition of a fearful misogynist response to the New Woman with an identificatory admiration. As Elizabeth Butler Cullingford demonstrates in her admirable book on Yeats's love poetry, the well-known Yeatsian misogyny evident in "Prayer for my Daughter" or "Leda and the Swan" is counterbalanced by a feminine identification comparable to Eliot's and Lawrence's. Unlike Eliot's and Lawrence's association of feminine identification with self-loathing and sexual abjection, however, Yeats's feminine identification, buttressed by his positive involvement with a range of women in Irish politics, arts, and occult movements, produced empowering

representations of women's presences and voices in the great body of love poetry inspired by Maud Gonne. As Cullingford argues, "Yeats loved, liked, collaborated with, and respected women – most of the time."<sup>4</sup>

Henry James's essay "The Future of the Novel," written in the pivotal year 1899, encapsulates in a single text this characteristic, irresolvably contradictory attitude of the male Modernists towards an empowered femininity. James begins with the standard Modernist attack on femininity. He links it with the social and aesthetic deterioration of standards connected to a debased, feminine/feminized popular culture, by deploying the figure of flooding frequently used in Modernist fiction to represent empowered femininity:

The flood [of fiction] at present swells and swells, threatening the whole field of letters, as would often seem, with submersion. It ... directly marches with the rapid increase of the multitude able to possess itself in one way and another of the *book* ... There is an immense public, if public be the name, inarticulate, but abysmally absorbent ... The diffusion of the rudiments, the multiplication of common schools, has had more and more the effect of making readers of women and of the very young ... the ladies and children – by whom I mean, in other words, the reader irreflective and uncritical.<sup>5</sup>

James appears here in the person of Modernist as misogynist, antidemocratic elitist, by now a wearily familiar figure.

As James proceeds in the essay to think about what he calls the "elasticity" of fiction, however – the way "it moves in a luxurious independence of rules and restrictions" (p. 246), and "the immense variety of life" fiction must represent, that "will stretch away to right and to left" (p. 247) – his tone and political stance shift markedly from the right to the left. The essay ends on a note diametrically opposite to that of its opening, expressing the endorsement of feminist aims, the desire for radical cultural "renewal," that coexists in unresolved contradiction with its opposite fear and loathing of such change:

It would be curious – really a great comedy – if the renewal [of fiction] were to spring just from the satiety of the very readers for whom the sacrifices [to propriety] have hitherto been supposed to be made [i.e., to "the ladies"]. It bears on this that as nothing is more salient in English life today, to fresh eyes, than the revolution taking place in the position and outlook of women – and taking place much more deeply in the quiet than even the noise on the surface demonstrates – so we may very well yet see the female elbow itself, kept in increasing activity by the play of the pen, smash with final resonance the window all this time most superstitiously closed.

(p. 250)

Many literary texts by male Modernists contain the same kind of painfully misogynist writing with which James opens his essay. Among the most notorious instances are Pound's "Portrait d'une Femme" of 1912 – "Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea / ... No! there is nothing! In the whole and all, / Nothing that's quite your own. / Yet this is you." – and of course his lines in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*'s epitaph for the Great War dead: "There died a myriad, / And of the best, among them, / For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization." Eliot's misogyny is often expressed as a sexual disgust conflated with both anti-Semitism and class hatred, as for example in "Sweeney among the Nightingales," whose "Rachel *née* Rabinovich / Tears at the grapes with murderous paws." The misogyny of the other great Anglo-American male Modernists has also been amply demonstrated by feminist criticism. Yet even in the most overtly misogynist literary texts, a more complex and ambiguous deployment of gender is often at the center of the work's Modernist innovations. In order to understand those complex deployments of gender, it is helpful to look briefly at the work of a quintessential male Modernist gender theorist, Sigmund Freud, and of one of his most important feminist revisionists, Luce Irigaray.

In Freud's oeuvre, the paradox of Modernist femininity is most stark. Freud developed psychoanalysis largely by working with women – his observation of Charcot's treatment of female "hysterics" in the Salpêtrière Clinic in late-nineteenth-century Paris initiated his theorizations of the unconscious, and these theories of the sexual etiology of the neuroses were then developed and articulated in large part through Freud's subsequent work with his own female patients (see for example *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* [1905]). However, the theorizations that emerged relegated women to an inferior status in every way: of secondary importance in the central Freudian Oedipal nuclear family drama of the psyche, which is dominated by the son as protagonist and the father as antagonist, with the mother as passive object of their conflicting desire, and the daughter as a near-invisible afterthought. Further, women are by Freudian definition "castrated," defined by and as "absence" and "lack," in the Lacanian-Freudian formulation; doomed to permanent moral immaturity, with a sexuality characterized, when "normal," as inherently masochistic.

Despite the founding role of female hysteria in psychoanalysis, and despite the extensive presence of female patients in his practice, Freud continued to find femininity a "mystery." In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, the French Lacanian psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray's groundbreaking work of feminist theory, this "mystery" is explained as a displacement of the central patriarchal suppression of the feminine.<sup>6</sup> For Irigaray, the "mystery" of man's role in reproduction (we always know who the mother is; paternity crucially is not self-evident) is reassigned to the "passive" woman. Her terrible power to engender life is repressed and reassigned to the man, who then appropriates all ownership of reproduction and powers of naming, and, therefore, of representation, under what Lacan calls the Name-of-the-Father. The vigilant repression and exclusion of the feminine "origin" of life results in the starkness of the familiar normative gendered self–



other dualisms of western culture: masculine–feminine, white–black, higher–lower, culture–nature are only the most rife with political implications of these pervasive dualisms. In Freud, as in Modernism in general, the power of the maternal feminine comes closest to erupting into representation, and therefore is met by an even more cruelly powerful act of re-repression.

It is in Modernist forms themselves that the repressed maternal feminine unconscious of western culture actually emerges into representation. Irigaray, and other psychoanalytically oriented theorists of gender in language, usually known as “French feminists,” such as Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, find the inscription of the de-repressed maternal feminine in non- or antirealist deployments of language and literary form, which are, precisely, the defining formal features of Modernism. Irigaray describes the feminine attributes of language, linked to its embeddedness in the maternal unconscious, as its “effects of deferred action, its subterranean dreams and fantasies, its convulsive quakes, its paradoxes and contradictions” (*Speculum*, p. 141). These are precisely the aspects of language, and potentialities of literary structure, foregrounded in Modernist form.

For Irigaray, Freudian Modernism represented at once the greatest potential for de-repression of the feminine and also the harshest denial of that potential de-repression – a reinstitution of the founding patriarchal repression in even more rigid terms. This dialectic of embrace of the empowered feminine along with violent repudiation of it is precisely the structure we find underlying male Modernist misogyny, where the harshest vituperation against women, or the loftiest superiority to them, often occurs in works in which an empowered femininity governs the most radical Modernist elements of the text.

Joseph Conrad is a Modernist founding father whose oeuvre is profoundly masculine. He works primarily off the masculine tradition of adventure fiction. There are few women characters in his novels and stories, major or minor, and those who do appear are consistently flatter, more stereotypical, less fully realized than Conrad’s great masculine characters.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, the empowered maternal feminine is at the heart of Conrad’s invention of Modernism. In *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* (1897), in many ways Conrad’s first real step into the twentieth century (as Stein will describe “Melanctha” in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*), the dying black sailor James Wait is the figure of moral and narrative undecidability who pushes the text beyond the boundaries of realism. The rescue of Wait in the storm, which is at the center of this story, is figured very explicitly in childbirth imagery: “he [Wait] pressed his head to it [a hole in the bulkhead beneath which he is trapped in a tiny room], trying madly to get out through that opening one inch wide and three inches long” (p. 54; he is “crowning”).<sup>8</sup> Finally, after much struggle, “suddenly Jimmy’s head and shoulders appeared. He stuck halfway, and with rolling eyes foamed at our feet ... all at once he came away in our hands as though somebody had let go his legs. With the same movement, without a pause, we swung him



up. His breath whistled, he kicked our upturned faces” (p. 55).<sup>9</sup> The text as maternal womb gives birth to James Wait, the embodiment of the powerful, dark complexities of Modernism. As black and working class, he also embodies the central conflation in Modernist figuration of the maternal with the “darker” races and “lower” classes implied by the crucially symbolic positioning of the womb, darker and lower down (Irigaray brilliantly elaborates the masculinist Platonic parable of the cave as repudiated maternal womb in her *Speculum* chapter “Plato’s Hystera”). This conflation of erupting, newly empowered femininity, “darker” races and “lower classes,” precisely the conflation suggested by the political contiguity of socialism and feminism in turn-of-the-century radicalism, reappears throughout Modernist figuration.

In *Heart of Darkness*, it is Africa itself that becomes the undecidable locus of empowerment of the maternal feminine as racially and geographically darker and lower down (the birth sequence in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* occurs as the ship passes through a gale in the Cape of Good Hope, at the southern tip of Africa). Conrad’s figuration of Africa is rife with maternal imagery. The “dark continent” is notoriously a figural conflation of racial and female-maternal otherness for white western masculinity. In Conrad’s upriver journey into Modernism, the dark continent begins stereotypically as terrifying, death-dealing, devouring, the locus of illusion. But as Marlow gradually shifts his allegiance from the “civilized” (actually cruelly barbaric) European imperialism of “the Company” and its “faithless pilgrims,” to what becomes the “truth” of the African wilderness itself, the heart of moral darkness shifts in the text from Africa to Kurtz, embodiment of the monstrous failure of Europe’s “civilizing” mission. The deepest informing “truth” of the novella, a truth associated with the Modernist forms of Symbolism and the dream, and with the “unreliable” first-person narration that, more than anything else, marks this text as a founding work of Modernism, resides in the undecidable (at once deathly and empowering) maternal African jungle.

The racially “primitive” is also conflated with the empowered working-class feminine in Picasso’s iconic Modernist work *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J.)* of 1907. *Les Femmes d’Alger* is a painting of nude female bathers, prostitutes, whose nudity is explicitly sexualized; that sexuality is marked simultaneously by degradation and by accessibility to the male viewer/voyeur/customer. It is, for 1907, a radically stylized painting, not only in the harsh discord of its treatment of the women (a harshness that still now strikes the viewer powerfully), but in its invention of the vocabulary of Cubism: the overall composition organized by, and the contours of the figures broken into, angular geometric shapes, the three-dimensionality or depth illusion of traditional pictorial representation flattened, the figures radically stylized and distorted so as to seem splayed against the surface of the canvas, and the overtly nonrealistic conventions, influenced by African tribal masks, in the drawing of the faces.

*Les Femmes d’Alger* fuses the invention of these Modernist formal practices with representation of an empowered sexual femininity. The female bathers are degraded within dominant convention (nude prostitutes), but are transformed here by *Modernist*

*form*, including alliance with racial blackness as well as with the working class, into a powerful force, which, like Modernism in general, retains its great strength now. It was in the process of painting and repainting these women that Picasso invented his version of Modernist art. By means of that Modernist art, these women become awesome, frightening, magnificent, powerful figures. They are figures of Modernist art as the release into new form of the empowered sexual feminine; of the new form as release into representation of the power and terror of the sexual feminine; of the irresolvable ambiguity – the figures are just as hideous and distorted as they are powerful and riveting – of that femininity.

Feminist Modernist criticism had a great amount of work to do, in its initial phases, before this male Modernist ambivalence could become visible. In order to open a space for the study of gender and Modernism, it was necessary to contest and counteract a well-established New Critical tradition that both placed male Modernist writers at the center of a rigorously exclusive canon, and also celebrated those features of Modernist writing associated with masculinity: hardness, toughness, a terse, cerebral economy. This early phase of feminist Modernist criticism was therefore preoccupied primarily with establishing the importance of women Modernist writers, both by opening the canon to include them and by broadening our understanding of what constitutes Modernism so that it is not so exclusively defined by the valorization of formal as well as thematic characteristics (vast, unifying mythic themes) associated with masculinity. Most of the work done in this phase focused on women Modernists, both individually and as constructors of a separate women's tradition of Modernism. The attention feminist critics paid to male Modernists in this phase was on the whole negative, focused on delineating, in derogatory terms, their differences from women Modernists, and on claiming misogyny as the foundation of their Modernist practice.

Once the tradition of women's Modernist writing, and the importance of the major female Modernists, became better established, and concomitant developments in feminist theory enabled broader discussions of femininity and the feminine in literary texts, the kind of attention feminist critics paid to the male Modernists shifted. The focus changed from stark denunciations of misogyny to more complex, theoretically nuanced, historically oriented investigations of the contradictory presence of the feminine, in its variegated manifestations, in the writing of male Modernists. This shift also brought a decline in the emphasis on viewing male and female Modernists as members of divergent literary species, and a concomitant interest in seeing Modernism as a broadly diverse movement, crossing not only gender and national but also racial, class, and sexual boundaries. Current feminist Modernist criticism is just as likely to focus on questions of race, class, sexuality, and nation as on questions of gender. In any case, the interconnectedness in historical situation between male and female Modernists has become much more important than it was when the category "female Modernists" had not yet been established.

One of the key points of interconnection, again, is an irresolvable ambivalence, shared

by male and female Modernists, towards the threat/promise of revolutionary cultural and political change, embodied in the figure of the empowered feminine, at the turn of the century. The same ambivalence, differently inflected, characterizes the work of women Modernists as that which characterizes the work of the men. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, an originary work of feminist Modernism, the unnamed protagonist, trapped postpartum in a dungeon-like attic nursery by her domineering doctor-husband, projects – literally, writes – her unallowable desire for freedom, autonomy, and sexual fulfillment onto her wallpaper, only to divide the wallpaper against itself so that the figuration associated with freedom and empowerment becomes linked to an imprisoning masculinity. At the same time, femininity reveals itself as fully abjected – a creeping, skulking figure imprisoned behind the bars of the protagonist’s erstwhile hopeful desire. All the protagonist can do, by the end of the story, is tear down those “bars,” destroying the wallpaper, her own creation, and releasing the creeping woman she has become into full-blown madness. The story ends with the protagonist, having tied herself to the symbolically nailed-down marriage bed in her nursery prison chamber, crawling repeatedly around the perimeter of the room. She crawls over the prostrated, fainted body of her husband, who had all but imprisoned her in this room, but this is a pyrrhic victory, because her madness precludes any meaningful emancipation. The desire for freedom invents the Modernist wallpaper (Modernist in its heightened, dreamlike, shifting, and overdetermined uses of figuration); the fear of that desire destroys it.

Similar structures of desire for freedom in unresolved dialectic with fear of punishment inform other founding early Modernist works by women. In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier, like the *Yellow Wallpaper* protagonist, gains a pyrrhic victory over the strictures of her patriarchal marriage: her freedom “to swim far out where no woman has swum before” comes at the cost of her death. The complex oscillations in narrative point of view that make this a founding work of Modernism are very similar to Conrad’s in *Lord Jim* (1899–1900): both narratives oscillate undecidably between approval and disapproval of their protagonists. Conrad’s ambivalence (via Marlow) towards Jim reflects his ambivalence concerning the traditional western masculine code of honor, with its attendant modern nexus of imperialism and misogyny, which Jim first abrogates and then dies in order to uphold. For Chopin, each feminist assertion on Edna’s behalf is immediately countered by a fearful withdrawal of approval. This Modernist form is, therefore, directly produced, for both Conrad and Chopin, by irresolvable ambivalence towards what Perry Anderson calls the “revolutionary horizon” of the twentieth century: for Conrad, the possibility of the overthrow of traditional masculinity; for Chopin, the possibility of the emancipation of women.<sup>10</sup>

Gertrude Stein’s revolutionary “Melanctha” goes well beyond earlier fiction’s development of Modernist forms. Stein initiates, in all three parts of *Three Lives* but particularly in “Melanctha,” an unprecedented stylization of the prose surface. (The other two novellas are “The Good Anna,” written and placed first, and “The Gentle Lena,” written second but placed last. Both have working-class German immigrant protagonists.

The characters in “Melanctha” are all black.) Stein uses a flattened, reduced, simplified vocabulary, much the way Picasso and the Cubists, her collaborators in the production of Modernism, use a palette reduced to a few tones of gray and brown, in order to intensify the nuance and effect of slight variations of color and of the complex geometric shapings and light–dark modelings on which Cubism was founded. For Stein, this reduced vocabulary allows key, repeated words, phrases, and motifs to acquire an open-ended richness of accumulated meaning, that shifts and grows as the narrative develops, so that in reinventing familiar words and phrases, Stein, through formal means, defamiliarizes and reinvents the familiar or ordinary world.

Each of Stein’s key words or phrases increases in significance as it passes through successive contexts, as its familiar, everyday meanings are gradually replaced by a large complex or cluster of undefined meanings. There are many such thematically central words and phrases in “Melanctha”: “wisdom,” “understanding,” “experience,” “excitement,” being “quiet together.” “Wisdom” becomes emblematic of everything in life that is desirable but difficult to attain; “excitement” of everything that is alluring but dangerous. These are the unanchored, refunctioned words that Stein uses to describe the dangerous, powerful fascination of Melanctha’s working-class, black, sexually experimental unconventionality – the dangerous allure, that, precisely like James Wait’s for Conrad in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* led Stein to invent Modernism.

Stein’s reduced vocabulary is accompanied by an incantatory mode of repetition she called “insistence,” in order to distinguish it from mere mechanical reiteration. In “insistence,” repetition is never verbatim; rather, the narrative moves forwards in incremental shifts through what Stein called a “continuous present”: meaning is steadily reformulated in each present moment, with no reference to previous formulations, therefore inevitably repeating (because unaware of) them, though in modified form.

Jefferson Campbell, coprotagonist of “Melanctha,” is a transformation of the autobiographical protagonist of Stein’s earlier, formally conventional, lesbian novel *Q. E. D.* (1903), which she put away in a drawer; it was not published until after her death. Stein’s lesbianism, and her long-term relationship with Alice B. Toklas, were common knowledge among the large, famous, “charmed” circle of their avant-garde, bohemian, Modernist acquaintance in Paris and beyond, but no reference was made in print to this knowledge until after Alice B. Toklas’s death in 1967. *Q. E. D.* narrates the deadlocked erotic triangle Stein was involved in as a medical student at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

The white, upper-middle-class, highly educated Adele of the conventional realist novel *Q. E. D.*, virtually indistinguishable from Gertrude Stein, becomes, in the radical Modernist “Melanctha,” a heterosexual black male doctor. Jeff is bourgeois, restrained, “regular” in his habits where Melanctha is “reckless” and irregular, given to “wandering” in search of “wisdom.” The race and class of Melanctha enable Stein, as Wait’s race and class enable Conrad in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* simultaneously to undo her own

naturalist narrative (Melanctha as hapless victim of cruel societal circumstances beyond her control) and to explore dangerous thematic possibilities. Again, it is the conflation of nonwhite race and the working class, embodied in the undecidable (dangerous, fascinating) feminine, that produces Modernist form: it is in following her lesbian desire for Melanctha, and therefore for Melanctha's sexual and intellectual "wandering," that Stein is able to take her text out into its formal *terra incognita*.

Once there, Stein, for the next three decades, went further than any other twentieth-century writer in English (perhaps in any language) in reinventing literary language and form, undoing conventional, hierarchical, sense-making modes of signification – modes that privilege the signified over the signifier in a way that can be considered characteristically patriarchal – substituting, in diverse stylistic modes, a rich, complex, open-ended, antipatriarchal syntactical and semantic polysemy. Generally, Stein was one of the most prolific, important, and influential writers of this century, in any formal mode, with twenty-five books published in her lifetime and approximately the same number, including anthologies, published posthumously. However, until, in the past decade, feminist and postmodernist criticism began to take Stein's writing seriously, most studies of her were biographical, focusing on her influence on other writers and her life in the Parisian bohemian-Modernist art world rather than on this remarkable productivity, or on the unparalleled diversity and originality of her work.

Stein was well aware of what she was doing as a groundbreaking experimental writer; she was eminently a literary theorist as well as a practitioner. (She launched her intellectual life as a star pupil of William James at Harvard.) Her essays and extended meditations of the 1930s, theorizing the radical innovative writing she had done in the teens and twenties, do a great deal more than explain her own literary practice – they treat standard preoccupations of literary theory, such as definitions of genre, accounts of periodization, and literary nationality, as well as general philosophical-aesthetic questions of the nature of representation and of literary time. While Stein seldom deals directly with the question of gender in these essays, the unpretentiousness and whimsical informality of her style, and the simplicity of her diction, "do theory" in a way that is welcoming and suggestive for theoretically oriented feminists who find inimical the overbearing, obfuscating language of so much masculine theoretical discourse. At the same time, the quality and structures of her thought are profound, challenging, complex. As she says in "A Transatlantic Interview, 1946," one of the last of her pieces, "After all, my only thought is a complicated simplicity. I like a thing simple, but it must be simple through complication."

Stein was at the center of three major Modernist/avant-garde Parisian groups: the lesbian Left Bank documented by Shari Benstock; the bohemian Montmartre of Picasso and Modernist painting described by Stein herself in vivid detail in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1932); and the postwar scene of younger American expatriate Modernists, most notably Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Anderson, and Wilder, who sat at Stein's feet at 27 rue de Fleurus. But it was not until the avant-garde gained wider

currency as precursor of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and French feminism, and effected a general shift in our sense of the possible in literature, that the revolutionary character of Stein's work was rendered visible.

Fortunately, that is not the case for Virginia Woolf. Partly because of her key position in the "Bloomsbury Group," the nodal center of British Modernism, and partly because her fiction is at least superficially closer to recognizable convention than Stein's genre-bending experimentalism, Woolf's nine major novels; her two great works of feminist theory, *A Room of One's Own* (1928), and *Three Guineas* (1938); and her multivolume stories, essays, diaries, and letters, have long been readily available and widely read. Even when academic New Critical Modernism was virtually entirely white and male, as it was even into the late 1960s, when I was in college, Virginia Woolf was taught. She was not, however, taught in relation to questions of gender, except insofar as her femininity was a code or metonym for inferior status: her preoccupations were viewed as "domestic," "personal," "private," and therefore of lesser value and significance than the classical-mythical themes of the male Modernists; her writing, though clearly Modernist, was seen as lightweight, insubstantial compared to theirs. No writer, perhaps not even Charlotte Brontë, has benefited more from feminist criticism than Virginia Woolf. She has become, with solid justification, one of the great literary "mothers" we "think back through if we are women," as she herself said in *A Room of One's Own*.

Woolf revised the association of Modernism with masculinity by associating it with femininity instead. Her arguments for the subversiveness of Modernist form, its ability to penetrate and represent the underlying, multiplicitous truths of consciousness and psyche beneath the outward, unitary, coherent appearances of social, and realist fictional, convention, most notably in "Modern Fiction" (1919), and in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), as well as in *A Room of One's Own*, connect with Irigaray's linkage of repressed maternal femininity to the Freudian unconscious, and also with Stein's invention of antipatriarchal, polysemous literary and linguistic forms. Woolf's first novel, *A Voyage Out* displayed the failed attempt of its New-Woman-inspired heroine Rachel Vinrace to "voyage out" of Europe and beyond its patriarchal-imperialist gender relations. Rachel remains thwarted by the community's translation of heterosexual love into patriarchal marriage. But through the rest of her career, Woolf explored the formal possibility of a new representation that would release the subversiveness of a culturally suppressed and repressed femininity. At the same time, in ways that the New Critics miraculously entirely missed, Woolf wrote directly about the great social and political issues of the twentieth century. A socialist, she always aligned herself with democratic egalitarian hope, even if she was not always in control of the upper-middle-class British ideologies of her upbringing.

*A Room of One's Own* makes a materialist argument for financial freedom for women from dependence on the support and approval of men: women will not be able to achieve intellectual independence, thereby realizing their potential as writers, until they have that freedom. *A Room* also argues for a separate tradition of women's writing, a history and

future of literary forms and preoccupations particular to women's minds and bodies, and, at the same time, contradictorily, for the "androgyny" of great literature. *Three Guineas*, written in the shadow of Fascism and impending world war, makes a powerful case, with a burning but controlled rage, for egalitarian, antihierarchical femininity as antidote to the masculinism underlying Fascism and war as life modes. Women should not collaborate; women should form "societies of outsiders" to resist and reconfigure the militarist authoritarian state from within.

All of these preoccupations and motifs work in complex, interwoven ways throughout Woolf's major fiction. In novel after novel, Woolf's female and gender-ambiguous protagonists try to reform (literally, re-form) their worlds according to their enlightened ideas, their fidelity to the complex truths of their perceptions, and their connectedness to the culturally alternative truths of the psyche. At the same time, Woolf pushed fiction as far formally as any of the other major Modernists, using fragmentation; collage-like juxtaposition; densely poetic language; epistemological and therefore narrative multiplicity and indeterminacy; temporal dislocations; heavy reliance on symbolism, fluidity, and de-definition of characterization; and an utterly destabilizing, pervasive irony, to realize her vision of a transcendentally truth-revealing art – like all the Modernists, she saw art as the only remaining avenue to truth, meaning, value, and transcendence in the otherwise bankrupt twentieth century. Writing for Woolf could embody a subversive feminine consciousness by penetrating the mind of Mrs. Brown, the anonymous, humble, marginal everywoman, and showing how the world looks when viewed through her eyes.

Woolf was not alone in these ambitions. She was joined by a wide range of other women Modernists, many of whose works and even names have only recently been revived, made available, and studied by feminist criticism. A recent volume entitled *The Gender of Modernism* has chapters on (in addition to Stein and Woolf, and also Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, Hugh MacDiarmid, and Pound) the following, all of whom made vital contributions to Anglo-American Modernism: Djuna Barnes, Willa Cather, Nancy Cunard, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Jessie Redmon Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Mina Loy, Rose Macaulay, Katherine Mansfield, Charlotte Mew, Marianne Moore, Jean Rhys, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Rebecca West, Antonia White, Anna Wickham. It would be impossible to survey here, in any meaningful way, the major contributions, let alone the oeuvres, of such a large and diverse range of writers, or even of a few of the most important of them; I recommend *The Gender of Modernism* as an invaluable resource for further study of the richness of the legacy of Modernist writing by women.<sup>11</sup>

Instead, we might look closely at works by two of the most important writers in the above list: H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), one of the great poets of Modernism, and Zora Neale Hurston, novelist, anthropologist, and towering figure of the Harlem Renaissance. H. D.'s oeuvre includes the great, mythological-historical-political-visionary, late Modernist long poems *Trilogy* (1944–6), which is comprised of *The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute to the Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod*, and *Helen in Egypt* (1961). These poems are



premissed generally on a revisionary feminist mythology, and a utopian belief in, or prophecy of, a regeneration of the world based on the power of female creativity. Before she had, in the company of her lover and lifelong companion Bryher (the writer Winifred Ellerman; H. D., like Woolf, was bisexual) the revelatory post-World War I psychic-visionary experiences on which these poems were based, H. D. had been cofounder with Pound of Imagism (it was Pound who invented the pen name “H. D. Imagiste”). H. D.’s role in and version of Imagism stand in the same subversive relation to Poundian masculinism as do Woolf’s feminist-Modernist manifestos, *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*.

H. D.’s *Sea Garden* (1916), her first collection of poems, was a crucial Imagist book. “Sea Rose,” one of the best-known, most widely anthologized poems in that volume, is usually discussed in relation to its fulfillment of the Poundian dicta of Imagism: allowing images to do the poetic work of making meaning; also brevity and concision, “direct treatment” of the material, no inessential words, and rhythms based on musical phrasing rather than the regular, metronome beats of poetic tradition in English. “Sea Rose” is in fact also a powerful and radical work of feminist Modernism.

The title itself is jarring in its linkage of the small, perfect, fragile, traditional feminine beauty of which the rose is the most standard poetic representation, with the vast power of the sea. The poem opens with an even more jarring invocation:

Rose, harsh rose,  
marred and with stint of petals,  
meagre flower, thin,  
sparse of leaf

“Harsh” releases the rose of female sexuality from its imprisonment in a gentle, perfected beauty, allowing it its raw power, as does the title’s conjunction of “rose” with “sea.” “Marred” insists on the vitality of the rose’s *im*perfection, in a cultural tradition that links its perfection to its reification. “Marred” also insists on the poem’s rejection of the conventions of female beauty. “Stint,” “meagre,” “thin,” “sparse” all contradict the opulence, the concupiscent lushness, of conventional images of the rose. At the same time, subversive though they are, these adjectives do not cancel their own negative connotations. Rejection of gender stereotype always comes at a cost. (One thinks of Woolf’s “puckered-up” Lily Briscoe of *To the Lighthouse*, whose name enacts a similar association of a flower with the “brisk” – very close to “crisp” – that is her nickname.)

The second stanza makes the speaker’s polemic position clear:

more precious  
than a wet rose  
single on a stem –  
you are caught in the drift.

This harsh, marred, meagre sea rose is “more precious / than a wet rose / single on a stem” – not only the conventional rose, but the sexually available flower perched on the phallic stem. The sea rose, unlike the stem’s single monogamous possession, is “caught in the drift”: the power of the maternal ocean, of the urban crowds of modernity, of Modernist sea-change itself. Again, while it is better to be caught in the drift than to be single on a stem, the negative connotations of “caught in the drift” are allowed to stand, in this Modernist poem of irresolvable ambivalence towards the feminist-Modernist “revolutionary horizon.”

In the final stanza, the sexuality of the sea rose itself is redeemed and made superior to that of the “wet rose / single on a stem”:

Can the spice-rose  
drip such acrid fragrance  
hardened in a leaf?

The “spice-rose” may or may not be equivalent to that wet rose, single on a stem, but it is certainly suggestive of the rose’s sexuality, here seemingly released (“drip”) by its association with the sea rose. But the sea rose itself is superior to the “spice-rose” in the dripping (manifest) acridness of its fragrance: a wonderfully ambiguous choice of adjectives for the sea rose’s sexuality, clearly presented as desirable by the syntax of the sentence, but nonetheless carrying negative connotations. The “hardened” “leaf” reminds us again of the sea rose’s empowered difference from the soft rose petals of feminine subservience.

Two decades later and in another country, Zora Neale Hurston published her greatest novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) (her other novels are *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* [1934], *Moses, Man of the Mountain* [1939], and *Seraph on the Suwanee* [1948]; she also wrote the autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* [1942], and the anthropological works on African-American and Caribbean folklore, *Mules and Men* [1935], and *Tell My Horse* [1938]). *Their Eyes*, while affirming the autonomy and strength of black culture in general, of black women in particular, and of the feminine narrative voice, in the face of murderous racism and sexism, refuses, in its Modernist complexity – its undecidable ambivalence towards radical egalitarian change – to choose black conclusively over white, or female over male.

In the courtroom scene that is the climax of the novel, Janey, the protagonist, who is on trial for shooting her literally rabid lover, Tea Cake, is surrounded by a sympathetic group of white women, protected from the black men who, in an eruption of male bonding, despise her for shooting Tea Cake in self-defense, insisting on believing her guilty of murder: “And the white women cried and stood around her like a protecting wall and the Negroes, with heads hung down, shuffled out and away” (pp. 279–80).<sup>12</sup>

The painful implications of this scene (particularly evident in the bowed heads and

shuffling) are quickly undercut. The narrator, Janey's surrogate in this free-indirect narrative, provides Janey with a rationalization of the behavior of Tea Cake's friends – "she knew it was because they loved Tea Cake and didn't understand" (p. 281) – and in fact it turns out they do understand. It is Janey who makes the first gesture of reconciliation, but the men relent easily and apologize to her, drawing her back within the warm circle of black community at Tea Cake's funeral.

That circle is not always a reliable defense against racism, however, any more than either Tea Cake's relatively egalitarian love for Janey, or Janey's nurturing friendships with other women (her closeness to Pheoby Watson – "'mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf'" (p. 17) – is the narrative's condition of possibility), are a reliable defense against sexism. Earlier in the novel, Tea Cake beats Janey in a fit of jealousy of Mrs. Turner's brother. Janey is innocent. Mrs. Turner is a racist, light-skinned black woman who identifies with whites and hates Tea Cake for his dark skin. Mrs. Turner's racism, which Hurston develops in episodes of her attempts at sisterly bonding with Janey, is repellent, but Tea Cake's violently macho response to it is equally so, to the reader if not (consciously) to Janey. Tea Cake's friends come to blame his death on Mrs. Turner's brother, and Janey, on the witness stand, says "Tea Cake couldn't come back to himself until he had got rid of that mad dog that was in him and he couldn't get rid of the dog and live. He had to die to get rid of the dog" (p. 278). Tea Cake literally has rabies, having been bitten by a mad dog, and he is trying to kill Janey when she shoots him in self-defense. He dies with his teeth buried in her forearm. But the "mad dog" is also symbolic, I would argue, of Tea Cake's violent response to his unfounded jealousy, and his death is a (rather extreme) punishment for it.

Tea Cake is certainly better than Janey's other, oppressive husbands, and is as close as any male character in this novel to being the "New Man" suitable for the New Woman. But even Tea Cake cannot kill that very strong patriarchal dog before it manages to bite him fatally. The new order of empowered femininity both preserves women like Mrs. Turner and still carries on its back that rabid dog.

Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), ends as the New Woman and Modernist artist Lily Briscoe finishes her painting, with a "line there, in the centre" (p. 310).<sup>13</sup> The closing "line" of Lily's, and the novel's, final "vision" is a line of simultaneous separation and union: separation and union of the (devastated/freed) postwar Modernist present and the (murderous/fructifying) Victorian-Edwardian realist past; separation and union of disillusioned but freer adulthood and idealized but oppressed childhood; separation and union of empowered/enchained, inspiring/inhibiting Victorian mother, Mrs. Ramsay, and cramped/autonomous Modernist daughter, Lily; separation and union of tyrannical/visionary patriarchal male, Mr. Ramsay, and fecund/murdered patriarchal female, Mrs. Ramsay.

It would be impossible, and a serious distortion of the text, to claim that Woolf resolves any of those myriad interconnected gendered dualisms in favor of one term over

the other. Instead, the text represents more clearly perhaps than any other the Modernist moment of unresolved contradiction, unsynthesized dialectic: of dualism that seeks neither unitary resolution in the dominance of one term over the other or in the third term of dialectical synthesis, but rather the two-way passage, difference without hierarchy.

Feminist Modernist criticism has in many ways achieved greater success than its practitioners would have thought possible when we began this work. The tradition of women's Modernist writing is established, not just as separate and (at least) equal, but also as a crucial part of the complex, multifaceted historical phenomenon of Modernism. Writers such as Woolf, Richardson, Mansfield, West, Rhys, Gilman, Chopin, Stein, Cather, H. D., Moore, Larsen, Hurston, and Barnes are widely read, taught, and written about; their work is not only taken seriously but also admired. Scores of less well-known women Modernists are also being rediscovered, reissued, and generally given their critical due.

Moreover, it is no longer necessary to think exclusively about women in the feminist study of gender and Modernism. Questions of sexuality, of masculinity in dialectic with femininity, as well as of male and female writers, are regularly raised now along with a range of historical and theoretical questions relating to race, ethnicity, class, nation, location, and empire. But those critics attuned to the quarter-century history of feminist work on Modernism remain committed to the importance of keeping both women writers, and the related questions of woman and the feminine, centrally in view.

## Notes

**1** For Lukács's argument, and various Marxist responses to it, see Perry Anderson, Rodney Livingstone, and Francis Mulhern, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977). For an extended discussion of Lukács's relation to Modernism, see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

**2** Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: A Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 34–7; Malcolm Bradbury and Robert McFarlane, *Modernism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 24–5.

**3** Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," in *Gaudier-Brzeska* (1916); reprinted in Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, eds., *The Modern Tradition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 145–52.

- 4 Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 9.
- 5 Henry James, "The Future of the Novel," (1899), reprinted in William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin, eds., *The Act of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and the Practice of Fiction* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 242–55.
- 6 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985). For Irigaray, and other Lacanian psychoanalytic feminist theorists, "the feminine," "the maternal," and "the maternal feminine" denote large, powerful psychic and cultural positions and formations that are not equated with, or exclusively assigned to, actual women or mothers.
- 7 See Thomas Moser, *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), for an analysis of heterosexuality as Conrad's "uncongenial subject."
- 8 Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* in *Three Great Tales* (New York: Vintage/Random House, n.d.).
- 9 See Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (York: Atheneum, 1970): "The actual rescue is presented as a difficult childbirth" (p. 112).
- 10 See Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," *New Left Review* 144 (March/April, 1984): 96–113.
- 11 *The Gender of Modernism*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- 12 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978).
- 13 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1927).







## 10 Musical motives in Modernism

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Daniel Albright

A scientific event removed one of the most important obstacles from my path. This was the further division of the atom. The collapse of the atom was equated, in my soul, with the collapse of the whole world. Suddenly, the stoutest walls crumbled. Everything became uncertain, precarious and insubstantial. I would not have been surprised had a stone dissolved into thin air before my eyes and become invisible.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing more enabling or more disabling than total lack of support: you fall or you fly. The artists of the beginning of the twentieth century found themselves in a state of uncomfortable freedom; and if no one would legislate for them, they had to make their own laws. The painter Vassili Kandinsky, one of the founders of abstract painting (and the author of the epigraph above), was fond of citing the Dostoevskian phrase “Everything is permitted”<sup>2</sup> – he felt that, when the discipline of the representable form has vanished, painters have to seek discipline elsewhere. Again and again Kandinsky fretted about a lack of grammar in the art of painting, and envied the art of music for having a set of reliable procedures, “its own grammar, which, like all living things, changes.”<sup>3</sup>

To supply the missing grammar, Kandinsky looked to the rudiments of the medium itself for counsel. He first sought a grammar in pigment, in the way that yellow bulges out of the picture-plane, while blue burrows in; he even considered that a given pigment can itself create the forms most suited to it: “sharp colors have a stronger sound in sharp forms (e.g. yellow in a triangle). The effect of deeper colors is emphasized by rounded forms (e.g. blue in a circle).”<sup>4</sup> But in later life Kandinsky sought a grammar, not in the rudiments of painting, but in the rudiments of drawing: in his book *Point and Line to Plane* (1926) he generates the whole of visual art from a meditation on the concept of point: a point pushed by a single force is a straight line; a point pushed by two simultaneous forces is a curved line; a point pushed by two alternating forces is a zigzag line.<sup>5</sup> A (nonrepresentational) picture, then, is an impulse-diagram of the various energies operating upon a point. From an infinitesimal, immaterial, mathematical fiction – a point – the whole art could be deduced.

But Kandinsky considered that the point was the basis of *all* art, not just the art of painting. He is fascinated by the possible roles of the period in determining the meaning of the sentence:

Today I am going to the cinema.

Today I am going. To the cinema.  
Today I. Am going to the cinema.  
Today I am going to the cinema

!

The point first gives emphasis – point – to various components of the sentence; then it wrenches itself “free from its habitual state ... from the tyranny of the practical-purposive,”<sup>6</sup> into the world of painting. Perhaps all aspects of language would like to be liberated from the tyranny of the practical-purposive, and enter into a world of pure emphasis – just as the Futurist Marinetti dreamed of a text that was mostly punctuation, !!...?#(×+ #)...(

Kandinsky goes on to describe the point as the basis of architecture (his example is the tapering-to-nothing of the gothic arch or the pagoda’s roof-curve), and the basis of dance (he makes much of the term *en pointe*), and the basis of music (he provides a remarkable translation into point-graphic of the opening of Beethoven’s Fifth).<sup>7</sup> I take it that, in a world in which the unsplittable atom had been at last split, Kandinsky was seeking for a subatomic particle, as if the point were art’s electron. In the general syntaxlessness of the Modern, Kandinsky sought something irrefutable, something capable of generating structure through its own wanderings. At the same moment when Kandinsky was working on the problem of point and line, Paul Klee, at the Bauhaus, was writing his *Pedagogical Sketchbook* (1925), which begins with a little picture of a point going for a walk, out of which a whole poetics of the visual is built up.

Others were approaching the problem of a liberated grammar from different angles. When he read the notes of the American sinologist Ernest Fenollosa (d. 1908), Ezra Pound was excited by the notion of a language with no grammar except the huge rough transitivity of the physical world. Fenollosa taught that a Chinese ideogram could be interchangeably a verb (for example, *to shine*), a noun (*sun*), or an adjective (*bright*).<sup>8</sup> To Fenollosa, this indifference of the Chinese language with respect to parts of speech mirrored the condition of nature itself, since nature has no parts of speech, and in nature “all truth is the *transference of force*” (italics in original)<sup>9</sup> – a farmer and his rice are simply the termini of the act of pounding.

... no full sentence really completes a thought ... The truth is that acts are successive, even continuous; one causes or passes into another. And though we may string ever so many clauses into a single compound sentence, motion leaks everywhere, like electricity from an exposed wire. All processes in nature are interrelated; and thus there could be no complete sentence (according to this definition) save one which it would take all time to pronounce.<sup>10</sup>

For Kandinsky, the sentence “Today I am going to the cinema” can be pointed in any number of different ways – to read it with varying stresses is to play a game with a bouncing ball. For Fenollosa and Pound, the sentence “Farmer pounds rice” can be read indifferently as a two nouns and a verb, or as three verbs, since the assignment of one term or another to a certain part of speech is arbitrary. Language is moving outside the domain of the dictionary and the grammar-book and into a domain of force-vectors. Mass has turned out to be energy.

If there is an equivalent to Kandinsky’s *point* in Pound’s poetics, it is *image*. Imagism can be understood as a search for an elementary poetic particle, something like an ideogram in the stunned, lamed, syntax-ridden English language. It could not be quite so concentrated and singular as a point or an ideogram, but it could have something of their toughness, irreducibility. “The Image is the poet’s pigment,” Pound claimed,<sup>11</sup> but it might be better to say that the Image is the poet’s pattern-unit: the tersest formula that will convey the equivalence of (say) a line of faces on a subway platform and a petaled branch:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

(“In a Station of the Metro”)

Pound compared this poem to Kandinsky’s nonrepresentational painting, and described this “*hokku*” (haiku) as the reduction-limit of a much longer poem;<sup>12</sup> its Asiatic sparseness does have an ideogrammic feel. It is not literally ungrammatical, but the two parts are abutted against each other without any coordinating or subordinating conjunctions. The two lines are not so much connected as superimposed, as a painter might superimpose one form on top on another to reveal a hidden likeness.

Pound was not only a poet but a composer and a professional music critic; when he heard music, he looked for the acoustic equivalent of point, ideogram, image:

Stravinsky’s merit lies very largely in taking hard bits of rhythm, and noting [i.e., notating] them with great care.<sup>13</sup>

[Antheil’s third violin sonata] thinks in time’s razor edge ... It means that, via Stravinsky and Antheil ... we are brought to a closer conception of time, to a faster beat, to a closer realisation or, shall we say, “decomposition” of the musical atom.

The mind, even the musician’s mind, is conditioned by contemporary things, our minimum, in a time when the old atom is “bombarded” by electricity, when chemical atoms and elements are more strictly considered, is no longer the minimum of the sixteenth century pre-chemists.<sup>14</sup>

[Antheil] was imperfectly schooled, in music, in letters, in all things, but he nevertheless did once demand bits of solidity, he demanded short hard bits of

rhythm hammered down, worn down so that they were indestructible and unbendable.<sup>15</sup>

Kandinsky decomposed the heavy, thick forms of representational art until nothing was left but a motile point; Pound decomposed the tick-tock meters and florid themes of the old poesy until nothing was left but an image; Stravinsky and the impulsive New Jersey Modernist George Antheil decomposed the sonata, the rondo, the aria, until nothing was left but a sort of rivet of rhythm. Pound believed that rhythm was the basis of all things in music: an audible pitch is nothing but a rhythm so fast that it is measured in cycles per second instead of beats per minute; and Pound thought that a whole musical composition could be generated from a hard bit of rhythm, just as Kandinsky thought that a painting could be generated from the overland travels of a point.

In the early 1910s, when Kandinsky was formulating his ideas about abstract painting, he responded with the greatest excitement to the music and the paintings of Arnold Schoenberg, and for a while the two men worked closely together. And just as Kandinsky had to seek some fundamental of his art after overthrowing the old rules, so Schoenberg had to seek a similar fundamental after overthrowing the rules of consonance and dissonance: “Dissonances ... are nothing more than remoter consonances,” as Schoenberg announced on a poster advertising a 1911 concert.<sup>16</sup> He also abolished the rules of large-scale structure: when Richard Strauss refused to conduct Schoenberg’s *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, Schoenberg told Strauss that the pieces had no architecture, no structure, nothing but an eternally changing succession of moods.<sup>17</sup> (Strauss was not mollified, and later said that Schoenberg needed psychiatric help and would better use his time by shoveling snow than by filling music paper with notes.) As always, when syntax is destroyed, all the burden of meaning tends to fall on small individual elements.

What is the elementary particle of music? Schoenberg experimented with various names: *germ*, *Gestalt*, *cell*, even *bit*: “An extremely small bit can be blue, sweet, or sharp, and can share all three characteristics.”<sup>18</sup> But he eventually settled on the term *motive*:

!! A motive is something that gives rise to a motion ... *A thing is termed a motive if it is already subject to the effect of a driving force, has already received its impulse, and is on the verge of reacting to it.* It is comparable to a sphere on an inclined plane at the moment before it rolls away; to a fertilized seed; to an arm raised to strike ... even *the smallest musical event* can be a motive; if permitted to have an effect, even an individual tone can carry consequences.<sup>19</sup>

Though a single note, in special circumstances (Schoenberg cited a passage in Beethoven’s Op. 59/1), might be a motive, for the most part a motive has to have a

certain rhythmic and intervallic push to it. Just as in Pound's poetics a single word is never an *image*, so it is difficult for a single note to be a *motive*. But Schoenberg's thinking differs from Kandinsky's or Pound's in its greater bloodthirstiness: a motive is like an arm about to smite; and elsewhere Schoenberg compared the search for the heart of a musical composition to the cannibal who "devours the heart of his victim first, because ... he has faith that by doing so he can add the strength, courage, and virtues of his victims to his own powers."<sup>20</sup> It is as if Schoenberg, in trying to isolate the fundamental entity of music itself, devised a little drama of slaughter and sacrifice – a drama not wholly unlike the plots of his operas.

In his stage music Schoenberg sought the sound-keys that induced the listener to convulsions of the brain. As the musicologist Theodor Adorno brilliantly put it,

The first atonal works are session-notes in the sense of a psychoanalyst's session-notes on a patient's dreams. In the first book published on Schoenberg,<sup>21</sup> Kandinsky called Schoenberg's paintings brain-acts [*Gehirnakte*]. The scars of that revolution of expression, however, are the blots which have fixed themselves, in the music as well as on the paintings, as the messengers of the id against the composer's will – blots that disturb the surface and can no more be wiped away by subsequent correction than the traces of blood in the fairy tale.<sup>22</sup>

Adorno was particularly struck by Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (*Expectation*, 1909), an opera for one singer, a madwoman who, stumbling through a forest, comes across the corpse of the faithless lover whom she may have murdered; but it is equally possible that all is hallucination – the corpse, the lover, the forest, the woman herself. Adorno felt that the disturbances in the woman's brain – the electrical stimulations that produce slow dread, quick horror, epileptic fury – found an exact embodiment in the music: the music was not an image of feeling, but feeling itself, made audible. The absence of a tonic note corresponded to the absence of conscious mental control; the forbidden intervals in the chords and melodies corresponded to the naked confrontation with taboo; the emancipation of dissonance corresponded to a filling out of the full spectrum of human emotion. The text of *Erwartung*, a tissue of ellipsis like the free association of a psychoanalyst's patient, was written by a medical student, Marie Pappenheim, a relative of the woman known to history as "Anna O.," the hysteric whom Breuer and Freud described in a famous case history. And *Erwartung* can be understood as a prolonged teasing-out of music's id, the huge shifting sound-blot that lurks under all the rules and regulations that govern polite discourse.

Schoenberg, Kandinsky, Yeats, and other Modernists were attracted to theosophical mysticism, the doctrine that the universe consists of a series of graduated emanations from spirit down to matter. Mystics of this sort are often synesthetes – that is, they promote the idea that the agitation of one sense organ creates resonances in other sense

organs: spiritual intensities aren't addressed specifically to ear or eye or nose or skin or tongue, but set all in motion at once. The only way of indicating a beauty beyond the range of the senses is to illustrate the effect of the artwork on the "wrong" sense organ. And the farther from the material world you get, the less dependent you are on the material medium: the synesthete may dream of an artwork utterly independent of matter, more like telepathy or pentecostal fire than like an object of clay or pigment or sound. As the work of art contracts, loses temporal duration and spatial extension, it approximates immateriality more exactly.

Synesthetic imagery was common in the Symbolist poetry of the mid-to-late nineteenth century: Baudelaire wrote of perfumes cool as child's flesh, sweet as oboes, green as meadows; Rimbaud linked vowels to colors – A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue. This phenomenon, called *audition colorée*, isn't rare; a friend of Pound's, Katherine Ruth Heyman, claimed that the note E natural was colored chrome green, and had the flavor of chicken liver.<sup>23</sup>

Kandinsky, as it happened, was an incomparably gifted synesthete – he could scarcely describe a painting without hearing a sort of orchestra in the background: "The pitch of the different instruments corresponds to the breadth of a line: violin, flute, and piccolo produce a very thin line, viola and clarinet a somewhat thicker one."<sup>24</sup> If Kandinsky heard paintings, Schoenberg saw music. At the climax of Schoenberg's second opera, *Die glückliche Hand* (*The Lucky Touch*, 1912), the artist-hero raises his hammer and strikes an anvil: this act is accompanied by a "light-crescendo. It begins with dull red light (from above) that turns to brown and then a dirty green. Next it changes to a dark blue-gray, followed by violet. This grows, in turn, into an intense dark red which becomes ever brighter and more glaring."<sup>25</sup> At the moment of the hammer-blow, the orchestra plays a chord that contains all twelve notes of the chromatic scale at once, a chord that represents a sort of ultimate of expression. Richard Wagner wrote that every finite expression of emotion is a weakening or dilution of some primal pan-expressive act – a scream, a lullaby, an expression of pious devotion, a tender cooing of lovers – all are simply shadings-down of a shriek.<sup>26</sup> The nine-note chord in the adagio of Gustav Mahler's Tenth Symphony, or the twelve-note chord in *Die glückliche Hand*, is an acoustic representation of the primal scream, Edvard Munch's *Scream*. It may be that this huge simulacrum of white noise is the goal – the "point" – of atonal music.

But all this synesthesia, this dazzling of the ear's eye, met resistance in some quarters. Richard Strauss complained, concerning Schoenberg's *Five Pieces*, that "*his music more and more approaches the condition of modern painting!*"<sup>27</sup> Pound complained that there was something meretricious, self-defeating, about Debussy's eye-music:

When Debussy was new to us, those of us who "heard" him at all found in the "Sunken Cathedral" [*Préludes* 1.10], in "Sails" [*Préludes* 1.2], in "Gold Fish" [*Images* 2.3], in the "Granada" [*Estampes* 2] ... suggestion of colors, suggestion of



visions ... And this visionary world was a delight. By his very titles it was hinted to us that the composer wished to suggest scenes and visions and objects, and, to a great extent, he succeeded. He succeeded, I do not wish to be paradoxical, in writing music for the eye, with the result [that] ... the effect of his music diminishes on repeated hearing.<sup>28</sup>

Debussy's music is not atonal, but it is sometimes asyntactic (just as much of Pound's own *Cantos* is asyntactic). Debussy advised composers to pay no attention to the pre-existing laws of musical structure:

Musicians listen only to the music written by cunning hands, never to that which is in nature's script. To see the sun rise is more profitable than to hear the *Pastoral Symphony*.<sup>29</sup> What is the use of your almost incomprehensible art? Ought you not to suppress all the parasitical complexities which make music as ingenious as the lock of a strong-box? ... Discipline must be sought in freedom, and not within the formulas of an outworn philosophy only fit for the feeble-minded. Give ear to no man's counsel; but listen to the wind which tells in passing the history of the world.<sup>30</sup>

But as soon as a sense of musical consequence, the pull towards the tonic note, vanishes, then music starts to feel pictorial. Debussy hoped to write music that moved like the wind or the waves; but to many ears the result was flat, filmy, a *raffiné* sound-portrait of nature. Debussy perhaps invited this, by publishing on the cover to the score to *La Mer* (*The Sea*, 1905) Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, with its crisped and curled, fretted waves. By trying to liberate art from artifice, Debussy succeeded in writing music that sounded exceptionally artificial.

Pound felt that pictorialism in music was fascinating, but futile; the implacable Adorno, however, thought that pictorialism in music was treason. Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1948) is divided into two halves: praise of Schoenberg and rage against Stravinsky. Adorno understood Stravinsky as the source of most of the twentieth century's musical vice: he called Stravinsky an acrobat, a civil servant, a tailor's dummy, hebephrenic, psychotic, infantile, fascistic, and devoted to making money. Adorno considered that much of Stravinsky's depravity comes from his essentially pictorial method of writing music: any composer who used models from the visual arts was perverse and destructive.

But Stravinsky's reliance on pictorial method was different from Schoenberg's or Debussy's. Debussy was a self-conscious painter in sound; even Schoenberg's *Five Pieces* bore such evocative titles as "Morning by the Lake." But Stravinsky had little interest in expressive atmospherics; indeed his autobiography famously declares,



I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc. ... *Expression* has never been an inherent property of music. That is by no means the purpose of its existence. If, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion and not a reality. It is simply an additional attribute which, by tacit and inveterate agreement, we have lent it, thrust upon it, as a label, a convention – in short, an aspect unconsciously or by force of habit, we have come to confuse with its essential being.<sup>31</sup>

It would seem that screaming had nothing to do with the aesthetic of the dry, urbane Stravinsky – except that he was in fact quite expert in musical convulsions representing expressive extremes, such as the sacrifice of the Chosen One at the end of his pagan ballet *The Rite of Spring* (1913) or the dismemberment scene in *Orpheus* (1948). Still, tone-painting is indeed far from Stravinsky's usual aesthetic, and landscape is all but unknown in his work. Stravinsky's visualness is not that of oil painting but of *découpage*: like the elderly Matisse, patiently cutting out stelliform and amoeboid shapes and gluing them onto a background, Stravinsky seemed to array music-chunks against one another without modulation, buffering, or transition. As Adorno put it, "the spatialization of music is witness to a pseudomorphosis of music to painting, on the innermost level an abdication"; "The trick that defines all of Stravinsky's organizations of form: to let time stand in, as in a circus tableau, and to present time complexes as if spatial – this trick wears off. It loses its power over the consciousness of duration."<sup>32</sup> "Pseudomorphosis" is Adorno's word for the importation into one medium of structural principles of an alien medium: as far as Adorno was concerned, Stravinsky had crippled his art by trading the syntax of music – propulsive, dynamic, forward-moving – for the syntax of visual art – immobile, juxtapositive.

For many Modernists, pseudomorphosis was exhilarating, a liberation from the bondage of old procedures – we need not agree with Adorno that it is evil. But there is indeed something disturbing about Stravinsky's continuity-technique. After the Great War, Stravinsky turned from the opulent ballets that had made his reputation – *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring* – to a much soberer, sparer art, often strongly reminiscent of eighteenth-century music; this new art came to be called Neoclassicism, and Stravinsky claimed that his *Pulcinella* (1919), based on music ascribed to Pergolesi (1710–36), was the very first specimen of this new movement. Soon baroque chugging and clattering and huffing were to be heard everywhere, in music by Paul Hindemith, Ernest Bloch, and many others; but Stravinsky's special expertise lay in his ability to make archaic syntax sound wrong – less baroque than "Baroque," estranged, in quotation-marks. In the *Vivo* movement from *Pulcinella*, for example, he took a simple melodic line from a Pergolesi cello sonata, and divided it between a trombone and a double bass, chopping it up in a manner like that of Cubist painting. The English composer Constant Lambert, who disliked Neoclassicism, once tried to render the

twisted syntax of Stravinsky's Piano Concerto by writing a speech organized according to Stravinskian logic: "Ladies and gentle ladies and gentlemen-unmissionaries unaccustomed as I am to a Siamese customary una-menu-mina-mo ('alf a mo' ladies) to a ladies' public bar and gentlemen's speak-easy I mean to easy public speak I-N-G spells ING."<sup>33</sup> Lambert compared this to Gertrude Stein's prose style – he may well be right in comparing Stravinsky to Stein, but this might be understood as praise by those who find Stein's syntactical experiments exciting. One variant of Modernist syntaxlessness is Modernist false syntax, syntax alienated from the material it contains. False syntax would become one of the key factors of the Surrealist movement: for example, the bad horizons, the awry perspective lines of Salvador Dalí.

To consider Stein and Stravinsky at the same time is to remember that Stravinsky, though younger than Stein, came first: *The Rite of Spring* (1913) precedes *Tender Buttons* (1914). Through most of European history, music was the belated art: in romanticism, for example, Schubert and Schumann begin at roughly the moment when Byron dies. But in Modernism, music is the vanguard art. Schoenberg's first experiments with atonality (1907–8) precede the significant breakthroughs of Picasso, Joyce, Pound, Proust. Among the great Modernists, only Einstein raised his hand before Schoenberg: and Schoenberg's project is oddly complementary to Einstein's, in that Schoenberg abolished the middle C of tonality from the art of music, whereas Einstein fixed another *c*, the speed of light, as the one invariant in a relativistic universe.

The Modernist poets paid unusual homage to composers. In 1925 T. S. Eliot wrote *The Hollow Men* ("We are the stuffed men ... Headpiece filled with straw") partly in response to the eerie energy of the marionette in Stravinsky's 1911 ballet *Petrushka*,<sup>34</sup> and when Eliot in 1921 heard *The Rite of Spring*, his description makes it clear that he heard the ballet as a direct precursor of *The Waste Land*: the music seemed to "transform the rhythm of the steppes into the scream of the motor-horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the other barbaric noises of modern life."<sup>35</sup> Others were equally boggled by Stravinsky. Edith Sitwell wrote of *Petrushka* as a turning point: "this ballet, alone among them all, shatters our glass house about our ears ... The music, harsh, crackling rags of laughter, shrieks at us like some brightly-painted Punch and Judy show."<sup>36</sup> Sitwell's *Façade* poems (1922) were intended as pseudomorphoses of music into poetry: "The poems in *Façade* are *abstract* poems – that is, they are patterns in sound. They are ... virtuoso exercises in technique of extreme difficulty, in the same sense as that in which certain studies by Liszt are studies in transcendental technique in music."<sup>37</sup> But I hear in them little Liszt and much Stravinsky – the jazzy, raggy, slangy, tangy, tangoey, postwar Stravinsky of *The Soldier's Tale*:

Queen Victoria sitting shocked upon the rocking horse  
Of a wave said to the Laureate, "This minx of course

Is as sharp as any lynx and blacker-deeper than the drinks and quite as  
Hot as any hottentot, without remorse!  
For the minx,”  
Said she,  
“And the drinks,  
You can see  
Are hot as any hottentot and not the goods for me!”<sup>38</sup>

When William Walton set some of these poems as recitations to music – arch, nonchalant, too-too-Stravinskian music – he was only returning to music a group of poems that had sprung from music. Perhaps the climax of Stravinskiolatry came in a 1947 letter that W. H. Auden sent to Stravinsky concerning their proposed opera, *The Rake's Progress*: “I need hardly say that the chance of working with you is the greatest honor of my life.”<sup>39</sup> It is impossible to imagine a poet of Auden's stature writing such a sentence to any composer earlier in European history.

There are many other Modernist musics than those described in this chapter. But perhaps it is good to begin with the canons of Schoenberg and Stravinsky – the composers whom Robert Craft called the twin popes of music. Then: Charles Ives's experiments with deep multiplanar psychoacoustics; Alois Hába's microtonalism, severing the semitone – the normal minimum interval of European music – into quarter-tones and sixth-tones; Luigi Russolo's construction of black-box *intonarumori* (noisemakers), such as howlers, rumblers, cracklers, gurglers, hissers, and his propounding of a theory of the art of noises; the Dada music of Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp; Erik Satie's way of devising a taciturnity as aggressive as any scream of Schoenberg's – all these adventures will give pleasure to those with a mind to investigate them. Just as the atom gave way and left us ghosts in a ghost-world, so the basic elements of music gave way and left us with *glissandi*, microtones, thumpings, faint stridulations, the noise of hell to some ears, the noise of heaven to others.

*Erwartung* is a succession of disturbing chords, full of major sevenths and other intervals forbidden by the rules of tonality; and these chords are devised and connected not by an intelligible harmonic procedure but by pure intuition. There is scarcely even the ghost of syntax. Schoenberg intended his opera as evidence that clock time and the time-scheme of the unconscious mind have nothing to do with one another: “In *Erwartung* the aim is to represent in *slow motion* everything that occurs during a single second of maximum spiritual excitement, stretching it out to half an hour”;<sup>40</sup> furthermore, he praised the *Six Bagatelles* (each only a few seconds long) of his pupil Anton Webern by saying, “Think what self-denial it takes to cut a long story so short ... To convey a novel through a single gesture, or felicity by a single catch of the breath: such concentration ...”<sup>41</sup> A musical composition, even one thirty minutes long, seems to dwindle to the

condition of a single point. There is something a little menacing about this Modernist punctualism: in Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus*, the devil tells the composer hero (who combines traits of Schoenberg and Nietzsche) that all production threatens to come to a stop: if art denies its character as pretense and play, if art seeks to be devastating, *real*, the only end can be creative impotence: "the self-contained work ... shrinks in time, it scorns extension in time."<sup>42</sup> Pound's Imagism also seemed on the brink of making a poem contract to zero: the eliminating of every superfluous element always raises the possibility that *every* element is finally superfluous.

## Notes

**1** Vassili Kandinsky, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1994), p. 364.

**2** E.g., *ibid.*, p. 241.

**3** *Ibid.*, p. 197.

**4** *Ibid.*, p. 163.

**5** *Ibid.*, p. 584.

**6** *Ibid.*, p. 540.

**7** *Ibid.*, p. 560.

**8** Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1969), p. 18.

**9** *Ibid.*, p. 12.

**10** *Ibid.*, p. 11.

**11** Harriet Zinnes, ed., *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts* (New York: New Directions,

1980), p. 202.

**12** *Ibid.*, p. 205.

**13** R. Murray Schafer, ed., *Ezra Pound and Music* (New York: New Directions, 1977), p. 258.

**14** *Ibid.*, p. 316.

**15** Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970), pp. 94–5.

**16** Arnold Schoenberg and Vassili Kandinsky, *Arnold Schoenberg/Wassily Kandinsky/Letters, Pictures and Documents*, ed. Jelena Hahl-Koch, trans. John C. Crawford (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 24.

**17** *Ibid.*, p. 188.

**18** Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea*, ed. and trans. Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 147.

**19** Arnold Schoenberg, *Coherence, Counterpoint, Instrumentation, Instruction in Form*, ed. Severine Neff, trans. Charlotte M. Cross and Severine Neff (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 27.

**20** Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea*, p. 127.

**21** Kandinsky's essay is reproduced in Schoenberg and Kandinsky, *Letters, Pictures, and Documents*, pp. 125–8. Kandinsky there remarks that Schoenberg paints “in order to give expressions to those motions of the spirit [*Gehirnakte*] that are not couched in musical form.”

**22** Theodor Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1966), p. 43.

**23** Katherine Ruth Heyman, *The Relation of Ultramodern to Archaic Music* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, 1921), p. 7.

- 24** Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 618.
- 25** Schoenberg and Kandinsky, *Letters, Pictures and Documents*, p. 96.
- 26** Richard Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama*, ed. Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn, trans. H. Ashton Ellis (New York: Da Capo, 1964), p. 182.
- 27** Schoenberg and Kandinsky, *Letters, Pictures and Documents*, pp. 188–9.
- 28** Pound, *Ezra Pound and Music*, p. 71. From *The New Age* (January 24, 1918): 248–9.
- 29** Beethoven's Sixth Symphony in F (1808), which contains musical evocation of a brook, some bird-calls, and a thunderstorm. Beethoven was sufficiently concerned about its pictorialisms to note: "More an expression of feelings than a painting."
- 30** Claude Debussy, *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music*, trans. B. N. Langdon Davies (New York: Dover, 1962), p. 8.
- 31** Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1962), p. 53.
- 32** Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, pp. 176, 180.
- 33** Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 303
- 34** B. C. Southam, *A Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (San Diego, CA: Harvest, 1994), p. 210.
- 35** T. S. Eliot, "London Letter," *Dial* (September, 1921).
- 36** Edith Sitwell, *Fire of the Mind*, ed. Elizabeth Salter and Allanah Harper (New York: Vanguard, 1976), p. 119.
- 37** Edith Sitwell, *The Canticle of the Rose Poems: 1917–1949* (New York: Vanguard

Press, 1949), p. xii.

**38** Albright, *Modernism and Music*, p. 330.

**39** Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 155.

**40** Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 105.

**41** *Ibid.*, pp. 483–4.

**42** Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Modern Library, 1966), p. 240.





## 11 Modernism and the visual arts

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Glen MacLeod

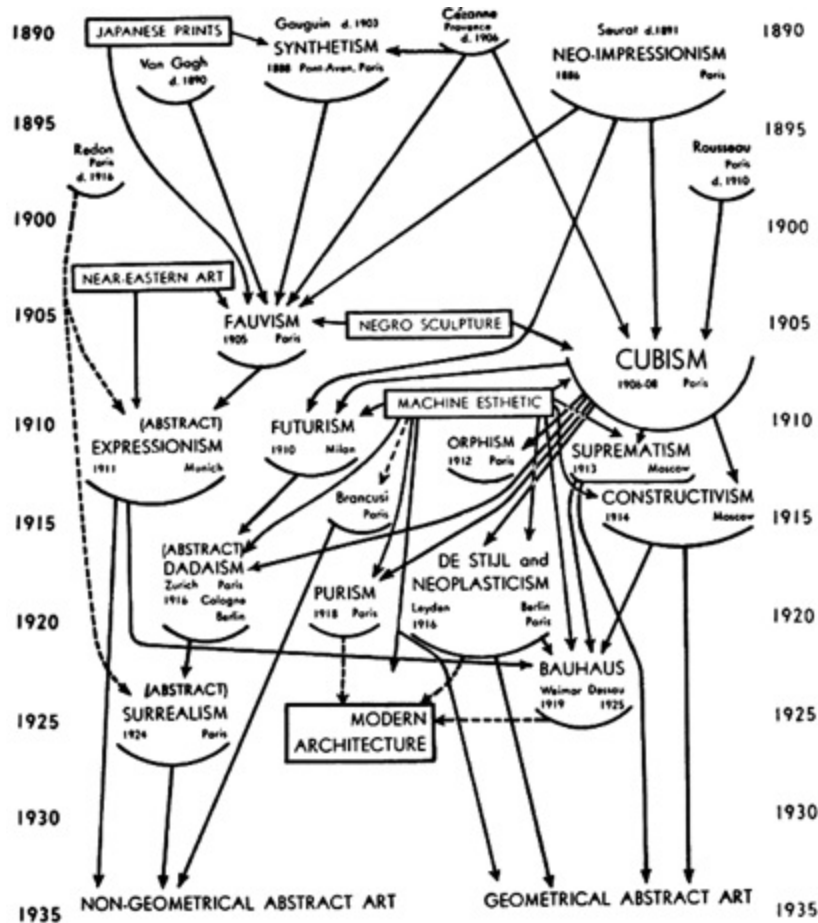
The ancient parallel between literature and the visual arts – i.e., painting, sculpture, and architecture – became newly relevant in the twentieth century. Painters were the first to explore the revolutionary possibilities of Modernism, so that painting became the leading art form. Modernist writers often patterned their literary experiments on parallels drawn from the visual arts. It is impossible to understand fully the development of literary Modernism, therefore, without at least a rudimentary knowledge of modern art. This chapter is intended to provide a brief history of modern art for those whose primary interest is modern British and American literature. It follows the version of Modernism that was endorsed by the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s and that served as the standard for most of the twentieth century. Literary parallels will be drawn primarily from poetry, since there the influence of the visual arts is deepest and most direct.

The great progenitor of Modernist revolt was the Impressionist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first official exhibition devoted to artists rejected by the established Academy was the “Salon des Refusés” (1863), famous for the scandal it caused by showing Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. That painting’s offense both against bourgeois morality (showing a nude woman with two fully clothed men at a picnic) and against academic standards (the flatness of his technique, the lack of careful modeling) anticipates the uncompromising posture of Modernist paintings to come. The Impressionists, whose name was first applied to them as a term of derision, established the pattern of the avant-garde: an elite group of artists, scorned but heroic, leading humanity into the future through their prophetic vision. The foundation in 1884 of the Société des Artistes Indépendants, whose exhibitions had no jury and were open to anyone, marked the coming-of-age of this antiacademic tradition that was essential to the development of modern art.

The history of that development is conveniently illustrated by a chart made in 1936 by Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art. In that year, the Museum mounted two landmark exhibitions, “Cubism and Abstract Art” and “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” which were meant to survey, between them, the entire field of modern art. This version of the history of modern art sees two clearly defined lines of development: from Cubism to purely abstract art on the one hand, and from Dada to Surrealism on the other. This is still a useful way to make sense of the welter of isms that comprise modern art.

Barr’s chart ([Figure 1](#)), which appeared on the cover of the catalog for the “Cubism and Abstract Art” exhibition, conveys at a glance both the great number of movements contributing to the development of abstract art and their complex interrelations.<sup>1</sup> Yet it

also shows one clear, central current amidst these diverse tributaries. The mainstream begins with Post-Impressionism in the 1890s (Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, and Seurat), climaxes in Cubism (the largest lettering on the chart), and proceeds inevitably to abstract art (whither all arrows point at the bottom of the page). The development from Cubism to abstract art parallels the contemporaneous line of development from Dada to Surrealism (for which Barr did not make another chart). That these two movements sometimes overlap is suggested by the inclusion of two in-between categories in the lower-left quadrant: “(Abstract) Dadaism” and “(Abstract) Surrealism.”



REPRODUCED FROM THE JACKET OF THE ORIGINAL EDITION  
**Figure 1** Chart prepared by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. for the dust jacket of the catalog of the exhibition “Cubism and Abstract Art.”

The tradition of abstract art begins most importantly with the postimpressionist Cézanne (1839–1906). Cézanne was associated with the Impressionists, who were concerned primarily with light and color. But he was not satisfied with their focus on surface effects, which made their canvases appear formless and shallow – decorative in the pejorative sense. He longed to create an art that would “make of Impressionism something as solid and durable as the art of the Museums.” Retaining the Impressionists’

broken brushstrokes and their use of pure color, Cézanne added weight and volume by emphasizing the underlying geometric structure of objects (Figure 2). He advised painters to “deal with nature in terms of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone.” His parallel strokes of color called attention to his painterly technique and to the flat surface of the canvas, as did the art of the Impressionists. But his new method also, paradoxically, created a solid architecture of interlocking planes, making possible a monumentality beyond the reach of Impressionism. Yet the method could be applied as well to a teacup as to a mountain. Indeed, many of Cézanne’s greatest canvases are still-lives. His elevation of this formerly lowly subject overturned the traditional hierarchy of genres and pointed the way (though this was hardly Cézanne’s intention) to the ultimate disappearance of objects altogether in purely abstract art.



**Figure 2** Paul Cézanne, *View of L'Estaque and the Chateau d'If*, 1883–5.

Cézanne was the major influence on both Matisse and Picasso, the two leading artists of the early twentieth century. Matisse (1869–1954) was the dominant figure of the “Fauves” (or “Wild Beasts”) who, at the turn of the century, borrowed Cézanne’s use of

pure color to define space and developed it in a more freely expressive manner. The mysteries of color occupied Matisse for the rest of his career. Picasso (1881–1973) developed in a very different direction. Beginning with Cezanne’s interest in geometric form, Picasso – together with Georges Braque (1882–1963) – invented Cubism, the chief break with the western tradition of representational art and the most influential art movement of this century. Between 1907 and 1914, these two artists developed the possibilities of Cubism in three stages.<sup>2</sup>

## Cubism

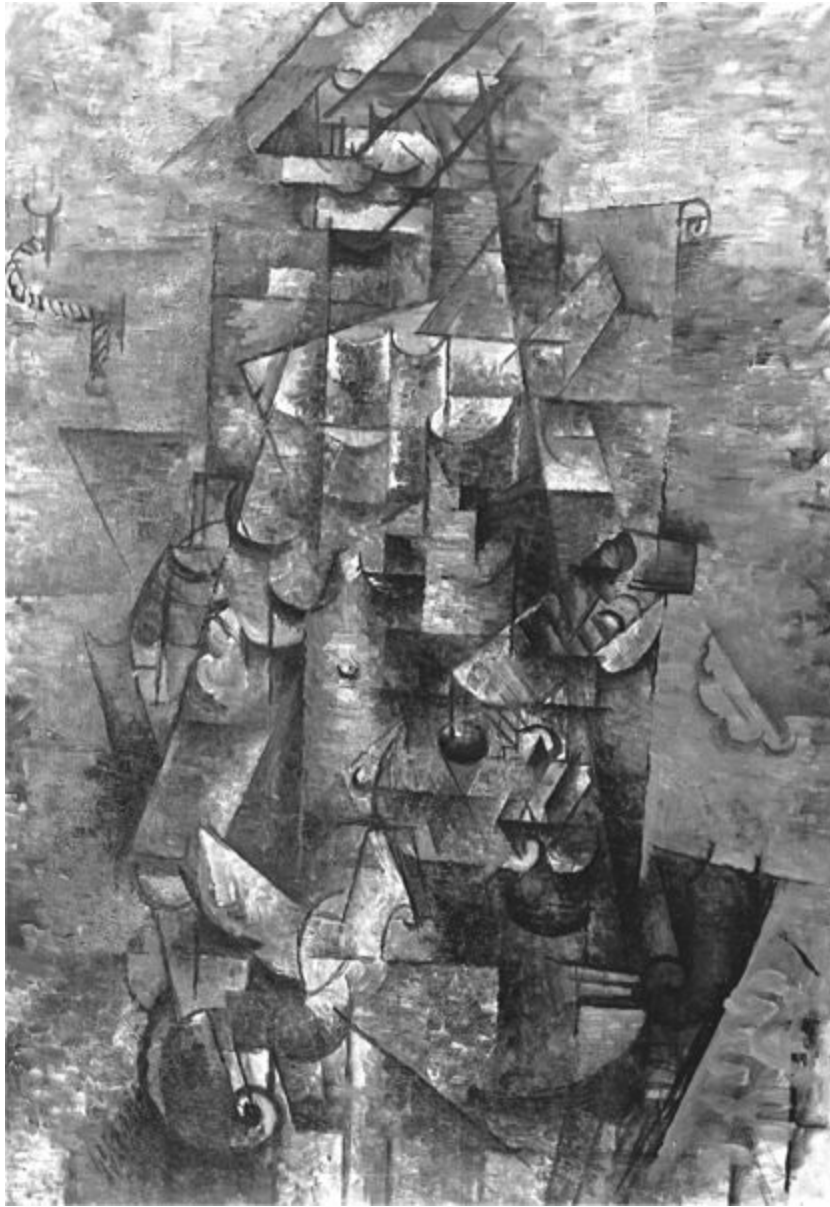
Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907) marks the beginning of Cubism, with its depiction of the female nude in terms of a few simplified, flattened shapes. Obviously inspired by Cezanne’s *Bathers*, this painting disturbed even the most advanced painters because of its deliberately “primitive” distortions and because of its utter disregard for conventional standards of beauty. Cezanne’s influence is perhaps even more evident in Picasso’s landscapes of this period. A painting like *Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro* (1909) (Figure 3) reflects the influence of Cezanne’s landscapes not only in its method of composing a scene in terms of geometrical planes, but also in its simplified palette of green and ochre.



**Figure 3** Pablo Picasso, *Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro* (1909).

Cubism’s second stage, known as Analytical Cubism, occurs from about 1910 to 1912. During this period Braque and Picasso so thoroughly analyzed (or broke into smaller parts) objects that they became hardly recognizable (Figure 4). This is one respect in which Cubism points the way to purely abstract art. At the same time, the two

artists banned almost all color from their canvases. Their pictures became nearly monochromatic, usually restricted to a small range of browns and grays, so that the viewer's attention is focused exclusively on matters of form. This was a particularly bold step for Braque, who had recently been painting in a Fauvist manner, and it clearly marks the Cubists' distance from Matisse, whose dismissal of their efforts as "little cubes" gave the new movement its name.



**Figure 4** Georges Braque, *Man with a Guitar*. (Begun summer, 1911; completed early 1912.)

Analytical Cubism is a watershed in the development of modern painting primarily because it invents a new kind of pictorial space. The centuries-old tradition of deep perspective is replaced by a shallow space in which there is little distance between figure and background. The eye is not led back into an imaginary distance, but is held on the

painting's surface. In this respect, Cubism anticipates the central concerns of later abstract artists with flatness and the two-dimensionality of the picture plane. At the same time, Cubism introduces a new way of representing three-dimensional objects. Instead of reproducing the object according to realistic conventions dating from the Renaissance, the painter is free to break apart the object and distribute its pieces about the canvas as the composition requires. The painter can show the back and the front of a chair at the same time, for instance, or paint a face with one eye viewed frontally and the other in profile.

The third stage, Synthetic Cubism (1912–14), set off in a new direction. Having stripped the object of virtually all color and recognizable shape, Picasso and Braque now began adding elements back into their canvases. Color reappears, then letters and words are introduced, inviting the viewer to compare and contrast verbal and visual signs. Finally, the two artists started putting real objects into their artworks: a cigarette wrapper, a piece of fabric or wallpaper or rope, a sheet of music or a newspaper article (Figure 5). This technique, known as *collage*, is a revolutionary invention because it breaks down the boundaries between art and life, causing the viewer to ponder various kinds and degrees of artifice.





**Figure 5** Pablo Picasso, *La Suze* (1912).

The literary implications of Cubism are vast. Probably the first writer in English to appreciate them was Gertrude Stein who (with her brothers Leo and Michael) lived in Paris and was an early patron of Picasso. She consciously thought of her own literary experiments as parallels to modern painting. Her book *Three Lives* (1909) was written in response to a portrait by Cézanne, and her own literary “portraits” were modeled on the Cubist paintings by Picasso, Braque, and Juan Gris that she collected.<sup>3</sup> Few cases of Cubist influence are as direct as this, but it is certainly true that a great deal of Modernist experimentation in both prose and poetry was inspired to some extent by Cubism. The Cubist techniques of fragmentation, multiple perspectives, and juxtaposition are part of the standard Modernist repertoire, from Eliot’s *The Waste Land* to Stevens’s “The Man with the Blue Guitar.” Marianne Moore’s famous definition of poetry as “imaginary gardens with real toads in them” conceives of imaginative activity in terms that call to mind Cubist collage, a technique that also underlies her idiosyncratic method of splicing

direct quotations into her poems. Without the invention of Cubism, Pound's *Cantos* and Williams's *Paterson* probably would not exist as we know them.<sup>4</sup> Wendy Steiner is surely right to call Cubism "the master-current of our age in painting and literature."<sup>5</sup>

## London, 1910–14

From the point of view of modern art, Paris is the vital center. During the Modernist period, the major artists converged there, and the rest of the world looked to Paris for the latest artistic developments. The way these Parisian innovations were introduced to Britain and the United States helped to determine the way modern literature developed in those countries. The first major showing of modern art in London was the exhibition "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" at the Grafton Galleries in 1910.<sup>6</sup> This was the first of two exhibitions devoted to "Post-Impressionism" that were organized by Roger Fry (who invented the term). It is some measure of the insularity of London at the time that the press and public found this show shocking, even though it was, in fact, an historical survey of painting done in Paris about a quarter of a century before. (It focused mainly on Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Cézanne, with a few more recent works in the Fauvist or neo-impressionist styles.) The stunning impact of the first postimpressionist show marks the beginning of the British Modernist movement; it was what Virginia Woolf had in mind when she wrote that "In or about December 1910 human character changed."<sup>7</sup>

There were no Cubist paintings in the first postimpressionist exhibition. The second exhibition in 1912 did include Cubist works, but it is clear that Roger Fry had little sympathy with Cubism or the radical experiments that followed in its wake. Fry's chief interest was Cézanne. But he most admired those qualities in Cézanne that aligned him with Matisse – his sensuous use of color combined with his intuitive feeling for form – rather than the rational geometry that attracted Picasso and the Cubists. Fry's taste for Cézanne and Matisse is reflected in his own paintings as well as in those of Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and other artists of the Bloomsbury group with which Fry was associated.

It is as an art critic that Roger Fry has had the greatest influence. In trying to explain the innovations of Cézanne and the other postimpressionists, he came to the conclusion that the essential aesthetic quality has to do with pure form. He soon developed (along with his disciple Clive Bell) a method of analyzing art solely according to its formal characteristics. In this view, subject matter is irrelevant to aesthetic considerations. Fry's formalist art theory was attractive because it could be applied democratically to any work, from any period or culture, no matter what the subject and no matter how abstractly it was treated. The influence of formalist criticism spread rapidly as modern art developed further and further away from the European tradition of representational art. A purely formalist interpretation of modern art history soon became (and remained, until recently) the orthodox version. Fry's critical emphasis on form in the visual arts has also had far-reaching influence in the realm of modern literature: in the ascendancy of the

New Criticism from the 1930s through the 1950s, and in the formal experimentation that characterized most avant-garde poetry in English since the 1910s.

The most important literary figure in London to be deeply influenced by modern art was the American Ezra Pound, who lived there from 1908 to 1920.<sup>8</sup> Pound dreamed of spearheading a poetic Renaissance and by 1913 his Imagist movement had made modest progress in that direction. But his literary efforts were obviously overshadowed by events in the visual arts. Fry's two postimpressionist exhibitions had generated far more controversy and publicity. As Lawrence Rainey's chapter in this volume demonstrates in detail, Imagism was not nearly as well known in London as Futurism. Since 1910, E. T. Marinetti, leader and chief propagandist of the Italian Futurist movement, had been regularly provoking the English establishment with exhibitions, raucous lectures and press conferences, and aggressive manifestos. The Futurists advocated the complete destruction of the past, worshiped the sleekness and power of machinery, and sought to convey in their art the rapid pace of modern life. Their success in London provided Pound with a useful model for organizing and promoting his own movement.<sup>9</sup>

In 1914, Pound joined forces with Wyndham Lewis, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Jacob Epstein, Edward Wadsworth, David Bomberg, and others to form the movement he called Vorticism.<sup>10</sup> Like Futurism (and unlike Imagism), Vorticism was conceived as an interdisciplinary movement that included literature and music as well as the visual arts. With shameless bravado, in their publication *Blast* the Vorticists gleefully attacked Futurism (among many other targets) in the aggressive manner and in the inventive typography of the Futurists themselves.

In terms of the visual arts, Vorticism represented an original variant of elements borrowed from Cubism and Futurism. What Vorticism meant in terms of poetry is less clear. Pound's only obviously Vorticist poem is "Dogmatic Statement on a Game of Chess: Theme for a Series of Pictures," whose angular shapes and abrupt movements could describe a Vorticist painting. Pound's poetic principles remained essentially Imagist: sharpness of observation, economy of phrasing, organic rhythm. Adopting the Vorticist label allowed him to distinguish his own campaign for Modernist reform from the debased form of "Imagism" popularized by Amy Lowell. And it allowed him to align poetry with other arts in a more broadly based movement.

Pound's excessive enthusiasm for his London artist friends – for instance, his praising Wyndham Lewis as a greater artist than Picasso – points up his obvious inadequacy as a guide to modern art. Nevertheless, the short-lived Vorticist movement – cut short, as it was, by World War I – played an important part in Pound's poetic development. His involvement with artists, and his thinking in terms of analogies with the visual arts, influenced both his poetry and his poetic theory. His own great influence in literary circles helped to disseminate the discoveries of modern art throughout modern literature in English.

## Abstraction

Pound's thinking about modern art during his Vorticist period (c. 1913–15) was greatly influenced by the views of T. E. Hulme, a disciple of the German aesthetician Wilhelm Worringer. Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908) analyzed the history of art according to two opposing impulses: (1) *empathy*, reflecting a secure, confident relation to the world and resulting in an organic, humanistic art like that of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy; and (2) *abstraction*, reflecting an anxious, fearful relation to the world and resulting in a stylized, geometric art, as in African, Egyptian, and Byzantine art. Hulme borrowed Worringer's theory and used it to promote the geometric-abstract art of Lewis, Epstein, and others in the Cubist tradition.<sup>11</sup> The Modernist sensibility, according to Hulme, is fundamentally opposed to the Christian humanism of the Renaissance tradition; it is closer in spirit to more "primitive" cultures and expresses itself most fully in the hard, clean, geometric shapes characteristic of modern machinery. The Vorticist painters and sculptors immediately adopted Hulme's rationale as their own, as is evident in their polemics in *BLAST*. At the same time, Pound's prescriptions for poetry began to emphasize the "hardness" and "clarity of outline" typical of geometric-abstract art.

Another important influence on Pound during this early period was the painter Vassili Kandinsky (1866–1944). One of the pioneers of abstraction, Kandinsky painted his first purely abstract work in 1910 and was associated with the German *Blaue Reiter* group (represented on Barr's chart as "(Abstract) Expressionism"). His book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, one of the chief documents in the history of abstract art, was translated into English in 1914 and immediately circulated among avant-garde circles in both Britain and America. Kandinsky argued for the necessity of abstraction in the twentieth century, illustrating his points by drawing analogies with other art forms, particularly music. Pound admired Kandinsky's analogical method and asserted that his theory applied equally well to poetry: "The image is the poet's pigment; with that in mind you can go ahead and apply Kandinsky, you can transpose his chapter on the language of form and color and apply it to the writing of verse."<sup>12</sup>

Kandinsky thought of abstract art primarily in spiritual terms, as an attempt to discover a reality behind surface appearances. In this sense his aesthetics are at the opposite extreme from the pure formalism of Roger Fry. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* argues that a great spiritual revolution is taking place and that the arts are leading the way, citing Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society as evidence. This view of art was typical of the founders of abstraction; Piet Mondrian and Kasimir Malevich also thought of it in these mystical, visionary terms.<sup>13</sup> Nor would Pound have found strange such an esoteric approach to Modernism. Pound himself was interested in spiritualism, sharing in Yeats's occult studies at the very time he was working out his own theories of Imagism and Vorticism.<sup>14</sup> Kandinsky's faith that art can bring about the evolution of the human soul is hardly more grand than Pound's own project for the *Cantos*.

The spiritual basis of abstract art also informs Wallace Stevens's *Notes towards a Supreme Fiction*, which explores the possibility of creating a modern substitute for God. The first section of that poem, subtitled "It Must Be Abstract," considers the supreme fiction as analogous to the spiritual content of Mondrian's pure geometric-abstract paintings.<sup>15</sup>

The term *abstract* can be applied to a bewildering variety of modern art. It can refer, on the one hand, to any form abstracted (to any degree) *from nature*; and, on the other, to purely abstract forms without any reference to nature. It can cover the full range of shapes from biomorphic (for example, Joan Miró) to geometric (for example, Piet Mondrian). In order to keep confusion at bay, it is helpful for the nonspecialist to bear in mind the clear organization of Alfred Barr's chart. There Cubism leads most directly to pure geometric abstraction. Picasso and Braque's analysis of objects into geometric shapes leads, with irresistible logic, to Mondrian's austere canvases that use only straight lines, right angles, and primary colors. The clarity of that development (from Cubism to pure geometric abstraction) provides a convenient standard by which to measure the many other kinds and degrees of abstract art.

## New York, 1910s

There seemed little doubt in the 1910s that London was the heart of literary activity in the English-speaking world. In contrast with the portentous doings of Pound and Eliot in London, New York seemed relatively minor and provincial. From the perspective of the early-twenty-first century, however, the New York writers – especially the poets Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore – assume an importance perhaps equal to that of their expatriate rivals.

The poetry of Stevens, Williams, and Moore owes much of its distinctive character to the pre-eminence of the visual arts in New York. Each of these poets wrote intensely visual poetry in which often the act or quality of looking is the central point. Moore's minute observations always showed a painter's eye, and when she edited the *Dial* in the 1920s, she made sure that it covered the visual as much as the literary arts.<sup>16</sup> Williams was friendly with New York painters such as Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and Charles Sheeler; while he listened intently to Pound's bulletins from London, he developed his own poetic voice primarily by looking at modern paintings.<sup>17</sup> Stevens tended to visit art galleries rather than artists' studios but he, too, consciously modeled his poetry on analogies drawn from the contemporary art world.<sup>18</sup> This habit of mind is already well established in one of his earliest mature poems, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" (1915), which expresses his delight in the imagination in terms of the bold shapes and colors of modern painting.

New York was, during the first two decades of this century, the only city in the United



States where one could see with any regularity the latest art from Paris. Beginning in 1908, Alfred Stieglitz presented exhibitions of modern art in his small gallery called “291” (after its address on Fifth Avenue). There, adventurous spirits could encounter works by such European artists as Cézanne, Picasso, Brancusi, and Matisse, as well as by advanced American artists like Arthur Dove, John Marin, and Georgia O’Keeffe. Modern painting, sculpture, and architecture were reproduced often in Stieglitz’s periodical *Camera Work*. It was not until 1913, however, that modern art really “arrived” in New York, with the legendary Armory Show.

The International Exhibition of Modern Art, held in the 69th Regiment Armory at Lexington Avenue and 25th Street in Manhattan, contained nearly 1,300 works by both European and American artists. It is remembered as the single most important exhibition in United States history because it first made the American public aware of postimpressionism and Cubism. From this show we can date the rise of Modernism in all the arts in America. Although versions of the Armory Show also traveled to Chicago and Boston, it had the biggest impact in New York. Aspiring Modernists were drawn there in the wake of the Armory Show, and New York soon became a thriving center of Modernist activity. The close relation between poetry and painting that prevailed among the New York avant-garde is epitomized in the person of E. E. Cummings who, refusing to choose between the two art forms, always considered himself a “poetandpainter.”<sup>19</sup>

A crucial ingredient in the formation of the New York avant-garde was the presence of foreign – primarily French – artists driven there by the outbreak of World War I. Among these expatriates were Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Jean and Yvonne Crotti, Albert Gleizes and Juliette Roche, Edgar Varèse, and Henri-Pierre Roché. This concentration of French men and women established a New York–Paris axis that characterized the mainstream of modern art for most of the twentieth century. Although London remained the center for poetry in English during the 1910s, as Pound never tired of reminding his New Jersey-bound friend Williams, the New York poets were actually in closer touch with the latest Parisian developments in the visual arts.

The leading figure among these French expatriates was Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). When he first arrived in New York in 1915, Duchamp was already widely known there. His *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Figure 6) had been the most notorious work in the Armory Show two years before. Critics singled out the *Nude* for ridicule – one called it “an explosion in a shingle factory” – and it quickly became a symbol in the American press for all modern art. A version of the *Nude* hung from 1915 to 1921 in the New York apartment of Walter Conrad Arensberg, a friend and patron of Duchamp, whose pioneering collection of modern art is now housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Arensberg’s apartment was a kind of salon where avant-garde writers and artists gathered to share their enthusiasm for modern art. Regular guests included (in addition to the French men and women named above), among writers, Williams, Stevens, Alfred Kreymer, Carl Van Vechten, Djuna Barnes, and Mina Loy; and among artists, Demuth, Hartley, Sheeler, Joseph Stella, John Covert, Morton Schamberg, and Man

Ray.



**Figure 6** Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912).

## Dada

This loosely affiliated group is now known as the New York Dada movement.<sup>20</sup> The character of this movement differs significantly from that of Pound's circle in London. As an illustration, we may take Duchamp's *Nude*. Like the art of the Vorticists, this



painting consciously combines elements of Cubism (the reduction of a nude body to an arrangement of geometrical planes) and Futurism (the kinetic motion of the figure). But these stylistic aspects are not enough to explain the notoriety of the *Nude*. What made the press and public single out this painting from among the many other Cubist works in the Armory Show? The explanation lies in Duchamp's title, which promises a fairly racy spectacle but delivers, instead, a geometrical construction of planes and angles. The title arouses titillating expectations that the painting itself frustrates. The teasing humor in this conception – so different from the bombastic rhetoric of the Vorticists – is the defining quality of New York Dada.

A similar tendency towards ironic humor among the New York poets contrasts in the same way with the high seriousness of Pound and Eliot. Stevens's delight in puns, nonsense, and other kinds of wordplay, and Williams's often improvisational manner, for example, led early critics to dismiss them as minor. In hindsight, however, we can see these qualities as typical of Dada – an international movement that had great impact in both Europe and America but that seems to have bypassed London completely. As an official movement, Dada was founded in Zurich in 1916. Important Dada groups soon sprang up in Cologne, Hanover, Berlin, and Paris. Among the leading figures of the movement were Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, Jean Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck, Max Ernst, and Kurt Schwitters. Unlike Cubism, Dada is not an artistic style but an attitude or way of life. (There is, however, some overlapping of categories. A work may be Cubist in style but Dada in spirit, for instance, like Schwitters's Dada collages.) Dada is a nose-thumbing challenge to all convention. It is the purest embodiment of the *destructive* element that is an essential part (though only a part) of Modernism. Outraged by the massive carnage of World War I, the Dadaists rebelled against all established institutions and traditional values – indeed, against reason itself since, as the guiding principle of western civilization, rationalism had led directly (in their view) to the wholesale destruction of the war. The nonsense-term *Dada* was an appropriate name for this exuberantly anarchic movement. The Dadaists made artworks from found objects and chance occurrences; gave nonsense lectures and poetry readings, concerts of noise, and bizarre theatrical productions. If these events sometimes led to riots, so much the better.

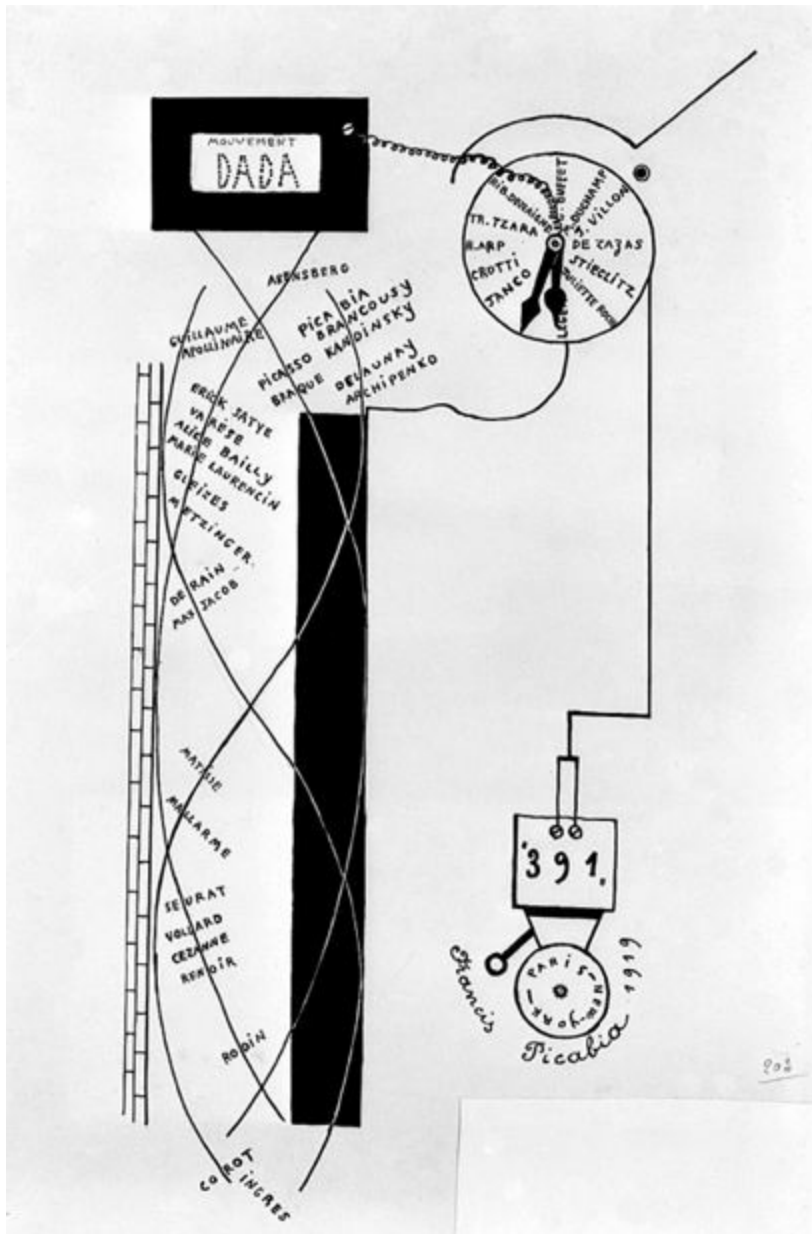
New York Dada actually preceded European Dada and was less negative in character. Its leading figure was Duchamp, whose most notorious act while he lived in New York occurred in connection with the first annual exhibition of the Society for Independent Artists in 1917. Modeled on the famous French institution of the same name, the “Indeps” was to be thoroughly democratic, open to anyone, with no jury. In order to test the sincerity of the hanging committee (of which he was the head), Duchamp entered a work pseudonymously. Called *Fountain* and signed “R. Mutt,” it was an ordinary porcelain urinal. The work was rejected and Duchamp resigned in protest from the committee.

*Fountain* is the most famous example of the art form Duchamp called the *readymade*. In creating a readymade, the artist selects an ordinary, mass-produced object and

displays it as a work of art. His first readymade, *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), consisted of a bicycle wheel mounted upside-down on top of a four-legged stool. Over the next decade, the artist created a number of these works – a snow shovel, a bottle rack, a metal comb. The viewer’s automatic first reaction, “Is it art?” cannot be answered without addressing the complex philosophical question, “What is art?” As Duchamp put it, “I was interested in ideas – not merely in visual products. I wanted to put [art] once again at the service of the mind.”<sup>21</sup> In doing so, he laid the foundation for the later developments of Pop Art, minimalism, and conceptual art.

Traces of Duchamp’s readymades can be discovered in some of the best-known works of the New York poets. Williams’s “The Red Wheelbarrow” presents the object unadorned and without comment; his minimalist approach calls into question the very nature of poetry, as a readymade questions the very nature of art. Stevens’s “Anecdote of the Jar” could describe the creation of a readymade: the speaker places a jar on a hilltop in Tennessee, thereby transforming both the object and its environment. Both of these poems reflect the combination of intellectual seriousness and deadpan humor that characterizes New York Dada.

After Duchamp, the most important Dada artist in New York was Francis Picabia (1879–1953) who first came there to see the Armory Show in 1913. He shuttled between Europe and America for the rest of the 1910s, participating in Dada activities on both continents. In New York, he exhibited paintings in exhibitions, became close to Duchamp and the Arensberg circle, and contributed to Stieglitz’s magazine *291* and other publications. His paintings and drawings during this period are mainly based on machine forms, perhaps the best known of which are a series of mechanical portraits published in *291*, including a portrait of the photographer Stieglitz (a modified camera) and *Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity* (a spark plug). His drawing *Dada Movement* (Figure 7) appeared in Tristan Tzara’s *Anthologie Dada*, published in Zurich in 1919. It seems to show a kind of fire-alarm system whose various parts display the names of Picabia’s associates in Zurich, Paris, and New York (including Duchamp, Arensberg, and Stieglitz). The alarm bell announces the crucial “New York–Paris” axis. The irrational workings of this machine contrast appropriately with the geometrical and logical neatness of Barr’s chart for *Cubism and Abstract Art*. The anarchic energy of Dada exists outside the rational development of the Cubist tradition.



**Figure 7** Francis Picabia, *Dada Movement* (1919).

Critics have been slow to acknowledge the importance of Dada artists to modern writers in English, though Stevens's *Harmonium* (1923) records the very spirit of New York Dada, and though Williams remarked of his own work: "I didn't originate Dadaism but I had it in my soul to write it. *Spring and All* [1922] shows that."<sup>22</sup> Until recently it was not generally known that Pound, too, became interested in Dada when he lived in Paris from 1920 to 1924.<sup>23</sup> Disgusted by the violent spectacle of World War I, which he saw as the betrayal of all he valued, Pound shared wholeheartedly the Dadaists' desire to wipe the slate clean. In Paris, he took part in Dada activities; reported on them in letters to the *Little Review*, the *Dial*, and other literary journals; and contributed to Dada publications. He was most impressed with Picabia, praising him as the leading "intellect"

of European Modernism and as “the man who ties knots in Picasso’s tail.” He recognized in Picabia’s conversation, writings, and artworks the possibility of what we would now call conceptual art: “[Picabia works] in a definite medium, to which one may give an interim label of thought.”<sup>24</sup> Pound’s involvement with the Dadaists in Paris may well have been the catalyst that allowed him to renew his work on the *Cantos*. The “boisterousness and disorder” he sought to include in the “Malatesta Cantos,” which mark such an artistic breakthrough in the compositional method of the *Cantos* as a whole, probably owe something to the anarchic energy of Dada.

## Surrealism

Dada’s commitment to anarchy and disorder contributed to its own demise. In 1924, most of its adherents became part of the newly formed Surrealist movement, which had a more coherent theoretical foundation and a more positive agenda. The first *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), written by André Breton, the high priest of the movement, declared: “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, in a sort of absolute reality, or surreality, if one may so speak.”<sup>25</sup> To this revolutionary end, the Surrealists sought to free the irrational powers of the unconscious mind. One favorite method they used to disrupt conventional thinking was to create unexpected juxtapositions, as in the classic example from Lautréamont: “the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissection table.” Although it began primarily as a literary movement (founding members Breton, Eluard, Soupault, and Aragon, for example, were poets), Surrealism has had the greatest impact in the visual arts. This is especially true in England and America where the language barrier has impeded the promulgation of Surrealist texts.

Surrealist painting can be divided into two distinct kinds, veristic and absolute, to use Werner Haftmann’s terminology.<sup>26</sup> Veristic Surrealism is illusionistic; it distorts or oddly juxtaposes recognizable objects in order to create a kind of dream image or hallucinatory vision. The most extreme practitioner of veristic Surrealism is Salvador Dalí, whose small canvas *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), with its melting watches in a barren landscape, is one of the best-known images in modern painting. The opposite extreme – absolute Surrealism – is represented by Joan Miró, whose strange, nearly abstract, biomorphic shapes were achieved through *automatism*: he used chance occurrences or spontaneous gestures as a way of starting a painting and gaining access to the unconscious. In one series of watercolors, for instance, Miró began by roughening the surface of the paper. “Painting over the roughened surface produced curious chance shapes,” which he would then develop into a composition. “I would set out with no preconceived idea,” he said. “A few forms suggested here would call for other forms elsewhere.”<sup>27</sup> Miró’s often flat, cartoon-like shapes contrast utterly with Dalí’s conventionally modeled objects in deep Renaissance space. Between these two extremes stretches the full spectrum of Surrealist art.

The chief impact of Surrealism on Anglo-American literature occurred among the New York-centered poets. Ezra Pound never showed any interest in the Surrealists, and in fact left Paris for Italy just as they came onstage.<sup>28</sup> William Carlos Williams, on the other hand, was quick to respond to the new movement. Williams's own experiments in automatic writing in *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1919) may actually have anticipated the first automatic Surrealist text, *The Magnetic Fields* (1919) by André Breton and Philippe Soupault. When he visited Paris in 1924, Williams met and became friendly with Soupault; he later translated the Frenchman's Surrealist novel *Last Nights of Paris* (1929). But Surrealism was not widely known in the United States until the 1930s, a decade during which Williams, Marianne Moore, and Wallace Stevens all frequently attended Surrealist art exhibitions. The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" (1936/7) stirred up nationwide interest in the Surrealists. Stevens had always been known for his surreal juxtapositions, such as the title image of "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." He had Surrealism in mind when he wrote his first prose essay, "The Irrational Element in Poetry" (1936), and in composing "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (1937).<sup>29</sup> Surrealist activity again swept through New York during World War II, when Breton and other Surrealists-in-exile were living there. Williams was at the heart of that activity.<sup>30</sup> Moore's interest in Surrealism is highlighted by her correspondence during the 1940s with the American surrealist Joseph Cornell, a kindred spirit, both of them fastidious hoarders of marvelous objects and curiosities.<sup>31</sup>

By the early 1930s, the Parisian art world was divided into two opposing camps: the Surrealists and the abstractionists. The rivalry between these two camps tended to make their theoretical positions more and more extreme, so that it became possible to consider them nearly absolute opposites. If Surrealism stood for the irrational, for literary content, and for figuration, then abstraction came to stand for utter rationalism, pure formalism, and nonobjectivity. Between them, Surrealism and abstraction seemed to define the full range of possibilities for modern art. The two landmark exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936 – "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" and "Cubism and Abstract Art" – officially codified this dualistic way of interpreting the development of modern art. For the nonspecialist looking for a secure foothold in the complex field of modern art, it remains a useful paradigm.

## Notes

**1** Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art*, exhib. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936).

- 2 The standard history of Cubism is John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907–1914*, 3rd edn. (1959; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). The most thorough study of Picasso and Braque's collaboration in the invention of Cubism, with the best illustrations, is William Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989).
- 3 Wendy Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).
- 4 Marjorie Perloff treats the *Cantos* as collage in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), Chapter 5. Henry Sayre treats *Paterson* as collage in *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press 1983).
- 5 Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 177–97. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan traces a Cubist tradition in modern poetry in *Part of the Climate: American Cubist Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
- 6 See Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), vol. I, pp. 16–18.
- 7 Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, vol. I (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1967), p. 320.
- 8 For an overview of Pound's interest in the visual arts see *Pound's Artists: Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts in London, Paris, and Italy*, exhib. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1985).
- 9 For the influence of Futurism on Pound's poetry see Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), Chapter 5.
- 10 On Pound and Vorticism see Cork, *Vorticism*; William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972); Timothy Materer, *Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1979); and Reed Way Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Toward the Condition of Painting* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).



**11** See “Modern Art and Its Philosophy,” in T. E. Hulme, *Speculations*, ed. Herbert Read (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1924), pp. 75–109.

**12** Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 86.

**13** See Maurice Tuchman *et al.*, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville, 1986); and Roger Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988).

**14** James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and the Occult* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993); Timothy Materer, *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

**15** Glen MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), Chapter 5.

**16** For Moore’s interest in the visual arts, see Bonnie Costello, *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), Chapter 7; and Linda Leavell, *Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts: Prismatic Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995). Many visual sources of Moore’s poetry (not only the visual arts) are discussed and reproduced in Patricia C. Willis, *Marianne Moore: Vision into Verse* (Philadelphia: Rosenbach Library, 1987).

**17** The first major study of Williams and the visual arts was Bram Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969). Since then other book-length studies have appeared by Dickran Tashjian (1978), William Marling (1982), Henry Sayre (1983), Christopher MacGowan (1984), Peter Schmidt (1988), Terence Diggory (1991), and Peter Halter (1994).

**18** For Stevens’s interest in the visual arts, see especially MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art*, and Bonnie Costello, “Effects of an Analogy: Wallace Stevens and Painting,” in Albert Gelpi, ed., *Wallace Stevens and the Poetics of Modernism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also Michel Benamou, *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton



University Press, 1972), Chapters 1 and 4; and Robert Buttel, *Wallace Stevens: The Making of "Harmonium"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), Chapter 6.

**19** On Cummings and the visual arts, see Milton A. Cohen, *Poet and Painter: The Aesthetics of E. E. Cummings's Early Work* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

**20** The definitive history of the movement is Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–1923* (New York: Abrams, 1994). For a broader treatment of American responses to Dada, primarily from a literary perspective, see Dickran Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde, 1910–1925* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1975).

**21** Quoted in the introduction to Arturo Schwartz, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Abrams, 1975), n.p.

**22** For Williams's interest in Dada, see Tashjian, *Skyscraper Primitives*, and Peter Schmidt, *William Carlos Williams, the Arts, and Literary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

**23** Vincent Sherry, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 142–3. Sherry summarizes work on Pound and Dada by Richard Sieburth, Andrew Clearfield, and Robert von Hallberg, with bibliographical information, on pp. 214 n 2, 215 n 3. See also Rebecca Beasley, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) ch. 4.

**24** Ezra Pound, "Parisian Literature," *Literary Review* [of the *New York Evening Post*] (August 13, 1921): 7. Quoted in Richard Sieburth, "Dada Pound," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 83.1 (Winter, 1984): 50.

**25** André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1972), p. 14.

**26** Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Praeger, 1976).

**27** Quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists*

*and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 434.

**28** Daniel Tiffany speculates on Pound's affinities with Surrealism in his *Radio Corpse: Imagism and the Cryptaesthetic of Ezra Pound* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 230–3, 280–1. There was a Surrealist group in England that published the periodical *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* during the 1930s. Further Surrealist influence is evident in the New Apocalypse movement of the 1940s that included poets David Gascoyne and Dylan Thomas.

**29** MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art*, Chapter 3.

**30** For Williams's connection to Surrealism, see Mike Weaver, *William Carlos Williams: The American Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), Chapter 8; and Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde, 1920–1950* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

**31** Dickran Tashjian discusses Marianne Moore's correspondence with Joseph Cornell in *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire* (Miami Beach: Grassfield Press, 1992), pp. 65–77.



## 12 Modernism and film

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Michael Wood

I decided I liked Photography *in opposition* to the Cinema, from which I nonetheless failed to separate it.

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*<sup>1</sup>

It is tempting to argue that all films are Modernist, that the cinema itself is an accelerated image of modernity, like the railway and the telephone. But to do this is to miss the nostalgia inseparable from the way the medium has worked out historically, its (amply rewarded) yearning to become the twentieth century's version of the nineteenth century's novel. There are Modernist films, even outside the period we associate with Modernism; but the largest fact about the cinema over the hundred years since its birth is its comfortable embrace of ancient conventions of realism and narrative coherence.

When the German critic Walter Benjamin describes the strange mingling of artifice and illusion in the cinema – we know all about the tricky construction of the pictured world, which we nevertheless take as far more intimately actual than anything we could find in the live theatre – he says “the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.”<sup>2</sup> “In the theatre one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary. There is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot. Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting.” Benjamin's inference is that the absence of illusion in the studio or on location is canceled by the sheer power and invisibility of the editing process. The result is (most often) more illusion, a Modernist, distancing gesture swallowed up in denial; an orchid pretending to be a daisy or even a weed.

Still, technology is not always disavowed in the movies, and illusions are questioned as well as fostered, so we can ask what Modernism looks like when it does appear in the cinema; where it appears; and what this Modernism has to tell us about other Modernisms. I have concentrated on particular films and ideas about films rather than attempt a survey, but I hope the reach of the questions will suggest something of the richness of the ground. My examples are chiefly German, Russian, French, and American films of the 1920s and early 1930s. A trawl which went on a little longer would pick up the work of Jean Renoir in France, and one which reached beyond World War II would find Modernism going strong in Italy, notably in the films of Federico Fellini and Luchino Visconti. But the range of Modernist possibilities in the cinema was clearly outlined by the end of the 1920s; and the disavowal of Modernist preoccupations was already proceeding apace.

In Christopher Isherwood's novel *Prater Violet* (1945), a brilliant and tormented Austrian film director defines his medium for us:

The film is an infernal machine. Once it is ignited and set in motion, it revolves with an enormous dynamism. It cannot pause. It cannot apologize. It cannot retract anything. It cannot wait for you to understand it. It cannot explain itself. It simply ripens to its inevitable explosion. This explosion we have to prepare, like anarchists, with the utmost ingenuity and malice ...<sup>3</sup>

We can scarcely miss this man's intricate pleasure in his contact with hell, but the narrator also records a gesture for us: "Bergmann cupped his hands, lovingly, as if around an exquisite flower." A little later, the narrator explains to his mother and brother that Bergmann was talking about the fixed *speed* of film, the fact that it does not allow us to pause or go back, as a painting or a novel does, but this seems trite, a deliberate backing off from Bergmann's metaphor. The novel is set in 1933 and 1934, Austria is yielding to the National Socialists, we can think of other persons and inventions, apart from anarchists and movies, eminently incapable of pausing, apologizing, retracting, waiting or explaining. Bergmann is saying that film is not only an art of time but the art of his time, a modern, even a Modernist art which cannot disentangle itself from the world it opposes, and which must describe its hopes in terms entirely appropriate also to its fears. His infernal machine recalls and looks forward to the factory worlds of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (Germany, 1926) and Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (USA, 1936), as well as the ticking bombs of European politics. The irony is further complicated by the film Bergmann is making, a frothy operetta set in a Vienna which is all charm and unreality, impervious to the very notion of politics. Bergmann's infernal machine begins to look like a fancy cake.

Bergmann is working in an England where modernity is pictured as uncertainty, a kind of technological and commercial bewilderment. The "panic" is not the Wall Street Crash or the Depression, but the arrival of sound at Imperial Bulldog Pictures:

At the time of the panic, when Sound first came to England and nobody's job was safe, Bulldog had carried through a hasty and rather hysterical reconstruction program. The whole place was torn down and rebuilt at top speed, most of it as cheaply as possible. No one knew what was coming next: Taste, perhaps, or Smell, or Stereoscopy, or some device that climbed right down out of the screen and ran around in the audience. Nothing seemed impossible.<sup>4</sup>

I am sure this is an accurate enough picture of the British movie business in the 1930s – Isherwood would be the first to say he is writing from memory rather than invention – but as an image constructed in 1945 it means something rather different, just as the name of the movie company shifts in this light from broad comedy to rather subtler historical

satire. This England is no more prepared for Hitler and war than the company was for sound. It is noticeably edgy, has lost all its old biting arrogance, but has found nothing to replace it. It is like an art form in transition; like a 1930s movie, or a movie studio. Later Isherwood describes a ghostly sound stage, with its multiple, partial sets: “a kind of Pompeii, but more desolate, more uncanny, because this is, literally, a half-world, a limbo of mirror-images, a town which has lost its third dimension. Only the tangle of heavy power cables is solid, apt to trip you as you cross the floor.”<sup>5</sup> The unreality of the movie world is a trope as old as the movies themselves, so we must ask what produces its peculiar force in this context. The answer, I think, is history, and a form of double-take. We register the forlorn unreality of this half-world, because it is not like ours, then or now. Then we look at our world again, and are astonished at the resemblance. Emptied of what we thought was its reality, our world *is* the studio, frantically guessing at what it can not know. The Modernists kept frightening themselves with such thoughts, as if they were not quite ready for the implications of their insights.

Virginia Woolf’s essay “The Cinema” (1926) does not seem to tell us a lot about the movies. She mentions only one film by name, glances at the contents or conceptions of a few others. Yet with characteristic shrewdness and indirection Woolf manages to evoke an essential feature of the cinema, an abstract, nonmimetic expressive possibility that the film industry, both before and after 1926, has devoted considerable amounts of time and money to refusing.

For instance, at a performance of *Dr. Caligari* the other day a shadow shaped like a tadpole suddenly appeared at one corner of the screen. It swelled to an immense size, quivered, bulged, and sank back again into nonentity. For a moment it seemed to embody some monstrous diseased imagination of the lunatic’s brain. For a moment it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words. The monstrous quivering tadpole seemed to be fear itself, and not the statement “I am afraid.”<sup>6</sup>

Woolf goes on to explain that the shadow was not part of the film but the effect of some sort of fault of projection or flaw in the print; but then implies that the unintentional quality of the image was also part of its magic – and a rebuke to the rather meager intentions of the cinema as Woolf understood it.

Yet if the shadow was an accident, an abstract shape rather than a scripted and performed human action, Woolf’s interpretation of it as “fear itself” belongs very much to the world of this particular film. In another film the same shape would have meant something different, and Woolf through sheer mischievous intelligence appears to have stumbled on one of the fundamentals of film theory: the principle of montage.

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (directed by Robert Wiene, Germany, 1919) announces itself as old and new, in a way which is familiar to us from literary Modernism: “A tale of

the modern re-appearance of an 11th century myth ...” Later we are told that a monk called Caligari was practicing the dark arts of hypnotism in 1093; and that a modern psychiatrist has taken his name and turned showman, because his scientific interest in somnambulism has modulated into something more sinister: into the desire, as the doctor says, to get Cesare, his haunted, sleeping subject, to “perform deeds he would shrink from in his normal waking state.” Cesare in his sleep kills the doctor’s enemies, terrorizes the town, abducts a young woman. Then the doctor’s part in these crimes is discovered, and he is pursued through a nightmarish landscape, only to disappear into the mental hospital of which he is, it turns out, the director. His assistants, quickly persuaded of his guilt, tie him up in a straitjacket: the fuming doctor is one of the great images of the film. A title card informs us that “Today he is raving under chains in his cell.”

Except that he is not. The whole story we have seen has been told by one of the inmates of the doctor’s hospital. The inmates, including the person who has been telling the story and someone who looks just like Cesare, walk dreamily around a courtyard, the doctor appears, unchained, reassuring – or even more sinister, if we are unable to shake off the effect of the story. His appearance, S. S. Prawer informs us, “was suggested to the script-writers by a photograph of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer in his old age”;<sup>7</sup> but then this piece of information could lead us in several different directions. The common interpretation of the film, initiated by Siegfried Kracauer in his book *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), is that a first, radical version of the story – the doctor is the criminal – was softened and commercialized by the frame story, which makes the bad doctor merely a patient’s fantasy, and restores the threatened authority figure. This is no doubt true to the historical sequence of the film’s creation, but I do not think viewers experience the alternatives in quite this way. The madman’s story reveals the director of the asylum to be a villain, no doubt about it: the doctor *is* Caligari. But the frame story does not and cannot show the unnamed director to be a benevolent authority. It can only show him in control, possibly benign, but probably not. The suggestion, I think, is that the madman’s story, literally false, reports an important and irreducible truth: any person in authority could turn into Caligari, and some already have. When the doctor says at the end that he sees what the storytelling patient’s problem is, the effect is not consoling.

The striking thing about this film, as a film, is that its most memorable moments actually come very close to the tadpole shadow Woolf saw. When the doctor turns himself into Caligari he devises a visiting card, which we see in close-up, heavy letters in ornate black script running across the screen like an announcement of death, a triumphantly squiggled flourish under the signature. How could a mere name seem so menacing? A minute or so earlier, when the doctor experienced his temptation to become Caligari, the name itself flashed at him from all corners of the screen, in lights, like the signs of nightclubs or theatres, as if his desire had been lit up like a city.

The other remarkable moment in the film is that of the awakening of Cesare from his supposed twenty-five years of sleep. Caligari as showman does his patter, we see the mask-like face of the young Conrad Veidt, the massive black makeup underneath the



eyes. Are these eyes open yet, could we tell? Then suddenly they are open, there can be no mistake. The eyes are huge, otherworldly, back from the dead. They are otherness itself, to adapt Woolf's image, rather than the statement "I am other." This is the genuine, rational magic of the cinema, and we may think of a related movie moment: the birth of the monster in James Whale's *Frankenstein* (USA, 1931). Victor Frankenstein insists that he is not resurrecting the dead but making life. "And you really believe that you can bring life to the dead?" Frankenstein's former mentor asks. Frankenstein says, "That body is not dead. It has never lived. I created it. I made it with my own hands from the bodies I took from graves, from the gallows, anywhere." When the creature first comes to life, all we see is its hand, quite still, and then faintly moving, stirring into animation as Cesare's eyes open into sight. And what is truly spooky about the creature when we finally see it whole, as it backs into the room and turns towards the light, with its stiff legs, short-armed suit, heavy boots, bolt in its neck, is its unearthliness. It does not look as if it has come from the grave, it looks as if it has come from nowhere.

Something wakens in these scenes, and the movie camera is there to watch it. Paintings and photographs are, necessarily, always too early or too late for such a moment, and words have to approach it another way. But what is the moment, what is it that awakes, apart from Cesare or the monster? Is it far-fetched to see here a repetition of the original shock of the cinema, the arrival of the train at La Ciotat, in the Lumière Brothers' first film (France, 1895)? The traditional story, endlessly retold, is that the first audiences were terrified by the realism afforded by the new technology: they thought the arriving train was going to run them over. But audiences can also be terrified, even now, by the further and deeper effect of this realism: not the impression that the machines and creatures of this two-dimensional world can reach out into ours, but the conviction that in spite their incredibly lifelike motions and gestures they cannot. They are like the dead mother whom Odysseus failed to embrace in the underworld; they are shadows, the most perfect copies of animated life we are likely ever to see. And they make us conscious of our exclusion. Their world is complete without us, as Stanley Cavell says, and as Woolf had also suggested. The figures in moving pictures, she said, were not more beautiful than photographs, but they were perhaps "more real": "We behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it."<sup>8</sup> I am not suggesting that the awakening of Cesare or the monster, or the arrival of the train at La Ciotat, is an allegory of the cinema, or that the audience needs to be conscious of any question about reality as it watches a film; only that the sight of otherness, the unmistakable sight of actual alien existence, is one of the cinema's great gifts, and anyone meeting it would be right to be overwhelmed.

*Life to those Shadows* is the title of Noel Burch's remarkable book about the early cinema, but his argument is that commercial films have overwhelmingly attempted to deny that the shadows are shadows, to replace the expressive possibilities Woolf evoked with an old-fashioned and all-consuming illusion of life. Burch calls this practice the Institutional Mode of Representation, a system that has come to seem like nature to us,

as if the movies had to become what they did become, and as if their development into the mode of realism still dominant in Hollywood and on television was only to be expected, a form of evolution. We can see things this way only by concentrating on the reality effect in movies, and denying the ghost effect which is its precise twin; and by thinking of the movies as mostly defined by the single shot, the watching camera, a moving picture which is also an impeccable picture of movement. The moment we put two shots together we have a syntax, and realism in this mode, as perhaps in any other, involves our thoroughly learning and thoroughly forgetting this syntax – or not even forgetting, since we usually learn it without even knowing we have. The syntax consists chiefly of the principle of montage, which I have already mentioned; and of another fundamental movie principle, that of the construction of imaginary space through the direction of the gaze. Both of these principles are so quintessentially Modernist that their burial in Victorian narrative illusion makes for an all but unmanageable paradox. It is as if we were to read the broken images of *The Waste Land* as a smoothly written novella; not fragments shored against ruin but complete sentences connected by an invisible but quite unproblematic grammar.

“Montage is the organization of cinematic material,” Lev Kuleshov wrote in 1929. “Separate shots ... did not constitute cinema, but only the material for cinema.”<sup>9</sup> Kuleshov conducted a famous experiment by alternating the same shot of the actor Mozhukin with “various other shots (a plate of soup, a girl, a child’s coffin).” Depending on the cutting, the same face looked hungry, lascivious, grieving, and so on. Sergei Eisenstein reports an even more interesting historical case, a Russian version of a German film about Danton. Camille Desmoulins is sentenced to death, Danton rushes to meet Robespierre, who brushes away a tear. A title card says, “In the name of freedom I had to sacrifice a friend.” “But who could have guessed,” Eisenstein continues, “that in the German original Danton ... ran to the evil Robespierre and ... spat in his face? And that it was this spit that Robespierre wiped from his face with a handkerchief ... Two tiny cuts reversed the entire significance of this scene.”<sup>10</sup>

Montage, then, is not only the organization of cinematic material, it is the implication of meaning – of a meaning that can only be implied, since films, like dreams, have a syntax which functions chiefly by association and accumulation. They cannot say no, they compact every apparent contradiction into a metaphor, make every time into a version of the present. Title cards and dialog and voice-over narrative or commentary work to disguise and mitigate these features, but nothing quite cancels the sight on the screen: we cannot *not* see what we are seeing, and much of what is not seen is not said either. The famous opening scene of Luis Buñuel’s *Un Chien andalou* (France, 1928) shows us a man, a pair of hands, a razor, a young woman, an eye, the moon, clouds, another (animal) eye. Only a range of logical leaps and suppositions converts this sequence into narrative: “The man sharpens the razor and then he cuts the woman’s eye.” Film has no *and*, still less an *and then*, and in this case, no possessive apostrophe. Films replace grammar and causality by simple succession: *then, then, then, then*. We

invent the missing syntax, supply all the connectives – or rather we invent and supply a good deal more than we usually recognize.

But then, Eisenstein and Kuleshov would say, films are made of images *and* implication: irrefutable images, ideally, and irresistible implication; not the illusion of life but the force of a passion or an argument. When Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (USSR, 1925) shows us the squirming maggots in the seamen's food, this *is* an argument against the men's terrible working conditions, and the ship's doctor's claim that these are just dead eggs seems extravagant and heartless in advance, a denial not only of justice but of the very idea of evidence. But Eisenstein does not oppose the literal to the metaphorical. This film, with its changes of light, ships in the mist, rocking spaces of gleaming water, is always photographically beautiful in ways that *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is not, and no doubt could not be, since it sought not to reconstruct the historical world but to photograph a world of nightmare. Eisenstein called *Caligari* a "barbaric carnival." But then when Eisenstein, in *Potemkin*, shows the seamen off-duty, sleeping below decks, their hammocks are intricately strung across each other at all angles, like a cat's cradle, the camera lingers on the faces, the physical forms of the men. There is something similar to the *Caligari* effect here, in spite of all the differences. The resemblance has to do with complication and constriction, with the picture of reality as tangle; but even more fundamentally with the reaching for metaphor in the cinema. Montage *is* metaphor here, it is what makes the image into a story. Later in the film, in the famous massacre scene on the Odessa steps, the soldiers descend like automata, firing on the fleeing crowd. A child is shot, trampled. There is a close-up on the child's mother's face, then she is shot too. An abandoned baby carriage teeters on a step, then starts its amazing, solitary journey through the carnage. Another woman is seen in close-up, her eye slashed by a soldier. This is a Modernist poem, we might say; but it is not a photograph album. We do not convert the images into simple protest or an exclamation of horror: there are too many of them, and they are too memorable, for that. But we do not just collect them. We *read* them, to use a term which is often problematic in talking about film, but carries the necessary intimation of interpretation here.

In a quite different register, Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (USA 1925) is hugely and brilliantly dependent on montage. What is wonderfully funny about the great scene where the prospectors' cabin is tilted over an abyss is the alternation between different knowledges of the situation. It is because we have seen the cabin from a distance, hanging ridiculously over the cliff's edge, that we know what is happening in the cabin. Chaplin and Big Jim are merely mystified by the sudden tips and lurches of the place. When their random movements, their crossing over to either side of the cabin, for instance, maintain or restore the balance, we are delighted by the intersection of chance and physics. The two men stamp, jump up and down, proving to their own satisfaction, at least for a moment, that nothing is wrong. Then Chaplin's attack of hiccups disturbs this precarious order. They do get out alive, Big Jim discovers his lost claim (underneath the cabin, or rather where the cabin was), and they both become rich. What follows now

is one of the most intricate moments in the movies. Chaplin and Big Jim are traveling (“Homeward bound on the good ship Success,” a title card says). They get out of their old clothes, and Chaplin now looks not like the tramp Charlie but like a rich man – like the moviemaker Charles Chaplin, say. He is wearing a smart overcoat with an astrakhan collar (later taken off to reveal a fur coat underneath, and a very smart morning suit, with tails, under that). Boarding ship, he is asked by a photographer if he will pose in his old clothes. He agrees, goes into a room to change, a valet pulls a curtain. Then pulls back the curtain, as if Chaplin, now back in costume, was stepping on to a stage. He goes out on to the deck, poses for the photographer, cleans his finger nails with his cane, steps back, comes forward; steps back again and falls out of sight on to a lower deck behind him. This accident reunites him with the girl he had lost, but we can scarcely concentrate on the happy ending because of the astonishing pile-up of visual wit. Chaplin, having once turned himself into Charlie, now turns Charlie into Chaplin and back again into Charlie, before our very eyes. What do we see, when we see him posing for that photograph? The very image of the man we saw before, when he was not rich, just the endlessly unlucky (but resourceful) tramp. What’s the difference? There is no difference, visually. Montage here is plot rather than metaphor, the story of the riches and the return to visual poverty for the photograph. But the interaction between image and implication is very similar to that in Eisenstein’s Danton example, and everything depends on the fact that the image cannot simply be absorbed into an alibi or the plausibility of a narrative excuse, that it both lends itself to and resists interpretation.

Buñuel said that he had excluded all narrative sense, all logical association from *Un Chien andalou*. I have already mentioned the opening scene. A title card says, “Once upon a time,” and a burly fellow, who happens to be Buñuelhimself, appears in his shirtsleeves, smoking, sharpening a razor, testing it against his thumbnail. He steps out on to a balcony and takes a look at the moon. We see a young woman’s face in close-up. A hand holds her left eye open, while another hand approaches the eye with a razor. A cloud passes across the moon, as though slicing through it, and in a very large close-up the razor cuts into an eye, which leaks matter immediately. A new title card says, “Eight years later.”

People still gasp when this scene is shown. There is no way of reducing the intimacy of its violence. The fact that the same young woman appears soon after in the film, both eyes happily intact, and the fact that the sliced eye, on inspection, can be seen to be that of an animal – of one of the two dead donkeys, I take it, which are later draped over two grand pianos – are not as comforting as one might hope. Much has been written about this eye, but it is clear that however Buñuel and Dalí arrived at this image (“Dalí and I,” Buñuel told François Truffaut, “rejected mercilessly all that could have signified something”<sup>11</sup>), there is nothing accidental about its place in the film. It assaults the very organ we are viewing with, blinds us by proxy, and our physical disgust and fright are complicated by an obscure sense that some sort of ugly justice has been done, that we have got what we deserve. Antonin Artaud had written earlier that a film should come as

“a shock to the eye, drawn so to speak from the very substance of the eye,”<sup>12</sup> and *Un Chien andalou* renders this figure with horrible literality. The casual narrative adds to the effect. We did not think he was sharpening the razor for that, and the cards suggest an idiotic storyteller who just does not know what is in his tale.

I think it helps to see *Un Chien andalou*, and indeed much of Surrealism, as an exercise in nonsense, as nonsense was understood, for example, by Lewis Carroll, who fulfilled nearly every Surrealist prophecy before it was made. “What has been understood,” Paul Eluard wrote in a poem, “no longer exists.”<sup>13</sup> Buñuel told a friend that Surrealism was not to be confused with idiocy, although they “share something of the same quality”; and R. P. Blackmur’s dubious definition of an idiot’s exploit (“a dive beneath the syntactic mind”<sup>14</sup>) is a fine description of nonsense. Nonsense represents, in a broader and less mystified form, the freedom from meaning that the Surrealists sought in automatic writing, and it is similarly elusive, and short-lived. Lautréamont’s “Nothing is incomprehensible”<sup>15</sup> is not opposed to Eluard’s assertion; it merely marks a later stage in the game of meaning.

Much of the nonsense in *Un Chien andalou* has to do specifically with the cinema. It is true, as critics have often said, that in spite of its avant-garde reputation *Un Chien andalou* is not formally a very experimental film; does not, apart from a bit of slow motion and some dabbling with an iris, tinker much with technique. But it is because the work is conventional in so many respects that its questioning of convention is so interesting.

What makes us think, for example, that space in a movie is continuous and substantial? If a person leaves a room, we picture him or her arriving in another room, or in a corridor, or on a street; not merely in another frame of film, or off the set entirely; or as happens in *Un Chien andalou*, in the *same* room, or on a beach. The gags here concern not philosophers’ space but moviemakers’ space, the fabricated world we keep taking for a straightforward representation of the actual world. The cinematic rule Buñuel keeps breaking is that of shot-countershot, whereby an image of a face looking offscreen followed by an image of an object means the person is looking at the object. Or a face looking offscreen right followed by another face looking offscreen left means two people are in the same space and talking to each other. These are rules not in the sense that anyone is punished for breaking them, but in the sense that the very constitution of familiar film worlds depends on them. There is nothing natural about this rule, as Noel Burch says; although some theorists, notably David Bordwell, have argued that if it did not relate to the nature of human perception in some way it would not have established itself as it did. “It took some twenty years for this figure of editing to become the cornerstone of a narrative continuity in films,” P. Adams Sitney writes. “By the end of the First World War, it was a firmly established convention.”<sup>16</sup> When Alfred Hitchcock, cited by Sitney, describes Kuleshov’s montage experiment – “Show a man looking at something, say a baby. Then show him smiling” – his first sentence, in this context, takes

entirely for granted the grammar of shot-countershot, this just is one of the ways in which you “show a man looking at something.” The figure is so extensive in the cinema that we scarcely need to illustrate it further; the important thing is that it *is* a figure, one of the principal ways in which films become worlds rather than sequences of flat images, and that its logic resembles not only that of dreams but that of Modernist poetics as say Ezra Pound understood them.

In *Un Chien andalou*, Buñuel also plays with the idea that a film frame always excludes something; or rather seems to exclude a space that prolongs the scene that is viewed. We can get very anxious about what we are *not* seeing in a movie, even when we know there is nothing there, or only a studio, power-cables and boxes and arc lamps. We think we may be missing a piece of the heroes’ universe, that a shift of the camera will reveal an essential truth, the crucial absent clue. When the protagonist of *Un Chien andalou* picks up two ends of rope and starts to drag on them, the film makes an implicit promise that it will let us know where the ropes lead; this is the sort of thing films do, part of their decorum. But then when the man’s extraordinary cargo comes into view – cork mats, melons, two live priests, the grand pianos with the dead donkeys slung across them – we are being shown not only the repressed and displaced past of the character, as many critics have thought, but again, a certain provocative possibility of the cinema. *This is a film*. What is beyond the frame, what can be dragged into sight at any moment, may literally be *anything*.

Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (USSR, 1928), a montage of events depicting the life of a city, is a celebration of film, shown as miraculously able to capture motion – as distinct from two forms of stillness, that of a sleeping world and that of frozen action, the world halted in a photograph. The first form is shown in the early part of the film: machines idle, buses in their depot, streets unpeopled, a woman asleep, a tramp asleep. This is a world that could move, but is not moving – yet. The camera moves, the only live thing in sight. Then the machines are shown in whirring motion, the buses emerge, the streets fill up, the woman awakes, gets dressed, the tramp yawns, rolls over. But the camera is always alive in this film, and always in sight, here and later, because the man with the movie camera keeps showing up on the screen, trotting from location to location with his tripod over his shoulder, flat cap, checkered sweater, jodhpurs, what used to be the moviemaker’s uniform – at least in the movies. The man and his camera are reflected in mirrors, in people’s eyes; we see the camera perched on a high building, swiveling to catch another portion of the street below; the man clings dangerously to a moving train, cranking his camera furiously. But of course the camera is also not in sight – since there has to be another camera beside this one, an unseen apparatus photographing this one at work. As Stanley Cavell says, you can always feel a camera is left out of the picture, the one that is running now, and nowhere is this claim truer than for this movie. At one point, as if performing this truth, daring us to deny it, the camera on its tripod starts to work on its own, stalking about, stretching its legs, hauling itself up to its full height, looking very much like one of the long-limbed attack



creatures in George Lucas's *Star Wars* (USA, 1977). So *Man with the Movie Camera* is a double, glancing title: it names the film's theme, and the visual image that connects scene to scene; and it names the invisible author, telling us that this is the actual world, collected with documentary enthusiasm, and also the world Dziga Vertov has made.

The second form of stillness is brusquely, bluntly introduced by a freeze-frame shot of a horse pulling a carriage. Racing along a moment ago, now the horse is stopped in mid-motion, just a photograph. Various other stills appear, a woman sewing, a baby, another woman's face, all intercut with moving pictures of a woman doing something else, looking at strips of ... celluloid, slicing them with scissors. She is editing a film, and after a little more parallel montage (stills, woman editing) we see (we assume) what she has been editing, and these very stills come to life, fill the screen. The horse continues its career. There is a very strong sense of miracle. It does not seem strange that a film could be stopped; but it seems incredible that a photograph could be started, that these frozen figures spring to life, as if there had never been a photograph, as if they were simply there, alive, and film had registered their presence, the way an audiotape registers sound. What Vertov is suggesting, I take it, is that film neither invents the world nor simply records it. His term "cinema-eye," like Isherwood's famous phrase "I am a camera," insists on the documentary nature of the material to be seen; on the *seen* nature of the material. But eyes inhabit human heads, and are instructed by passions and prejudices as well as optics. Vertov thought the time was always the present in film, and did not like the simulation of historical scenes which Eisenstein (and many others) went in for. But his ideal was a cinema based on the "organization of camera-recorded documentary material,"<sup>17</sup> where the element of organization is at least as important as the element of record, and *Man with a Movie Camera* insists on the art of the filmmaker as a way, perhaps, of getting us to see historical reality more clearly – the way the Russian Formalists, in literature, saw the estrangement of the world as a path to the restoration of a world lost to automation and habit. There are several remarkable split-screen shots, for example, where the two halves of the screen dissolve into each other: two city scenes with criss-crossing crowds, the two halves of a theatre facade imploding on each other, like twin leaning towers colliding.

*Man with a Movie Camera* is all montage, a tribute to film as montage. Its narrative is that of the seeing eye, and it does not contain, as far as I can tell, a single instance of shot-countershot. Carl Theodore Dreyer's fabulous *Passion of Joan of Arc* (France, 1928), by contrast, takes this by now established, mainstream narrative figure and converts it into an art form of its own. The movie depicts Joan's trial, her stubborn resistance to her accusers, her recantation through fear, and her recantation of her recantation. At the end she is burned, and the smoke-singed face of Maria Falconetti as Joan, intercut with Breughel-like faces in the crowd and among the soldiers, is one of the great moving icons of the cinema. What we see here is not so much her pain or terror, or even her heroism, as her helplessness, the agony of her loyalty to her simple ideas of goodness and justice. Before that we have seen what she sees, the rows of



sympathetic and unsympathetic faces among her ecclesiastical judges, the hard mugs of the English soldiers, often shot from below in an angle which anticipates the directorial signature of Orson Welles. We see what she cannot see, the world outside her cell, a whole carnivalesque crowd of jugglers, acrobats, contortionists, a figure on a swing, another figure balancing a huge cartwheel on its head. And we see her as characters in the film can and cannot see her, a living person in the same room and a face in huge, long close-up, a map of the intimate, intricate sorrows of a simple soul. Buñuel wrote admiringly of the “pitiful geography” of all the faces in this film, as if flesh and blood were all a filmmaker needed for tragedy; but emphasized the delicacy of Dreyer’s unsentimental attention to Joan’s innocence: “Lit by tears, purified by flames, head shaved, grubby as a little girl, yet for a moment she stops crying to watch some pigeons settle on the spire of the church. Then, she dies.”<sup>18</sup> The pigeons are probably larks, or pigeons cast as larks; but here as with Hitchcock’s remark about the man and the baby, we note the ease of the syntax, the verb which slips into the space between frame and frame. “She stops crying to watch ...” That is, a shot of her face is followed by a shot of some birds.

Dreyer later said he wished he could have made this film with sound, but the silence of this work has an extraordinary eerie quality, and tells us something about silent films in general. The French surrealist poet Robert Desnos once quoted an anonymous friend of his as saying that the old cinema was not silent (mute in French); it was the spectator who was deaf. “People say terrible things to each other, and like a sick person, he needs to have them written down.”<sup>19</sup> In *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, we do indeed feel that the film is not silent, since it is full of talk, accusations, dialog; and we guess at the dialog, try to read lips, long before the title cards come to our assistance. The world of the film is complete, and sound could only help us to understand better what is already there without us. The same is true of all the great silent films: *Caligari*, Fritz Lang’s *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (Germany, 1922), *Potemkin*, Erich von Stroheim’s *Greed* (USA, 1924), many others. In other silent films, notably those of D. W. Griffith, like *Broken Blossoms* (USA, 1919) and *Intolerance* (USA, 1919), spectacular as they are, you feel the weight of prehistory: these lurid narratives are hampered by their silence, sound can only become a fulfillment for them.

Modernism in the movies was not always highbrow. Or, not only highbrow movies were Modernist. One could argue (although I shall not just now) that animated cartoons are one of Modernism’s most significant achievements, and certainly one of Modernism’s most extravagant and brilliant appearances in the cinema occurs in the Marx Brothers’ *Duck Soup* (Leo McCarey, USA, 1933). There is a scene here which makes the cinematic self-reference in Vertov or Chaplin seem very modest indeed. All three Marx Brothers, Groucho, Chico, and Harpo, look alike at this moment in the film. For the purposes of an elaborate secret-stealing plot, both Chico and Harpo are disguised as Groucho: all three are wearing a nightcap, a long white nightshirt, Groucho glasses and eyebrows and Groucho greasepaint moustache. After various misadventures, Harpo,

pursued by Groucho, crashes through a full-length mirror. He pauses, and decides to simulate the mirror that is not there by imitating the gestures of Groucho as he faces it. Groucho scratches his chin, lifts an eyebrow, does a little dance; leaves the frame of the mirror and returns hopping; leaves the frame of the mirror and returns on his knees. Harpo copies all of these gestures with minute fidelity – or rather, since the gestures are simultaneous, he does not copy them, he intuits them and performs them. At one point, the point at which the routine reaches its funniest and also its most disturbing reach, Groucho spins full circle and spreads his arms, while Harpo stands quite still and spreads his arms.

Only the movie audience has seen that Harpo has not spun round, and the following implications and questions crowd upon us. The uncanny (and hilarious) imitation of a mirror gives way to a picture of the mirror's difference, not only what it can and cannot do, but what it does not have to do. When Harpo does not spin he asserts the reality of the mirror even more fully than in his other acts. If we were there, if we had spun around, we would not be able to see anything in the mirror except the moment of our turning away and the moment of our coming back. It is like missing the instant of Frankenstein's creature's birth, or Cesare's awakening. It is like a photograph, not a movie. It is only because this is a movie that we see what Groucho cannot see, what we ourselves would not see if we were there. You cannot see yourself in a mirror when you are looking away. Or more eerily, you cannot tell what is happening in a mirror when you close your eyes. And more subtly, if you are not looking at it, it does not matter whether the mirror is really a mirror or not.

Picturing a mirror, an empty space which becomes a mirror, the film pictures itself, and more than that. It pictures an anxiety of knowledge, comically drawn here, but desperate elsewhere, as in several of Welles's films, notably *Citizen Kane* (USA, 1941) and *Mr. Arkadin* (France/Spain, 1955), where the spectators' knowledge is fuller than that of the characters, but also useless. We know what "rosebud" means in the first of these two films – it refers to the sled taken away from Charles Foster Kane as a child, and therefore, sentimentally, to the child in him who got lost – but what good is that knowledge to him or us? Because films rely so much on our seeing things, on our watching a world, on the illusion of our being there, their richest effect is not like that of the great realist novels or plays, where our absence is what allows us to accept and rebuild and inhabit the offered worlds. In Modernist cinema, or in any cinema which remembers its Modernist possibilities, our absence, however much we are prepared for it, is a shock. How could a world so real get on so well without us? How could we not be able to reach into a world so meticulously resembling ours? Like the effect of immediate reality, this denied/recalled absence is "an orchid in the land of technology"; a false flower of the Modernist waste land, desolate when it is not comic, but riotously comic, fortunately, when the infernal machine trusts us with its secrets. "We see life as it is when we have no part in it"; when it is not our face and body in the mirror. It is not just that we haunt the world of films, as Cavell memorably says. It is that a florid, blooming

technology has taken our place there, and is living what used to be our life.

## Notes

**1** Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 3.

**2** Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 233.

**3** Christopher Isherwood, *Prater Violet* (New York: North Point Press; Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), pp. 30–1.

**4** *Ibid.*, p. 65.

**5** *Ibid.*, p. 71.

**6** Virginia Woolf, *The Captain's Death-Bed and Other Essays* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 183.

**7** S. S. Prawer, *Caligari's Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 173.

**8** Woolf, *The Captain's Death-Bed*, p. 181.

**9** Lev Kuleshov, *Kuleshov on Film*, trans. Ronald Levaco (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1974), p. 48.

**10** Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, quoted in P. Adams Sitney, *Modernist Montage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 40.

**11** Luis Buñuel, interview with François Truffaut, quoted in Steven Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), p. 196.

**12** Antonin Artaud, quoted in J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971), p. 79.

**13** Paul Eluard, *Capitale de la douleur* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 77, my translation.

**14** R. P. Blackmur, *Eleven Essays in the European Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1964), p. 144.

**15** Lautréamont, quoted in Mary Ann Caws, *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 175.

**16** Sitney, *Modernist Montage*, p. 17.

**17** Dziga Vertov, quoted in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, entry on “Motion Pictures: Soviet Union.”

**18** Luis Buñuel, “Carl Dreyer’s *Joan of Arc*,” in Francisco Aranda, *Luis Buñuel* (New York: Da Capo, 1978), p. 268.

**19** Robert Desnos, *Cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 99, my translation.



## 13 Modernism and colonialism

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Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews

Interpretations of Modernism current in the academy still tend to assume a long-dominant Anglo-American or Euro-American axis, despite the fact that criticism in recent years has begun to ask new questions as regards the transnational makeup of early-twentieth-century literature and art. Moreover, although Modernism evidently involved a series of movements that were animated by, and shaped within, inter- and transnational arenas, Modernism's methodological and critical coordinates by and large remain transatlantic. The cross-cultural and cross-national exchanges that took place between artists, and the various cross-border journeys they undertook, all centrally formative to what we now understand to be Modernism, are perceived to be in the main exchanges and journeys between Britain, the rest of Europe, and America. Even Richard Bégam and Michael Valdez Moses's *Modernism and Colonialism* (2007), a path-breaking collection investigating how "the modernist revolution can be understood as a critical and artistic engagement with the ... European quest for empire," ultimately circumscribes the investigation it wishes to pursue by focusing, the introduction emphasizes, on "traditional" Modernism.<sup>1</sup> Taking a different direction, this chapter proposes that the shaping of Modernism by a colonial geopolitics can be persuasively demonstrated by setting its canonical figures – Eliot, Woolf, Joyce, Yeats – in relation to expanded cosmopolitan and constellated colonial contexts, and examining the cultural and aesthetic contours of these.<sup>2</sup>

In specific terms, the question this chapter wishes to ask is whether the apparently definitive two-pole Anglo-American interrelationship encompasses the greater part of the cross-border interaction, and exploration of contact zones and liminal spaces, that were going on in the period. How central was Anglo-American Modernism to the numerous movements and individuals investigating newness and redefining tradition elsewhere in the world? In short, is the diffusionist picture from traditional center to periphery the whole picture? If we suspend the allegedly axial relationship, and consider Modernism in its high period, 1910–30, in a wider transnational, even world-scale context – a context shaped by colonial, and incipiently global, forces – could Modernism be said to have been *informed* by colonial experiences and energies? Following from studies of Modernism as at once local in preoccupation yet global in reach, as found in Doyle and Winkiel's *Geomodernisms* (though its time-frame is comparatively belated), might we detach ourselves from the assumption that creative production elsewhere, across the world, was merely reflective and derivative of Euro-American Modernism?<sup>3</sup>

As does Partha Mitter in his invigorating new study of Modernist art in India, we as Modernist critics should, we believe, investigate whether the apparently derivative did not

instead play out as a “two-way dialogic process” between the so-called center (London, Paris, New York) and its peripheries (Calcutta, Kingston, Sydney). Worldwide, Modernism represented an unfolding of different, interacting responses to the predicament of modernity.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, placing Modernist lines of influence and affiliation within an expanded, colonial field, sheds light on new patterns of interrelationship, cross-fertilization and elective affinity that emerged within and around the “virtual cosmopolis” of the colonial city – a cosmopolis forged by the print media and shared languages, as Mitter describes. Might it be the case, we ask, that the troubled yet also creative and even collaborative interactions that colonialism (as both system and practice) produced, helped to forge Modernist perceptions and techniques? Are we as critics confronted by a more complex, ramified picture than the sometimes-exclusive attention paid to the transnational Modernists Eliot and Pound, or the gender- and class-travelers Woolf and Lawrence, suggests? Focusing on a cluster of writers in the period, drawn from different colonial regions and cultural backgrounds, this chapter considers the changed and shifting aspects of Modernism when situated within the dimensions laid open by colonialism. Informed, too, by a growing understanding on the part of postcolonial critics of cultural histories as transnational, the chapter will outline a more striated, complex picture of Modernism than traditional accounts have hitherto allowed.

## **The colonial landscape of Modernism**

The broader colonial landscape of Modernism is, it is important at once to recognize, not only a methodological or ideological construct but also licensed by the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century history of colonialism, in particular that of the British empire. Modernism – defined as a self-reflexive concern with formal innovation in the face of perceived historical and moral crises besetting the West – was perhaps the first global development in literature and the arts, as new research on the responses to empire of the mainstream Modernists suggests.<sup>5</sup> It was a development enabled first and foremost by the communication channels, and the travelers’ and migrant pathways that empire put in place. But, insofar as Modernism represents a serious – fascinated yet also frightened – confrontation with the “other,” it was also enabled by the contacts between mutually unfamiliar cultures that empire brought about, unequal and unjust as these often were. In similar ways to how modernity in the colonial context constitutes for historian Dipesh Chakrabarty not a continuous line of progress but a layering of disjointed temporalities, Modernism in the context of a world-embracing anglophone empire emerged out of that empire’s concatenation of discontinuous cultural perceptions of time and space.<sup>6</sup> As Jed Esty writes in *Modernism and Colonialism*, “the modernist [novel] assimilates the temporality of a global and imperial era when nations spilled beyond their borders and when the accelerating yet uneven pace of development seemed to have thrown the time of modernity out of joint.”<sup>7</sup>

Modernism famously acknowledged the epistemological challenge and stimulation



represented by the distant and the other: think only of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907), or the ambivalent physicality of the West African fetish figures in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920). It was perhaps the first movement in the arts that could claim participation worldwide, not only on the part of writers and artists, but also in its implicit appeal to audiences and readers across the globe, *and* in its response to them. A situation arose where colonial and native writers were deploying the so-called Modernist devices of defamiliarization and dissociation to give expression to their decentered, culturally disrupted realities at around the same time that metropolitan Modernists were turning to other cultures to transform their society and the western self.<sup>8</sup> To put it more strongly, cross-border dialogs facilitated by colonialism's globalizing forces encouraged at various different levels the process of giving the "other" voice – as well as of investigating who the "other" was in the first place. So, as metropolitan Modernist writing formed a counterpoint to, and a correlate for, what was happening away from the center, colonials – citizens of the empire – transfigured European representation by introducing to it, as Mary Lou Emery writes of Caribbean Modernism, their "unique," transcontinental "crossroads of styles, forms and cultures."<sup>9</sup>

A related development was that, with the vast expansion of the imperial metropolises, colonial writers like Katherine Mansfield, Claude McKay, Mulk Raj Anand, Jean Rhys, and C. L. R. James gravitated to these cities' cultural, class, and gender freedoms. They themselves constituted part of its experimental hubbub and their exilic and migrant perspectives contributed to the living collage that was the urban avant-garde. This creative involvement of other cultural and national players inevitably intensified those experiences characteristically associated with Modernism: "making new"; a sense of historical liminality; the fragmentation of absolutes; interests in subjective and multiple perspectives, and in the fluidity of consciousness. That is to say, the preoccupation with alienation and disoriented or displaced identity shared by the new colonial writers, related to and interacted with the breakdown in universal systems of understanding that preoccupied the metropolitan Modernists. The colonials' culturally and nationally translated art also provided models for the multilingual, discontinuous, and generically mixed utterance that Modernism increasingly began to favor, as is clearly demonstrated by the teasingly innovative jump cuts that characterize the colonial Katherine Mansfield's short stories.

It is true of course that the participation of colonial writers and artists in the expanding Modernist movement or movements was not as intensive or frequent as it was for the Anglo-American metropolitans: their status was simply not equivalent. Especially for black writers like McKay, but also for white colonials marked, as Mansfield said, by "the taint of the pioneer in their blood," their sense of place in Britain and the rest of Europe was different.<sup>10</sup> Yet the mere fact that there were prominent colonial participants in Modernism – Mansfield and Yeats, Plomer and McKay, Anand and Rhys – testifies to the importance of their contribution and the significance of their insights. The "political and artistic movements across [the] exclusionary and shifting boundaries" they

encountered produced in them, to different degrees, an energetic “aesthetics of transfiguration,” to cite Emery once again. Far from their relationship to the center being belated, as has been suggested in relation to Anand and Rhys for example, the vigorous and heterogeneous modernity they represented cannot but have informed the metropolitan Modernist involvement in the inverse, the miscellaneous, the disjointed. In corresponding terms, Paul Gilroy designates the African slaves of the New World the first moderns on the basis of their painful but ultimately transformational interaction with, and adaptation to, a variety of transatlantic cultural developments.<sup>11</sup>

Edward Said is prominent within the postcolonial rereading of Modernism for his contention that protomodernists like Joseph Conrad exhibited, even if in conflicted and contradictory ways, the “consolidated vision” of empire.<sup>12</sup> As will be clear from the above, the emphasis in this chapter is differently inflected. We suggest that empire (alongside war, urbanization, modernity itself) made Modernism possible – powered it, even if partly in reverse or negatively. The experience of colonial rule produced cultural and aesthetic processes that ultimately helped to trigger the delegitimation of that rule: the dissociation of subjectivity, the dislocation of western sensibility, the valorization of the fragment, the reification of the alien, and the fascinated glance at the stranger.

Colonial and nationalist writers and artists sought through their work, within its dissociated forms, to speak of alternative worlds and to create alternative selves – alternative both to their parochial colonial realities and to the alienating urban modernity that they now confronted. They looked for a new sense of community, between artists as opposed to citizens. In their art and through their networks, colonial writers of the Modernist metropolis, like Mansfield, Anand, and McKay, but also Joyce and Yeats, invented nostalgic frameworks of belonging (within their avant-garde groups or in their mythical methodology), built out of the native, local knowledge they had left behind. W. B. Yeats’s later career, for example, asserts a range of historical and visionary possibilities in order to shore up his sense of his unique lineage as an Anglo-Irishman against the “filthy modern tide” of modernity on his native soil. One of his central conceits, partly composed from the vantage point of London, is that of the so-called Big House, the Protestant mansion where “certainty” might be found “upon the dreaming air” and “great works constructed ... in nature’s spite”.<sup>13</sup>

For a writer like Yeats, yet also for the Indian radical and Bloomsbury fellow-traveler Anand, Modernism represented a way in which to “[transform] the present out of the clutches of the past,” yet also to define the past or tradition in such a way that made this transformation possible.<sup>14</sup> As Amit Chaudhuri has written of the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Prize winner in 1913, colonial writers of this early Modernist period were improvisers, experimenting eclectically with new forms and “irreducible symbols” while still contending in palpable, serious-minded ways with a self-consciously constructed (even orientalized) tradition.<sup>15</sup>

## Colonial phantasmagoria: Mansfield, Plomer, Anand

The search for new ties of affiliation and the speaking of difference are commitments everywhere present in the work of Katherine Mansfield, William Plomer, and Mulk Raj Anand, all three of whom are united by their relatively marginal, yet, to them, stimulating and nurturing relationships with Bloomsbury. Both Mansfield and Plomer were published by the Hogarth Press, and participated in friendships with central Bloomsbury figures, most notably Virginia Woolf in the case of Mansfield. And, beginning in the late 1920s, Anand received important encouragement from former colonial officer Leonard Woolf at the Press, as well as from E. M. Forster.<sup>16</sup>

The New Zealander Katherine Mansfield's complex "voyage in," her creative trajectory from her "little land" to the metropolis (born in Wellington and educated in London, she moved to Europe for good in 1908), maps a restless striving away from the bourgeois provinciality of her colonial backwater background. Yet in her work this is offset by the traveling colonial's strong preoccupation with self-alienation and a related yearning for her lost homeland, what Homi Bhabha following Freud terms the postcolonial *Unheimlich*, the sense of viewing the world as a permanent outsider.<sup>17</sup> As Angela Smith amongst others observes, Mansfield's short stories ceaselessly explore sites of liminality and estrangement.<sup>18</sup> In particular her more obvious and influential Modernist tales, like "Prelude" or "The Garden Party," generate moments of rupture and fission provoked by moral and emotional crises connected to feelings of being unable to conform or to fit in. In story after story Mansfield's view of the unstable, multifaceted self, which her vagrant experience arguably generated in her, rubs up against not only the limitations imposed by bourgeois provinciality, but also the violations and betrayals foisted by the Modernist city. Both city and colony are places of discomposure and disruption: something that powerfully suggests the extent to which Mansfield's bifurcated colonial-metropolitan positioning is integral to her Modernism.

To take but one example, "Je ne parle pas français" (1919/20) is one of Mansfield's more experimental and perverse shorter stories.<sup>19</sup> The story – which consists of the preening, self-regarding commentary on his languid café life of Raoul Duquette, the I-narrator (a Parisian male prostitute and would-be artist) – announced itself as transgressive at its very first appearance. To publish it, Mansfield was pressed to make reluctant cuts to the sexually explicit content. With its metaphors of "submerged" unconscious worlds, the story indeed announces itself as interested in discovering, through the medium of its deluded first-person narrative, how the self – that constant subject of Modernist interest – both subtends and exceeds conventional characterization. And this no matter how overweening, pretentious, or degraded that self – or perhaps especially at such moments. Throughout, the scene-painting is self-consciously cinematic, referencing early film noir: "the direct result of the American cinema acting upon a weak mind."<sup>20</sup>

Empire, whether in ideological form, or as a material force that had substantially shaped Mansfield's own reality, does not noticeably interfere in Duquette's recollection of the passing encounters with women and men from which he aspires to make his art, except once: in a generative ur-encounter with an "African laundress." His recollection of this encounter, the only memory he retains from childhood, introduces a hyper-disruptive moment into what is already a self-consciously perverse narrative. The "very big, very dark" African laundress who was wont to play with him as a child, as he recalls, made him scream for "joy and fright," and showered deafening kisses upon his ears. Finally, in what became a repeat-performance across his childhood that has, it appears, moulded his parasitic relations with others since, she would put him to her breast, from which, he now surmises, he has inherited his enervating languor and incubus-like emotional greed.

The unexpected encounter Mansfield offers between the "little and light" man-child and the voluminous African laundress in "Je ne parle pas français" is not innocent of Lawrentian-type colonialist associations of black Africanness with visceral knowledge and intuition. Even taken along with the more positive (yet no less stereotyped) associations of the black woman with fecundity and the elemental, this much is evident. However, there is something more interesting at work in the story than a mere recognition of a highly conventional African physicality present at the very heart of France (and at the center of the small Parisian's psychic makeup).

Even taking into account that Mansfield's recognition of the irruptive energy of Africanness within Europe was uncannily prescient of the emergence of Negritude and its reversed aesthetic binaries in Paris a few years later, what is particularly striking about the story is the acknowledged agency of the laundress herself. She may be predatory and corrupting, even abusive and dangerous – a poisoning well – yet she is also represented as self-pleasuring and attentive, both at once, and she is concerned to mother a child who seems to lack alternative parental support. Here the reader might recall that we are reliant upon Duquette's already suspect self-rationalizing memory-work for our account of the woman. Yet, different than his representation of an abusive domestic, the woman might equally well have been a laundress doubling as a paid wet-nurse (under such conditions, the mechanics of Duquette's memory would have manifested no differently). As such, as a wet-nurse, the African woman is of a kind with the numerous other replacement mothers in Mansfield's stories, who stand in for, yet can never fully embody, the lost center and what it represents: aesthetic tradition, primal connectivity. In her ambivalent vitality (contrasting with Kurtz's African woman's despairing appeal in *Heart of Darkness*) the laundress reflects Mansfield's provocative understanding, as a metropolitan outsider, of the transgressive force of the stranger – of the one from elsewhere who positions herself so as to become closer even than a mother.

When reflecting back upon his early life, William Plomer recalled having as a teenager been lent work by Proust and D. H. Lawrence, as well as *Ulysses*. This work sent him into "a turmoil of imaginative and sensory experience" in which "I would hide myself in

the eucalyptus forest known as the Sachsenwald,” and, “in that dry, balsamic air,” would compose his own writing. An early product of this hidden creativity was Plomer’s first novel, *Turbott Wolfe* (1926), begun at age 19. Despite his access to contemporary European literature, Plomer, who held a series of jobs including farming and working at the family native station, felt as he began to write: “I had been largely deprived by circumstances of the direct influence, correction and guidance of my intellectual equals and superiors.” As a result, *Turbott Wolfe*, in retrospect, seemed to him to have obtained a unique form: “To speak of it as a novel is perhaps a misnomer: it was a violent ejaculation, a protest, a nightmare, a phantasmagoria.” The peripheral experience of the writer in the colonial realm produced in him a quintessentially Modernist or dissociated structure: “a shifting scene of real or imagined figures,” as he defines phantasmagoria.<sup>21</sup> Tracing a pathway from the margin to the center not unlike that mapped by his South African precursor Olive Schreiner, Plomer then sent his manuscript to London, where *Turbott Wolfe* was accepted by the Woolfs and appeared through their Hogarth Press.

*Turbott Wolfe* adopts a Kiplingesque or Conradian frame-device, in which Wolfe “narrates” his tale to “William Plomer.” Wolfe, who himself is sent out from Europe because of poor health to run a trading-station in a fictional African village, is an artist *manqué*. He sees trade as a form of art, dreams the Wagnerian dream of coordinating all of the arts, and, when considering the encounter between whites and the native population, filters his ideas through recognizable colonial coordinates. Remembering his admiration for “the marvelous animal grace” of the native population, he states:

I was losing my balance. I remembered that every civilized white man, who considers himself sensitive, in touch with native peoples in his daily life should hold in his heart an image of the failure of Gauguin. Was it a failure? I asked myself: and in the question itself thought I suspected danger. I found myself all at once overwhelmed with a suffocating sensation of universal black darkness. Blackness. I was being sacrificed, a white lamb, to black Africa.

It may have been a disorder of the nerves; it may have been pre-vision.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, like *Heart of Darkness*, *Turbott Wolfe* does not present the reader with a developed or continuous narrative of Wolfe’s cultural disintegration or somewhat predictable colonial “disorder of the nerves.” Its chapters are divided into brief subsections containing scenes of recollection and narratives-within-narratives in which various encounters with enervated white settlers and with the native population (including an unrequited passion for a local woman) are relayed. Early on, Wolfe becomes aware that a crowd circulates around him: English, Dutch, Portuguese, “Bantu,” Lembu, “Christianized or otherwise,” and “Mohammedan negroes.” The crowd represents the “harsh polyglot gaiety that I was living in Africa,” but also the polysemous “gaiety” through which the narrative processes – and which Plomer was again to experience in metropolitan London. This ambivalence about living in Africa is underlined at the political

level in the novel's then-controversial suggestion that it is out of a merging of all these racial elements that a truly African future will emerge. However, Wolfe's involvement in a political movement propagandizing for miscegenation ultimately leads to his expulsion from the country. The novel's uncertainty about establishing a coherent perspective from which to adjudge of its various encounters seems confirmed by the conceit of printing in an Appendix 3 "poems by Friston," one of which ends in Conradian fashion: "Fear has withered swiftly since / horror was written on the sun."<sup>23</sup>

The unresolved but brilliant intensity of *Turbott Wolfe*'s episodes underpins its radical destabilization, and reflects the multiple potentialities within the "Africa" described, as, too, does his next book *I Speak of Africa* – which was again accepted and produced by the Woolfs (1927). "Ula Masondo," a short novel from that book, comes replete with epigraphs from Dryden, a "Zulu folk-song," the Dutch novelist Louis Couperus, and D. H. Lawrence on "the powerful blood-feeling of the negro African"; by any measure an extraordinary intertextual mix. This commingling in many ways reflects the pressure that Plomer, like Mansfield, placed on the linguistic and generic resources that lay to hand in order to evoke their particular colonial phantasmagoria – which in his case includes the exploitation and entrapment of the native. An Eliot-like vision is imported into – yet in fact generated out of – the African bush:

Horrent with thorns, the aloe, the snake-apple, the poison cactus and the century plant clutch the dry earth with tortured roots, withering and sprouting in the burning waste ... somewhere gilded roofs vibrate and vanish in a soothing or a harrowing triumph of complaining pipes and prattling strings ...<sup>24</sup>

Mulk Raj Anand, the Gandhian nationalist and later socialist, did not himself publish in the period under investigation, up to 1930, though he energetically hawked his first novel, which became *Untouchable* (1935), to all comers from about 1928 onwards. Yet in *Untouchable*, the tale of a day in the life of the eponymous Bakha, a latrine cleaner, Anand was not only concerned to portray "the human condition of an Indian in the lower depths" (and the situation of all Indians under colonialism), but also to write a modern novel.<sup>25</sup> In its identification with Bakha's plight, *Untouchable* has most frequently been read as a passionate nationalist critique of India's caste system – and was according to an apocryphal story read and criticized by Gandhi when Anand visited him at his ashram in either 1929 or 1932. At the same time, influenced by a fascination with society's dregs shaped by Maxim Gorky and by the day-in-a-life frame of Joyce's *Ulysses*, the novel is noticeably experimental as well as being programmatic. An exuberant product of Anand's own cross-cultural and transnational experience, *Untouchable* (like *Turbott Wolfe*) demonstrates how a new, revolutionary approach may be generated out of the crossing of different cultural forms and techniques: it inscribes a symbolic "bridge," as Anand himself said, between "the Ganga and the Thames."<sup>26</sup> *Untouchable* is in this respect as eclectic in its terms of reference as is *The Waste Land*, and indeed sparked a comparable



degree of shock in its audience, in this case about what E. M. Forster in his famous supportive Preface called its “dirtiness.” Yet, far from being simply imitative of Joyce or Eliot, the novel itself participated in formative ways in the cross-border flows of exchange that, as described above, characterized Modernist activity. As Jessica Berman writes, in Anand’s writing it is possible to see how “streams of discourse [moved] not just from metropolis to colony, or even back from colony to metropolis, but ... from colony [Ireland] to metropolis to another colony [India] and back again.”<sup>27</sup>

## The unsettling of settled worlds

World War I, the crucial watershed in the period, had an incalculable impact on writers and art movements worldwide, and must be taken into account in any discussion of Modernism and colonialism. The war not only represented the conflagration of imperial Europe, laying waste to the Austro-Hungarian empire, and assailing the imperial authority of Britain and France. For colonials drawn into a conflict not of their making, it also violently stirred up distinctions between center and periphery, and promoted and intensified colonial disenchantment and local nationalist feeling.

In the trenches of the western front, where Indian Army soldiers in great numbers (about 1.5 million) fought alongside Jamaicans, Australians, Canadians, Nigerians, and the British, the mystique of liberal Europe, which the colonial troops had come to safeguard, was conclusively shattered. Soldiers carried home to towns in Africa and Australia images of the waste lands of the West, and rumors that the “falling towers” of empire would give way to a recognition of small nations’ rights (as Woodrow Wilson indeed confirmed in 1919) – and hence implicitly of “small”/nonmetropolitan artists and communities. Even Mansfield, though relatively removed from the war experience, sought, after the loss of her soldier brother Leslie Beauchamp in 1916, to commit herself to transporting the imagined worlds of her Pacific childhood “into the eyes of the old world,” presumably as a mode of aesthetic escape and transformation. The vocabularies of revolution and disruption provided by a Europe at war, its “vortex of broken passions ... fears and horrors,” as Lawrence wrote in *Kangaroo* (1923), effectively licensed colonial and native writers to articulate and make sense of the greatest disruption of all – colonialism itself.<sup>28</sup> Claude McKay, a prominent writer of the Harlem Renaissance, for instance, adapted the black folkloric traditions he had studied as a young poet in Jamaica, to unsettle inherited narrative conventions in novels like *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929), subtitled “A Story without a Plot.” His most powerful and politically radical statement, however, the sonnet “If We Must Die” (1918), is written in Standard English, as if, when speaking formally of black retaliation, he cannot afford to be less than clear. For him, the promotion and intensification of national feeling demanded a solicitation of both registers – the conventional and the Creole.

The impact of the war, the undermining of settled traditions and ways of life,



reverberates across non-Anglo-American Modernist writing by women as well as men. Indeed, it can be persuasively argued that the unsettling of tradition affected writers from settler communities invested in land and landed conventions particularly deeply, with particularly upsetting consequences. The Anglo-Irish novelist and short-story writer Elizabeth Bowen is an eloquent commentator on precisely such unsettling, inflicted in her case by the Irish War of Independence, an end-of-empire conflict that followed close upon World War I and led to the partial liberation of Ireland from British rule. Taking up the Big House conceit of her precursor Yeats, Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) is an historical novel that addresses that nationalist struggle through the surprising technique of indirection. As the title signals, the subnationalist stability represented by the Big House Danielstown is fragile even if desirable: its account of diurnal visits and dinners for the Anglo-Irish inhabitants is literally circumscribed and threatened by the surrounding countryside in which violence swirls, and which eventually consumes the house itself.

This fragility of connection and possibility is contained at the level of plot through the relationship of one of the women in the house, Lois, with a British soldier at the local barracks, who is killed by the Irish Republican Army (IRA). At the level of style, however, it is conveyed through the multitudinous ellipses and dashes that interrupt the flow of the characters' spoken words, and that alter the direction of events. The novel's predominant mode becomes, as Maria DiBattista describes it, "retrospective intimation" – a mode that subtly communicates that the present, willy-nilly, is incubating history.<sup>29</sup> In a climactic scene a group of walkers from the house stray into an old mill and come upon a holed-up IRA gunman, just at the moment at which the married man in the party is about to declare his illicit love for one of the young women, Marda:

She impinged on the whole of him, on his intimate sense of himself, with her cool somber amusement. Had she a ghost everywhere? [...]

"It is like this," he began to rehearse, "what I need is –"

A shot, making rings in the silence. Eardrums throbbing, he gathered up the reverberations with incredulity. A battle – a death in the mill? *Whose* death?

In fact Marda has been only superficially wounded. But the dazed incoherence and interruptions of the scene write in miniature the larger threat to the novel's own formal and spatial coherence that the events of the surrounding war continually impose. At the end of the book, as the IRA finally win back the local territory and break in to burn down Danielstown, these imbalances become stark:

Here, there would be no more autumn, except for the trees ... For, in February, before those trees had visibly budded, the death – execution, rather – of the three houses, Danielstown, Castle Trent, Mount Isabel, occurred in the same night. A fearful scarlet ate up the hard spring darkness; indeed, it seemed that an extra day, unreckoned, had come to abortive birth that these things might happen.<sup>30</sup>

A similar shock and distortion are evident in a short story by Bowen of 1926, “The Back Drawing-Room.” The story delivers the narrative of another kind of ghostliness surrounding the Anglo-Irish, as a man tells in a London salon of his visit to Ireland, where he had inadvertently come upon a house deserted except for the drawing-room of the title. There a woman wept in an unexplained manner. This is a ghost story, however: the mansion that the man claims to have happened upon had been burnt down previously. What he witnesses is the savage defeat of that established way of life, and a lament over it. Noticeable, however, is that Bowen’s story does not settle into any one genre in relaying this incident. Instead, the sense of unsettlement generates a recognizably Modernist truncated style. The narrating man seems dismal, unknown, and despised by his sophisticated audience, who do not allow him to get his story out uninterrupted. Only the evening’s hostess, Mrs. Henneker, appears to grasp the truth of what is narrated, as “the quenching of the world in horror and destruction,” but such grandiloquent terms are inappropriate to understanding his account of a local catastrophe.<sup>31</sup>

What we find in Bowen’s writing of the period, beneath the surface elegance, is a supreme edginess, an awareness of transience that forces her to alter and interrupt narrative time and type within highly concentrated moments. She so unsettles readerly expectations that we are unsure of what kind of writing we are encountering. External order is perpetually threatened, and narrative structure cannot explain the events that rise to its surface. In an image that was to prove resonant also to the generation of postcolonial writers that emerged from the 1950s, the center of the cultural world, for Bowen as for Yeats, was not holding firm.

A similar edginess, accompanied by a strong and, to her, distinctive world-weariness, marks the work of Bowen’s near-contemporary, the Dominican white creole writer Jean Rhys. Though her work is late for the period under discussion, it harks back to the war and merits mention for signaling in ways similar to Mansfield the colonial writer’s contradictory compulsions towards a sophisticated metropolitan disaffection on the one hand, and the impossible wholeness of colonial homelands on the other. The bifurcated or conflicted subjectivity of Rhys’s protagonists – Julia Martin in *After Leaving Mr. McKenzie* (1931) or Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) – which on one level might be identified as prototypically Modernist, bears clear comparison, too, with the culturally displaced perspectives of McKay or even Anand.<sup>32</sup> In Jean Rhys, once again, the transnational movements and distresses, so familiar to the colonial and native practitioner, palpably haunt her characters’ often fateful uncertainties.

Further afield, Australian as well as Indian and South African writers registered the implications of modern destruction and Modernist disruption for their art and turned to indigenous worlds for different forms of validity. From the 1880s Bengali writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore were drawing narrative and poetic materials from vernacular resources in order to resist the dilution of indigenous cultures under British rule. In so doing they drew inspiration from the example of Celtic

revivalists in Ireland: Tagore observed that the past should be retrieved to shore up the present, but only if it could be made relevant to its needs.

In Australia, federation in 1900 immediately raised questions about the identity and literature the new nation might lay claim to. The late 1890s and early 1900s saw the establishment of a native ballad tradition celebrating the Australian bush, its horsemen and larrikins, in the work of such as A. B. (“Banjo”) Paterson and Henry Lawson. But, by the 1920s, doubts had emerged that such ballads were nostalgic, and out of touch with contemporary cultural and social developments. For example, the vast numbers of soldiers returning from the war in Europe had brought images of a world seriously out of joint. In urban Australia the short-lived *Vision* magazine (1923–4) now sought to promulgate a nationalism that was open to Nietzsche and to modern cultural and sexual mores, whilst being at the same time instilled with the different perspectives of the Australian landscape and its flora and fauna. *Vision* was produced by the painter Norman Lindsay and his novelist son Jack, along with the poet Kenneth Slessor, whose work has been claimed to be the only truly Australian Modernist production in literature.<sup>33</sup> Though Slessor’s writing, both early and late, largely retains established formal patterns, it offers a range of witty and sardonic “takes” upon the process of colonization in enameled images reminiscent, but not derivative, of later Yeats. It also experiments with disjointed and fragmented perspectives in innovative ways that appear metropolitan and Modernist from the vantage-point of hindsight, yet are at the same time distinctively Australian and boldly “peripheral.”

Slessor’s first collection, published as *Thief of the Moon* in Australia in 1924 and, in expanded form with woodcuts by Lindsay, as *Earth-Visitors* in London in 1926, offers a typical blend of bawdy, satiric humor, and consistent renditions of a clash of worlds past and present, old and new. Whilst seeming to denigrate specifically Australian attempts at urban sophistication, these early poems quietly establish a national distance from Old World possibilities. In “Pan at Lane Cove,” for instance, we witness an attempt to reorient familiar Dionysian energies within a specific local context. Set in a colonial mansion that has now been overrun by habitat again (“Great fungi steam beside the gate”), the Pan in the poem’s title is a small statue “whose flute juts like a frozen flame. // O lonely faun, what songs are these / For skies where no Immortals hide?” Within a few stanzas, though, the seeming desuetude and inappropriateness have disappeared, as the poet seeks to enjoin his own rite in the mansion grounds:

Now earth is ripe for Pan again,  
Barbaric ways and Paynim rout,  
And revels of old Samian men.  
O Chiron pipe your centaurs out.<sup>34</sup>

It is in the poems completed in the later 1920s towards Slessor’s second book, however, that this sense of New World possibility, in contradistinction to Old World mythology, is

fully expressed. In the parodic sequence “The Atlas,” completed in 1930, the crowning ambitions of colonialism are questioned (“we can always find a minute / For the festivities of death”). More extensively, in “Five Visions of Captain Cook” (1929), the doubleness of experience produced by the colonial enterprise is examined. In the third “Vision,” we learn

Two chronometers the captain had,  
One by Arnold that ran like mad,  
One by Kendal in a walnut case ...

Time is curiously subjective, divided, disjointed: Arnold’s time rushes forward to the future; “Kendal dawdled in the tombstoned past.”<sup>35</sup> Cook’s initial attempt to colonize Australia hovers bizarrely in time and history: neither past nor future synchronizes with him. The experience eludes definition, as do the seasons and the flora of the new landfall: in the second “Vision,” “Flowers turned to stone ... Stone turned to flowers.” Botanist Joseph Banks cannot “find” the Latin “for this loveliness” (p. 88). Unlike the sense of poetry as an epic that “contains history,” in the sense shared by Pound and Eliot, therefore, we have a sense of epic as involving colonial encounter that defies and eludes definition. Slessor establishes how the colonial engagement of Old World with New throws into relief what is now termed Modernist ennui – the sense that all attempts to render experience in and through writing are necessarily dislocated and ghostly, as Jean Rhys, the perpetual colonial outsider, too, recognized.

Each of the writers discussed in this chapter shared, with more familiar Modernist authors, historical and cultural shock at the breakdown of established values in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Yet it is important to recognize in ending that the motivating and shaping forces behind their work remained adamantly different. They variously brought to the metropolis a locally and nationally inflected set of energies and preoccupations that created formative dialog with, and interrogation of, the qualities of an emerging Anglo-American or Euro-American Modernist “tradition.” A fuller understanding of Modernist possibility must include acknowledgment of these various resistances to, and at the center of, this explosive and global artistic era.

## Notes

**1** See Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses, eds., *Modernism and Colonialism: British-Irish Literature, 1899–1939* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 7, 5.

2 As for example does Jahan Ramazani in various essays, one concluding the Begam and Moses collection (“Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity,” pp. 288–314), that investigate the Modernist ramifications of bricolage, juxtaposition, polyglossia, and astringency in the postcolonial work of Brathwaite, Ramanujan, Okigbo, and others. Yet even Ramazani at times prefers to see the traveling of poetic influence as emanating largely from the traditional centers in the Modernist period. See, for example, his “Travelling Poetry,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 68.2 (June, 2007): 281–303.

3 Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, eds., *GeoModernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); see also Howard Booth and Nigel Rigby, eds., *Modernism and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

4 Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India’s Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922–1947* (London: Reaktion, 2007), pp. 9, 11. For a recasting of the canonical self–other relationship of empire as a relationship that can be seen as taking place “between others” or between various different “centers,” see Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

5 See, for example, Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), especially his remarks on Eliot; Kathy Phillips, *Virginia Woolf against Empire* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

6 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). As Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Cape, 1993), p. 276, also recognized, Modernism was in a sense the release of energy produced by that intersection of different time-frames. If, as Johannes Fabian suggests, colonialism imposed on other cultures “a stream of Time” – the time of European history, the time of the modern – in and through Modernism those other cultures asserted their simultaneity. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

7 Jed Esty, “Virginia Woolf’s Colony,” in Begam and Moses, *Modernism and Colonialism*, pp. 70–90.

8 See Andrzej Gasiorek, “War, ‘Primitivism,’ and the Future of the West: Reflections on D. H. Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis,” in Begam and Moses, *Modernism and*

*Colonialism*, pp. 90–110.

**9** See Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 75. See also Simon Gikandi, “Picasso, Africa and the Schemata of Difference,” *Modernism/Modernity* 10.3 (2003): 455–80.

**10** Katherine Mansfield, “To Stanislaw Wyspianski,” in *The Poems of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Vincent O’Sullivan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 30.

**11** Emory, *Modernism*, pp. 3, 17, 35; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

**12** Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 225–9.

**13** W. B. Yeats, “Coole Park, 1929,” in *Collected Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright (London: J. M. Dent, 1998), p. 226.

**14** Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 2.

**15** Amit Chaudhuri, “Two Giant Brothers,” *London Review of Books* 28.8 (April 20, 2006): 27–30.

**16** On Leonard Woolf as a liminal figure, uneasily positioned between empire and Modernism, see Boehmer, *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial 1880–1920*, pp. 169–214.

**17** Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 136–7; see also Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Léon Roudiez (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 181.

**18** Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

**19** Katherine Mansfield, “Je ne parle pas français,” in *Selected Stories*, ed. Angela Smith (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2002), pp. 142–67. Citations are from pp. 143,



146–7.

**20** Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf*.

**21** William Plomer, *Double Lives: An Autobiography* (London: Cape, 1943), pp. 122–3, 160–1.

**22** William Plomer, *Turbott Wolfe: A Novel* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), p. 17.

**23** *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 138.

**24** William Plomer, *I Speak of Africa* (London: L. and V. Woolf, 1927), pp. 75, 95, 127.

**25** Mulk Raj Anand, “The Making of an Indian-English Novel: *Untouchable*,” in Maggie Butcher, ed., *The Eye of the Beholder* (London: Commonwealth Institute, 1983), p. 35; and E. M. Forster, Preface to Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1935).

**26** Mulk Raj Anand, *Roots and Flowers: Two Lectures on the Metamorphosis of Technique and Content in the Indian-English Novel* (Dharwar: Karnatak University Press, 1972), p. 16.

**27** Jessica Berman, “Comparative Colonialisms: Joyce, Anand and the Question of Engagement,” *Modernism/Modernity* 13.3 (2006): 465–86; Kirstin Bluemel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 69–92. My remarks on *Untouchable* are also strongly indebted to Susheila Nasta’s investigative essay: “Between Bloomsbury and Gandhi: The Publication and Reception History of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*,” in Robert Fraser and Mary Hammond, eds., *Books without Borders: Perspectives from South Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 120–39.

**28** D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, ed. Bruce Steele (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p. 216.

**29** Maria DiBattista, “Elizabeth Bowen’s Troubled Modernism,” in Begam and Moses, *Modernism and Colonialism*, pp. 226–45.



- 30** Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* (London: Vintage, 1988), pp. 126, 206.
- 31** Elizabeth Bowen, *Collected Stories* (London: Cape, 1980), pp. 208–9.
- 32** Emery, *Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Literature*, pp. 95–6, 156–7.
- 33** Andrew Taylor, “Kenneth Slessor’s Approach to Modernism,” in Philip Mead, ed., *Kenneth Slessor: Critical Readings* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997), p. 190.
- 34** Kenneth Slessor, *Earth-Visitors* (London: Fanfrolico Press, 1926), p. 51.
- 35** Kenneth Slessor, *Collected Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1997), pp. 76, 89.



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