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INTRODUCTION

What Modernism Was

"WHAT WAS MODERNISM?" is the title of a provocative essay by Harry Levin first published in 1960.[1] That there has been no lack of answers is shown by the selected bibliography which follows this Introduction. The critics who have taken up the question vary considerably in their approaches and definitions, but most of them would accept Professor Levin's use of the past tense in his title. They agree that we can now look *back* on the Age of Modernism with more detachment and objectivity than was possible while we remained immersed in the period. Although a few major Modernists are still alive and productive, the main thrust of the Modernist movement in literature and the arts has ended. For many of us the passing of the greatest literary age since the Renaissance may well be occasion for regret, but we can take some comfort in the realization that we can now define Modernism with confidence that we shall not have to keep adjusting our definition in order to accommodate new visions and values.

There are already many meanings of Modernism. If literary theorists still debate the nature of tragedy and disagree on the primary characteristics of Romanticism, we can hardly expect unanimous agreement on a subject as fresh as Modernism. The remarks that follow are therefore intended to be more suggestive than definitive. They offer my personal understanding of what "Modernism" means, but it should be understood that my view is not necessarily the prevailing one. Partly because we seem to be witnessing a resurgence of

[1]Bibliographical information on most of the critical material cited throughout my text may be found in the selected checklist of writings on Modernism and post-Modernism provided at the end of this Introduction. References to tangential studies are separately footnoted.

values that are essentially Romantic, there is a growing tendency to see the Modern movement as only "a detour or dead end away from the main highway of tradition."[2] If one takes a very broad view and sees that culture of the early nineteenth and later twentieth centuries is dominated by such "Romantic" values as emotion, nature, and spirit, then the cool rationalism and ironic scepticism of the Modernists could indeed seem only a freakish aberration. But why not expand the perspective even further to encompass the eighteenth century? Then Modernism can be seen as itself a return to values we think of as essentially "classic" or Apollonian. In that perspective the Romantic and neo-Romantic periods become mere interludes. Modernism as seen by a Romanticist is very different from Modernism as seen by a Modernist. I belong in the latter camp.

The word "Modernism" offers peculiar difficulties in itself. It is unfortunate that we do not have a better name for the international revolution in literature and the arts which began in the late nineteenth century and flourished until the 1950s. Many people still think of the history of literature in terms of the classical, the medieval, and the modern periods. For them "Modernism" is a term broad enough to cover the past five or six centuries, and they may well resent our appropriation of the word for a period which constitutes but a small fraction of that extended time. "Modern" also applies to whatever is recent or up-to-date. Used thus, it slides along the course of literary history in such a way that it serves as a synonym for "contemporary." Harry Levin did not ask "What Was Modern?" and would not have unless he were referring to what was current at a particular time. We can defend the use of "Modernism" only by placing strong emphasis on the "-ism" that is attached to "Modern" and by pointing out that, rightly or wrongly, the word is already firmly established in recent criticism as referring to the particular historical period with which we are here concerned. It is too late to rechristen the era with a less confusing name. But now that "modern" is applied more and more exclusively to literature of the past century, we can perhaps avoid semantic difficulties in the future by using "contemporary" when referring to the present time and "Post-Modernism" when referring

[2]Monroe K. Spears, *Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 15.

to a current literary and artistic movement which has certain distinguishable and definable characteristics. Just as all modern literature is not necessarily Modernist literature, today's literature is not entirely Post-Modernist. Some of it is still Modernist, and much of it hearkens back to Pre-Modernist traditions.

There is a special sense in which the problem of historical change in the arts is important for the understanding of Modernist literature.[3] Writers of few other periods have been so insistent that they were producing something original and unique. The concept of the avant-garde is closely associated with the beginnings of the Modernist period, and it is appropriate that the phrase was originally a military term used to describe those soldiers who are first to attack. Ezra Pound's exhortation to his contemporaries, "Make It New," served as a rallying cry for his generation, and Malcolm Bradbury is justified in finding that one of the main distinguishing characteristics of the movement was "literary radicalism, a considerable sense among artists of finding themselves in a context of aesthetic revolution" (p. xxx). It would be difficult to evaluate Modernist culture without deciding whether or not it was justified in its claim of being new, and it is for this reason we must be grateful to those critics and theorists who have addressed themselves to the question of literary change and periods. Paul DeMan, one of the wisest of comparatists, sometimes seems to be trapped in his own paradoxes when he writes about the conflict between what he calls "literary history" and "literary modernity." He asserts that "the continuous appeal of modernity, the desire to break out of literature towards the reality of the moment, prevails and, in its turn, folding back upon itself, engenders the repetition and the continuation of literature. Thus modernity, which is fundamentally a falling away from literature and a rejection of history, also acts as the principle that gives literature duration and

[3]A distinction should be made between "Modernism" and "modernity." Some theorists use the latter term when referring to the modernization of literature in any historical period—that is, the constant updating of literature through the accumulative effect of new contributions by writers capable of modifying or expanding traditional forms through their individual talent and originality. I have included studies of modernity in the selected bibliography only when they seem especially concerned with the phenomenon during the past century. Other important studies of literary change are W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Harvard University Press, 1970) and Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Robert Belknap (Harvard University Press, 1968). Many of the essays included in a special issue of *New Literary History*, III (Autumn 1971), on "Modernism and Postmodernism: Inquiries, Reflections, and Speculations" are concerned more with "modernity" than "Modernism."

historical existence" (p. 162). DeMan is certainly correct in pointing out that absolute newness is an impossibility, but to insist on the point too strongly leads nowhere. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," one of the classic texts of Modernism, T. S. Eliot wrote intelligently about the necessity for balance between his terms, and we have long realized that for Pound "making it new" often consisted of importing literature from ancient sources and distant places. Of course a complete break from the past is impossible, but what is important—and will become increasingly important when we consider the relationship between Romanticism and Modernism—is that the Modernists *thought* they were an avant-garde moving into unexplored territory and crossing new frontiers.

Critics who see culture as a product of society take an external approach to the question, "What Was Modernism?" Knowing that modern literature began sometime in the late nineteenth century, at a time when Darwinism and other scientific or philosophic schools of thought were destroying the sense of religious community which had prevailed until then, they have found it easy to see Modernism as essentially an age of crisis marked by a shared sense of loss, exile, and alienation that was to find expression in such recurrent themes as the quest for a father, the end of innocence, and man's inability to communicate. Knowing that the period was marked by a rapid acceleration of the Industrial Revolution, the socio-historical critics have noted that the depersonalization of the individual in a mechanized society is reflected in the art of the period, and they have easily traced an increased emphasis on urban and technical imagery as opposed to the rural and the natural. Knowing also that the First World War had a traumatic effect on twentieth-century civilization, they have helped to promulgate the concept of a "lost generation" during the 1920s, and they have managed to discover that many modern writers and artists are concerned with death and violence.

I cannot seriously question the validity of these observations. They have in fact become truisms—the tired commonplaces of every English teacher's introductory lecture in courses on literature of the modern period. I do think, however, that they are an inadequate way to define Modernism. Not only do they fail to differentiate literature of the twentieth century from that of the nineteenth—there is, for example, as much alienation and violence in Dickens and Melville as in Faulkner and Camus—but they fail to allow for the oscillating give-and-take between literature and society. Literature

does indeed reflect society, but society in turn is affected by literature, and one can make a valid case for Henry James's insistence that "It is Art that *makes* life!" Leslie Fiedler, now a champion of popular culture, might no longer agree with his 1960 realization that the great minds in every age cry "No! in Thunder" to the prevailing ideas of their time, but I think that he was right then nonetheless. Gabriel Josipovici reminds us that "although the First World War effectively marks the break between the world of the nineteenth century and our own,... the modern revolution in the arts did not take place during the war, or immediately after it, as one might have expected, but a decade or so before it. This should make us wary of too facile an identification of art with the culture and society out of which it springs" (p. 179).

Closely related to the socio-historical approach to the question of Modernism—and showing like strengths and weaknesses—is the attempt to see modern art and literature in terms of the prevailing ideologies of the time. We all owe a debt to Richard Ellmann and Charles F. Feidelson, Jr. for compiling their expansive anthology on *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*. That volume gathers together and places in nine broad categories hundreds of statements and documents which are crucial to an understanding of the wide and variegated spectrum of philosophy which lies behind the modern movement in the arts. It is an invaluable collection, but when I tried using it as a basic text in courses on Modernism, I found that my students and I were constantly forgetting that our main concern was literature and the arts. I might as well have been teaching a course in the history of modern thought, and such a course might more properly (and ably) be taught by someone from the Philosophy department.

I am not saying that literature exists in a vacuum, and I am not denying that among the many good reasons for reading literature of any period is our hope that it will help us understand the human condition. Certainly Lionel Trilling was right in his influential essay on "The Modern Element in Modern Literature" when he pointed out that what makes the teaching of modern literature difficult as well as exciting is the teacher's responsibility not only to describe accurately the reluctance of modern writers to go along with conventional ideas and traditional values, but also to pass judgment on the validity of their beliefs. It is this conviction that the major artists of our time have something to teach us about life which explains

the abundance of critical literature devoted to the meanings of modern art. On the one hand, there is a persistent effort by theologians-turned-critics to rescue modern literature for religion. At the other extreme, there are those who argue for the essentially individualistic and anarchic nature of modern culture. And in between are a number of significant studies with titles like *Radical Innocence, The Picaresque Saint, Problematic Rebel,* and *The Mortal No* which assume that modern literature exists in a state of tension between opposing poles of faith and doubt, conviction and scepticism. As usual, the middle way is probably the best way, and in this case even more so than usual, for a midway stance of irony and noncommitment is one of the features which most clearly distinguishes Modernist literature from that of other periods.

My only quarrel with the ideological approach is that it tends to equate art with philosophy. We cannot question the fact that existentialism was the dominant belief of writers and artists throughout the Modernist period, but with a few obvious exceptions, I do not think that modern writers considered their primary mission to be that of ministers in a Church of Existentialism. That credo remains a significant aspect of the *background* of Modernism. In the present context, the chief value of our awareness of its presence there is to remind us that the existentialists' insistence on individual responsibility should enable us to better understand why the writers and artists who stand at the forefront of Modernism offer private visions of life which are only incidentally interpretations of life in general. Gabriel Josipovici is right, I think, in saying that for Modernist writers, "Art is not the key to the universe, as the Romantics had believed; it is merely a pair of spectacles" (p. 192).

One trouble with -isms is that they sometimes cause us to forget that within every movement there is considerable variety. As histories of Imagism, Surrealism, and Futurism have shown, the followers of a movement are as ready to fight among themselves as to battle the philistines together. There seems to be something innately competitive in writers and artists, even in those who pretend indifference to the work of others, and this competitiveness may partly explain why each significant artist has his own special aura which sets him apart from every other artist. Yet because even those artists who most pride themselves on their originality are subject to changing fashions, it is also true that literary and artistic periods have their distinctive auras as well. Quoting T. S. Eliot's observation

that "sensibility alters from generation to generation in everybody, whether we will or no," Malcolm Bradbury goes on to say, "And so we can usually identify, in a rough and ready way, the work of one decade, or one literary generation, from another by its particular interests and emphases, its mood, temper and obsessions" (p. 69).

It seems obvious to me that the best way to identify the sensibility of a period is not to look for ways in which its art reflected what was happening in the social and ideological climate, but to search for traits held in common by the most representative writers and artists of the time. Just as the sensibility of an individual is reflected in the "style" of his appearance and expression, we might expect to find that the temper and tone of a group of individuals are to be found most directly in their favored styles and most characteristic art-forms. Yet one can point to only a few attempts to define Modernism in this inductive way. Particular -isms within the Age of Modernism have been studied separately, and occasionally a single movement has been hailed as the characteristic style of the whole age. Some Marxist theorists, for example, argue that the modern period has seen the triumph of Realism, and they would dismiss more abstract styles such as Surrealism and Expressionism as being but transitory experiments.[4] For those of us who think that *Ulysses, The Waste Land,* and *The Sound and the Fury* are more distinctly Modernistic than, say, *Germinal, An American Tragedy,* and *The Magic Mountain,* the weakness of this position is obvious. One could go to the opposite extreme and agree with Wylie Sypher, who argues in *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature* that Cubism is the most characteristic style of the modern period, but that would mean that we would then have to accept such works as *The Making of Americans* and *Finnegans Wake* as the most representative accomplishments of Modernist literature.

Nonetheless, if forced to choose between the Marxist position and that of Wylie Sypher, I would lean towards the latter. Whereas Realism has been with us almost from the beginnings of literature.

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[4]Peter Egri's monograph is worth special notice among studies of this sort. Egri, an Hungarian Marxist and disciple of Georg Lukács, distinguishes what he calls the "avantgardism" of *Ulysses* from the Modernistic realism of *The Magic Mountain.* He renders the valuable service of showing how Joyce's novel illustrates virtually every stylistic -ism of the twentieth century, but sees even such wide-ranging movements as Impressionism and Surrealism as only temporary fads away from the mainstream of Realism.

Cubism has at least the merit of being a distinctly new style of the twentieth century. The Cubist painters attempted to show many sides of an object at once and thus to break through the barriers of the painter's two-dimensional canvas. Modernist writers also have attempted to escape the limitations of the forms imposed upon them by the nature of the medium in which they are forced to work—that is, language itself—and to achieve an effect of simultaneity like that achieved in the visual arts. For that reason Joseph Frank's well-known essay on "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" remains a key text for the understanding of that "aesthetic revolution" which was Modernism. Long before Hugh Kenner named "space-craft" as one of the features which most distinguish the literature of *The Pound Era* from that of earlier periods, Frank showed how writers since Flaubert have attempted to transcend the temporal nature of their art by achieving an illusion of plasticity. Indeed, the attempt to escape the limitations of individual forms has been a dominant feature of the entire Modernist movement. Not only did that movement cross national boundaries, but it also saw a breakdown of genres as writers, painters, and composers sought to borrow techniques and achieve effects like those in the other arts. It is appropriate that the last chapter in Arnold Hauser's four-volume *Social History of Art* is called "The Film Age," for the most characteristic art-form of the twentieth century is that one which combines narrative, visual effects, and musical score in such a way that space and time seem to merge together.

The attempt to break through the limitations of form imposed by specific kinds of art implies a preoccupation with form itself which I think is a major distinguishing feature of Modernism. Several years ago, in an essay called "*Ulysses* and the Age of Modernism," I attempted to show that Joyce's novel—perhaps the single most representative work of the movement—illustrates what I called "four cardinal points of Modernism." I thought then that my four points clearly showed that Modernism was not a mere continuation of what had preceded it, but an independent and autonomous movement with a beginning, middle, and end. I defined Modernism as "an international current of sensibility which dominated art and literature from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until about 1945—from the Impressionist exhibitions of the 1870s and the first writings of Henry James to about the time of the Second World War" (p. 174). It seemed to me that there were four features in par-

ticular which enable us to differentiate Modernist literature from that of the earlier nineteenth century and that of today.

> First, Modernist literature is distinguished by its formalism. It insists on the importance of structure and design—the esthetic autonomy and independent whatness of the work of art—almost to that degree summarized by the famous dictum that "a poem should not mean but be." Secondly, Modernism is characterized by an attitude of detachment and non-commitment which I would put under the general heading of "irony" in the sense of that term as used by the New Critics. Third, Modernist literature makes use of myth not in the way myth was used earlier, as a discipline for belief or a subject of interpretation, but as an arbitrary means of ordering art. And, finally, I would date the Age of Modernism from the time of the Impressionists because I think there is a clear line of development from Impressionism to reflexivism. Modernist art turns back upon itself and is largely concerned with its own creation and composition. The Impressionists' insistence that the viewer is more important than the subject viewed leads ultimately to the solipsistic worlds-within-worlds of Modernist art and literature (p. 175).

I would not attempt to argue that these four characteristics are uniquely the property of the Age of Modernism. Good art has always been well-made; "irony," as the etymology of the word indicates, goes back to classic literature; the way in which Modernist writers use myth is not unlike the way in which earlier writers wrote allegories; and it would not be difficult to trace reflexivism back to *Don Quixote* by way of *Tristram Shandy*. Nor have contemporary writers entirely repudiated these four leading characteristics of their Modernist predecessors. That an interest in form and technique is still with us is readily apparent when one considers such Post-Modernist developments as *le nouveau roman* and concrete poetry. Some contemporary writers carry irony so far that for them art seems to be only a game. And we have only to think of such Post-Modernist novelists as John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Bernard Malamud, John Fowles, and Iris Murdoch to realize that today's writers not only use myths as a means of arbitrarily structuring their works, but often do so in an extravagantly reflexive way.

My four cardinal points do, in fact, serve better to distinguish the beginning of Modernism than its ending. The first two in particular enable us to recognize the principal ways in which the early classic Modernists broke away from Romantic tradition. That such a break occurred has been denied by some literary theorists. Monroe K. Spears, for instance, begins his *Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth Century Poetry* by surveying previous definitions of Modernism and singles out writings by Edmund Wilson, Northrop

Frye, and Frank Kermode in support of his own conviction that the modern movement is basically a continuation of trends started during the romantic period. Formidable support for this view may be found in the writings of such respected critics as Morse Peckham, Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, and Robert Langbaum. These men (surely it is no accident that they are all known primarily as experts on the nineteenth century rather than the twentieth) offer what one of their disciples calls "varying and powerful evidence for an essential continuity between the Age of Wordsworth and ourselves—and for a continuity based in part on a recognition of self-consciousness as a specially Romantic malaise."[5]

Although I can agree that self-consciousness is perhaps the most important of the several threads linking the Romantic period with the twentieth century and though I would concede that the Modernists failed to break that thread, the period which Hugh Kenner calls *The Pound Era* seems to me very different from the Age of Wordsworth. As I pointed out in "*Ulysses* and the Age of Modernism," much depends on whom we consider to be the most representative writers of the Modernist Age.

> If we see modern poetry as a current which moves from Whitman to Frost to Graves to Ginsberg (to Bob Dylan?) and if we see Lawrence, Hesse, Hemingway, and Mailer as the major novelists of the twentieth century, then I suppose it may be possible to see Modernism as only another wave in the incoming tide of Romanticism. But what then do we do with Flaubert, James, Conrad, Ford, Woolf, Forster, Shaw, Pound, Stein, Cummings, Eliot, Auden, Mann, Kafka, Proust, Gide, Stevens, Williams, Faulkner, Beckett, Nabokov, Warren, Durrell—and James Joyce? To label these writers Romantic seems to me a clear case of mistaken or insufficient identification, and to reduce them to the status of minor writers would violate all sense of critical justice. Monroe Spears says that "if any god personifies modernism, it is Dionysus," but try to imagine Henry James on a Dionysiac frolic with Virginia Woolf and Thomas Mann. Surely a stronger case could be made for the major Modernists as Apollonian. (p. 173)

This is not to say that the Modernists were incapable of becoming excited or sometimes indulging in "romantic" gestures. When the Georgian poet Lascelles Abercrombie urged his contemporaries to turn back to Wordsworth as a source of poetic inspiration, Ezra

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[5]David Thorburn, "Conrad's Romanticism," in David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman, eds., *Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities* (Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 229. See Thorburn's footnote on that page for references to critical studies on the continuity between the Romantic and Modern periods.

Pound became so incensed that he challenged Abercrombie to a duel. "Dear Mr. Abercrombie," he wrote, "Stupidity carried beyond a certain point becomes a public menace."[6]

Pound objected in particular to what he called the "emotional slither" which dominated British and American poetry during the Romantic, Victorian, and Georgian periods. Because he wanted poetry to be "direct" and "austere," he felt stronger affinities with prose writers like Flaubert and Henry James than with the poets of their generation. James was one of the first writers of fiction to insist that his kind of art was subject to formal and structural standards as demanding as what was expected of poets and composers. Indeed, he left little doubt that he considered fiction superior to poetry because it was harder, more restrained, and less vulnerable to what he called "the lyric leak." His "Art of Fiction" essay of 1884 was one of the first important manifestos of Modernism in part because he insisted there that what constituted the *art* of fiction was to be found more in treatment than in content. Properly dramatized by an artist of fiction, a single glance from an attractive woman might be as shattering an experience as a whole revolution. One of the first literary Impressionists, James found in his "center of consciousness' technique a way to fuse content and form through the rich vision of a detached observer, but it is clear that for him, as for the other major Modernists, technique was more important than subject. To claim that the Modernists shared this insistence with the Romantics would be an act of critical recklessness. Not only the minor, didactic poets of the Romantic period, but the major figures also would not have said "a poem should not mean but be." For them a poem could hardly be at all unless it meant something as well. The Romantics were nothing if not morally earnest, whether they conceived of themselves as spiritual magicians capable of penetrating ultimate mysteries or as those "unacknowledged legislators of mankind" who could lead the way to a better society.

By the late nineteenth century writers had grown sceptical of their ability to change the world. The prevailing stance became an attitude of impartial yet disinterested detachment—that "irony" which

[6]Irvin Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* (Pantheon Books, 1970), p. 159.

Thomas Mann defined as "the pathos of the middle.... It glances at both sides... plays slyly and irresponsibly—yet not without benevolence—and is in no great haste to take sides and come to decisions." Philip Stevick is correct, I think, in pointing out that "one could almost define modernism by its irony, its implicit admiration for verbal precision and understatement, its Apollonian guardedness in the matter of the softer emotions such as pathos, joy, tenderness, or what John Wesley called in the eighteenth century 'the heart strangely warmed.' There is not much tenderness in the great masters of the first half of the twentieth century, and to speak of the warmed heart in connection with Mann, Gide, Proust, Joyce, Lawrence, or Faulkner is to sound bizarre indeed."[7] The Modernists were not only anti-sentimental but detached and aloof in other ways as well. "Don't talk to me about politics," Joyce once admonished his brother, "I'm only interested in style." And though it was presumably pride which made a romantic like Rousseau turn down a pension because it would have meant appearing before Louis XIV in order to receive it, Faulkner turned down dinner at the White House on the simple grounds that to travel from Charlottesville to Washington was a long way to drive just to eat with strangers.

In his well-known essay on "*Ulysses,* Order and Myth," T. S. Eliot insisted that Joyce's parallel use of *The Odyssey* throughout *Ulysses* had "the importance of a scientific discovery" because it enabled him "not as legislator or exhorter, but as an artist" to find "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." Although Joyce makes use of Homer's story in order to point up some of the ironic contrasts between the Heroic Age and the time of Bloomsday, Joyce does not adapt or interpret the Homeric myth in the way that classic myths were used by Romantic and Victorian writers. For Joyce, the myth provides not a message but only an arbitrary means of structuring his story. In theory at least the third of my cardinal points serves to differentiate Modernism from Post-Modernism. Richard Wasson, whose "Notes on a New Sensibility" seems to me one of the most penetrating and convincing discussions of what is happening now in literature, contends that

[7] "Sentimentality and Classic Fiction," *Mosaic,* IV (Spring 1971), 23.

contemporary writers like Iris Murdoch, Thomas Pynchon, and Alain Robbe-Grillet have grown weary of the Modernist concept of myth as a valid means not only of ordering art but also of disciplining the self through role-playing. Instead, says Wasson, the Post-Modernists "desire to get back to particulars, to restore literary language to its proper role which for them means revealing 'the raggedness, the incompleteness of it all. They want a literature finally which accurately presents man's place in a world of contingency, a world in which man is free to cope spontaneously with experience" (p. 476).

The Post-Modernists heralded by Wasson object in particular to the closed worlds of Modernist art. They want a literature which will reflect a looser and more realistic view of life than that implied through the use of rigid artistic forms or established mythic structures. Members of the activist generation object also to the reflexive nature of Modernist art, the way in which, as Wasson says, "the outer world becomes the hero's inner world" and "the work becomes a projection of the artist's subjectivity." They would finally break that chain which stretches from the "self-consciousness" of the Romantics through the emphasis on the world *as seen* which we find in the work of the Impressionists to the more complete solipsism of literature at the peak of the Modernist period—in not only such monuments as *Remembrance of Things Past, The Counterfeiters,* and *Finnegans Wake,* but in such lesser and perhaps more representative products of the age as *Nightwood, Under the Volcano,* and *Pale Fire.* If a movement dies when it begins to parody itself, we can say that Nabokov's brilliant little combination of fiction, poetry, myth, and puzzle marks the beginning of the end of the Age of Modernism.

Yet it may be a mistake to prescribe where literature ought to go rather than to merely observe its coming. The writers singled out for attention by Wasson are mostly middle-aged academics who went to school under the Modernists, and try as they might, they have been unable to break their ties with their predecessors. John Barth, whose *End of the Road* in 1958 seemed to mark his recognition of the end of an era and to suggest a new beginning, has since reverted to forms of fiction more ingeniously reflexive than anything to be found at the height of the Age of Modernism. Even in the work of somewhat younger writers like Robert Coover and Ronald Sukenick we find a strong awareness that they stand at the end of a tradition, but little indication of where they may be going from there. The only hope for a

new beginning provided by Coover and Sukenick is to be found in their self-conscious parodies of the artist-as-god myth from which their fiction derives. They may be credited with recognizing their own inversion, but even in that they were shown the way by Nabokov, a Modernist writer as old as the twentieth century.

Although it is difficult to point to successful works of literature which reflect the Post-Modernist preference for content over form, emotional commitment over irony, "contingency" over "mythotherapy," and the group over its members, the fact that knowledgeable critics like Richard Wasson, Leslie Fiedler, and Ihab Hassan can call for a new Post-Modernist literature which will reflect a more democratic and popular view of literature is evidence in itself that we are moving into a new literary age. If that transition enables us to see more clearly than we have that Modernism was indeed something autonomous and different, I will even concede the Romanticists their right to stake out a claim on the new territory.

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The essays which follow in this special number of *JML* are not parts of a planned symposium. No papers were solicited, and the eleven other authors have not seen these introductory remarks. Probably most of the contributors would want to modify or expand the four cardinal points of Modernism described above, and several of them would undoubtedly take a stand different from mine on the relation between the Romantic and Modernist movements. Yet, for all the diversity of approaches and opinions expressed in these articles, I think that there is a certain continuity which links the essays together and provides a definite progression.

One unifying concern is expressed in Bernard Duffey's essay on the experimental lyric in modern poetry. Using three long poems which are now considered classics of Modernism—*The Waste Land, The Cantos,* and *Paterson*—Duffey comes to grips with the way in which Eliot, Pound, and Williams find appropriate forms for their ambiguous personal feelings. In the article which follows Ronald Primeau enables us to see that much of the confusion which prevails even today in discussions of the relation between order and emotion in modern poetics goes back to T. E. Hulme and the failure of that influential critic to realize that what he found "the best" in the Romantics after he had purged them of "moaning" and "whining" is actually very close to the "classicism" which he advocated.

The next three essays deal in widely different ways with the social concerns of Modernist writers. In his study of the Vortex movement Timothy Materer shows that for all the conservatism of Eliot, Pound, and Wyndham Lewis, they were progressive in their humanistic hopes for a "new Renaissance" which would lead to a better society as well as a richer culture. Tom Gibbons shows that the much-maligned "élitism" of the early Modernists seemed to them to be sanctioned by the evolutionary theories which dominated scientific thought around the turn of the century. Gaylord LeRoy and Ursula Beitz next offer what may be considered the prolegomena to a new and enlightened kind of Marxist study of Modernism which will recognize the dialectic of form and content in literature yet remain cognizant of esthetic demands as well as social ones.

The pivotal essay in this collection is Richard Wasson's study of dominant critical theories during the 1960s. Wasson charts a direction of cultural criticism away from the enclosed criticism of the New Critics to a criticism represented by Susan Sontag, Northrop Frye, and others in which culture is a whole way of life. The progression traced here is "From Priest to Prometheus," and it is appropriate therefore that Wasson's study be preceded by Charles M. Baxter's study of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* as an example of the way in which Modernism ultimately became self-defeating. The self-reflexive techniques and symbols of inversion which pervade that poetic novel find their center in the character of Dr. Matthew O'Connor, "a defrocked priest of words" whose collapse marks the end of the movement he represents. Following Wasson's essay are four papers which suggest various directions of Post-Modernism even though the four writers discussed lived during the Modernist period. Neil Schmitz finds in the rhetoric of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* an anticipation of ways in which today's younger writers try to break down the epistemological basis of traditional narrative in order to reconstitute the act of writing as self-effacing play within the finite yet open field of language. James R. Baker next considers the prophetic poetry of D. H. Lawrence, perhaps the most "Promethean" of writers in this century, and shows how the concerns of that Anti-Modernist anticipate the work of contemporary psychologists and cultural historians. Dennis E. Brown shows how Theodore Roethke's "self-world" differed from that of the early Modernists and enabled him to achieve a new synthesis between the ego and the "other." Finally, in an essay which provides a fitting conclusion to the special number, Enoch

Brater shows how the writer Samuel Beckett and the artist Andy Warhol are alike in practicing a minimal art involving a suspension rather than a clarification of meaning. Moving beyond the kind of reflexive art which mirrors its creator, Beckett and Warhol produce a new kind which forces its audience to confront itself. Familiar systems of interpretation break down and all clues prove to be false ones as the well-wrought urn becomes the empty can.

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