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Editor in Chief



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MODERNISM ~ PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

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MODERNISM

Kevin J. H. Dettmar

Modernism (c. 1901–c. 1939) dominated artistic production in the visual, plastic, musical, design, and literary arts for the first four decades of the twentieth century, ceding its predominance to postmodernism at about the time that Great Britain entered World War II. Some artistic movements have definitive, easily identifiable “birthdays”; Ezra Pound’s Imagism, for instance, was kicked off when Pound and F. S. Flint each wrote and published manifestos, Pound’s “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” and Flint’s “Imagisme,” in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry* magazine. Modernism, however, is a much larger, much less coherent movement, and consequently its origins are more ambiguous.

If we focus our attention primarily on literary modernism, and British literary modernism in particular, some of these questions are more easily resolved. In fiction, British literature might, in a pattern that seems to hold constant to the present day, have been brought to modernism by way of an American and a Pole. Henry James, the American novelist who moved permanently to London in 1876, moved fiction in the direction of modernism through his unparalleled detailed explorations of individual psychology and, especially in his three last novels (*The Wings of the Dove*, 1902; *The Ambassadors*, 1903; *The Golden Bowl*, 1904), did so in an increasingly stylized and stylistically experimental narrative form. At about the same time, influenced by the example of James’s fiction and that of his friend and sometime-collaborator Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad took up, in such texts as *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Heart of Darkness* (serial publication, 1899; book publication, 1902), vital new modern topics in a teasingly difficult, relativistic narrative form in which stories are recounted through unreliable narrators. While the search for truth has not (as is often facetiously suggested) been wholly abandoned in modernism, certainly any belief in its easy availability has been.

In poetry, Imagism is probably the first distinctively modernist movement; and here, too, writers born outside the United Kingdom, especially Pound, H.D., and T. S. Eliot, were central to its early development. Poetry, ac-

ording to Pound’s analysis at least, came later to modernism than did fiction. Even more prolific as an essayist and reviewer than he was as a poet, Pound for years was urging poets to catch up with the technical advances already evident in the prose of, for instance, James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). And to a much greater extent than in fiction, the shift to modernism in poetry was registered in the critical writings of poets; the sometimes hysterically polemic essays of Pound, as well as the far more restrained and genteel writing of Eliot, adumbrated a program for modernist poetry at the same time that the two men were writing it. Following on the heels of Imagism (in which he never participated), Eliot forged a style of aggressively fragmentary, urban poetry, full of indelicate, “unpoetic” images and diction; early experiments in this vein include the well-known “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1917) and the “Preludes” (1917), culminating, of course, in the fragmentary modernist epic *The Waste Land* (1922).

Drama and dramatists were never as central to modernism as were fiction and poetry; and the single most influential presence in early-twentieth-century modernist drama wrote in Norwegian. Henrik Ibsen forced the modern theater to deal with contemporary problems in a contemporary dramatic idiom; among his earliest and most apt disciples in Great Britain was George Bernard Shaw. Shaw was in many ways a perverse modernist: although he presented himself in the persona of a high Victorian scold, his plays staged multiple autonomous voices presenting mutually incompatible perspectives, and Shaw forced the reader to work out for himself where the play’s truth might lie. Other Irish dramatists, such as John Millington Synge and Sean O’Casey, brought contemporary issues and experimental dramatic techniques to the British stage; in England proper, Joe Orton brought audiences face to face with their sexual and imperial anxieties. But because stylistic experimentation was always such an important component of literary modernism, thus shifting emphasis to the printed page, and because modernism’s most important theorists were its poets and, to a lesser

extent, its novelists, drama sometimes seems to have been left to one side.

Although it is an oversimplification that would have bothered modernism's theoreticians, who argued strenuously for the inseparability of "content" and "form," especially in poetry, we can begin to get a sense of modernism's intellectual and aesthetic preoccupations through cataloging each. As Samuel Beckett wrote of the prose poetry in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (for many, the text in which modernism morphs imperceptibly into postmodernism), the modernist ideal was a text in which "form is content, content is form." For the purposes of criticism, on the other hand—in the service of analysis, which breaks things down to their component parts—we will now consider separately the "content" and the "form" of literary modernism: the writing's recurrent philosophical and cultural concerns, and the stylistic means adopted to address them. Neither of these catalogs is exhaustive; nor, it should be pointed out, are these catalogs internally consistent, nor does any given modernist artist or text conform to all these criteria—that would be impossible. Taken together, however, they begin to suggest the intellectual and aesthetic contours of the body of literary texts known as modernism.

INTELLECTUAL CONCERNS:
THE BATTLE OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

If one were to characterize the philosophical tenor of modernism in one word—a risky, even foolhardy endeavor, to be sure—that word would have to be "uncertainty." It would be wrong to characterize the Victorian era (1837–1901), leading up to modernism, as a time of certitude (though modernism's propagandists were often willing to do so); after all, events of real significance during the mid- to late nineteenth century did much to unsettle the traditional understanding of humankind's place in the scheme of creation. But if a kind of uncertainty began to creep into the thinking of certain Victorian intellectuals and artists, it came absolutely to dominate the thought of the early twentieth century.

The first of these intellectual shock waves leading to modernist uncertainty actually predates Victoria's ascension: the publication, between 1830 and 1833, of Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. Lyell's assertion that the earth is millions or even billions of years old was difficult to reconcile with literal interpretations of the biblical account of the Creation. In the mid-seventeenth century, Archbishop James Ussher (vice-chancellor of Trinity

College, Dublin) had calculated, by correlating Middle Eastern historical texts with biblical evidence, that the creation of the world had taken place on Sunday, 23 October 4004 BC; this date was widely accepted, and appeared in the apparatus of many bibles.

Some of the most moving and disturbing passages in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) result from his reading of Lyell (and a book by Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, 1844), including this section from near the middle of the long poem:

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life,

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

The work of a new generation of geologists had begun to shake the foundations of a biblically based understanding of our cosmogony. More famously, the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859 seemed to beg for either a refutation or a compelling reconciliation of science and religion; none was forthcoming. The net result of these scientific discoveries (and many others, less famous) was a nagging uncertainty in the minds of modern men and women regarding our place in the scheme of creation. Are we, as the Old and New Testament scriptures assert, created especially by God, "a little lower than the angels," "crowned with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:5)—or are we merely the result of a long train of blind accidents, and the universe a careless and uncaring place? Both the earth and life sciences had, by the last third of the nineteenth century, given thinking men and women plenty to think about.

MODERNISM IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

So, too, had the social sciences. One important milestone was the publication in 1845 of Karl Marx and Friedrich

Engels's *The German Ideology*. Marx and Engels are, of course, best known for *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and Marx's *Das Kapital* (the first volume of which Marx published in 1867; Engels edited and published the second and third volumes in 1885 and 1894, after Marx's death); both have been enormously influential. But in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels first formulate the important modern concept of *ideology*: in their usage, the notion that our thoughts and behaviors are not, as we might wish to believe, "spontaneous," "autonomous," or "natural," but instead suggested by a complex, internalized (and largely unconscious) system of values and beliefs promulgated by those in power. The concept of ideology, by suggesting that we are not fully in control of the way we live our lives, poses a severe stumbling block for Victorian notions of progress and the belief in an imperial, autonomous human subject. And the work of Marx was not nearly so distant from British writers and thinkers as his German birth and language might suggest: he moved to London in 1849, and did the research and writing for his magnum opus in the reading room of the magnificent British Museum; and his work was made available to non-German speakers quite early through English translations, with the first two volumes of *Das Kapital*, for instance, appearing in English translation in 1887, and available to readers of French even earlier (1872).

Similar insights, pursued on the level of the individual rather than the community, are of course to be found throughout the work of the father of modern psychology, Sigmund Freud. Like Marx, Freud produced an enormous body of work, running into the thousands of pages, and like Marx, the system he created is much more important than any individual volume. Like Marx, too, his influence was almost immediate, and has been enormous and inescapable. Thus, picking any one text from Freud's oeuvre risks oversimplification, and yet turning to his turn-of-the-century text *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) is nearly irresistible. *The Interpretation of Dreams* was one of Freud's most popular texts; published at the dawn of the twentieth century, it illustrates in an especially vivid way Freud's evolving theories about the influence of the unconscious mind on our daily lives—what he would call, in a text of the following year, the "psychopathology of everyday life." Freud's explorations of the constitutive nature of unconscious thought provide an especially clear example of the wedding of content and form in the best of modernist texts, since much of the stylistic brio of modernism was devoted to the exuma-

tion and articulation of unconscious motivations and drives. The unconscious was thus not just a subject of modernist writing but also the motivation for many of its most extreme stylistic experiments.

The net result of the work of these three social scientists (Marx, Engels, and Freud; and here, too, many others might be cited) was a growing awareness that we are not our own masters, not able to control the influence of unconscious and extrapersonal (social, political, economic) forces on our "personal" lives and relationships.

TOWARD THE REVALUATION OF ALL VALUES

Whereas the work of nineteenth-century scientists such as Lyell and Darwin had, as an unintended consequence, thrown the religious establishment into disarray, the most significant philosophical forebear of modernism, Friedrich Nietzsche, set out to dismantle the foundations of the Judeo-Christian tradition with malice aforethought. A representative (and notorious) text in this connection is Nietzsche's *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay* [i.e., "joyous"] *Science*), published in 1882—the birth year of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. As was the case with Marx and Freud, it is a bit silly to pretend that Nietzsche's influence resides primarily in any one of his voluminous writings; another good nominee would be *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), a somewhat more systematic attempt to discredit the bases of Judeo-Christian morality. But in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche wrote the one sentence for which, if for no other reason, he is remembered today in the popular imagination: "God is dead." This deliberately provocative statement comes as the culmination of a long and complicated argument, and does not mean simply that Nietzsche was an atheist (although he was that certainly, despite being the son of a Lutheran pastor). What Nietzsche means to suggest is that as traditional religion had been discredited by advances in the physical sciences (as well as by biblical hermeneutics and the higher criticism, both also coming out of Germany), and as religion ("God") disappeared, so logically must all moral and ethical systems that depend on such faith for their force likewise fade away. Thus comes his famous idea of the *Übermensch*, the "superman" who because of his intellectual and moral superiority over others must not be bound by social conventions. A host of early modernist protagonists and narrators, like Charlie Marlow in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), John Dowell in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), and the narrators of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), find themselves adrift in

an amoral landscape with no traditional moral or ethical points of reference; they are the inheritors of Nietzsche's scathing critique.

THE EARLY-TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCIENCE OF UNCERTAINTY

Of all the modern prophets of "relativity" or "uncertainty," none is more famous, and perhaps none is less well understood, than Albert Einstein. Einstein is another one of the household names of the twentieth century; many who had a hard time with high-school math can at least write the equation $E = mc^2$, even though most of us do not have a clue what it means. In both the special theory of relativity (1905, dealing with motion) and later in the general theory of relativity (1915, dealing with gravity), Einstein shook the traditional understanding of the universe and our relationship to it. In a way that was perhaps difficult for members of the general public to put their fingers on, Einstein was slowly but surely unsettling a mechanical understanding of the time-space continuum, creating shock waves every bit as profound as those of Lyell and Darwin (if a bit more difficult to fathom). Ironically enough, the true import of Einstein's ideas is not, as the truism has it, that "everything's relative"—in fact, Einstein says almost the exact opposite. In Einstein's vision of the world, *nothing* is relative: everything is absolute, and absolutely fixed—except for us, fallible and limited observers who, because of outside forces like time, motion, and gravity, are not able to see things "the way they really are."

Einstein's sense of the instability of the supposedly neutral scientific observer, an uncrowning similar to that performed by Marx and Freud for human subjects more generally, was formulated in a way perhaps more memorable and easily grasped by nonphysicists in Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, first published in 1927. Concerning himself with the movement of subatomic particles, Heisenberg demonstrated that a degree of uncertainty in all scientific measure and calculation was due not to the errors of the observer but to the function of observing, as it were: with regard to electrons, for instance, Heisenberg wrote, "The more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known in this instant, and vice versa." In the version of this insight that subsequently became important in social science circles, the presence of an observer necessarily changes the thing observed. Two witnesses standing on the same street corner, watching the same traffic accident,

do not see the same thing, because of the baggage (memories, opinions, prejudices, experiences) they carry around in their heads; likewise absolute zero (-459.69°F), the temperature at which all motion stops, must always remain a theoretical construct because the introduction of any instrument that would measure the temperature would change the temperature. The work of these two theoretical physicists thus helped to reinforce the impression among early-twentieth-century intellectuals that truth, if it exists at all, is not available to us in any but various distorted forms.

The development of modern linguistics as a human science followed this same trajectory: the founder of structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, suggested in his *Course in General Linguistics* (published by his students, posthumously, in 1916) that the uncertainty that seems to be a feature of every area of modern thought characterizes all human languages as well. The relationship between a word and the object in the real world that it names is completely arbitrary, grounded in nothing solid: the relationship is "unmotivated." Language, in Saussure's vision, is a huge web of words, all of which "mean" only because of their relationship to other words in the web; but the web itself floats on the breeze, anchored to nothing solid. Later thinkers such as Benjamin Lee Whorf, Edward Sapir, and Michel Foucault have amplified Saussure's insight into the inherent slipperiness of language, suggesting that even our thoughts, because we necessarily think in language, are subject to the same kind of slippage—the categories and structures of our mother tongue secretly color our perception of the outside world. This line of thinking resulted, in the late 1960s in France, in the school of interpretation called deconstruction, a style of reading that emphasizes not the ostensible "meaning" of texts but rather the ways that texts are always in excess of, or subtly contradictory of, an author's intended message. The end result of this line of thinking, so articulated, was not part of the intellectual framework of modernist writers, but an awareness of the inherent fallibility—"slipperiness"—of language informs most if not all important modernist texts; the first two chapters of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are apropos here.

FORM BECOMES CONTENT

"I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity," Pound wrote in 1913 in the essay "Credo." In modernism, style becomes content to an unprecedented degree, as

writers conclude that style is never invisible, never innocent, and instead seek to “foreground the device” (in the famous phrase of the Russian formalist critics), seeking restlessly for new forms that might more adequately convey their new insights. Joyce described the ideal relation of style to content this way:

As life changes, the style to express it must change also . . . A living style should be like a river which takes the colour and texture of the different regions through which it flows. The so-called classical style has a fixed rhythm and a fixed mood which make it to my mind an almost mechanical device. Proust’s style conveys that almost imperceptible but relentless erosion of time which, as I say, is the motive of his work.

Modernism’s stylistic innovations cover quite a wide range, as might be expected; just a few of the more salient and influential of these technical innovations will be discussed here.

One of the first—though of a different order, admittedly, than any particular stylistic technique—is the modernist imperative to “make it new.” From the time of its first articulation by Ezra Pound as something like the rallying cry of modernism, the job of the modern writer was understood to be to work restlessly for the revelation of the new, through formal and stylistic experimentation. As Eliot wrote in “Tradition and the Practice of Poetry” (1936), both playing off of and revising Pound’s formula: “The perpetual task of poetry is to *make all things new*. Not necessarily to make new things. . . . It is always partly a revolution, or a reaction, from the work of the previous generation.”

In his “Canto 53,” long after Pound had put the phrase into circulation as a slogan for the movement—indeed, long after it had become axiomatic—Pound revealed the genesis of the phrase:

Tching prayed on the mountain and
wrote MAKE IT NEW
on his bath tub
Day by day make it new
cut underbrush,
pile the logs
keep it growing.

With rich irony, Pound here reveals that modernism’s fetishization of “the new” is itself nothing new at all: it’s a slogan taken secondhand, plagiarized from the Chinese emperor Ch’eng T’ang (fl. c. 1766–c. 1754 BC). But by

redeploying it in the ways he had, Pound was able to take “make it new” and—well, make it new.

Most literary movements see themselves as doing something new; if they did not, it is hard to know how they would justify their existence. But perhaps as important in the development of modernism was the rather counterintuitive notion that modern literature must be difficult. This is not difficulty as (unfortunate) side effect; instead, at its most extreme, difficulty is preached as the very goal of modernist writing, or at least its inevitable condition, as in this, its most famous formulation, from T. S. Eliot’s essay “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921):

We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.

This is an intentionally provocative formulation, but nearly a decade later Eliot seems hardly to have eased his requirements. Writing of Saint-John Perse’s poem *Anabasis*, Eliot insists, “If, as I suggest, such an arrangement of imagery requires just as much ‘fundamental brainwork’ as the arrangement of an argument, it is to be expected that the reader of a poem should take at least as much trouble as a barrister reading an important decision on a complicated case.”

In some of its manifestations, the modernist movement also placed a great deal of emphasis on what has come to be known as primitivism, the diametrical opposite of an educated and cerebral difficulty. The influence of the African mask in the painting of Pablo Picasso, most notably *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907), is perhaps the most memorable example of this trend, but certainly primitivism found its literary manifestations as well. Freud was to give primitivism its intellectual justification, well past its primary impact in modernism, in his 1930 book *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

If civilization imposes such great sacrifices not only on man’s sexuality but on his aggressivity, we can understand better why it is hard for him to be happy in that civilization. In fact, primitive man was better off in knowing no restrictions of instinct. To counterbalance this, his prospects of enjoying this happiness for any length of time were very slender. Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security.

D. H. Lawrence—tongue how deeply in his cheek, it is impossible to say—enthusiastically gives way to this desire for the primitive, as a refusal of the civilized repression of the “modern” world, in his essay “Indians and an Englishman”:

I don't want to live again the tribal mysteries my blood has lived long since. I don't want to know as I have known, in the tribal exclusiveness. But every drop of me trembles still alive to the old sound, every thread in my body quivers to the frenzy of the old mystery. I know my derivation. I was born of no virgin, of no Holy Ghost. Ah, no, these old men telling the tribal tale were my fathers. I have a dark-faced, bronze-voiced father far back in the resinous ages. My mother was no virgin. She lay in her hour with this dusky-lipped tribe-father. And I have not forgotten him.

If difficulty, then, was seen in some circles as a necessary evil, primitivism was seen in others as a necessary corrective. Wyndham Lewis, for instance, wrote in his “Manifesto II”:

The Art-instinct is permanently primitive. In a chaos of imperfection, discord, etc., it finds the same stimulus as in Nature. The artist of the modern movement is a savage (in no sense an “advanced,” perfected, democratic, Futurist individual of Mr. Marinetti's limited imagination): this enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert of modern life serves him as Nature did more technically primitive man.

Another stylistic feature in modernism traces an obvious legacy back to the writers of the 1880s and 1890s: a kind of formalism, an emphasis on the literary text as a self-sufficient aesthetic object, answerable to no demands or laws outside the world of its own creation. Ezra Pound quotes with approval the poet Lawrence Binyon on the necessary “irresponsibility” of art, its rejection of any mimetic requirements: “For indeed it is not essential that the subject-matter should represent or be like anything in nature; only it must be alive with a rhythmic vitality of its own.” In its most extreme versions, however, this kind of aestheticism always sat uncomfortably with other elements of modernist aesthetics, like the need for psychological realism. Indeed, it is telling that the most articulate, extended defense of this position comes not from a modernist writer but from a character in a modernist novel—Joyce's Stephen Dedalus—and he articulates a position with which Joyce, arguably, is not in sympathy:

“In order to see that basket,” said Stephen, “your mind first of all separates the basket from the rest of the visible universe

which is not the basket. The first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object to be apprehended. An esthetic image is presented to us either in space or in time. . . . But, temporal or spatial, the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which is not it. You apprehend it as *one* thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas*.”

Too exclusive an emphasis on what the writers of the 1890s called “art for art's sake” would, of course, have prevented modernist writing from carrying out any of the social and political reforms that its practitioners sometimes embraced. So, for instance, the desire to break down Victorian-era taboos regarding sex and sexuality required a sometimes quite direct treatment. In defense of his scandalous novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), for instance, Lawrence protested: “In spite of all antagonism, I put forth this novel as an honest, healthy book, necessary for us today. . . . We are today, as human beings, evolved and cultured far beyond the taboos which are inherent in our culture. . . . The mind has an old grovelling fear of the body and the body's potencies. It is the mind we have to liberate, to civilize on these points.” Fellow persecuted writer James Joyce defended his practice in similar terms, while emphasizing the continuity of sexual frankness with a kind of psychological realism:

The modern writer has other problems facing him, problems which are more intimate and unusual. We prefer to search in the corners for what has been hidden, and moods, atmospheres and intimate relationships are the modern writers' theme. . . . The modern theme is the subterranean forces, those hidden tides which govern everything and run humanity counter to the apparent flood: those poisonous subtleties which envelop the soul, the ascending fumes of sex.

Surely it is this commitment to a thoroughgoing psychological realism that was initially seen as modernism's great literary contribution. Joyce and Woolf are the writers most often mentioned in this regard, although the prior contributions of Henry James need to be kept in mind. As a statement of doctrine, Woolf's famous defense of the stream-of-consciousness technique in “Modern Fiction” (1919) is worth quoting at length:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into

the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there. . . . Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small.

In her almost scientific description of the novelist's job, Woolf also suggests obliquely what Eliot, in another of his famous essays ("Tradition and the Individual Talent," 1919), says quite directly: that modernist writers must move away from the cult of personality that reigned in Romanticism, and must strive instead for what Eliot called "impersonality"—through such devices as irony, the "objective correlative," and other innovations in narration. Eliot writes:

The poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. . . . Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

Eliot's notion of the objective correlative remains underdeveloped in his essay on *Hamlet* (1919), but the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska seems to have something like it in mind (though before Eliot had coined the term) in his manifesto "Vortex Gaudier-Brzeska," printed in the first issue of *Blast* (1915): "I shall derive my emotions solely from the *arrangement of surfaces*, I shall present my emotion by the arrangement of my surfaces, the planes, and lines by which they are defined." Or, as the American poet William Carlos Williams was to pithily remark, "No ideas but in things."

One final feature of some modernist writing is so distinctive and emblematic that, while it features prominently in only a small number of modernist texts, it warrants separate mention here: that is the technique that, again using the name given it by Eliot, critics call the "mythical method." Eliot's review of Joyce's *Ulysses* ("Ulysses, Order, and Myth," 1923) is the locus classicus for discussions of the mythical method; in the review Eliot is both defending Joyce's difficult narrative construction—with nods to the earlier experiments of W. B. Yeats—and, implicitly, gesturing toward his own tour de force in *The Waste Land*:

Mr. Joyce's parallel use of the *Odyssey* has a great importance. It has the importance of a scientific discovery. No one else has built a novel upon such a foundation before: it has never before been necessary. . . . In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. . . . It is simply 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.

THE LEGACY OF MODERNISM

In spite of losing momentum after World War II, modernism remains the most vital and important literary movement of the twentieth century. Nor, although post-modernism now clearly reigns, is modernism altogether gone: in the popular imagination and taste, modernist literature is still preferred by what Woolf called "the common reader," for it encounters a world seemingly coming to pieces, and tries to suggest how those pieces had once, and might once again, fit together. "Hammer your thoughts into unity," the young Yeats used to encourage himself; if a drive toward aesthetic, cultural, and political unity was what was most admirable in modernism, it also seems to have led inexorably to what was most frightening, the embrace of totalitarian politics, for greater or lesser periods of time, by many of modernism's leading figures (Yeats, Pound, Lawrence, Lewis, and too many others). And this subtle shift—from "unity" to "totality"—spelled the end of modernism's primacy as a cultural force. World War II, as the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard remarked, gave us more than our share of totality.

Modernism has, for the past decade, enjoyed a resurgence in interest from literary scholars, who now speak of the "new" modernism or, suggestively, of "modernisms," plural; and as we rediscover the rich variety hiding under modernism's monolithic facade, the contributions of these writers and texts to twentieth—and even twenty-first—century art and thought shines clearly through.

[See also Joseph Conrad; T. S. Eliot; Sigmund Freud; Henry James; James Joyce; D. H. Lawrence; Wyndham Lewis; Karl Marx; Virginia Woolf; and William Butler Yeats.]

EDITIONS

The modernist canon is vast, and no bibliography could hope to encompass all the primary texts. The following

are some useful anthologies that bring together important documents, manifestos, essays, etc., from the period.

Ellmann, Richard, and Charles Feidelson Jr. *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*. New York, 1965. Still the best single-volume sourcebook for writings about modernism, though now usefully supplemented with Rainey.

Rainey, Lawrence. *Modernism: An Anthology*. Oxford, 2005. A richly interdisciplinary collection of key texts relating to the development of modernism.

FURTHER READING

Ayers, David. *Modernism: A Short Introduction*. Malden, MA, 2004. A good general introduction to the topic.

Baldick, Chris. *The Modern Movement*. Oxford, 2004. A comprehensive and balanced account of literary modernism.

Bradshaw, David, and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*. Forthcoming. Entries by leading scholars on the primary intellectual currents, genres, and texts.

Dettmar, Kevin J. H., ed. *Rereading the New: A Backward Glance at Modernism*. Ann Arbor, MI, 1992. A collection of essays reexamining modernism from the vantage point of postmodernism.

Diepeveen, Leonard. *The Difficulties of Modernism*. New York, 2003. A fascinating piece of intellectual history, looking at the development of “difficulty” as an element of modernist aesthetics.

Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. 3 vols. New Haven, CT, 1987–1994. A systematic account of the systematic exclusion of women writers from the main line of modernist literary history.

Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. Berkeley, CA, 1971. A massive, somewhat idiosyncratic history of modernism, emphasizing poetry and arguing for the central role of Ezra Pound.

Levenson, Michael. *A Genealogy of Modernism*. Cambridge, U.K., 1986. A thorough examination of the intellectual and philosophical backgrounds of modernism.

Lyon, Janet. *Manifestos: Provocations of the Modern*. Ithaca, NY, 1999. A stimulating study of the manifesto

both as a critical guide to modernism and to the modernist literary form par excellence.

Marcus, Laura, and Peter Nicholls, eds. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*. Cambridge, U.K., 2004. An invaluable encyclopedic resource for information on important writers and texts.

McDonald, Gail. *Learning to Be Modern: Pound, Eliot, and the American University*. New York, 1993. A study of how the modernist writers and the burgeoning university system in the United States mutually constituted one another.

Meisel, Perry. *The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literature and Criticism after 1850*. New Haven, CT, 1987. A rich intellectual history of modernism placing its roots firmly in the late nineteenth century, and suggesting that the sense of “belatedness,” rather than newness, characterizes modernist writing.

Menand, Louis. *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context*. New York, 1987. The best study of Eliot’s role in and relation to modernism.

North, Michael. *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*. New York, 1994. One of the first, and best, critical studies to return scholars’ attention to the central role of race in the development of modernism.

North, Michael. *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern*. New York, 1999. A ruthless focus on modernism’s *annus mirabilis* helps suggest just what modernism looked and felt like before its audaciousness became familiar.

Rainey, Lawrence. *The Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*. New Haven, CT, 1998. A collection of sometimes brilliant essays exploring the gap between announced modernist principle and observed modernist literary practice.

Scott, Bonnie Kime. *The Gender of Modernism*. Bloomington, IN, 1990. A collection of primary materials pertaining to central modernist figures, uncovering a complicated legacy of sexual/gender politics ignored by earlier work.

Torgovnick, Marianna. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago, 1990. A study of the primitivist strain in modernist art.

Wilson, Edmund. *Axel’s Castle*. 1931. The earliest substantive study of modernism, emphasizing its roots in the symbolist tradition.

MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU

Isobel Grundy

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) has been described by modern scholars as one of the most significant women writing in the earlier eighteenth century. Although others are better known as novelists, playwrights, or poets, she was a woman of letters who wrote in almost all the current genres and was an innovator in every genre she touched. In the two centuries after her death she was best known for her letters, a fact that encouraged interest in her life rather than her work. Her British contemporaries knew her as Lady Mary Wortley, while her Continental contemporaries knew her (incorrectly in British terms) as Lady Montagu. Nineteenth-century scholars called her Lady Mary; more recent ones refer to her as Montagu.

The eldest child of an influential Whig statesman who rose to become a duke, retaining her courtesy title of “Lady Mary” when she married out of the nobility, with a husband whose own efforts made him the richest commoner in England, Montagu appears at first glance to be the embodiment of privilege. A closer look reveals how, for a woman of this time, privilege (and the accompanying upper-class identity and material comfort) could diverge from almost any power of self-direction. When Montagu remarked that human beings are not players but cards that are played with, she was accurately reporting her own experience.

When she was three, shortly after the birth of her brother, Lady Mary Pierrepont lost her mother. The family of four children was subsequently split up, and she lived first with a grandmother and then among servants in the grand country house of her father (whose title at this stage was the Marquess of Dorchester). There she entertained her earliest dreams of becoming a writer, producing an ambitious prose-and-verse romance in the style of Aphra Behn (first printed in 2000), a body of varied and skillful poetry, and an epistolary novel in five letters—the first and last of her fictions to provide a happy ending for its heroine. At this point she was a romantically idealistic Old Whig, holding high ideas about the liberty of the subject and the duty to resist corrupt rulers.

She probably sided with those of her ancestors who fought against the monarchy during the English Civil War. She began keeping a diary, a practice she continued the rest of her life. If her diary had survived it would be a much-valued document, but it outlived her by only about thirty years; her daughter destroyed it shortly before her own death.

Lady Mary had been writing to her other grandmother (actually her dead mother’s stepmother) since childhood, honing her skills as a reporter but more particularly as a creative commentator on daily experience. Her lifetime output of letters was probably several times as large as the surviving fraction of it, and there are whole categories of letters (particularly those to male literati, politicians, and philosophes) that have not survived at all. The extant letters begin in the period leading up to her marriage, and at that point they already spanned several distinct styles. To female friends of a literary bent Lady Mary wrote eagerly about the latest in books and pamphlets; to others she wrote mostly about affairs of the heart—flippantly about those of other people, feelingly about those of her correspondents and herself. Whether flippant or with feeling, she was equally liable to supplement realistic writing with fantasy or allegory. To her future husband she wrote (surreptitiously, since writing to men was forbidden to an unmarried woman, especially after Edward Wortley Montagu had been categorically ruled out as a suitor by her father) letters that were conscious works of art. She sought not merely to impress him by her intellect but to win his moral approval (no easy matter) by a self-construction that was high-minded; philosophically detached from ambition, desire, and strife; and in every way contrary to his notion of a fashionable, superficial young lady. He loved her irrationally and reluctantly.

Lady Mary married by her own choice, but her choice was dictated by circumstances she had not chosen. Her father wanted her to marry a man she disliked and despised, and she had been passionately in love with a man about whom nothing is known other than that he was for some reason unsuitable as a husband. In this desperate

situation she eloped with Wortley Montagu, whom for two years, on and off, she had been trying to persuade that she was not the stereotypical coquette he feared she was. She wrote that marrying him made her love him, but their mutual love did not endure.

The first golden age of Lady Montagu's writing came two and a half years after her wedding, when the accession of George I brought the Whigs to power. Once Wortley Montagu had secured a job for himself, he no longer kept his wife in rural lodgings, and when she reached London she was launched. It was probably in 1715–1716 that she wrote her "Account of the Court of George I" (an important essay combining historical narrative, political analysis, and thumbnail character sketches). She certainly wrote her best-known poems at this time, the six "Eclogues," which others have labeled *Court Eclogues* or *Town Eclogues*. These poems have been subjected to much misreading, partly because they are deeply a part of the culture of the day—both intellectual and fashionable—and partly because of the collaborative situation surrounding them.

By March 1715 Montagu had written the poem that she later called "Monday" (to open the series of days of the week). Of the rest of the set, "Thursday" was mistakenly attributed to Alexander Pope by some of his posthumous editors (although never by himself) and "Friday" exists in two slightly different versions, one by Montagu, the other by John Gay. The original poem in the series

received unwelcome attention while Lady Mary lay deathly ill with smallpox in December 1715. It circulated from unauthorized, uninformed sources and was read as a satire on Caroline of Anspach, Princess of Wales, although the obviously unjust and prejudiced character of the anti-Caroline speaker ought to have made it clear that the poem was an ironic tribute to a princess whose progressive interests offended the more straitlaced among her courtiers.

This illicit circulation led to the illicit and anonymous printing of three of the eclogues under the title *Court Poems*, which confirmed the controversial nature of the whole enterprise and probably ensured Montagu's abandonment of this kind of updated satirical pastoral. Soon afterward she removed her disfigured face from court circles, the scenes of her success, to accompany her husband, who was going to Constantinople as the British ambassador.

The ensuing three years of travel completed Montagu's education in the field of varied national and religious cultures, and confirmed her liking for life in countries other than her own. The result was her best-known text, her *Embassy Letters*. (Like her "Eclogues," they commonly bear a title that was never used by her and that obscures their nature. Calling them *Turkish Embassy Letters* has the effect of suppressing the vital component of observation of modern Europe and the invocation of the ancient world of Greece and Rome.) Recent criticism has tended to situate Montagu's generally favorable assessment of Ottoman Islamic culture in a context of the European, Christian, and imperial hegemony of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. Montagu herself carefully situated her analysis of Turkish society (of an Islamic multinational empire far outstripping Christian Europe in power and cultural sophistication) between a tour of many diverse European nation-states—both monarchical and republican, Catholic and Protestant—and a retrospective look at pagan Europe under the hegemony of Greece and then Rome, as well as a homecoming to the provincial and insular culture of eighteenth-century England. The *Embassy Letters* were Montagu's first potential book, yet they remained unpublished. Her careful selection and revising of actual letters shows that she contemplated publication—and she was urged to publish by her feminist friend Mary Astell—yet she ultimately chose not to. If this was a free, unpressured choice, it was one of very few that life offered her.

Lady Mary's busy life during the 1720s included involvement in the paper wars surrounding the introduc-



Mary Wortley Montagu

Mary Wortley Montagu with her son, Edward Wortley Montagu, and attendants. Portrait attributed to Jean Baptiste Vanmour, c. 1717
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

tion of inoculation for smallpox (which she had, like others, observed in Turkey and, unlike others, set out to naturalize in the Western medical repertoire); a close friendship, succeeded by violent feuding, with Pope; and family anxieties. Each of these was a provocation to writing of various kinds. The inoculation controversy produced correspondence—sadly, none extant—with medical practitioners and a single identified newspaper article, “A Plain Account of the Inoculating of the Smallpox,” published as if authored by a “Turkey Merchant” (representative of the well-informed nonprofessional). Here Montagu lashed the medical profession for transforming a risk-free minor procedure into a heroic affair involving preparation by such means as fasting and purging, a large and deep cut, and escalating amounts of the virus. Her essay is unique among inoculation pamphlets in espousing a position that still makes sense today.

Her worst family worry, that over her sister Frances, produced a series of dazzlingly disillusioned letters about the goings-on of high society in London, and it probably fed a series of protofeminist poems decrying the injustice and suffering visited on women in marriage. Frances’s husband, the Jacobite earl of Mar, chosen by her father for reasons unconnected with her personal happiness, had given her a life of penurious exile and eventual clinical depression.

After Pope’s admiration turned to hatred (for reasons still not understood, but probably having to do with Montagu’s determination to behave as a poet in her own right rather than as an acolyte of his genius) she followed him in turning from other poetic genres toward personal satire and lampoon. This was no radical swerve: she was already a satirist, in the ambivalence of the eclogues, the epigrammatic cut and thrust of her letters to Lady Mar, and the controlled rage of the “feminist” poems and the inoculation essay. As Pope’s avowed enemy she joined forces with her young cousin Henry Fielding in mock-epic poems, and with John, Lord Hervey, in Pope’s own specialty of Horatian epistle. The epic project was never finished, but the *Verses Address’d to the Imitator of Horace* (1733) are generally recognized as the most brilliant and telling of all the literary attacks on Pope. (One of its distinguishing marks is a confident pastiche of Pope’s style. Montagu paralleled this achievement in the Swiftian pastiche of her anti-Swift poem, “The Reasons that Induced Dr Swift to write a Poem called the Lady’s Dressing Room”—anonymously published as “The Dean’s Provocation for Writing the Lady’s Dressing Room.”)

Unhappy in her marriage, Lady Mary left England in 1739 in hopes of happiness with a young lover, Francesco Algarotti (which evoked another virtuoso series of letters, this time in the French style of passion and gallant compliment). Her final literary project before her departure was a periodical, the *Nonsense of Common-Sense*. The title stems from the appropriation by the political opposition of the title *Common Sense* for its own journal, which Montagu regarded as severely slanted. She was the only eighteenth-century woman to initiate and publish a periodical with a political-economic agenda, although she left space for fantasy, feminism, and entertainment as well.

During Montagu’s final years in France and Italy (especially 1746–1756, spent in remote northern Italy) she wrote letters to her daughter that are perhaps the most brilliant, as well as the most deeply matured and most wide-ranging, of her correspondence. Here she discusses personal feelings and the dynamic between mothers and daughters, the education of girls, her recreational reading, and the events of her life (of which she communicates a somewhat sanitized version). Like many of her writings, these letters have been inadequately studied. To these years also belong a history of her own times—a currently popular genre of politicized autobiography—which she unfortunately destroyed, apparently unwilling to face the controversy that it would otherwise arouse.

From the time that she left England, Lady Mary managed the greater part of her social life in her fluent, though far from perfect, French and Italian. She wrote some highly significant texts in these languages, which are unavoidably rendered to some degree marginal for most present-day readers by the interposition of a translation between Montagu’s production and the reader’s acquisition. One of these texts is her “Italian Memoir” (not titled by herself), a testimony drawn up for a trial that never took place. It is an astonishingly dispassionate and anti-heroic account of her exploitation at the hands of her landlord in the province of Brescia, Count Ugolino Palazzi, who as ill luck would have it was one of the most feared upper-class bandits and extortioners in a province then famed for such men. The other—far more significant for English literary history—is her antiromance “Princess Docile” (not titled by herself), her longest and finest prose fiction.

“Princess Docile” stands closer to the French tradition of fiction than to the English one. Apart from a few details, such as a passing gibe at Richardson’s *Pamela*, it is written as if the mid-eighteenth-century revolution in the

novel had never happened. It moves easily between verisimilitude and fantasy, featuring a heroine dowered in her cradle by fairy gifts and courted by a space traveler from the planet Venus. Docile is a highly convincing symbolic representation of the condition of eighteenth-century women, educated with a view to making her what her name implies, having superhuman heroism and self-sacrifice demanded of her, yet never given credit for any of her good actions, as well as being scapegoated and victimized. Standing apart from the mainstream of the English novel, "Princess Docile" would hardly have changed the official history of the novel if its existence had been known; nonetheless, its publication (in 1996) calls for an assessment.

Montagu's idiosyncratic career is studded with landmark texts, from her early contribution to Addison's *Spectator* (the only essay the journal published that was written by a woman) to the late, undatable "Princess Docile." She was an opportunistic writer, often producing her work under the spur of some specific occasion or controversy. She loved to assume identities not her own, and she mustered a wide range of generically inflected styles. Even in a male persona, however, her trenchant approach to issues of gender now normally ensures that she would not be taken for a man. (This was not the case as long as logic-driven argument and an appeal to reason were seen as masculine indicators.) Her own opinions, voiced by means of sometimes elaborate indirection, are those of a disillusioned idealist, and her feminist readers are not permitted to take the idealism without also swallowing the disillusion. Although she was condescended to by generations of admiring nineteenth-century reviewers, she remains a very grown-up taste.

[See also *Bluestockings*; *The Novel*; Alexander Pope; *Satire*; and *Hester Thrale*.]

SELECTED WORKS

- Poems* (1716). The title was given as *Court poems. Viz; I. The Basset-Table. An Eclogue. II. The Drawing-Room. III. The Toilet*, and the prefatory material, without naming names, strongly implied that there were three authors: Alexander Pope, John Gay, and Montagu.
- "A Plain Account of the Inoculating of the Smallpox. By a Turkey Merchant" (1722)
- Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace* (with John, Lord Hervey; 1733)
- The Dean's Provocation for Writing the Lady's Dressing Room. A Poem* (1734)

The Nonsense of Common-Sense (1737–1738)

Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—y W—y M—e: Written, during her Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, To Persons of Distinction (3 vols.; 1763). Generally known as *Embassy Letters* or, confusingly, as *Turkish Embassy Letters*.

The Poetical Works of the Right Honourable Lady M—y W—y M—e (1768)

EDITIONS

- Dallaway, James, ed. *The Works of the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Including her Correspondence, Poems, and Essays*. 5 vols. London, 1803. The authorized edition, spectacularly badly edited, but the first printing of most of its contents.
- Grundy, Isobel, ed. *Romance Writings*, New York, 1996. Much unpublished material, including "Princess Docile" and the "Italian Memoir."
- Grundy, Isobel, with students, eds. *The Adventurer*. 2000. First printing of the juvenile verse-and-prose romance.
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- Halsband, Robert, ed. *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Oxford, 1965–1967. The first appearance of such vital correspondence as that with her future husband and Francesco Algarotti.
- Halsband, Robert, and Isobel Grundy, ed. *Essays and Poems and Simplicity, a Comedy*. Oxford, 1993. Contains a high proportion of previously unpublished material; the revised edition incorporates significant additions and corrections.
- Thomas, W. Moy, ed. *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. 3rd ed. 2 vols. London, 1861. The first scholarly edition of her work, this was intended to undo the damage wrought by Dallaway in 1803. Almost the whole of her courtship correspondence was still missing from the record.
- Wharnccliffe, James Archibald Stuart-Wortley-Mackenzie, Baron, ed. *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. 3 vols. Paris, 1837. Nominally edited by her great-grandson Lord Wharnccliffe but actually edited by her youngest daughter, Lady Louisa Stuart, and her great-nephew Stuart Corbett.

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