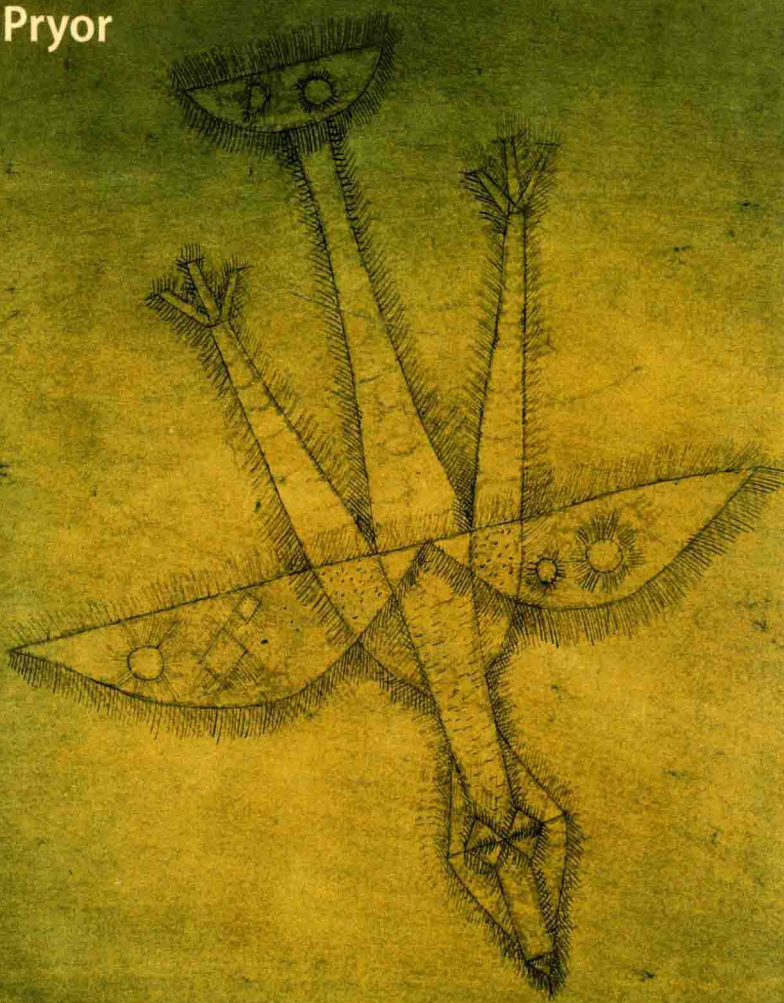


Poetry, Modernism, and an Imperfect World

Sean Pryor



POETRY, MODERNISM, AND AN IMPERFECT WORLD

SEAN PRYOR

University of New South Wales



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107184404

10.1017/9781316876909

© Sean Pryor 2017

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2017

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-107-18440-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

POETRY, MODERNISM, AND AN IMPERFECT WORLD

Diverse modernist poems, far from advertising a capacity to prefigure utopia or save society, understand poetry to be complicit in the unhappiness and injustice of an imperfect or fallen world. Combining analysis of technical devices and aesthetic values with broader accounts of contemporary critical debates, social contexts, and political history, this book makes a formalist argument about how these poems understand themselves and their situation, and a historicist argument about the meanings of their forms. The poetry of the canonical modernists T. S. Eliot, Mina Loy, and Wallace Stevens is placed alongside the poetry of Ford Madox Ford, better known for his novels and his criticism, and the poetry of Joseph Macleod, whose work has been largely forgotten. Focusing on the years from 1914 to 1930, this book offers a new account of a crucial moment in the history of British and American modernism.

SEAN PRYOR is Senior Lecturer in English in the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales. He works on nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry and poetics. He is the author of *W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and the Poetry of Paradise*, and co-editor of *Writing, Medium, Machine: Modern Technographies*.

Acknowledgements

In writing this book I have been extraordinarily fortunate. For advice on early drafts I am indebted to John Attridge, Sara Crangle, Chris Danta, Ben Etherington, Jacinta Kelly, David Larkin, Julian Murphet, Elizabeth Pender, and David Trotter. The readers for Cambridge University Press made generous suggestions, and Ray Ryan, my commissioning editor, has been very supportive. Helen Groth, George Kouvaros, and Rónán McDonald offered wisdom and encouragement. A fellowship from the Australian Research Council funded much of my research, for which the Centre for Modernism Studies in Australia, in the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales, has been a home. I would also like to thank the staff of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, of Cornell University Library, of the National Library of Scotland, and of the University of New South Wales Library.

An early version of parts of the fifth chapter appeared in the *Wallace Stevens Journal* 35.2 (Fall 2011). Unpublished drafts of Ford Madox Ford's 'On Heaven' are quoted courtesy of David Higham Associates, and unpublished letters by Mina Loy are quoted courtesy of Roger L. Conover, Loy's editor. I am also grateful to Roger L. Conover for permission to quote from *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Highlands: Jargon Society, 1982), and from *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996). Unpublished materials by Joseph Macleod are quoted with the permission of Iain Antony Macleod and the National Library of Scotland. Unpublished materials by Ezra Pound are copyright © 2016 by Mary de Rachewiltz and the Estate of Omar S. Pound, and used with permission.

Most of all, I am grateful to Sally Smith for her patience and her love. This book is for Joseph.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page vi</i>
1 Introduction	I
2 Ford's Fall	20
3 Eliot's Line	53
4 Loy's Cries	90
5 Stevens's Accidence	127
6 Macleod's Signs	157
7 Conclusion	193
<i>Bibliography</i>	198
<i>Index</i>	219

CHAPTER I

Introduction

I

'But all this beauty is exactly what does not exist', says the creature in Kafka's 'Der Bau', 'and I must get to work'.¹ The creature has been speculating about the form his burrow could have taken, the happiness he could have had, and now he resolves to work on the burrow again, to implement another plan and so attempt another form of happiness. The creature's resolution pivots from a contrast between the world he can imagine and the world as it is, to a contrast between the world as it is and the world he can make. Probably he cannot make a burrow as beautiful as the burrow he can imagine, though they both oppose the state of things, and possibly such beauty is only ever what does not exist. Possibly the thought of such beauty is oppressive. At the beginning of the story the creature had seemed pleased: 'I have established my burrow, and it seems to be a success.'² But that beauty exceeds this success, and he must get to work.

Imagine the creature's resolution as a motto for the great labours of modernity, aesthetic and political, from modernism to socialism: the tremendous effort to get to work because of what exists. Kafka's creature must work precisely with what exists, including the burrow he has made for himself, and the burden of that work is part of what makes the present world ugly and unhappy. But the burrow he creates and recreates, a work in perpetual progress, is a refuge from the world which proves no refuge at all. It offers an allegory for the isolations and anxieties of modern life, and for a labour of thinking which can never rest, which incessantly dissatisfies. The burrow seems an allegory for Kafka's story too, and more broadly for the work of art: a part of the world which promises a refuge from that

¹ Franz Kafka, *Kafka's Selected Stories*, trans. and ed. Stanley Corngold (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), p. 180.

² Kafka, *Kafka's Selected Stories*, p. 162.

world. The creature's resolution is a model for the projects of modernity in this, that with a simple enigmatic conjunction ('and') it holds together art and the world, imagination and work. These oppositions do not coincide, for art means both imagination and work, and so does the world which art opposes. The friction between the oppositions generates the energy, the compulsion, the 'must'. Even art fails the beauty which does not exist, or not yet.

It seems to me that modernism could not but resolve to redeem or transform a new world of ugliness, suffering, and injustice, and at the same time reflect on its failure or its inability to do so. In 1929, looking back on the renaissance which had promised so much, and having helped to edit the *Little Review* for more than a decade, Jane Heap remarked that the 'actual situation of art today is not a very important or adult concern'.³ 'Art is not the highest aim of man', she says; 'it is interesting only as a pronounced symptom of an ailing and aimless society'. Heap speaks without melodrama of 'the passing of the arts'; the transformations required today are just 'too big a job for art'. Others believed that those very transformations would eliminate the need for art. If modernist aesthetics were the symptom of a 'historically unstable form of society and an undecided epoch, in which drastically variable futures were lived as immediately possible – among them, saliently but not exclusively, socialist revolution'⁴ – then the advent of one or more of those futures promised not just the passing of modernism, but the passing of the aesthetic. Were life 'ever to be ordered within the perfect state', Nietzsche prophesied, 'there would no longer exist in the present any motive whatever for poetry and fiction'.⁵

This book is about modernism as the art of an imperfect or fallen world, and modernity as a world in which art is imperfect or fallen. Most of all, this book is about poetry. I want to argue that modernist poetry responds to these dilemmas with power and insight when it understands itself as a fallen art in a fallen world. The poems I read here bring their complicity to self-consciousness; they present their complicity and implicate poetry as such. They do so by confessing their participation in some other compromised category, as for instance when *The Waste Land* (1922) represents the ruin of civilisation and represents itself as a product of civilisation, or when *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* (1923, 1925) represents learning language as

³ Jane Heap, 'Lost: A Renaissance', *Little Review* 12.2 (May 1929): 5–6 (p. 6).

⁴ Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 53.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 112.

a fall into the semiotic, and so damns itself for using language. More importantly, these poems do so by implicating in that world of ugliness, suffering, and injustice precisely what distinguishes them from short stories, philosophical treatises, political speeches, and casual conversations: the verbal devices, cultural expectations, and aesthetic values which make them poetry. For these poems, whatever hope, happiness, or consolation poetry offers, poetry is also and as a consequence wretched, unhappy, and unconsoling.

Yet Matthew Arnold hoped that poetry could save us,⁶ and more recent theorists sometimes call poetry 'a form of utopia', since poetry 'invents within language new ways of being with oneself, others, and the world'.⁷ Whether in the poems of today or of the past, some critics find a poetics 'capable of birthing a new, and newly redemptive, culture'.⁸ Poetry's 'complex testing operations' represent 'an anxious utopianism',⁹ or a particular poetic movement, such as Objectivism, is driven by an 'aesthetic-political utopian impulse'.¹⁰ If this is true for the poems I discuss, it is only because they know they cannot redeem themselves and cannot redeem the world. Their promise is negative. Writing in the *Dial* in 1920, Maxwell Bodenheim called the poet 'brilliantly futile', even as she makes a 'daring attempt to show men the potentialities which forever slumber within them'.¹¹ Bodenheim's 'forever' forecloses utopia; his 'futile' makes it possible. Although art 'is compelled toward absolute negativity', compelled to oppose the fallen world, 'it is precisely by virtue of this negativity that it is not absolutely negative'.¹² But it must be unremittingly negative, even towards itself, and even the poems I have chosen probably fail that imperative. I do not therefore make the sociological argument that, despite appearances, poetry serves capital or power or the existing state of things. Art is social, says Adorno, it participates in the social world,

⁶ Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960–1977), 9.63.

⁷ Gabriella Bedetti and Henri Meschonnic, 'Interview: Henri Meschonnic', *Diacritics* 18.3 (Autumn 1988): 93–111 (p. 106).

⁸ Julie Carr, *Surface Tension: Ruptural Time and the Poetics of Desire in Late Victorian Poetry* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive, 2013), p. 26.

⁹ Joel Nickels, *The Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 19.

¹⁰ Ruth Jennison, *The Zukofsky Era: Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 90.

¹¹ Maxwell Bodenheim, 'Modern Poetry', *Dial* 68.1 (January 1920): 95–8 (p. 96).

¹² Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 305.

not only because of its mode of production, in which the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is concentrated, nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art.¹³

The autonomy is complicit. Modernist works engage with their social world through 'forms of relative autonomy', contingent upon and compromised by their historical situation.¹⁴ 'The detached observer is as much entangled as the active participant', and 'the only advantage of the former is insight into his entanglement'.¹⁵

So certain modernist poems bring their complicity to self-consciousness, and they do so by implicating poetry in the 'fallen society' of modernity,¹⁶ 'the fallen world of the here and now'.¹⁷ The features which, for these poems, distinguish the art of poetry, and on which my readings focus, are sometimes technical and sometimes conceptual. They range from lineation to the desire for every element or aspect of a poem to be necessary and significant. But no criterion for poetry is secure or binding, and in the first decades of the twentieth century, every criterion was contested. 'If we speak of a work like the *Orlando Furioso* as a poem', reasoned Richard Aldington in 1920, 'can we deny that praise to a work like *Du Côté de Chez Swann*, which contains beauties, perceptions, and thoughts of which Ariosto was incapable?'¹⁸ Metre and rhyme may define verse, or may have defined it once upon a time, but they do not define poetry. Technical distinctions thus seem to yield to conceptual identities. 'Even if you make poetry a matter of verbal harmony', Aldington continues, 'there are in M. Proust's book finer cadences, more lovely conjunctions of sound, more original rhythms'.¹⁹ And yet Aldington derives even these criteria from works categorised by other criteria. He cannot call *Du Côté de Chez Swann* (1913) a poem without thinking of *Orlando Furioso*.

Many other modernists sought to define the matter of poetry, and the way that poetry matters or no longer matters, and they did so in many

¹³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 296.

¹⁴ Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), p. 26.

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 178.

¹⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 23.

¹⁸ Richard Aldington, 'The Art of Poetry', *Dial* 69.2 (August 1920): 166–80 (p. 167).

¹⁹ Aldington, 'The Art of Poetry', pp. 167–8.

other ways. The problem remained a source of fascination, a spur to experiment, and the cause of some anxiety; I shall return to it repeatedly. The situation of poetry, for modernism, was one of acute crisis. 'Modern civilization seems to demand that the poet should justify himself not only by writing poems', observe Laura Riding and Robert Graves, 'but furthermore by proving with each poem the contemporary legitimacy of poetry itself'.²⁰ This tension between the instance and the idea, between poems and poetry, is crucial. It means that, as Peter Nicholls puts it, 'the exemplary modernist poem deliberately invites the question "Is it poetry?"'²¹ Each work had to earn the name of *poetry* anew, as classification or evaluation. Descending to the particular, it could try to do so by employing techniques of versification. Ascending to the universal, it could try to do so by epitomising the concept of art. Yet neither those techniques nor that concept are eternal laws; they are the measures of a historical moment. In modernism, poetry opposes a necessary other at every level: prose, narrative, the novel, the world. It opposes science, religion, and capitalism. It opposes mechanical reproduction: 'A prose kinema, not [...] the "sculpture" of rhyme', writes Ezra Pound in 1920,²² before criticising a passage in the drafts of *The Waste Land* as mere 'photography'.²³ Given this situation, poetry vanishes in a cloudy abstraction or crumbles into that contingent set of verbal devices, cultural expectations, and aesthetic values. At every level, poetry is a refuge which proves no refuge. My argument is that modernist poetry engages powerfully with the fallen world when it reflects on its peculiar falls or failings, and so this book attends to some of those distinguishing features.

II

The labours of modernity are not separate. Both the notion that poetry is a form of utopia and the notion that poetry is complicit in an imperfect

²⁰ Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: William Heinemann, 1927), p. 260.

²¹ Peter Nicholls, 'The Poetics of Modernism', in Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 51–67 (p. 52).

²² Ezra Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), in *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990), pp. 183–202 (p. 186).

²³ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), pp. 10–11. Hereafter abbreviated as *F*. For discussion of modernist poetry's productive antagonisms with film, photography, and other technological media, see Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Julian Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

world involve aesthetic work in politics. In the first decades of the twentieth century, political work involved aesthetics, too, and it involved poetry in particular. This, like the crisis concerning the nature of the art, characterised its situation. To a surprising degree, social criticism and political comment turned to poetry in order to understand fallen modernity. So as to appreciate what is at stake when, in 1922 or 1925, a poem implicates poetry in the present state of things, I want to spend some time working through these contemporary arguments. For socialists and conservatives alike, whether in London or in New York, the problem was to decide whether poetry only imagines a beauty which can never exist, or instead makes a beauty which has not yet existed.

When A. R. Orage and Holbrook Jackson relaunched the *New Age* on 2 May 1907, the magazine appeared under a new subtitle: 'An Independent Socialist Review of Politics, Literature, and Art'. The first editorial then set out the magazine's guiding concept of socialism. Just as 'Religion is the will of the individual towards self-perfection', the editors declare, so socialism is 'no less than the will of Society to perfect itself'.²⁴ Orage and Jackson thus invert Oscar Wilde's claim, in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' (1891), that socialism works towards the perfection of the individual.²⁵ (In that same first issue, Jackson calls for a cheap reissue of Wilde's 'important essay' as 'a matter of urgency'.²⁶) But like Wilde, the editors of the *New Age* develop their argument by comparing socialism to religion. In order to span politics, literature, and art, the editorial paints its programme in the broadest of brush-strokes. The new magazine did address specific political and economic issues. Its very first pages treat the purpose and the fate of the British Empire, then being debated at the Colonial Conference in London; the budget recently delivered by Asquith, Chancellor of the Exchequer; and major reforms to the British Army about to be passed through Parliament. In each case, the magazine offers direct judgements and specific recommendations. 'The Socialist objection to the army is that it is a class army', and the only remedy is 'to make the army national and democratic and transfer its control from a class to the whole people'.²⁷ But the socialism of the *New Age* always had one eye on the stars: a beauty beyond shadowed the work being done today.

²⁴ Anonymous, 'The Future of the "New Age"', *New Age* 1.1 (2 May 1907): 8.

²⁵ Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', *Fortnightly Review* 49.340 (February 1891): 292-319.

²⁶ Holbrook Jackson, 'Book Notes', *New Age* 1.1 (2 May 1907): 13.

²⁷ Anonymous, 'The Outlook', *New Age* 1.1 (2 May 1907): 1-2 (p. 2).

Over the next fifteen years, the *New Age* featured prominent articles and regular columns by Orage, Florence Farr, G. K. Chesterton, Ramiro de Maeztu, T. E. Hulme, Hilaire Belloc, and Edwin Muir.²⁸ H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw argued vigorously against private property. Katherine Mansfield and Wyndham Lewis published short stories, F. S. Flint published poems and reviewed others' poetry, and Pound reviewed art and music, provided countless articles on sundry other topics, and published his own poetry too. The magazine quickly found a new subtitle, becoming simply 'A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, and Art'. Many of its contributors set about analysing the failures of modern Britain and, more broadly, of modernity, and Orage gave space to conflicting opinions and approaches. But balancing the emphasis on modern life was a sense that life's imperfection was older or more permanent. On 3 October 1907, in the first instalment of a series entitled 'Towards Socialism', Orage wrote that

Most great men have had to build for themselves an imaginary heaven in the skies as a retreat from the condition of men on earth. All the angels and isles of Avilion conceived by poets and philosophers are no more than a tragic testimony to the inadequacy of earth. The worse earth the better heaven must be imagined!²⁹

Tennyson has King Arthur depart for 'the island-valley of Avilion',³⁰ and the long history of such dreams of the otherworld implies that our earthly condition is fixed, but in fact Orage heralds an imminent and drastic change. Where poets had failed, socialists could succeed: 'at last, our great men are venturing to fix their heaven upon earth. We desire, said one of them recently, that the heaven which men expect after their death shall be attained on earth during their life.'³¹ Like Heap, Orage subordinates art to social transformation, but he lacks her disillusionment. The urgent task was twofold. It was crucial to imagine the perfection towards which society should aim, and it was crucial to imagine that perfection is possible. It was as if to say, 'all this beauty is exactly what does not exist, and we

²⁸ For recent accounts of Orage's time as editor, see Ann L. Ardis, 'Democracy and Modernism: *The New Age* under A. R. Orage (1907–22)', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume 1: Britain and Ireland 1880–1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 205–225; and Paul Jackson, *Great War Modernisms and The New Age Magazine* (London: Continuum, 2012).

²⁹ A. R. Orage, 'Towards Socialism', *New Age* 1.23 (3 October 1907): 361–2 (p. 361).

³⁰ Alfred Tennyson, 'Morte d'Arthur' (1842), line 259, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1987), 2.3–19 (p. 18).

³¹ Orage, 'Towards Socialism', p. 361.

must get to work to bring it into existence'. 'We must kill the force in us that says we cannot become all that we desire', Farr counselled in the same issue, 'for that force is our evil star which turns all opportunity into grotesque failure'.³²

Across the Atlantic, social and cultural critics in New York made comparable arguments. Take, for example, the magazine *Seven Arts*, founded in 1916 by James Oppenheim.³³ *Seven Arts* published work by D. H. Lawrence, Sherwood Anderson, Amy Lowell, and Alfred Kreymborg, and though Pound criticised the magazine's compromise with popular taste, he did offer Oppenheim the manuscript of Ernest Fenollosa's essay on 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry' (1919).³⁴ Perhaps the essay seemed, as Pound suspected it would, too 'exotic', for it was declined. Oppenheim's attention was turned to more immediate matters, for in the July 1917 editorial he announces 'the coming of a new heaven and a new Earth'.³⁵ The good news of this redemption had been 'heard in France during the Terror', had been 'heard by such different spirits as Karl Marx and Nietzsche', and had most recently resounded in revolutionary Russia: 'we see Russia now as that hopeful chaos, that confusion of the nebula, out of which a new world shapes itself'. The February Revolution had erupted but four months earlier, and the October Revolution would soon follow. That April, caught by the fervour of epochal change and hailing Jefferson, Lincoln, and Whitman as America's 'national poets', Oppenheim demands a twentieth-century successor, someone to lead the United States towards its heaven on earth: 'A new poet must appear among us.'³⁶

So whereas Orage envisions socialism superseding poetry, Oppenheim's grandiloquence conflates the two. Max Eastman took a third approach during his tenure as editor of the socialist magazine the *Masses*, choosing to juxtapose poetry with politics as parts of a common project. Just as at the *New Age*, Eastman and his contributors 'addressed a variety of issues' beyond the strictly political and economic: 'suffragism, free love, birth

³² Florence Farr, 'Our Evil Stars', *New Age* 1.23 (3 October 1907): 358–9 (p. 358).

³³ For a good, summary account of *Seven Arts*, see Victoria Kingham, "'Audacious Modernity": *The Seven Arts* (1916–17); *The Soil* (1916–17); and *The Trend* (1911–15)', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume II: North America 1894–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 398–419.

³⁴ Ezra Pound, letter to John Quinn, 10 January 1917, in Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn, 1915–1924*, ed. Timothy Materer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 93.

³⁵ James Oppenheim, 'Editorial', *Seven Arts* 2.3 (July 1917): 340–43 (p. 342).

³⁶ James Oppenheim, 'Editorials', *Seven Arts* 1.6 (April 1917): 627–30 (pp. 629, 630).

control, religion, race relations'.³⁷ In a 1913 essay, having distinguished between genuine revolution and mere reformism, 'between the party of the people and the parties of the people's money', Eastman pauses to consider the state of contemporary poetry.³⁸ He scorns 'the connotations and the music of ancient phrases' and instead urges poets to 'go down to the street, and out into the fields and quarries and among the sips [sops?] and chimneys, the smoke and glory of living reality'. Other issues of the *Masses* featured Eastman's own poems, including a ballad for Wat Tyler,³⁹ and in his 1913 critical study, *Enjoyment of Poetry*, Eastman proclaims the poet a 'restorer' and a 'prophet'.⁴⁰ 'All creeds and theories serve' the poet, he writes, for the poet imparts to us 'the spirit of bounteous living'. But Eastman never argues that the poetry of fields and quarries will deliver revolution; instead he makes poetry one aspect of a broader social and cultural project. In a similar vein, many contributors to the *Masses* aligned socialism with religion or framed socialism in religious terms. The May 1912 issue featured essays on Christian charity by Will Irwin and on the temptation of Jesus by Charles P. Fagnani, professor at Union Theological Seminary. Moses is 'the class-conscious hero of the Hebrews', Fagnani writes, and Christ 'the supreme class-conscious hero of humanity': 'Without class-consciousness we cannot be saved.'⁴¹ So, too, in January that year the magazine's founder, Piet Vlag, attacked the American Federation of Labor for compromising with capital. Mere 'individualists', its members have 'no dream of a better world'.⁴² Their 'heaven is a fair day's work for a fair day's pay *for themselves*', Vlag protested, not a new earth for and through the collective. 'What is Socialism?' asked Frank Stuhlman in October 1911: 'Socialism is Salvation!'⁴³

Such conjunctions of politics, religion, and art were more than passing rhetorical ploys. At the *New Age*, Orage 'promoted the need for a cultural revolution to sit alongside revolutionary political change',⁴⁴ and in general British socialism tended 'to evoke the socialist future not through conventional political declarations or detailed policy formulations but through

³⁷ Benoît Tadié, 'The Masses Speak: *The Masses* (1911–17); *The Liberator* (1918–24); *New Masses* (1926–48); and *Masses & Mainstream* (1948–63)', in Brooker and Thacker, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume II*, pp. 831–56 (p. 836).

³⁸ Max Eastman, 'Knowledge and Revolution', *Masses* 4.4 (January 1913): 5–7 (p. 6).

³⁹ Max Eastman, 'To Wat Tyler – A Ballad', *Masses* 8.2 (December 1915): 18.

⁴⁰ Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 198.

⁴¹ Charles P. Fagnani, 'The Temptation of Jesus', *Masses* 3.5 (May 1912): 10.

⁴² [Piet Vlag], 'Brains or Bombs?', *Masses* 3.1 (January 1912): 5–7 (p. 5).

⁴³ [Horatio Winslow and Frank Stuhlman], 'What Is Socialism?', *Masses* 1.10 (October 1911): 15.

⁴⁴ Jackson, *Great War Modernisms*, p. 25.

aesthetics, myth, Christian symbolism and idioms, metaphor and other forms of literary embellishment, dreams and various kinds of utopian imagining'.⁴⁵ Many radical and progressive American writers did so, too. But these analogies and tropes introduce conceptual complications. Christianity teaches that salvation is impossible without God's grace, however much an individual may will it, and for some writers socialism was similarly limited by our earthly condition. 'We know that individual interests and raw temperaments will always clash', Eastman warns in October 1916.⁴⁶ To believe 'that anything remotely approaching a Brotherhood of Man', he then continues, 'can be engendered in a race with our hereditary nature, is as utopian a dream as it is unexciting'. In the November 1907 issue of the *New Age* Cecil Chesterton remarks that the abolition of class would be 'as near an approach to justice as we are likely to get in this imperfect world'.⁴⁷ But for Orage such arguments betray an entrenched conservatism, the conviction that things 'will never improve, and there is no salvation'.⁴⁸ Instead, true socialism aims at nothing less than 'the re-creation of Eden'. Seizing on this second way, Orage rises to a Pelagian proclamation: 'Men must redeem themselves, and they must redeem the world.' And yet in time Orage's convictions changed. In October 1918, more than a decade after calling for a new Eden and a few weeks before the armistice, he laments the decline of the religious spirit, since religion is 'the study and practice of perfection', but rather than heralding perfection as an imminent future, Orage now calls it an 'impossible and infinite aim'.⁴⁹ Women and men must work to redeem themselves, knowing that they never will.

In this way, though these magazines' various contributors analysed poverty, labour, class, and gender, they often addressed what Jackson called 'the more remote and philosophic aspects of Socialism'.⁵⁰ Hulme was no socialist, but it was in the *New Age* that he elaborated his opposition of romanticism and classicism, recasting Orage's early distinction between socialism and conservatism. Classicism, Hulme explains in October 1915, means

the conviction that a man is by nature bad or limited, and can consequently only accomplish anything of value by disciplines, ethical, heroic or political. In other words, it believes in Original Sin. We may define Romantics, then,

⁴⁵ Thomas Linehan, *Modernism and British Socialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 4.

⁴⁶ Max Eastman, 'Towards Liberty. III. The Aim of Agitation', *Masses* 8.12 (October 1916): 23–5 (p. 23).

⁴⁷ Cecil Chesterton, 'The Problem of Equality', *New Age* 2.4 (21 November 1907): 69.

⁴⁸ Orage, 'Towards Socialism', p. 361.

⁴⁹ R. H. C. [A. R. Orage], 'Readers and Writers', *New Age* 23.27 (31 October 1918): 429–30 (p. 429).

⁵⁰ Jackson, 'Book Notes', p. 13.

as all those who do not believe in the Fall of Man. I believe this to be the most fundamental division that can possibly be made in the region of thinking about society.⁵¹

Two months later, Orage countered that, though an insistence on original sin may be necessary, the 'complementary doctrine of the Redemption' was 'equally in need of affirmation'.⁵² Hulme believed humanity to be 'radically imperfect',⁵³ while Orage urged that 'there are no base instincts, no evil tendencies'.⁵⁴

On the one hand, such arguments obscure pressing problems of political economy with an old theological conundrum, with appeals to an unchanging human nature. On the other hand, the recovery of old theological, mythological, and philosophical solutions was itself a symptom of the moment. These debates emerged out of well-established nineteenth-century controversies. Nietzsche, for instance, had chastised the 'paradisiac prospect' envisioned by socialism, its demand for the rights of 'Man in his original goodness'.⁵⁵ But the unprecedented catastrophe of the Great War gave these debates new urgency, as did the revolution in Russia. In February 1916 Hulme argued that pacifists foolishly rely on the goodness of human nature, confident that progress will of its own accord deliver a harmonious society. War is necessary, Hulme counters, not because it will achieve some 'great *liberation* of mankind', but 'merely in order that bad may not get worse'.⁵⁶ Hulme calls this a 'quite *abstract* matter', but the problem of the condition of women and men on earth was inseparable from the problems of contemporary society. The war gave the theory its concrete occasion, making its abstractions possible and valuable. The same

⁵¹ T. E. Hulme, 'The Translator's Preface to Sorel's "Reflections on Violence"', *New Age* 17.24 (14 October 1915): 569–70 (p. 570). For the later version that appeared with Hulme's translation of Sorel, slightly altered and with additional footnotes, see *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 246–52 (p. 250). For further discussion of Hulme's theory of original sin, see C. D. Blanton, 'The Politics of Epochality: Antinomies of Original Sin', in Edward P. Comentale and Andrzej Gasiorek, eds, *T. E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 187–208.

⁵² R. H. C. [A. R. Orage], 'Readers and Writers', *New Age* 18.8 (23 December 1915): 181–2 (p. 181). Ardis notes that some of the contributions signed 'R. H. C.' may not be by Orage ('Democracy and Modernism', p. 209, n. 12), but though this piece was not included in Orage's later collection of articles from the column, *Readers and Writers* (1922), the insistence on redemption seems characteristic of him.

⁵³ T. E. Hulme, 'A Notebook', *New Age* 18.13 (27 January 1916): 305–7 (p. 305); Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, p. 444.

⁵⁴ A. R. Orage, 'Towards Socialism. II', *New Age* 1.24 (10 October 1907): 375.

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 91.

⁵⁶ North Staffs [T. E. Hulme], 'War Notes', *New Age* 18.15 (10 February 1916): 341–2 (p. 341); Hulme, *The Collected Writings*, p. 397.