

The 1910s and the Great War

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Though the 1920s represent a high point of modernism, it was not entirely hyperbolic of Virginia Woolf to observe that “On or about December 1910, human character changed.”¹ In Europe and North America, early modernism was noticeably entering the public sphere by around 1910. As various as that modernism was, “it” had noticeably arrived and even enjoyed a few brief years of success and notoriety before the outbreak of the most shocking bloodbath humanity had yet experienced. If we understand modernism as a significant expression of the transformations at which Woolf’s conceit gestures, we must come to terms with the extent to which the Great War quickly reshaped that nascent modernism in ways that would resonate well into the 1920s.

Though this *Cambridge History* volume highlights the non-linear and historically fluid developments of modernism across time and space, I examine the events of a brief time period in this chapter. During those few years, the war drew what many experienced as a definitive dividing line between the past and the present. Samuel Hynes argues that the extreme violence and devastation of the war essentially “changed reality,” not least for his main subject, the British: “That change was so vast and so abrupt as to make the years after the war seem discontinuous from the years before, and that discontinuity became a part of English imaginations. Men and women after the war looked back at their own pasts as one might look across a great chasm to a remote, peaceable place on the other side.”²

In Hynes’s account, that “radical discontinuity” happens as a result of the war.³ But *avant-guerre* modernism suggests that discontinuity, rupture, and thematic or aesthetic violence were already strong features of European and American culture *before* the great conflagration. Moreover, while dark irony was a dominant note in much war literature, there was a significant literature – even modernist literature – of the war that was not defined by irony. In order to understand what difference the war made to modernism, we

must look at a few years in Europe and the United States that were critical to the history of modernism.

During the period from 1910 through the first shots of the Great War, rapid modernization could exhilarate or disorient or even threaten the social order. Political liberalism lurched uneasily toward its twentieth-century progressive basis as Asquith's government laid the foundations of the modern welfare state, along the way curtailing the power of the House of Lords after the death of Edward VII, while Woodrow Wilson instituted a national income tax and radically reformed banking by creating the Federal Reserve in 1913. Yet the British government proved incapable of meeting other demands for modernization increasingly loudly voiced by labor unions, suffrage societies, and Irish republicans.⁴ Wilson made little progress toward ending economic or social inequality or establishing internationalism and freedom of dissent, and free speech was greatly reduced during his presidency. But scientific and technological breakthroughs astounded, as Soddy and Rutherford explained radioactivity, new X-ray tubes transformed the medical profession, and new and ever-faster modes of transportation made the world seem much smaller and more knowable. New technologies allowed the proliferation of movies, musical recordings, mass-market magazines, and national brand consumer products. Even if governments and social mores had not kept pace, these technological developments felt singularly new, modern, life-changing.

"Modernization" and "modernism" are not identical, of course. "Modernism" connotes a self-consciousness about the modern condition – and it, too, was in full swing during the immediate prewar period. This remarkable efflorescence of modernist literature and art shows that the institutional infrastructure for modernism had finally reached the critical mass it needed to allow modernists and audiences to interact in a mutually transforming way. With its exhibition and gallery networks, periodicals, book publishing initiatives, bookstores, public readings, performance venues, and the like, modernism had, essentially, arrived, reaching a point of public viability in the United States and Western Europe. It had its impresarios – Roger Fry, Ezra Pound, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Amy Lowell, Sergei Diaghilev, F.T. Marinetti, Walter Pach, and many others – and its prewar scenes in London, Paris, Berlin, Milan, New York, St. Petersburg, and Moscow as well as Tiflis (Tbilisi), Tokyo, Chicago, and Barcelona. Modernism was, seemingly, everywhere. Its rhetorical contempt for the multitudes and for the mass-market economy that entertained and sustained them was already in evidence, but such slogans as the *Little Review's* "making no compromise with the public

taste” also shrewdly positioned modernism within a commercial culture that advertised products as symbols of lifestyle and identity.

Many of these institutions – such as *Blast*, *Poetry and Drama*, *The Masses*, the Rebel Art Centre, and the Omega Workshops, to name but a few well-known examples – did not survive the war. Others, such as the *Little Review* and the Abbey Theatre, carried on, though they were moving in new directions by the 1920s. And new cultural movements sprang up in the 1920s, of course. But their sensibilities were different. Futurist technophilia was tempered by the bleak vision of wounded soldiers returning from a technologically superpowered war. Dada emerged as a direct response to the war’s horrors. A generation of artists would die in the trenches or find their work and their careers completely changed by their experiences. As Pound memorably put it, “There died a myriad, / And of the best, among them, / For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization.”⁵ As Vincent Sherry shows, the language of anglophone modernism – of Pound, Eliot, and Woolf – marks a response to the disintegration of the values and culture of liberal England.⁶ Modernism would continue after the war, and its genre-blurring, experimental creativity would continue, but the meaning of the ruptures and transformations wrought by modernization would be radically different.

Avant Guerre

As a concept, or as a set of related aesthetics or sensibilities, “modernism” did not spring into being in 1922, or 1914, or 1910, or any other single year. Nonetheless, the period between the publication of F.T. Marinetti’s “Manifesto of Futurism” on the front page of *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909, and Austria’s declaration of war on July 28, 1914, witnessed the public impact of modernism across Europe and the United States. This history may be witnessed most vividly in the pairing of aesthetic inventions and institutional innovations.

In 1910, London experienced its first major public recognition of continental modern art. Returning to London after a period as a curator of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, where he tried desperately to reform the museum’s acquisitions and exhibition strategies,⁷ key Bloomsbury art critic Roger Fry took advantage of the slow winter season to launch the exhibition “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” at the Grafton Galleries. British audiences had scarcely come to appreciate the French impressionism that was already a half century old when Fry offered them

“post-impressionist” art – a term he coined for the work of artists such as Cézanne, van Gogh, and Gauguin (who had all died years before the exhibition opened) and a younger generation that included Picasso, Matisse, and Signac, among others. Most importantly, Fry conveyed a sense of modern art as a coherent movement with an appreciable aesthetic capable of engaging contemporaneity. While most critics were openly hostile, using terms such as “pornography” and “sickness of the soul” to describe the art, the exhibition ran until January 1911.⁸ Fry’s Bloomsbury friend Desmond MacCarthy noted that the exhibition’s intention was “no gradual infiltration, but – bang! an assault along the whole academic front of art.”⁹ That attack was received by many critics as a blow to the historical foundations of civilization itself.

Across the Atlantic, just two years after Fry’s show closed, Walter Pach’s “International Exhibition of Modern Art” – more commonly remembered as “The Armory Show,” due to its location in the National Guard armory at Lexington and 25th Street in New York City – displayed some 1,300 works by over 300 artists, ranging from Cézanne to Marcel Duchamp. As with Fry’s exhibition, critical recoil indicated how revolutionary and unsettling this event was perceived to be. An art critic from the *New York Times* memorably quipped that Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)” resembled “an explosion in a shingle factory,” and former US president Theodore Roosevelt allegedly proclaimed upon walking into the exhibition, “That’s not art!” Yet the show sold 205,000 tickets, with some 87,000 people attending in New York, and over 100,000 at the Art Institute in Chicago. A significant, though much smaller, crowd of 17,000 turned out for its final stop in Boston. Fifty years later, Lloyd Goodrich, director of the Whitney Museum, proclaimed, “No single event, before or since, has had such an influence on American art.”¹⁰

The Armory Show presented the most advanced wing of international modernism to American audiences. Take, for example, Duchamp’s iconic painting “Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2).” It was seen as an example of cubism and futurism, though it had been rejected by the Parisian cubists from the exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants in 1912, and Duchamp never considered himself a futurist. The painting draws together the geometric vocabulary of analytic cubism, the dynamism of Italian futurism, and Duchamp’s own appropriation of two significant technologies of the period: chronophotography and the X-ray. Linda Dalrymple Henderson notes the importance of nineteenth-century French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey’s “chronophotographie géométrique” technique, which used dots and lines to create a linear record of the movement his photographs tracked,

noting that Duchamp's paintings of the period "add a new X-ray-related element to [his] continued exploration of transparency and cutting: stripping and nudity."¹¹ His Armory Show painting used its technological inspiration to unite the tensions of internal and external worlds, time and space, into a single aesthetic perception.



5.1 Time in space: Duchamp, "Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2." © 2016 Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

While the Armory Show was winding down in Boston, the first performance of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* by Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on May 29, 1913, nearly caused the audience to riot. The object of the audience's outrage varies according to the teller, with some feeling that the show was an affront and others defending it from ridicule. While the dissonance of Stravinsky's score and the bold and brutal choreography by Nijinsky were remarkable, the event itself, with its provocation of the audience, has come to define modernism for some critics. As Modris Eksteins explains,

From the setting in the newly constructed, ultramodern Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, in Paris, through the ideas and intentions of the leading protagonists, to the tumultuous response of the audience, that opening night of *Le Sacre* represents a milestone in the development of "modernism," modernism as above all a culture of the sensational event, through which art and life both become a matter of energy and are fused as one.¹²

As the preceding chapter on the avant-garde has shown, such provocations and audience involvement were not simply a feature of the postwar period. The Italian futurist F.T. Marinetti, the self-styled "caffeine of Europe," was a master of such incitements, deliberately agitating audiences to riot at "futurist evenings."

Not all of the prewar energies of modernism and the avant-garde were expressed in headline-grabbing events, however. Yeats, Conrad, Proust, and Joyce had been writing a recognizably modernist literature in Europe for some years: experimental in form, self-conscious about its genre, probing the contours of the psyche, blurring the boundaries between realism and symbolism, at times gesturing toward a twentieth-century mythopoesis. In addition, as John Timberman Newcomb shows, American poets (such as Stephen Crane, E.A. Robinson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charlotte Perkins Gilman) had resisted the genteel traditions of American poetry for two decades. Gertrude Stein's masterpiece of modernist parataxis, *Tender Buttons*, was published in June 1914 by Greenwich Village vanity press, Claire Marie, just in time to catch summer readers. The slim volume looked traditional enough, but Stein's experiments in poetry were anything but that. The lists of objects and lack of discursive connections (or metrical regularity of any sort) in *Tender Buttons* made its poetry a heightened play of language that was virtually unrecognizable to prewar audiences as poetry at all.

That same year, after ten years of rejection, Joyce finally saw *Dubliners* reach print. The collection had languished for so many years that Joyce had

continued to write stories, completing the collection's masterpiece, "The Dead," by 1907. The bleak and detailed portrayal of urban poverty and futility in *Dubliners* reflects the era's strain of naturalist fiction, but the stories display some features of the modernist writing for which Joyce would be known in *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Ulysses*. After the three first-person childhood stories, the collection experiments with free indirect discourse. By the last piece, "The Dead," we have the character-in-voice of "Lily" punctuating the narrative with her characteristic idioms and expressions:

Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet. Hardly had she brought one gentleman into the little pantry behind the office on the ground floor and helped him off with his overcoat than the wheezy hall-door bell clanged again and she had to scamper along the bare hallway to let in another guest. It was well for her she had not to attend to the ladies also.¹³

The later stories in *Dubliners* also demonstrate Joyce's synthesis of detailed realism and symbolic structures, with early attention to mythic elements provided by Christianity and Frazer's *Golden Bough*. Even Joyce's further experiments with narration, such as the newspaper headlines that structure the "Aeolus" chapter of *Ulysses*, had antecedents in *Dubliners*, where "A Painful Case" features a newspaper account in its narrative.

Boldly innovative as their *texts* were, neither *Dubliners* nor *Tender Buttons* departed from the traditional book *form*. But modernist and avant-garde practices in the visual arts were influencing print culture as well. One especially striking example is the 1913 collaboration between the (Swiss-born) French poet Blaise Cendrars and the (Ukrainian-born) French artist Sonia Delaunay-Terk, *La prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France*.

Cendrars's poem is a significant contribution to avant-guerre modernism, with its free verse and variable line length and its radical temporal and spatial dislocations. The speaker, in the company of a Montmartre prostitute, traverses time and space on the Trans-Siberian railroad (Paris, Ephesus, Moscow, "48,000 miles away from where I was born"¹⁴), and frequently breaks the frame of its voyage narrative. But the poem's major contribution to modernism was not simply its textual pyrotechnics; Cendrars's collaboration with Delaunay-Terk produced a strikingly innovative example of the modernist "artists' book" genre.¹⁵ Comprising four sheets of printed paper glued together to form a square over six feet high, with Cendrars's poetry printed down one side in colored type and Delaunay-Terk's abstract watercolors painted down the other, the copies of the book also made a spatial statement consonant with its far-ranging travel text. When stacked end to

end, the copies were to attain the height of that icon of Parisian modernity, the Eiffel Tower. The book boldly challenges the traditional relationship of verbal text to image. Johanna Drucker notes, “In its closed form, this work is folded into a parchment wrapper painted by the artist, and it only functions as a readable ‘book’ when it is fully open, defying the codex form by its graphic flatness and large-scale presence.”¹⁶

The publication and promotion of *Prose du Transsibérien* in autumn 1913 also tells us much about the prewar institutions of modernism. It was an early example of an eventually common arrangement by which modernist books were published through the efforts of a periodical,¹⁷ and Cendrars and Delaunay then utilized two seemingly contradictory marketing strategies to promote their artists’ book. They limited the first edition to 150 numbered and signed copies,¹⁸ thus adopting what later became a common modernist strategy to create a collector’s market for modernism through planned scarcity.¹⁹ But the mass-market promotional culture of the period suggested their second strategy: as Perloff explains, the book’s publication in 1913 “was preceded by a flurry of leaflets, subscription forms, and prospectuses.”²⁰ A modernist poem probing the limits of spatial and temporal coordinates becomes a material object of both scarcity and broad-ranging marketing, available only for a moment, as glitzy and on display as the Eiffel Tower, symbol of the promotion of Paris as the epicenter of modernity.

While the Symbolist roots of modernist poetry go well back at least to mid-nineteenth-century France, the legacy of the prewar period of anglophone poetry would endure most notably through the aesthetic invention and institutional innovation of imagism. This new poetic “movement” – though “brand” might be the more appropriate word – arose in the context of modernist culture’s most significant point of intersection with promotional capitalism: the magazine. Roger Fry’s Post-Impressionist Exhibitions in London and the Armory Show in New York demonstrated British and American awakening to modern art in the years preceding the war, while modernist literature was also beginning to make increasing claims on public attention. Periodical publication allowed modernism to participate in the tactics of exclusivity – the writers published in little magazines that consolidated group identities and served as arbiters of taste and delineators of the truly modern – and in the expansive dynamics of a buzzing and rapidly expanding consumer market for print culture. Advertisers used magazines to mobilize desire for specific brands, whether of household cleaning products, cigarettes, or literature, and advertising revenues made even modest magazines financially viable. Periodicals were an increasingly dominant form of

print culture, following on the late nineteenth-century “magazine revolution,” which encouraged readers to define themselves in terms of commodities.²¹ The immediate prewar years witnessed a range of new periodicals espousing literary modernism.²²

While numerous varieties of modernist literature appeared in prewar periodicals, imagism emerged from the essentially local dynamics of the London literary scene. Nonetheless, it rapidly spread abroad through the periodicals and used the driving force of modern print culture – the logic of advertising appeals – to offer a modernist poetry that could distinguish itself from the limitations of Georgian poetry, the technofetishism of Italian futurism, and even the Symbolist legacy that still animated much modernist verse. It took its place in a force field of diversified modernisms. The year 1912 saw Marinetti lecturing on futurism in London and futurism spreading as far as Russia. In that same year, Fry mounted the second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in London, this time including more British painters, while Harriet Monroe launched *Poetry* in Chicago. Concurrently, Harold Monro edited the *Poetry Review* and founded his Poetry Bookshop in Bloomsbury as a place not only to browse and buy poetry but also to attend readings, and Edward Marsh convinced Monro to bring out the first of the so-called *Georgian Poetry* anthologies. Monro, ever optimistic about poetry’s relevance to mass audiences, proclaimed in his first editorial in the *Poetry Review*, “Poetry is said to be unpopular – generally by those who dislike it themselves. Good poetry is as much read now as at any time since the invention of printing, and bad poetry is read a great deal too much.”²³

A crucial point to mark about the experimental temper of this prewar period is that even an identifiably mainstream poetic like Georgianism was being read as an expression of some of the same innovative energies as those of early literary modernism. While some writers of the 1920s would dismiss Georgian poetry as conservative, lark-lover effusions, it was seen as excitingly modern in 1912, when the vernacular language of John Masefield echoed to the iconoclastic daring of Rupert Brooke, who could write a sonnet about – yes – sea sickness (“Channel Passage”).²⁴ As D.H. Lawrence would put it in a review of the first volume, “We are awake again, our lungs are full of new air, our eyes of morning. The first song is nearly a cry, fear and the pain of remembrance sharpening away the pure music. And that is this book.”²⁵ The healthy sales of the early *Georgian Poetry* anthologies²⁶ seemed to confirm Monro’s sense in *Poetry Review* and his new magazine, *Poetry and Drama* (1913–14), that there was a market for modern poetry. Pound, H.D. (another recent American transplant to London), and the

English poet Richard Aldington took notice not only of Monro's enterprises but also of Marinetti's successes in self-promotion, and decided to try their hands at shaping the public reception of their own poetry.

So, what did imagism contribute to modernist poetry? Essentially, without adopting the strident publicity stunts of a Marinetti, it combined the marketing strategies of the modern periodical, which brought advertiser and consumer together like no other institution of the period, and a perceptibly novel poetic technique. Indeed, the juxtaposition of images without a discursive or narrative apparatus or self-consciously "poetic" language replicated the logic of the modern product advertisement.²⁷ Imagist poetry worked on the economies and juxtapositions of the vibrant image and became itself a brand name in the market of modernism.

Pound described the poetry he and H.D. were writing as "Imagiste" (perhaps the quickly dropped French ending was originally intended to give the movement the flair of the continental avant-garde) and began promoting the term in print in 1913. As H.D. described it, Pound more or less invented her as "H.D. Imagiste" in the British Museum tea room as he decided to send her paradigmatic imagist poem, "Hermes of the Ways," to Harriet Monroe – it was published in the January 1913 number of *Poetry*. As for articulating what imagism meant in an editorial comment in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry*,²⁸ Pound avoided the form of a manifesto, like those Marinetti had turned out with some regularity to articulate a group identity and program for futurism. He struck his own famously independent note by listing "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste":

Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something.
 Don't use such an expression as "dim lands of peace." It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.
 Go in fear of abstractions. Don't retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose.

There were many targets in these prohibitions: the "natural object" might well have been a swipe at Marinetti; the attack on abstractions and mediocre verse also dismissed a great deal of English verse, where the excesses of late romanticism in Georgian poetry showed the senescence of Symbolism in its English habitations. But the first line, "Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something," was advertising orthodoxy of the period.

As in the case of Cendrars and Delaunay's *Prose du Transsibérien*, Pound's first effort at an imagist anthology, *Des Imagistes*, was brought out first in February 1914 as a special issue of a magazine: Alfred Kreymborg's *The Glebe* (and only later as a book volume in March 1914). *Poetry* had already become the American magazine outlet for imagism, publishing not only Pound's statements but also his early imagist poetry ("In a Station of the Metro" appeared in the April 1913 issue) and that of H.D. *The Egoist* would be the British mouthpiece for Imagism.

"In a Station of the Metro" serves as well as any of the early imagist poems to demonstrate imagism's rejection of the discursive, meter-bound, and self-consciously poetic diction of Victorian verse.

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Approximating the 5/7/5 syllable count of the traditional haiku form, the poem evokes rather than describes the experience of coming out of a metro station in Paris.²⁹ In doing so, it also reveals a modernist poetic impulse toward parataxis that can be seen in the early works of Pound, H.D., Aldington, and William Carlos Williams, and that persists in anglophone poetry through Gary Snyder and into the present.

Pound's interests were turning elsewhere, however, as he lost control of the brand in squabbles with Amy Lowell, who published three further anthologies under the title *Some Imagist Poets* in 1915, 1916, and 1917 (they did not include Pound). Pound was also collaborating with Wyndham Lewis on *Blast*, the first issue of which, in retrospect, can be seen as the culmination of the prewar avant-garde in London. This is the magazine that best illustrates the immediate impact of the war on anglophone modernism.

The War

The event commonly seen as the spark that set Europe aflame was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary) and his wife, Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, by Yugoslav nationalist Gavrilo Princip. By the end of July, Austria had declared war on Serbia, and by the end of August, a network of secret alliances and nationalist and imperialist aspirations had locked all of the major combatants (other than the United States) into the bloodiest war yet seen. The dark side of modernization was evident, as the war made use of

the machine gun, chemical warfare, weaponized aircraft, the tank, and the mass mobilization of soldiers. Modern hygiene and medicine kept many soldiers from dying of disease, but the war nevertheless claimed some 17 million military and civilian lives, with another 20 million wounded. The Spanish Flu pandemic that followed (1918–20) quickly highlighted the limits of modern medicine and the dangers of modern global mobility, with 500 million people infected, some 50 to 100 million of whom would die from the virus. By the end of the decade, four empires had fallen, as Eliot would famously intone in a litany of collapsing imperial capitals in *The Waste Land*: “Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal.”³⁰ In one of his most quoted lines, Yeats would tersely sum it up: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”³¹

Wyndham Lewis’s *Blast* would be ever marked in literary history by its proximity to these military “blasts” of August 1914. Whatever difference exists between military and artistic firepower, its first issue was nonetheless the quintessential prewar modernist avant-garde manifestation in Britain. It approached the multimedia disruptive power of Cendrars and Delaunay’s collaboration, just as it hinted at the brutal brilliance of the premiere of *Le sacre du printemps*.

Launched on July 1, 1914, *Blast* promoted “vorticism,” a British avant-garde positioning itself polemically against both the incursions of Marinetti’s Italian futurism and the homegrown art world of Roger Fry’s Bloomsbury as well as virtually the entire Victorian age. Included in *Blast* 1, Lewis’s drama *Enemy of the Stars* managed to swipe at complacent British audiences, inject a modernist primitivist and gothic strain into its few short pages, intervene in philosophical debates about Stirnerian Egoism and the limits and constraints placed upon the self by society, and style the modernist artist as a figure thriving upon the promotional culture of the period. Perhaps more telling than the agonistic struggle between the irreconcilable demands of the play’s dyad – Hanp and Arghol – was the “Advertisement” page inserted early in the play and followed by images of several of Lewis’s artworks before the text of the play resumed. The “advertisement” functions more as a statement of an art invigorated by modern promotional culture than of a specific stage direction. Like advertisements of its era, it evokes through abstract associative connections – the spectacle of “some bleak circus” joins the visual culture of fashion advertising more dynamically than the more restrained imagist poetry of the period could. “Enormous youngsters, bursting everywhere through heavy tight clothes, laboured in by dull explosive muscles, full of fiery dust and sinewy energetic air, not sap . . . Black cloth cut

somewhere, nowadays on the upper Baltic.”³² The alliteration and abstraction of phrases such as “packed with posterity” evoke – as advertising does, as modernism does – rather than describe, while the last phrases offer a kind of product commentary that is otherwise oddly placed in so severely imagined a scene. Most of the rest of the first issue of *Blast* lived up to its promise of shocking a complacent British audience to its core. One of Rebecca West’s strongest early fictions, “Indissoluble Matrimony,” contributed as much as *Enemy of the Stars* did to the manifestos’ combative polemics, portraying the agonistic arena of a bourgeois marriage between a misogynistic husband, aptly named “George” (to goad British self-righteousness), and his sensual, artistic, racially mixed, and sexually aggressive wife, Evadne. The play’s violence and primitive energy culminate in George’s believing he has murdered Evadne, only to end up defeated and held in the arms of his sleeping wife, who presumably does not even notice his attempt to drown her: “He undressed and got into bed: as he had done every night for ten years, and as he would do every night until he died. Still sleeping, Evadne caressed him with warm arms.”³³ The issue also included early chapters of what would become *The Good Soldier* by Ford Madox Ford; some poetry by Pound, who was trying on a more active and aggressive poetic demeanor more fitting for the visual avant-garde of vorticism than for Lowell’s *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies; and a great deal of strong artwork in varying cubist-, futurist-, or post-impressionist-inspired art by Lewis, Edward Wadsworth, Frederick Etchells, William Roberts, Jacob Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Cuthbert Hamilton, and Spencer Gore. Many of these artists were among the first generation of British artists still largely trained at the venerable Slade School to open themselves up to the continental avant-garde’s often violent assaults on figuration and traditional moral or aesthetic subject matter of art.

While the prewar modernism of *Blast* 1 could draw upon and even celebrate the dynamic agonism of modern life, the naïve romanticization of violence would be impossible to sustain, even if vorticism could powerfully capture or even participate in the aesthetics of real war. Yes, vorticist visual art may have lent itself to engaging with the agonistic feeling of war, and Edward Wadsworth, one of the chief vorticist painters, was enlisted during the war to supervise the “dazzle painting” camouflage of over 2,000 warship hulls. But *Blast*’s second (and final) issue, the July 1915 “War Number,” could not in fact have been more different from its flamboyant prewar predecessor. The soldierly khaki cover (as shocking by contrast to the pink of the first issue as that color was originally meant to be) and the shifting polemic toward the Kaiser and Germany, all in all, a more subdued sense of

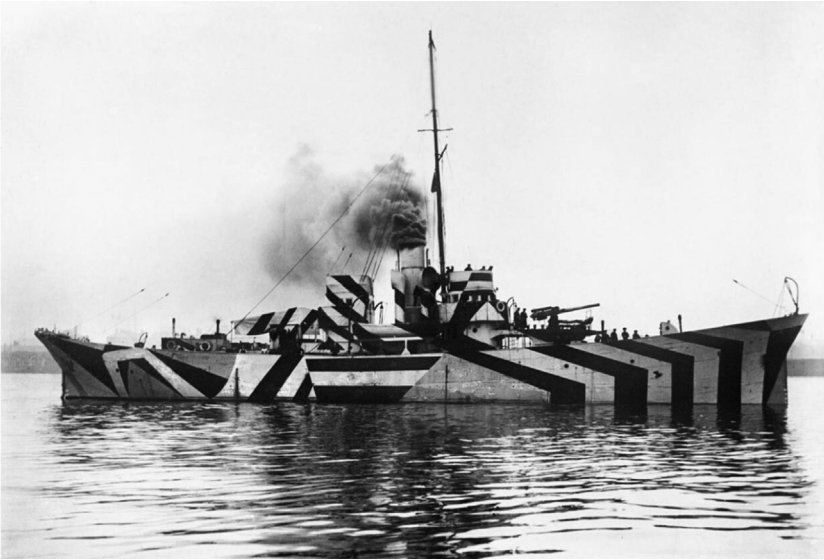
oppositionality, signified the difficulty vorticism would face in the war years. Lewis would note the problem in a brief article continuing his fight with Marinetti and with Christopher Nevinson, who had sided with the futurists during Lewis's prewar battles over control of the London arts scene: "Marinetti's solitary English disciple [Nevinson] has discovered that War is not Magnifique, or that Marinetti's Guerre is not la Guerre." He then goes on to criticize the dearth of good war literature.³⁴ Perhaps the most striking contribution in *Blast 2* was "Vortex Gaudier-Brzeska (Written from the Trenches)." The French sculptor and key vorticist attempted to insist on the aesthetic principles of his abstraction even in the face of war:

THE BURSTING SHELLS, the volleys, wire entanglements, projectors, motors, the chaos of battle DO NOT ALTER IN THE LEAST, the outlines of the hill we are besieging. A company of PARTRIDGES scuttle along before our very trench.

IT WOULD BE FOLLY TO SEEK ARTISTIC EMOTIONS AMID THESE LITTLE WORKS OF OURS.³⁵

This brave and complex assertion was tragically undermined by what followed it: the announcement of Gaudier-Brzeska's death in a charge at Neuville St. Vaast on June 5, 1915.³⁶ For all intents and purposes, vorticism was dead. Gaudier-Brzeska and T.E. Hulme would both be killed in the war. Even some of the Italian futurist sparring partners for Lewis and his circle did not survive; Umberto Boccioni was drafted into the Italian army and died during a training exercise on August 17, 1916.

Blast now looks like the culmination of the trajectory of the immediate prewar years in the London art world, with the war itself fragmenting, blunting, or destroying the promise of a truly vibrant scene. The centenary exhibition *A Crisis of Brilliance* (at the Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2013) highlighted the chilling impact of the war on a promising generation of young modern artists in Britain. The title of the exhibition derived from a comment by Slade School professor of drawing Henry Tonks, who thought that the wartime generation of Slade School students – Stanley Spencer, Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson, Mark Gertler, David Bomberg, and Dora Carrington – represented the Slade's last "crisis of brilliance." All of these painters' careers were started by their time at the Slade and tied to various exhibitions of the prewar London avant-garde, but all were affected by the war more than by any other event. Nevinson, who had fallen out with Lewis and Pound by signing Marinetti's futurist manifesto, "Vital English Art," was an ambulance driver early in the war and eventually an official war artist. He



5.2 Vorticism at war: dazzle camouflage.

contributed a vorticist-looking illustration, “On the Way to the Trenches,” to *Blast* 2, but began to move away from modernist painting styles, and his career went into decline after the war. Indeed, all of these painters were unable to realize the potential of their prewar artistic careers. Gertler and Carrington eventually committed suicide, and Nash turned to nature for inspiration in his paintings as a result of the war. As the war clearly darkened triumphalist prewar narratives of scientific and technological progress, it also further shaped another dimension of modernism that was emerging well before 1914: a fascination with the alternative spiritualities and epistemologies offered by occultism or esotericism. Many modernists – from Yeats, Butts, Pound, Eliot, H.D., Joyce, and Lawrence, to Kupka, Duchamp, Crowley, Aldous Huxley, Breton, Ithell Colquhoun, and a substantial portion of the postwar surrealists – had deep fascinations with or even direct investments in occultism, for reasons too diverse to characterize here.³⁷ The effect of the war on modernist occult writings was dramatic, and several key texts of the 1920s had their genesis in the war years. In 1917 Yeats and his wife Georgie Hyde-Lees began the automatic writing that not only produced his occult magnum opus, *A Vision* (1925, revised 1937), but also shaped much of his greatest poetry. Mary Butts’s *Ashe of Rings* (1925) and Aleister Crowley’s *Moonchild*

(written in 1917, published in 1929) both re-envisioned the Great War in terms of a magical or spiritual battle of the forces of light against those of darkness. Indeed, Pound's *Cantos* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* can be read fruitfully in the context of occult interpretations of war.³⁸

Ultimately, the war instilled in modernist esoteric and decadent imaginings a visceral sense of apocalypse. But the occult revival and the public fascination with visions of apocalypse and the eschaton predated the beginning of hostilities. Indeed, historian Philip Jenkins argues that this apocalypticism went hand in hand with rapid modernization:

From the late nineteenth century these [apocalyptic] ideas experienced a worldwide vogue, as believers tried to make sense of the sweeping changes they witnessed around them – the collapse of old social assumptions, the rise of gigantic cities and mass society, and the spread of seemingly miraculous technology. Across cultures and denominations, the resulting mood of expectation was peaking just as the war began.³⁹

Each of the major combatant countries had its own interpretations of the war as the battle at the end of times. In the United States, Billy Sunday and other religious leaders described combat between Hell (with the Kaiser as the Beast) and the forces of Heaven, while Germany's Ludwig Ganghofer would describe England as "Babylon, the great Whore."⁴⁰ Moreover, prewar apocalypticism was already vitally present in the avant-garde of the *Blaue Reiter* and German expressionism. As Jenkins puts it: "Apocalypse was a German literary and artistic genre."⁴¹

Before and especially during the war, this specific end-of-times sensibility might well be seen as a component of the modernist sense of a crisis of time, and, ultimately, of modernism's ongoing critical engagement with notions of Decadence. Perhaps the most compelling modernist synthesis of esotericism and apocalyptic thinking during the war was the 1916 novel *The Green Face* (*Das grüne Gesicht*), by Austrian/German occultist and modernist writer Gustav Meyrink, who was published alongside many expressionists and has often been compared to Kafka. Though appearing during the war, *The Green Face* is set prophetically in a postwar Amsterdam steeped in the ethos of Decadence: a soul-destroying emptiness, "nervous exhaustion," and world-weariness of which the war seems more a culmination than cause. In the "horrors of peace," Mammon rules, muscle-power displaces the intelligentsia,⁴² and sex shows and "Zulu circuses" provide amusement for the bored. The novel's protagonist, the engineer Hauberrisser, lives in a postwar urban landscape that Meyrink imagined would be defined by dislocated intellectuals

and disillusioned refugee inhabitants. Meyrink portrays a grim peace betrayed by “stony-hearted politicians of all races who were determined to say their immortal piece at the permanent peace conference which was discussing the securest way to bar the stable door now that the horse had bolted for good.”⁴³ He portrays the true cost of the war as unredeemable alienation. As one character explains, “The War split mankind into two, and neither half can understand the other. Some have seen Hell open up before them and will bear the image within them for the rest of their lives; for the others it was just so much newspaper.”⁴⁴

Turning away from the resources of politics and public culture, *The Green Face* offers up esoteric initiation as a structure for containing the dire collapse of civilization. The esoteric order that guides Hauberrisser calls for a renewal of language that might have fascinated a Joyce or Jolas in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. But, keeping with its esoteric vision, such a language would convey an inner voice that would yet restore communal connection: a “mysterious language with new words, which are beyond error or even uncertainty . . . a revelation of the truth in the light of which error vanishes because our thoughts are rings that are no longer separate, but have linked together to form a chain.”⁴⁵

Such a vision of a new language can only be achieved, however, through an apocalypse ushered in by the war. Amsterdam faces destruction of biblical proportions: by hurricane, a swarm of locusts blown in from Africa, and tornados that fill the air with coffins, corpses, and vegetation, and that pull down the twin bell towers of St. Nicholas’s. The “New Jerusalem” ushered in by this destruction culminates in a modernist rupture of the boundaries of time and space, syncretic myth and urban realism, mind and body. What follows is a harbinger of the modernism to come in the 1920s. Hauberrisser’s bare urban room becomes an Egyptian temple with Isis (Hauberrisser’s lost innocent Eva) in fresco and in reality on her throne:

he saw the wooden floorboards and at the same time they were the stone flags of the temple . . . He touched the whitewashed wall with his hand, could feel its rough surface and yet at the same time knew without mistake that his fingers were stroking a tall, gold statue, which he believed he recognised as the Goddess Isis sitting on a throne.⁴⁶

This syncretic modernist vision appealed powerfully to the postwar sensibility and succeeded wildly on the literary market, selling 90,000 copies in its first year.⁴⁷

Aftermath

While the war took its toll on modernist institutions as well as on the lives of individual writers and artists, modernism was also being recalibrated as a sensibility as a postwar world faced the challenges of demobilization, economic uncertainty, and a devastating influenza pandemic. The immediate postwar era saw early responses to war in modernist fiction many years before the definitive modernist war novels would be published in the later 1920s. Rebecca West's first novel, *The Return of the Soldier*, which dealt with the prevalent malady "shell-shock," was published in 1918; Romain Rolland's *Clérambault* and John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* were published in 1920 and 1921, respectively. Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel* would be published in its first version privately in 1920. But most of the important anglophone novels and memoirs of the war did not appear until later in the 1920s – Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* novels beginning in 1924 and extending to 1928, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1925, and, still later, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, Liam O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute*, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*.

Poetry had followed a different trajectory than fiction, however. The war had seen a remarkable boom in verse. If Meyrink had used a wartime vision of apocalypse to critique, essentially from within, the modernist fascination with Decadence, and had turned to esotericism and myth to provide a structure for the recovery of innocence and atemporal meaning, readers in England turned to the much more traditional fare of Georgian poetry for its bold rejection of the fragmentation admired approvingly by Decadents. And Georgian poetry struck a popular chord with nationalist British audiences at the beginning of the war. As Vincent Sherry argues, "The Georgian response to the war exhibits a quasi-religious significance. The innocence it reclaims will undergo a sort of baptism by fire, which, in turn, will authenticate and indeed consecrate the condition of innocence that this poetic temperament takes as its mainstay."⁴⁸ Rupert Brooke's 1914 sonnets gave voice to a pastoral sentimental view of Englishness that many soldiers (or at least the officers) felt they were going off to defend in 1914.⁴⁹ Brooke himself did not face combat or write about actual trench experience, as Sassoon, Owen, and Rosenberg did. These other poets offered a lyric realism about trench warfare, which included negative and darkly ironic visions of actual violence and the motivations behind the war, all of which strikingly undermined the naïve romantic nationalism of Georgian poetry.

The popularity of Brooke's poetry, and of poems such as John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields," published later in 1915, helped bring on a significant poetry revival that lasted until around 1919.⁵⁰ As that poetry boom waned, some modernists found their prewar aesthetics insufficient for the devastated world they faced. As Richard Aldington explained in his first postwar volume, his earlier imagist book "consisted of short-hand notes" that would be of little interest to the fellow soldiers to whom he wished his wartime poems to appeal.⁵¹ Among the new poetry magazines published immediately after the war, Thomas Moul's *Voices* (1919–21) explicitly placed both modernist and Georgian poetry alongside that of returning soldiers. Readers encountered angry and disillusioned "voices," such as that of Frederick Branford (a flight lieutenant permanently disabled in the Battle of the Somme). Branford's "The Secret Treaties," for instance, lamented the soldiers' willingness to be swayed by the corrupting *words* of the war's advocates: "We sprang, to win a New Jerusalem. / Now is our shame, for we have seen you fling / Full sounding Honour from your lips like phlegm, / And bargain up our soul in felonies."⁵²

Branford's poem is a soldier's evocation of Pound's "botched civilisation" in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, and is a no less powerful statement of Pound's postwar indictment of the betraying language that brought the world into a self-destructive war. In the fourth section of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, Pound lambasts the public school Latin phrases that elevated as civilized values the causes for which soldiers were enlisted: "THESE fought, in any case, / and some believing, pro domo, in any case," undermining their previously assumed moral certitude with the repetition of "in any case." The Horatian ode whose lines – "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" – were used to enlist soldiers are here rearranged to further negate their appeal as a rebuttal, almost an act of vandalism: "Died some pro patria, / non 'dulce' non 'et décor.'" As in Branford's poem, and even in Wilfred Owen's famous rejection of the Horatian lines as "the Old Lies," in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* the language of the war becomes that of deceitful leaders:

believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy;
usury age-old and age-thick
and liars in public places.⁵³

Pound's rage at "old men's lies" speaks to a sense of the betrayals of the language and logic of English liberalism by the politicians who entered into

secret treaties that committed millions to slaughter. Vincent Sherry identifies this sense of betrayal as an animating critical agenda of several major modernist writers of the 1920s – Woolf, Eliot, Joyce, and Pound.⁵⁴ The challenge to Western political and intellectual traditions did not only register in modernist art and literature, moreover. In his room in Vanessa Bell's and Duncan Grant's Bloomsbury hideaway at Charleston in 1919, John Maynard Keynes shaped a modernist macroeconomics in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. That year, Freud would begin to draw together psychoanalysis and aesthetics with his theorization of the uncanny and, reflecting the immense loss of life in the war, add a death drive to his model of the mind in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). The effects of the world-shaking events of the 1910s would live into the next decade.

Notes

- 1 Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 4.
- 2 Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1992), xi.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Putnam, 1980).
- 5 Ezra Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, in *Personae: The Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 191.
- 6 See Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 7 See Christopher Reed, *A Roger Fry Reader* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 235–37.
- 8 Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 47.
- 9 Desmond MacCarthy, "The Art Quake of 1910," *The Listener*, February 1, 1945, 123–24.
- 10 Quoted in James Panero, "The Armory Show at 100," *New Criterion*, December 2012, www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/The-Armory-Show-at-100-7494, accessed July 15, 2013.
- 11 Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context* (Princeton University Press, 1998), II, 10.
- 12 Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 16.
- 13 James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Grant Richards, 1914), 216.
- 14 See Ron Padgett's translation in Blaise Cendrars, *Complete Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 15–29.

- 15 Mary Shaw, "Un coup de dès and *La prose du Transsibérien*: A Study in Contraries," in Marija Dalbello and Mary Shaw (eds.), *Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 135–50 (at 143).
- 16 Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 2004), 51.
- 17 Cendrars and Emil Szittyta (a pseudonym for Adolf Schenk) began publishing a radical journal, *Neue Menschen* or *Les hommes nouveaux*, which also served as a small press for experimental book publications.
- 18 Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 3.
- 19 See Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
- 20 Perloff, *Futurist Moment*, 7.
- 21 Richard Ohmann has styled this new kind of cultural production the "magazine revolution." See Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996), 340.
- 22 For a useful sampling of key modernist magazines of the period, see the *Modernist Journals Project* at www.modjourn.org or Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).
- 23 Monro, "Preface," *Poetry Review*, 1 (January 1912), 3–4.
- 24 Robert Ross, *The Georgian Revolt, 1910–1922: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 99–101.
- 25 D.H. Lawrence, "The Georgian Renaissance," *Rhythm*, 2/14 (March 1913), *Literary Supplement*, xvii.
- 26 Ross records that, by the end of 1919, the first *Georgian Poetry* anthology was in its thirteenth thousand, the second in its twelfth, and the third in its eleventh – very strong sales figures indeed for a poetry anthology (*Georgian Revolt*, 107).
- 27 See Morrisson, *Public Face*, 95–109; and Timothy Materer, "Making It Sell! Ezra Pound Advertises Modernism," in Kevin J. H. Dettmar and Stephen Watt (eds.), *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, and Rereading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 17–36.
- 28 "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," *Poetry*, 1/6 (March 1913), 200–06.
- 29 *Personae*, 109. To increase the new poetic's audience and intellectual validity, Pound explained the genesis of the poem in a note in the *Fortnightly Review*, September 1, 1914, 465, 467.
- 30 T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 67.
- 31 W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose*, ed. James Pethica (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 76.

- 32 From Wyndham Lewis, "Enemy of the Stars," *Blast*, 1 (1914), 51–85 (at 55).
- 33 Rebecca West, "Indissoluble Matrimony," *Blast*, 1 (1914), 98–117 (at 117).
- 34 Wyndham Lewis, "The Six Hundred, Verestchagin and Uccello," *Blast*, 2 (1915), 25–26 (at 25).
- 35 "Vortex Gaudier-Brzeska (Written from the Trenches)," *Blast*, 2 (1915), 33–34 (at 33).
- 36 *Blast*, 2 (1915), 34.
- 37 For examples outside of the formidable scholarship on Yeats and the occult, see Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Leon Surette and Demetres Tryphonopoulos (eds.), *Literary Modernism and the Occult Tradition* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1996); M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); or the more broadly focused work on surrealism by Nadia Choucha and Celia Rabinovitch.
- 38 See Surette, *Birth of Modernism*.
- 39 Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 137.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 140–41.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 147.
- 42 Gustav Meyrink, *The Green Face*, trans. Mike Mitchell (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2004), 15.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 214–15.
- 47 Mike Mitchell, *Vivo: The Life of Gustav Meyrink* (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2008), 190.
- 48 Vincent Sherry, "First World War Poetry: A Cultural Landscape," in Santanu Das (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 38.
- 49 The definitive account of this phenomenon remains Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford University Press, 1975).
- 50 Ross, *Georgian Revolt*, 244–45, n. 22.
- 51 Richard Aldington, *War and Love* (Boston: Four Seas Press, 1919), 5.
- 52 Branford, "The Secret Treaties," *Voices*, January 1919, 14.
- 53 Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, 190–91.
- 54 See Sherry, *Great War*.