Introduction: The modernist latecomer and 'permanent novelty'

> 'Literature is news that STAYS news.'
>
> Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*[1]

At the end of 1922, Ezra Pound announced to Margaret Anderson, 'Intelligent reviews of my last works, of Eliots Waste Land, and even of that olde classicke Ulysses wd. be suitable features for an up to date annual.'[2] While there is an evident employment of irony in the use of the word classic to describe these fairly recently published works, Pound's statement reveals a contemporary acknowledgement of a tension in early twentieth-century literature that critics of the twenty-first century still find perplexing. That a work of art could be considered simultaneously well established, even 'classic', as well as 'modern' or 'up to date' is perhaps a peculiar problem in studies of the movement we still call, nearly a century later, 'modernism'. Those critics focusing on the period have done much to make this paradox a central element of the character of the movement, revealing the methods modernist authors used to make careers for themselves out of constantly reinventing the new, all the while consciously positioning their works within an older literary tradition.[3] We cannot know, of course, whether Pound could foresee the future literary histories which would confirm 1922 as the *annus mirabilis* of modernism, as well as making *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land* (both 1922) and Pound's poems of this time into what we call, perhaps oxymoronically, 'modernist classics'.

But the modernists themselves, of course, did have their own pronounced views on the relationship between the new and the classic works of art. T. S. Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), a significant statement which still forms a central pillar in monolithic views of the modernist period, first illustrated the view that the 'really new work of art' takes its place among the 'monuments', thus changing the structure of the literary tradition and taking its own place as a classic.[4] The emphasis

here is placed on the work being 'really new', which might translate as a work which (paradoxically) breaks with tradition before it then reenters or reshapes it. Likewise, Pound places the emphasis on the new when discussing his own definition of a classic in *ABC of Reading* (1934): 'A classic is not a classic because it conforms to certain structural rules, or fits certain definitions (of which its author had quite probably never heard). It is classic because of a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness.'[5] This idea of eternal freshness – Wyndham Lewis, as we shall see, would use the phrase 'permanent novelty' – clearly characterizes the paradoxical emphasis modernists would put upon the new finding its way into the establishment. The key here is that these high modernists were aware of the paradox that this break with tradition often meant simply the remaking of it or, to put it otherwise, that a work taking on the qualities of the really modern often involved it becoming, in time, a classic. Modernist literature aimed to be new, but also to *stay* new, to paraphrase Pound's significant dictum.

This study will aim to show that the writers of the modernist period were highly aware of the paradox involved in a simultaneous focus on the advanced or up to date and on the already established tradition, and that it resulted, in the late 1920s and after, in a reaction by a group of writers we might call the modernist latecomers within the context of the historicizing efforts and institutional manipulation of modernism's more established writers, those who are sometimes called the 'high modernists'. Yet before we can discuss the latecomers, we must first define what it means to be 'on time' – to characterize those who first established modernism as a historical period. Any group of writers we might designate 'high modernist' will necessarily be based on a later historical configuration, since there was no such label at that time; yet I would like to suggest that authors and commentators during the period shared the view that, even without an agreed label, certain authors stood out from the others as epitomizing what 'high modernism' now represents to us. The term seems often to be used in two subtly distinct ways, though both normally involve the same authors: one is used to designate those modernists who were devoted to an autonomous or art-for-art's-sake aesthetic, or those who were perceived to pursue 'high art'; the other is used to represent the writers establishing their careers during the 'high modernist' period, when the early revolutionary spirit was for the first time formalized and brought into cultural prominence, from roughly 1914 to 1925. While some writers might fit into one of these categories but not the other, it seems that an overwhelming majority of critics agree that Eliot, Pound and James Joyce form a central core to this specific strand of

modernists. Even more importantly, though, than the academy's later (re)construction of the historical period, these writers can be considered high modernists because, as I aim to reveal, they at one time or another held respective positions of cultural power within the period itself, and found ways to establish their newly modern works as more permanently modern*ist* icons.

This shift from the idea of the modern to that of the more enduringly modernist was to some extent, of course, due to the work of historians, but the period has always received attention as one which highlighted the rules for belonging to the movement, largely through manifestos and critical essays. The period's synonyms for 'modernist' – including 'advanced' or 'up to date' – did not, as we shall see, simply include *anyone* writing during the period, particularly since there were numerous contemporaries of the modernists who were considered to be passé in their literary efforts, or simply writing within a different aesthetic. Chris Baldick makes this the central theme of his volume of *The Oxford English Literary History,* 'The Modern Movement', choosing a broader understanding of the period than many critics have traditionally chosen. But while discussing his inclusion of more popular writers and alternative traditions, Baldick acknowledges that the current tendency to celebrate the 'triumph of the revolution' of high modernism is partly due to the actions of the high modernists themselves as they turned their revolution into an enduring cultural dominance.[6] This meant that writing in a modernist manner usually involved conforming to the characteristics of the period as defined by certain authors – particularly the blend of tradition and innovation exhibited by the high modernists in the late 1910s and 1920s. One could choose to ignore these high modernist tendencies, and many did, but those authors – as some openly acknowledged – were often aware that they were counting themselves out of the prevailing movement of the age.

This raises obvious problems in defining what is modern for any given age, especially within this specific period when, for a significant proportion of literary producers, writing 'good' literature came to mean writing 'modern' literature – two highly relative terms depending on each other for their definitions. W. B. Yeats, for instance, when compiling his influential *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936), had to face just such questions. Does one define the modern according to the age of the poets to be included, or their dates of publication, or rather according to the display of the characteristics of modernity? And if the latter (which seems more common, at least within the period), who is to decide which

characteristics are modern for each new generation? Yeats may not answer these questions for us, but he implies that being modern involves more than simply writing in one's own age when he states, 'I too have tried to be modern.'[7] In defining what it means to 'be modern', Yeats is suggesting it has little to do with simply writing or publishing in a specified period but rather with putting in an *effort* to represent or reflect the age. The irony of the sentiment here revealed is that even one of the most central modernist poets at the height of his career expresses anxiety over qualifying for a period identified, even then, with advancement and innovation. This study concerns itself with individual writers coming late to this period characterized by the up to date, particularly once the modernist movement had already been to some extent established, when all that was left was to choose to belong to one's age – as it had come to be defined by those who had gone before – or to opt out.

But first we must examine to what extent the writers of high modernism managed to institutionalize the notion of the 'new'. By 1922, the individual careers of these modernist writers were still capable of complete transformation; but for the most part, as will be shown, modernism as a *collective* movement had come into its own. *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* had successfully attracted enough attention in the press to be recognized even beyond the select circles of readers that modernist writers had until then found for an audience. As Lawrence Rainey suggests, the year marked the transition from an audience made up of coterie circles and publication in small circulation journals into the more widely recognized literary institutions.[8] Certain prominent modernists found their reputations growing within a limited but highly influential literary field and, though they could not rightly be considered 'popular', they managed to acquire a certain element of cultural celebrity, as Aaron Jaffe has observed.[9] Looking back on the period from a historic vantage point, many critics conclude that an ascendant or 'hegemonic' strand of literary modernism emerges about this time, a dominant mode of critical values led by the cultural and institutional power of, most obviously, Eliot and, to varying extents, Pound, Joyce and others.[10] While such a term as 'ascendant' is necessarily relative, rating the group's 'dominance' within the context of exclusivity in which they positioned themselves, it remains a useful designation for the few authors who managed to make a name for themselves within the various constructions that literary historians have built out of the period.

One of the central questions of ascendant modernism, however, concerns the source of the perception of this group's centrality or dominance.

High modernists had gathered, even during their own age, a reputation of detachment, even to the point where they were considered aloof to critical or popular reception. For example, when writing about the modernist artist in general, Richard Aldington would say, 'He writes for an audience equipped to understand him, and is indifferent to popular success.'[11] This may have been a view modernists encouraged of themselves or simply a misconception, but it now appears increasingly outdated, as more critical attention has been given to modernists within the marketplace. It is now recognized that the high modernists did not entirely resist the commodification of art, but took part, albeit hesitantly, in what Pierre Bourdieu has called 'The Market for Symbolic Goods'.[12] High modernists were aware that literary reputation and cultural value are forces which can be shaped and formed by any number of different factors. This was even acknowledged by their contemporaries, such as Louis Untermeyer, who in 1923 identified 'a group, in attempting to do for Mr. Eliot what "Ulysses" did for Mr. Joyce', that had displayed 'some of the most enthusiastically naïve superlatives that have ever issued from publicly sophisticated iconoclasts'.[13] The key here is the recognition, even by the high modernists' contemporaries, that there was a concerted effort to publicize and market certain works as the important literary texts of the age. Most high modernist artists were not reluctant to engage in the active manipulation of public opinion or institutional and cultural histories in order to ensure the best reception of their work by both contemporary readers and future literary historians alike. This is rarely disputed, but the consequences of these engagements with cultural institutions and historical formulations remain debatable – and it is the consequences arising that this study takes as its subject.

Examples of this group negotiating their own cultural reception can be readily found in the various collections of correspondence of high modernists such as Eliot, Pound and Joyce. With *Ulysses*, to take one illustration, Joyce proved himself to be an avid executor of his own public relations programme – one which made the novel a cultural monument long before it had a substantial readership.[14] According to the biographer of Sylvia Beach, the American expatriate who founded the Shakespeare and Co. bookshop and first published *Ulysses*, the author would spend every day at her shop, suggesting methods for getting his novel reviewed, even when the reviewers were reticent.[15] One reluctant reviewer of *Ulysses* was Ford Madox Ford, who claimed in *The English Review* that he had been 'pressed to write for the English public something about the immense book of Mr. Joyce', going on to say, 'I do not wish to do so;

I do not wish to do so at all for four or five – or twenty – years.'[16] But Joyce and his supporters were not sufficiently patient to allow opinions of the novel to form of their own accord. A letter from Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, his patron and publisher, reveals that it was she who 'dictated' the substance of Ford's article, with Joyce continuing, 'I am glad you have taken to writing the favourable criticisms. It seems to me I wrote most of them so far – I mean I see my own phrases rolling back to me.'[17] Another letter reveals Joyce encouraging Eliot to 'use or coin some short phrase, two or three words' for the benefit of the English reading public, despite the fact that copies of the book were largely unavailable in Britain, having been seized and destroyed at Folkestone customs.[18] Here we see an example of a high modernist helping to compose catchphrases and favourable reviews of his own novel, encouraging opinions to be formed from his own dictation rather than waiting for them to form in their own time.

This is not only a manipulation of literary consumerism, I will argue, but in a way a preemptive strike against literary history. But before the case is made, the example of Valéry Larbaud is similarly instructive. Not only was Larbaud the first to use the phrase 'interior monologue' in regard to *Ulysses*, he was also the first to discuss publicly what is variously called the 'key' or 'schema' behind the structure of the novel. Larbaud became an admirer and close friend of Joyce a few months before the book publication of *Ulysses*, and he was shown the schema which Joyce had used to construct the novel, an elaborate outline of each chapter in terms of its specific Homeric episode, technique, organ, architecture and various other categories. It was, in effect, a reader's guide to the structure of the novel, but paradoxically was not intended for the general reader, as Joyce made clear to Carlo Linati, the first person to see the plan.[19] Yet Joyce encouraged Larbaud to use it for a starting point in his public lecture on *Ulysses* at a special 'seance' held in Paris in Joyce's honour in December 1921, and for his follow-up essay in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Although *Ulysses* had already been printed by *The Little Review*, it should be remembered that there would have been few readers of the novel by the time Larbaud was stressing the way it should be understood. By April, he was writing, 'If one reads *Ulysses* with attention, one cannot fail to discover this plan in time.'[20] Yet Larbaud had not 'discovered' the key himself independently. Joyce admitted to Weaver that the purpose of the schema in the first place was 'in order to confuse the audience a little more'.[21] In so doing, Joyce had constructed a closed circle of interpretation, providing complications to his novel which only his own 'key'

could unlock. It was when Jacques Benoîst-Méchin wrote to Joyce demanding to be given the entire schema that Joyce famously answered, 'If I gave it all up immediately, I'd lose my immortality. I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality.'[22]

While this strategy may not involve the manipulation of commercial institutions, like marketing a novel in literary reviews, it has everything to do with the institution of a *historical* modernism. In other words, we are not only forced to come to terms with a high modernism involved in marketing itself, but with a group at the core of a notional modernist canon who were involved in the formation of, not just the new texts of the period, but the structure of the literary field and the history that would come to be written of the movement – in fact, investing time and energy in the institutions that would make these new works endure beyond their immediate novelty. Michael Whitworth, introducing the period in a section entitled 'Modernist Self-Construction', suggests that 'As the modern movement began to become established, various author-critics attempted to secure its group identity by writing first drafts of its history, and, in particular, by defining epochal dates or moments at which "the modern" was born.'[23] This hints at the modernist link between the creative and forward-looking artist, devoted to the new, and the traditional and historically minded critic, concerned largely with endurance and institutions. In fact, awareness of how literary critical studies led to a type of immortality was growing throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise in historical self-consciousness that was infiltrating the minds of writers in the 1910s and 1920s closely parallels the rise of professionalization in the literary vocations of the time, as well as the development of modern 'English' as taught within academic institutions.[24]

Likewise, there is evidence that academics in the third decade of the twentieth century were aware of an emerging movement based on innovation and experimentation with form and language, and that certain writers could be identified not just as subjects for study but as contemporaries or allies. I. A. Richards went so far as to confront Eliot with an open position in the faculty at Cambridge.[25] His colleague, F. R. Leavis, proposed as early as 1926 to make the banned *Ulysses* a textbook for an unspecified undergraduate class, a full ten years before the novel would be allowed in Britain and only four after its publication as a book.[26] The eagerness of the academic establishment to adopt the latest figureheads of

a contemporary movement served only to reinforce the positions already held by these writers. As contemporary literature grew more common material for the classroom, the modernist writers themselves grew more aware of their position within academic institutions and their prospects of entering an 'immortal' historical narrative.

Louis Menand has traced the reactions of modernist writers to the general professionalization of late nineteenth-century culture by looking specifically at Eliot's career and context. He describes how the various poetic associations of the period, as characterized by the anthology and the -ism, managed to institutionalize the new poetry immediately within more traditional and professional organizations. Menand writes:

> The task of the usurping practitioner is to make his discourse seem not new, but in fact the traditional discourse, and to make the language of the amateur he is supplanting appear to be an aberration. And this was exactly the procedure modernism followed in distinguishing itself from and claiming superiority to the established literary culture of its time.[27]

That Eliot succeeded in gaining considerable cultural and professional authority through his stylistic experimentation and concurrent assimilation of tradition is illustrated clearly by Menand. Although the modernists would become known for their experimentation and 'newness' – it was, in fact, what gave them their name – it was their ability to be simultaneously traditional that made them endure. In seeking to highlight their connection to the past, many high modernists, as Menand suggests a few pages later, aimed to acquire the status of the institution.[28]

Most of the authors writing within high modernism were dedicated to making their past visible in this way. Any casual reader of Pound's collected essays will come across numerous examples, usually in footnotes, of his reminders of the dates when he first developed or made public the ideas he promotes. This technique is identified by Stan Smith – who outlines many of the problems referred to above – as one which keeps Pound's criticism continually up to date by positioning his 'new' observations within a historical time frame.[29] With significant essays entitled 'The Tradition', 'A Retrospect' and 'Date Line', it is easy to judge how important historiography was to Pound's own assessment of the movement. Instructively, his 1934 volume of criticism, entitled *Make It New*, rather than beginning with any really new pronouncements, commences with 'Date Line', containing a type of *curriculum vitae*, complete with the dates of his major publications and those of his associates, alongside evidence of, in his own words, his 'capacity to pick the winner'. 'Let it

stand', Pound states, 'that from 1912 onward for a decade and more I was instrumental in forcing into print, and *secondarily* in commenting on, certain work now recognized as valid by all competent readers, the dates of various reviews, anthologies, etc., are ascertainable.'[30] Here Pound is cashing in his cultural credit as one who correctly judged the newly established authors years before they had grown established so that his readers might believe him regarding the next new thing (in this case economic theory).

But in setting out his past cultural triumphs, Pound is making an institution of himself, rather than 'making it new'. Like many of the modernists, Pound considers himself a step ahead of the tastes of the general reader, viewing the present as if from the position of a future historian, able to fit the immediacy of the 'modern' into the wider concept of a past tradition. This strategy, though, often leads the high modernists into playing simultaneous roles as literary artists, critics and historians, helping to institutionalize the creative work of their contemporaries, even their own, as it is produced. As Pound's phrasing illustrates, the modernist 'work now recognized as valid by all competent readers' was first 'forced' into print and then affirmed as 'valid' by Pound himself. The question that remains is whether this is because of his foresight, as Pound would have us believe, or because the conditions for literary validity were established by Pound as cultural arbiter in the first place. To phrase this another way, what best explains the eventual acceptance of modernist works as 'valid': the innovation and inherent aesthetic appeal, or the influence on publication and public acceptance that certain high modernists were capable of using? This latter explanation carries a whole new meaning for the phrase 'make it new', whereby the literary work is '*made* new' almost simultaneously through the artist's creative faculties and through the institutional work of publishers, commentators and journalists, and where the quality of 'newness' is measured by the literary work's relation to history as a whole – extending into both the past and the future.

Joyce and Pound were not the only modernists to formulate the position of their works while keeping firmly in mind the literary critics and historians of the future. Pound's forward thinking when it came to *Poetry* magazine, aiming for 'the files of this periodical to be prized and vendible in 1999', is echoed by Harriet Monroe, his editorial partner, who questioned as early as 1912, 'How will twenty-first century critics rank artists of the present day?'[31] This general concern over a future posterity's perception of the period almost certainly led to the active, though often

unpremeditated, attempts by high modernists to historicize themselves. These attempts could be either implicit or explicit. For example, Pound's often-quoted narrative account of how he and Eliot came to be linked within the movement comes as a response to Eliot's own much less obvious attempt to assimilate a history he never actually took part in. In 'Harold Monro' Pound tries to make the whole story clear:

> [Eliot] displayed great tact, or enjoyed great fortune, in arriving in London at a particular date with a formed style of his own. He also participated in a movement to which no name has ever been given.
>
> That is to say, at a particular date in a particular room, two authors, neither engaged in picking the other's pocket, decided that the dilution of *vers libre*, Amygism, Lee Masterism, general floppiness had gone too far, and that some counter-current must be set going.[32]

But just before this narrative of the 'counter-current', Pound takes issue with Eliot for labelling Monro's brand of poetry – as distinguished from the other common brand of that time, Georgian poetry – 'our own'. He writes, '"Our own" is too generous a term. And it might be of more general, critical service to point out how few of "us" have survived from a pre-Eliot decade, how few of the people who were there at all, in 1911, would still be admitted to Mr. Eliot's "our own".' Pound and Eliot were both intent on establishing their own versions of tradition, even when they conflicted, often focusing on that which survives the currents and counter-currents of successive modernist novelties. The struggle for the high modernists was not always to be the first or the newest but also to be the most enduring – survivors of the advances of innovation.

This is what leads Art Berman to distinguish the high modernists from the avant-garde modernists, stating, 'High modernism is modernism become self-conscious of itself as a historical event, decades into its progress, rather than as the new event announced in the early modernist manifestoes.'[33] This distinction perhaps ignores the fact that many high modernists were first avant-garde in approach, and that the two positions can, at times, be held concurrently. But there is a key recognition here that the historical development of modernism as a movement, particularly as viewed self-consciously by its participants, is a major reason for the complex nature of the period's relation to past and present. The idea can be found in an earlier work by Michael Levenson, who divides the earlier radical modernists from the 'counter-current' of the mid- to late 1910s, emphasizing tradition and authoritarianism and gaining dominance only once the early modernist visual artists and theorists, including