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ALEX DAVIS AND LEE M. JENKINS

Introduction

In 1921, T. S. Eliot declared that 'poets in our civilization . . . must be *difficult*'.[1] The publication in the following year of *The Waste Land* served to confirm the truth of this pronouncement: Eliot's bristlingly allusive poem, and its seven pages of accompanying notes, insists that 'difficulty' is a *sine qua non* of the modernist artwork.[2] For other practitioners of modernist poetics, like William Carlos Williams, the learnedness of Eliot's poem returned poetry to the classroom: arguably, however, Williams's democratic model of modernist poetry requires as much exegesis for the twenty-first-century reader as Eliot's elitist masterpiece. After all, critics have expended as much ingenuity in surmising *what* depends on Williams's red wheelbarrow, in his sixteen-word poem of that title, as they have in pursuing the meaning of Tarot cards and the Holy Grail in Eliot's pocket epic. Between the polar extremes represented by Eliot and Williams we find a heterogeneous array of modernist poetries. The broad church of poetic modernism includes Wallace Stevens's post-Arnoldian idea of poetry as a substitute for religion; the avant-garde '*écriture feminine*' of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Mina Loy; and the cultural nationalisms of African-American and certain Irish and Scottish poetry of the period.

Modernist poetry involves recuperations of history *and* Futurist and Dada abandonments of tradition; arcane *and* demotic registers of language; elitist *and* populist forms of literature. The rich diversity of modernist poetries, no less than the particular difficulties presented by *The Waste Land*, inevitably necessitates the kind of 'classroom assistance' Williams believed the 'new art' was on the point of escaping.[3]

We might date the periodisation of modernism, as an historical epoch, to the death of the critic Hugh Kenner, author of the hugely influential *The Pound Era* (1971). Kenner's death in 2003 can be seen as having marked the passing, figuratively and largely literally, of an entire generation of scholars and readers for whom modernist poetry, or Williams's 'new art', was contemporary poetry. For the overwhelming majority of twenty-first-century

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readers, modernism belongs as much to literary history as does romantic literature.[4]

While from one angle the modernist era has come into focus as a period, viewed from another its historical parameters are hazy. As this Companion demonstrates, the temporal boundaries of the modernist era are permeable: hence the discernible difficulty literary historians have in assigning dates to modernism. Since Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* (1957), modernism's roots in the poetry of the 1890s has become ever more apparent. Christopher Ricks's edition of Eliot's early poetry, *Inventions of the March Hare* (1996), is vivid testimony to the importance of fin-de-siècle symbolism to high modernism. Indeed, Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (1982) dates the beginnings of modernism to the mid-nineteenth century, to the thought of Karl Marx and the poetry of Baudelaire. At the other end of the modernist timeline, Marjorie Perloff contends that we find in certain contemporary poets (J. H. Prynne, Susan Howe and others) a twenty-first-century modernism that circles back to the restless experimentation of the historical avant garde in the early years of the twentieth century. Inheritors of modernist tendencies, such as the Objectivists (George Oppen, Carl Rakosi, Louis Zukofsky, Lorine Niedecker and Charles Reznikoff), and the Black Mountain poets associated with Charles Olson, may also be considered proponents of a 'late' or 'new' modernism. Certainly, modernism has not reached its expiry date for certain postcolonial poets. Kamau Brathwaite's creolised Caribbean modernism illustrates the 'uneven development' of avant-garde poetries between what we might term First and Third World modernisms. Brathwaite's poetry demonstrates that modernism and postcoloniality are not mutually exclusive categories, as some theorists of the postmodern would have us believe. Indeed, as Michael North has observed, 1922, the year of the publication of *The Waste Land* and of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, also saw the birth of the Irish Free State and the emergence of Egyptian self-determination, thus signalling 'the beginning of the postcolonial era'.[5]

In this respect as in others, the concept of postmodernism has shown itself to be overly reliant on a caricatured 'straw man' notion of modernism, of the kind presented in Ihab Hassan's *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1971). However, it is significant that one of the earliest proponents of the 'post-modern', Charles Olson, did not construe the relationship between modernism and postmodernism as a binary division.[6] Contemporaneous with the growing valorisation of 'postmodernist' literature, and the accompanying downgrading of modernist texts, was the rise of literary theory during the 1970s and 1980s. The reappraisal of romantic literature by, among others, the Yale Critics (in particular, Paul de Man,

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Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom) proved to be detrimental to the reputation of certain modernists, especially Eliot and Pound, loftily dismissed by Bloom as the Cleveland and Cowley of their age. (Doubtless, Eliot and Pound's frequently hostile and, in Eliot's case, highly influential interpretations of romantic writers played a part in the relative marginalisation of modernist poetry at this time.) Only modernists recuperable to a late romantic paradigm, such as Wallace Stevens, thrived during the heyday of theory. Not coincidentally, the present waning of interest in Stevens has gone hand in hand with the rise of a newly historicised critical attention to Eliot.

Recent years have seen a remarkable renaissance in the study of modernist literature in general; at the centre of this has been renewed attention to modernist poetry in particular, both that of the established canon, and the work of poets who have until now been marginalised in modernist studies. An example and a catalyst of this rejuvenation of the discipline is the Modernist Studies Association and its influential journal, *Modernism/Modernity*. The new modernist studies departs from the New Critical version of modernism canonised in the 1940s, with its emphasis on the text as an autonomous entity,[7] in its attention to, among other topics, the historical conjuncture in which modernism emerged, the material culture of modernity, and race and gender. Major reassessments of established reputations are currently under way – witness the lively controversy surrounding Eliot and the subject of anti-Semitism.[8] This rejuvenation of interest in modernist literature is to be welcomed; though it is important that issues of poetic form – so crucial to modernist texts – are not inadvertently sidelined in the current historicisation of the discipline.

An encouraging sign that the quiddity of the modernist text is still respected is the emergence of a growing number of reliable scholarly editions, though Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* is a significant exception, and perhaps an irresolvable one.[9] Carcanet's multi-volume edition of Hugh MacDiarmid's poetry and prose, and the works of W. B. Yeats under the general editorship of Richard J. Finneran and George Mills Harper, offer two instances of modernist authors who have received the kind of editorial attention previously reserved for writers of earlier eras.

Complementing this, the modernist canon has been significantly expanded, to represent the contribution to modernist poetry of, for instance, the Harlem Renaissance and pioneering women writers such as H.D. and Mina Loy. As George Bornstein has pointed out, the seminal anthology of the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro* (1925), is 'deliberately biracial', deploying a 'hybrid racial politics' apparent, for example, in the prominence, in the text, of illustrations by Winold Reiss.[10] The recovery of the London-born Loy is an instance of the growing interest shown in British modernist poetry,

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of which Keith Tuma's *Fishing by Obstinate Isles* (1999) is an important instance. Indeed, the very title of Peter Nicholls's *Modernisms* (1995) is testimony to our more capacious comprehension of this literary era. The chapters included in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry* reflect the recent transformation of the discipline, a sea-change increasingly manifested in the academic curriculum.

Recent groundbreaking studies of modernist poetry include Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), Michael North's *Dialect of Modernism* (1994), and Marjorie Perloff's many interventions in the field. This Companion complements such specialised monographs in offering an up-to-date overview of the spectrum of modernist poetry, its contexts and its formal demands. Although there are several excellent introductions to modernism, including Michael Levenson's *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999) and Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's still indispensable *Modernism* (1976), this Companion remedies the singular lack of a corresponding text devoted solely to modernist *poetry*.

The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry is composed of three Parts. Firstly, four chapters address those contexts that are essential to the comprehension of modernist poetry, providing a balance between necessary historical information and attention to the formal demands of the modernist poem. Secondly, eight chapters provide advanced introductions to the work of a range of Anglophone modernist poets and movements. Thirdly, the final chapter assesses the critical reception of modernist poetry. The Companion is framed by a chronology of key events and publication dates and an up-to-date Bibliography.

In the first chapter, David Ayers introduces the philosophical and political contexts out of which modernism emerged and developed. From the vantage point of the reader in the twenty-first century, the increasingly remote intellectual milieu of the period of modernism requires a comprehensive appraisal for its poetry to be accurately and adequately appreciated. To that end, Ayers explores the history of ideas to which modernism responds.

The three chapters that follow deal with specific dimensions of modernist poetry. Modernist poetry is not a homogeneous entity: Paul Peppis's chapter details the miscellaneous modernist schools that comprise Anglo-American and continental European poetry, discriminating between the many 'isms' and avant gardes – Imagism, Vorticism, Surrealism, Dada, Futurism – that comprise the modernist movement from before the First World War to the 1930s. The focus of this chapter is on Anglophone movements in the broader context of continental European modernisms. (Post-Second World War avant gardes are considered in chapters 10 and 12 of the *Companion*, which consider American poetry in the 'Williams

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tradition' and Anglophone modernisms from the Caribbean, Africa and India respectively.)

Peter Nicholls's chapter analyses the challenge posed by experimental form faced by all readers of modernist poetry. Nicholls provides an overview of the various techniques and devices deployed by modernist poets, including dialogue between tradition and the new, discontinuous form, fragmentation, personae, an emphasis on poiesis or poetic 'making', the modernist use of irony derived from the French poet Jules Laforgue, self-reflexivity, and the mythic method deployed by Eliot and Pound and denounced by Williams.

The sexual politics of modernist poetry are extreme, reactionary and subversive in equal measure. Cristanne Miller's chapter analyses the representation and role of gender and sexuality in both male and female-authored modernist poetry. Miller considers the historical context of debate about gender relations and sexuality in the period of modernism, re-reading modernist treatments of gender and sexuality as problematic and productive. Women's contribution to modernist poetry has until recently been relatively neglected, regardless of the fact that women writers and publishers were instrumental in the modernist movement from its earliest stages, particularly in the context of the 'little magazines' of modernism. This chapter addresses the careers of women poets (H.D., Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, Loy and Amy Lowell) who were crucial to the modernist project and whose work was shaped in often terse dialogue with their male peers. Miller also analyses the representation of sexuality and of women in male-authored modernist poetry (Pound, Eliot, Jean Toomer, Hart Crane and Langston Hughes).

The second Part of this Companion focuses on specific authors, collaborations and groupings. This Part begins with an extended analysis by Lawrence Rainey of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, arguably the most influential of modernist poets, the impact of whose poetic practice and cultural assumptions on poets writing in their wake is immense. Rainey's analysis of the poetics of Pound and Eliot is complemented by an interpretation of these major modernists as cultural catalysts for their era, and addresses the critical interpretations of their respective legacies. Rachel Blau DuPlessis's chapter complements Rainey's in its analysis of the increasingly acknowledged significance of the work of H.D. and its relationship to the male pantheon of modernist poets. H.D. is read in relation to her major male modernist contemporaries, her mythopoetic poems making a revisionary intervention into the 'masculine' mythic method of Pound and Eliot.

This second Part of the Companion continues with Anne Fogarty's consideration of W. B. Yeats's relationship with the modernist movement. Although belonging to an earlier generation, Yeats's contribution to modernism is immense. Indeed, the Irish Literary Revival, of which Yeats was a major

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orchestrator, has been regarded as prefiguring other movements within Anglo-American and European modernism. Fogarty's chapter considers the ways in which Yeats's project is imbricated in the evolution of modernism, his lyric mode, developed in the late nineteenth century, increasingly subjected to the pressures of modernity. Drew Milne's chapter constitutes an appraisal of British modernist poets, considering the important contribution made to modernist poetry by its Scottish, English and Welsh practitioners, including MacDiarmid, Loy, Basil Bunting, William Empson, John Rodker, Nancy Cunard, David Jones and Lynette Roberts. The chapter examines the relative critical neglect of British modernism, which has often been seen as peripheral in dominant critical accounts, especially in the wake of the anti-modernism of the Movement writers (Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and, in a far more complex form, Donald Davie). Milne also explores connections between regionalism and internationalism with reference to the work of MacDiarmid, Bunting and Jones, and discusses the British Surrealist aesthetic developed by Charles Madge, Dylan Thomas and David Gascoyne.

The following two chapters are devoted to the seminal significance, and internal diversity, of North American poetic modernisms. Bonnie Costello explores a dominant strain in the bifurcated tradition of American modernist poetry: the invention of the American modernist lyric, as manifested in the work of Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens. Costello investigates Moore and Stevens's creation of a poetic idiom appropriate to the America in which both poets chose to remain, unlike their expatriate contemporaries Pound and Eliot. Costello also explores the rich diversity of linguistic textures and lexical range in Moore and Stevens, the American renovation of the image undertaken by both poets, and their meditations on the function of the imagination in relation to religion. Mark Scroggins's chapter maps the 'other tradition' in American modernist poetry – that of Williams, Louis Zukofsky and Olson – which both derives and diverges from the example of Pound. This chapter assesses a nativist-modernist American poetics written in opposition to the Eurocentric imagination of Eliot and that celebrates, instead, the local American scene in innovative and disjunctive epic forms.

Our understanding of American poetic modernisms is complemented and extended in Sharon Lynette Jones's chapter on the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, which discusses the work of a number of poets, including Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Helene Johnson, Georgia Douglas Johnson and Angelina Weld Grimké. Jones discusses the contested relationship between modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, arguing that the Harlem Renaissance is essential, if not wholly assimilable, to a properly inclusive understanding of poetic modernism. Jahan Ramazani's chapter examines the

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heretofore underexplored cross-culturality of modernist poetry, focusing on the strategies of (re)appropriation and revision that characterise the work of Caribbean, African and Indian poets. Ramazani discusses a range of Anglophone modernisms, including the vernacular language of poetry deployed by the Jamaican Louise Bennett and Barbadian Kamau Brathwaite's experimental poetics of a Caribbean 'Little Tradition', to the deployment of ethnography in the work of the African Okot p'Bitek and Kashmiri-American Agha Shahid Ali.

Part III of the Companion comprises Jason Harding's detailed survey of modernist poetry and the canon. Harding assesses modernism's evolution within and ambivalent response to the swiftly altering literary marketplace of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and draws our attention to the centrality of the 'little magazine' to the dissemination and reception of modernist writing. Harding analyses the way in which modernist poetry was absorbed by the academy, attaining a central place within the burgeoning 'profession' of university literary studies. Harding concludes his summary of the critical reception and fate of modernist poetry with reference to the vigorous and exciting re-evaluations of modernist poetry at the present moment, a debate to which *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry* itself contributes.

NOTES

1. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 289. In his controversial appraisal of the period, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), John Carey attributes modernist 'difficulty' to a wilful attempt on the part of the 'intellectuals' to exclude the increasingly literate 'masses'.
2. In its magazine publication, in the October 1922 issue of the *Criterion* and in the November 1922 (which appeared in October) issue of the *Dial*, *The Waste Land* had no notes; these were added to the Boni and Liveright text on its publication in December of that year.
3. William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 174.
4. For a provocative account of 'modern poetry', in which modernism is viewed as one element within a wider 'modern movement', see Chris Baldick, *The Oxford English Literary History*, vol. X, *1910–1940, The Modern Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2004). For a nuanced reappraisal of a number of 'non-modernist' poets of the Edwardian and Georgian eras, see Peter Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
5. Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
6. George F. Butterick (ed.), *Charles Olson and Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence*, vol. VII (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1987), p. 75.

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7. For an authoritative account of the New Criticism and its relation to modernism, see A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand and Lawrence Rainey (eds), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. VII, *Modernism and the New Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).
8. See Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form*, 2nd edn (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), and the replies made by Ronald Schuchard and others in *Modernism/Modernity* 10.1 (2003).
9. See the essays collected in Lawrence Rainey (ed.), *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in 'The Cantos'* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).
10. George Bornstein, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 4, 152. As the title of his book suggests, George Hutchinson's *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995) offers a similarly inclusive version of the Harlem movement.

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PART I

Contexts

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DAVID AYERS

Modernist poetry in history

I

The discussion of modernist poetry in history seems at first glance to allow for a model in which poetry, in a specific phase of its development marked as 'modernist', will be situated in the wider context of a series of histories – the 'material' history of events, technologies and relations of production; and the 'cultural' history of ideas, artistic practices, science, education, and so on. In the context of the analysis of the social situation of modernist poetry, however, the term 'history' itself requires unpacking.

A specific poem may be judged 'modernist' in terms of its advanced technical features or in terms of the modernity of outlook of the producing poet or implied readership. Underlying such a judgement is something more than the notion that a poem or poet is 'modern' in the sense of 'recent'. The notion of modernism in the arts seems implicitly to rest upon a broader notion of modernity in society. This model – modernism in the arts corresponding to modernity in society – already seems conveniently to present something of which a history might be written, a promising set of correspondences between social realities and artistic practices. The cultural historicism of contemporary scholarship will commonly present accounts which depend in one way or another on this paradigm. However, history too belongs to modernity and is a product of it. History can be set alongside poetry and need not be granted instant analytic priority as something which contains poetry, or to which poetry in some simple sense belongs.

The relationship of poetry to history can be viewed under a variety of rubrics. Setting aside questions of reception, these include the poet, the poetic oeuvre (a poem or poems), and poetry itself as the speculative category in which the possibilities of this art and these works are mapped in terms of their social situation. It is plain that the speculative category 'poetry' will produce a notion of the social situation of poetry which may never have been available to any particular poet, and which might never have been plainly

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