Introduction:
"The captivating spell of the past"

> The past will have been worked through only when the causes of
> what happened then have been eliminated. Only because the causes
> continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this
> day unbroken.[1]
>
> – Theodor Adorno

> [S]hock and loss have been common responses. But we must then go
> beyond them to some crucial distinctions. Take the hardest first: the
> discovery in ourselves, and in our relations with others, that we have
> been more effectively incorporated into the deepest structures of this
> now dying order than it was ever, while it was strong, our habit to
> think or even suspect.[2]
>
> – Raymond Williams

MODERNIST PATCHING

It is uncanny (in all of the unease-producing senses of the word) to think
that the catastrophes and atrocities that are current news as I write this
introduction are likely to have been superseded by new disasters and fresh
outrages by the time the book goes to press. To cite, for example, the
tsunami that hit Sri Lanka in December 2004, or hurricane Katrina which
flooded New Orleans in August 2005, or the earthquake that struck
Kashmir and Pakistan two months later, is to risk obsolescence. For
the majority of people who were not directly affected, those events are
now remembered (if at all) as anniversaries. Similarly, the epicenters of
human-made violence – war, terrorism, military repression – have shifted
from New York to Afghanistan, Bali, Iraq, Chechnya, Madrid, London,
Lebanon, Myanmar, and Turkey in the space of six years. This is not
to say that the anguish of those devastated by natural disaster, traumatized
by terror attacks, or brutalized by war has abated because our front
pages are filled with stories of violence and suffering from the next new
calamity. Rather, I am describing what might be called a surrogation
effect in the consciousness of onlookers, as one disaster supplants the

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previous one as a sign of humanitarian crisis requiring immediate redress. As Joseph Roach suggests, however, surrogation is never complete, and traces of the old supplanted object remain in the performances of the new.[3] The surrogation effect ensures that consciousness of a new disaster does not overwrite the old like a new computer file being written onto the finite memory of a hard drive. Quite the contrary – the new file in human or collective memory exists alongside, or is imbricated with, the memory of the old. The old file, to continue the computer metaphor, is not overwritten by material from the new, but is nevertheless changed – patched – because of its relation to the new. The "Great War," for example, became World War I only after the war in Europe from 1939 to 1945 gave a sense of seriality to the two very different conflicts. The "Gulf War" of 1991, similarly, became the "First Gulf War" after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The new event restructures our understanding of the old, even as the old informs our perception of the new.

The concept of "patching" is an intriguing metaphor for the workings of (old-fashioned) human memory because the patch – a bit of new code that inserts itself into an already existing program in order to shore up security vulnerabilities or to smooth out conflicts that prevent certain operations from running properly – does more than cover over an existing gap; it changes the very functioning of the program. The patch and the virus, then, work by the same mechanism. Their difference is in their effects. One enhances the system's functioning in the present, and the other causes the system to operate in excess of its capacities, so that its memory becomes so overloaded that it ceases to function effectively. This is one way that theorists describe the workings of ordinary memory and traumatic memory, which overwhelms the psyche. For now, I would like to resist the lure of that analogy and focus on what the concept of patching might tell us about the relationality of past and present in more general terms: what it means to live on in a present that is shaped by past events. To understand the past in a relational sense is thus not simply to know what came before, but to know something about how one comes to function in the present. As Edward Said notes, "there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present."[4]

Said's epidemiological analogy – the language of "quarantine" implying the threat of the present becoming infected by the past – is not unique. Adorno takes up the metaphor of contagion in "Working through the Past," suggesting that post-World War II efforts to make anti-Semites

"aware of the mechanisms that cause racial prejudice within them" would include isolating the "propaganda tricks" that foster race hatred so that they could be known and used as "a kind of vaccine."[5] (H.D., writing at roughly the same time [1958] as Adorno, uses a similar language of "inoculation" to describe her own efforts to work through her past connections to Ezra Pound.) In Said's formulation, the past (the imperial past) is like the patch or viral code that continues to function in the present; it is part of the operating system of a present that is geopolitically different from the past, but nevertheless saturated with its effects. As Said explains, "although that era [of "high nineteenth-century imperialism"] clearly had an identity all of its own, the meaning of the imperial past is not totally contained within it, but has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology, and policy still exercises tremendous force."[6] In the same vein, Paul Gilroy argues that "the political conflicts which characterize [contemporary] multicultural socie-ties can take on a very different aspect if they are understood to exist firmly in a context supplied by imperial and colonial history . . . the imperial and colonial past continues to shape political life in the over-developed – but-no-longer-imperial countries."[7]

In a different, but contiguous, context I analyze the persistence of modernism in contemporary responses to war, terror, and trauma. A set of discourses that crystallized during a time of escalating loss, retribution, and violence from 1914 to 1946, modernism did not end neatly with the end of World War II. Read as a whole century, rather than as two halves separated by the war, the arc of the twentieth century might be imagined as parabola-shaped, with World War II at the vertex of a curve that begins and ends with uncannily symmetrical constellations of troubling social formations, from xenophobic nationalism to state-sponsored homopho-bia, to interethnic violence. Because modernism has been with us for over a century and does not promise to become obsolete in the near future, understanding its persistence is instructive for twenty-first-century readers facing the ethical and political complications of widespread suffering and loss.

If the wounds of the early twentieth century promise to remain with us – not metaphorically, but actually – examining modernist strategies of resilience may help us to understand these wounds from the perspective of the *longue durée*. Early twentieth-century writers such as Stein, Woolf, and H.D. thus provide conceptual resources for living in the midst of loss and violence. Similarly, twenty-first-century postimperial British writers such

as Hanif Kureishi and Pat Barker offer frameworks for understanding the current resurgence of violence and loss haunting the United States, Britain's successor to imperial power.

The impetus of this book is therefore to learn something from the way modernist writers and thinkers grappled with the world-shaping and world-shattering events that marked the first half of the twentieth century. Understanding modernism as a constellation of discourses about widespread loss and violence has the benefit of circumventing definitional debates about modernist orthodoxies – high or low, early or late, radical or reactionary, populist or elitist, luddite or technophilic. Sidestepping such debates, I analyze the function of (and the felt need for) apocalyptic rhetoric during times of terrible loss and devastation, such as the air raids of World War II. In the wake of such events, it is especially important to recognize the rhetorical patterns available for speaking about large-scale collective trauma, and to help elucidate the "collateral" effects of those forms. These rhetorical patterns occur in a variety of modernist works, from H.D.'s and Stein's experimental prose to the long poems *Four Quartets* and *Trilogy*, to Woolf's memoirs and novels, to contemporary cultural productions that recirculate "patched" forms of modernism.

In general (although *Trilogy* presents a notable exception), Woolf, H.D., and Stein are wary of triumphant or transcendent redescriptions of trauma. Their writing questions the construction of believing, heroic, sacrificial, even fascist, subjects willing to fight and die in order to belong to a larger collective entity. To take these three writers as exemplars of modernism is thus to characterize modernism as a resistant, even resilient cultural formation, rather than a cynical and ironic one. This stance may seem a bit heretical, given that the usual suspects in a study of modernism generally include Eliot, Pound, Conrad, Joyce, and *maybe* Woolf, Stein, and/or H.D. I center my analysis on the latter three rather than the former four precisely because Woolf, Stein, and H.D. – "queer" women whose citizen status (as Woolf reminds us in *Three Guineas*) could be trumped by marriage or nullified by heterosexism – occupy the position of "*metics*," subjects who belong, but not quite fully, to a culture. As I argue below, *metic* sensibility offers an alternative to forms of cosmopolitanism that are complicit with imperial and/or elite privilege. Eliot and Pound, less marginalized than H.D., Stein, or Woolf, enjoyed full membership in Anglo-American culture of the early twentieth century, and thus are less central to a modernism infused with *metic* sensibility. Conrad and Joyce, both postcolonial expatriates, were, on the other hand, closer to *metic* status. A longer study would have included chapters on both. My focus

here, however, is primarily on reading H.D., Stein, and Woolf as *metics* by virtue of their gender and sexuality who wrote in a geopolitical context permeated by trauma, bloodshed, and imperial unraveling.

In addition to contending with the shattering events (war, revolution, genocide) that marked the new century, modernist thinkers were faced with a more gradual shift (not unconnected to percussive eruptions of war, revolution, and racism) in the status of Europe as the imperial "center" of the world. "By 1914," as Said notes, "Europe held a grand total of roughly 85 percent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths."[8] As Jed Esty notes in his study of late modernism, the erosion of the British empire coincided with "the putative death of English modernism."[9] For Esty, this relationship is complex, rather than a simple chain of causation. Nevertheless, Esty argues that the later modernism of Woolf, Eliot, and Forster abandoned the "metropolitan perception" of high modernism for an "anthropological turn" toward "little" England. This "anthropological turn" was, for Esty, a precursor to the inward focus of British cultural studies, which urged the examination of Englishness as a particular object of ethnographic attention, rather than as the deracinated ideal of universal "civilized" subjectivity. Therefore, according to Esty, cultural studies and late modernism are both genealogically connected to British imperialism and imperial decline.

Esty's attempt to link modernism to the development of cultural studies is a continuation of a long-standing critical conversation about the political investments of modernist literature and culture. We can trace the debate about modernist politics at least as far back as "The Leaning Tower," Woolf's 1940 response to younger writers' critiques of Bloomsbury's alleged quietism. The Leavises and the *Scrutiny* group, as Brenda Silver demonstrates, further contributed to this characterization of modernism as alienating and excessively highbrow.[10] And Raymond Williams, although an admirer of Bloomsbury, furthered this association of modernism with formal, rather than political, concerns by attributing the creation of a "modern absolute" – a high modernist aesthetic style that outlived its conditions of cultivation – to the historical development of the imperial metropolis.[11] Between Williams, who argues for the persistence of a reified "modern absolute" in the late twentieth century, and Esty, who argues for a turn from metropolitan modernism to "little Englandism" and cultural studies, there is a third position which I endeavor to trace throughout this book – the historical development and redeployment (in patched form) of a modernism that is not

"absolute," but rather dynamic and co-evolving with (neo)imperialism and its violent effects.

The either/or view of modernism as reified and absolute or frustrated into provincial retrenchment depends upon imagining modernism from the vantage of Eliot or Joyce, rather than Woolf or H.D., or (to use the categories formulated by Bonnie Kime Scott), from that of the "men of 1914," rather than the "women of 1928."[12] Williams, for example, associates the metropolitan orientation of modernism with alienation or with "an individual lonely and isolated within the crowd" of "strangers."[13] Esty links this apparent isolation to "a cosmopolitan humanist language supported by English cultural hegemony . . . a European artistic elite increasingly bound to itself and split from its constituent societies."[14] In the case of Woolf, arguably the most prominent of English modernists and certainly the most prominent of the "women of 1928," these characterizations don't ring true. Woolf was both a cosmopolitan and a *metic*. As both Christine Froula and Jessica Berman argue, Woolf's cosmopolitanism was not entirely aligned with "English cultural hegemony," but was rather infused with her anti-establishment political thought. Berman, for example, suggests that:

Woolf's writings engage themselves directly with the political crisis in Great Britain in the period from 1929 to 1931, and with the entwined discourses of community and action so often in question in this period. In *Orlando* and *The Waves* in particular we can see the way in which narrative action becomes praxis, the expansion of the subject substitutes for the consolidation of personal political power, and the construction of alternative models of community pushes a cosmopolitan ideal.[15]

Froula, moreover, challenges the characterization of Bloomsbury as remote, disengaged, and elite, instead reading its "enlightenment project" as deeply political: "Integrating aesthetics with internationalist perspectives on economic, political, and social institutions at a moment when the *sensus communis* was under urgent debate, Bloomsbury challenges myths of modernism as an antirealism 'remote from the sphere of everyday practices.'"[16]

Bloomsbury's political values notwithstanding, cosmopolitanism cannot entirely escape the charge of elitism. Only the privileged classes can afford to move from metropolis to metropolis, to speak with the urbane knowingness of frequent travelers, to cross borders without worrying that a rifle barrel, detention facility, or vulnerable refugee camp awaits them on the other side. One person's mobility might be another person's

migrancy; one person's *belonging to the world* might be another person's *exile*. The term "cosmopolitan," derived as Martha C. Nussbaum tells us from the Greek "*kosmou politês*" or "world citizen," does not quite describe the differential vulnerability of border crossers, world travelers, and stateless persons, precisely because the term *politês* implies a form of citizenship, a sense of full belonging in the imaginary community of the global *polis*.[17]

The *metic*, on the other hand, is not quite a citizen of the world, and not quite a citizen of a nation. In ancient Greece, the *metic* was officially designated an outsider dependent upon the goodwill of a citizen sponsor in order to remain within the *polis*. Thus he or she operated within the *polis* without being fully enfranchised by it. Significantly, Antigone, an important figure of resistance for Woolf, calls herself a *metic* after being sentenced by Creon, thus calling attention to both her statelessness and expulsion from the familial.[18] As an expression of this *metic* sensibility, Woolf's often cited declaration that "as a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" takes on a resonance that is not quite a claim to world citizenship (*TG*, p. 109).[19] Far from advocating uncomplicated cosmopolitanism, Woolf resignifies a negative condition – a gendered sense of un-belonging (because marriage trumps nationality) – into inspiration for affiliation across borders and account-ability to the world beyond the provincialism of one's geographic location.

As I mention above, Williams characterizes the modernist as "an individual lonely and isolated within the crowd."[20] Esty extrapolates from this characterization an image of the modernist as an alienated artist trapped on one side of a "schism between art and society."[21] Woolf belies this characterization as well, as she certainly was not a writer who found art at odds with social relevance. In *Three Guineas*, for example (a text that grapples with the pressing question, "how are we to prevent war?"), Woolf considers the "intellectual liberty" of the writer to be crucial to combating militarism (*TG*, pp. 3, 97). In that text, Woolf exhorts her readers to "Go to the pubic galleries and look at pictures; turn on the wireless and rake down music from the air; enter any of the public libraries which are now free to all" in order to find (for example, the poetry of Sophocles) "a most profound analysis by a poet, who is a psychologist in action, of the effect of power and wealth upon the soul" (*TG*, p. 81). Whether or not we agree with Woolf's analysis of *Antigone*, we can hardly say that her sentiment is that of an artist who finds a great "schism between art and society."[22] Indeed, as Anna Snaith, Froula, and Alex Zwerdling (among

many others) have noted, Woolf was very engaged with the political concerns of the day, had a wide and varied social network of friends ranging well beyond the artistic elite, taught at a working-class college (one of the activities Williams credits for the formation of cultural studies), and corresponded with a great number of people from positions high and low.[23]

Finally, Esty's suggestion that Woolf's "late modernist" works are part of a larger cultural turn toward pastoral Englishness, as an antidote to the unease caused by imperial unraveling, bears some scrutiny. For Esty, Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, "uses the pageant to recast history as heritage – as the rehearsal of familiar gestures, songs and scenes. Woolf (like Forster) struggles to break narrative momentum by posing insular culture against the rapid transformations of capitalist modernity, enduring pastoral folkways against perpetual Hegelian struggle."[24] This seems to me a Streatfield-ish reading of *Between the Acts*, which depicts insularity as an impossible fantasy. Esty reads Lucy Swithin's contemplation of a prehistoric European continent undivided by the English Channel as "the starting point for a comforting narrative about the birth of culture as an island story."[25] The "aeroplanes" that cast their shadow over Reverend Streatfield's attempt to sum up Miss LaTrobe's pageant, however, suggest a less nostalgic reading of Lucy's fantasy, reminding us of the proximity of England to the continent (*BA*, p. 200). England may yet be an island, but in the age of aeronautics, it is no longer insular.

ARTICULATING LOSS

While Britain's shift from empire to "little England" is important to chart, it is equally important to register the effects of imperial migration (from Europe to the USA), mutation (from an empire of colonies and dominions to an empire of bases), and translation (from nation-based imperialism to globalization).[26] In a similar vein, modernism, as a literary-historical period, might, like the "age of empire," be over, and yet the meaning of the modernist past, to paraphrase Said, "is not totally contained within" its periodization. To write after World War II is to write in the wake of a conflict that killed an estimated 50 million people – half of them civilians – and with the knowledge of genocide perpetrated in the center of "civilized," modern, industrialized, philosophically "enlightened" Europe.

Theodor Adorno refers to the magnitude of this brutal knowledge in his frequently misquoted lines, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is

barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today."[27] Taken in the context of his full argument in "Cultural Criticism and Society," Adorno's comment is not a moratorium on poetry, but rather an indictment of criticism that reifies a "high" or "pure" culture purportedly unsullied by contact with ideology, politics, or the masses. Earlier in the same essay, Adorno argues that "cultural criticism" misrecognizes material suffering in the name of aesthetic universalisms: "Where there is despair and measureless misery, he [the cultural critic] sees only spiritual phenomena, the state of man's consciousness, the decline of norms. By insisting on this, criticism is tempted to forget the unutterable, instead of striving, however impotently, so that man may be spared."[28] This transvaluation reifies "culture" as static and elite, at the very moment that western Europe's "presupposed intellectual progress" was fundamentally called into question by the barbarism of National Socialism. If so-called pure culture is civilizing, then how can one explain the depravity of Nazism and its death camps? One cannot, and that impossibility unmasks the civilizing pretensions of high culture and the cultural criticism that placed it above ideology, politics, and everyday struggles for material existence.

It is tempting to say, then, that modernism faltered at this moment in history precisely because its "civilizing" projects (imperial and domestic) were shown up by the colossal brutality of the death camps and the bystanders who turned a blind eye to their existence. On the left, Bloomsbury's faith in the equality and justice-forging potential of "intellectual liberty" seems to have been misplaced, or premature (*TG*, p. 97). On the right, Yeats' and Eliot's belief in the salvific potential of traditional culture seems too tainted by complicity with fascism for one to be at ease with their civilizing impulses. And Pound is perhaps the quintessential example of the arrogant "cultural critic" Adorno critiques. His post-World War II position at the center of his self-proclaimed "Ezuversity" in St. Elizabeth's hospital presents a nightmare version of modernism's transatlantic migration, mutation, and translation from the cosmopolitan urbanity of the imperial metropolis to the formalist isolationism of the New Critical syllabus. If "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," then to award Pound the first Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1948 for his *Pisan Cantos* is in this context the epitome of barbarism, the apotheosis of cultural criticism's descent into sterile formalisms that "forget the unutterable."

The persistence of modernism is important to track precisely because there *is* poetry *and* barbarism after Auschwitz. To chart the migration of the meanings of modernism is to depart from the rarified and reifying

"cultural criticism" so fervently condemned by Adorno, and to move in
the direction of cultural studies – albeit a cultural studies that is imagined
differently from the "island story" that Esty tells. Describing a method-
ology for cultural studies of modernism, Rita Felski (following Stuart
Hall, Larry Grossberg, and Ernesto Laclau) describes "articulation" as:

> a theory of social correspondences, non-correspondences, and contradictions or
> alternatively as a theory of how contexts are made, unmade, and remade . . .
> Articulation thus seeks to explain how segments of the social field may join
> together to form temporary unities without resorting to a view of the social whole
> as an expressive totality whose essential features are mirrored in every one of
> its parts.[29]

Tracing modernist articulations of loss, violence, and their attendants –
trauma, consolation, and retribution – illuminates the contours of our
own encounters with imperial "blowback" in this already bloody first
decade of the twenty-first century.[30] To attempt this genealogy is some-
what different from suggesting that we learn from the past as exemplum
(the notion that history provides a "case study" for the present), for it is
clear that modernist articulations (from attempts to liken the "war on
terror" to the war against the Nazis, to neofascism, to renewed calls for
cosmopolitanism) are still with us, even if their correspondences and
contexts have shifted. The modernist past is thus not an inert object to
be studied in its alterity, but rather a "structure of feeling" (to use
Williams' phrase) functioning in a "patched" present still troubled by
modernist constellations of personal trauma, militarized violence, and
"imperial loss."[31]

   The third term, "imperial loss" requires some explanation. It fits in the
category of what Freud calls "loss of a more ideal kind."[32] For the
melancholic, this loss might be unarticulated, unavowed, or not under-
stood fully. As Freud explains, "the object has not perhaps actually died,
but has become lost as an object of love," or "a loss of the kind has been
experienced, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost," or the
"patient" "knows whom he has lost but not *what* it is he has lost in
them."[33] Imperial loss might then be the loss of the idea of British rule (or
American world dominance) as an object of love, or admiration, or pride.
Williams himself indicates this loss of ideal in his "Afterword to *Modern
Tragedy*," noting that, "when a social order is dying, it grieves for itself."[34]

   Gilroy continues this thread, arguing that "since [1945] the life of the
[British] nation has been dominated by an inability even to face, never
mind actually mourn, the profound change in circumstances and moods