Introduction
Modernism against the Liberal World

This book is about modernism's relation to the reconstruction of the liberal world after 1919. Once we knew how literary modernists saw that liberal world: as the Enemy. When T. S. Eliot calls interwar Britain "worm-eaten with Liberalism," when Ezra Pound remarks in *Guide to Kulchur* that "liberalism is a running sore," when even W. H. Auden proclaims the failure of interwar liberal political institutions, they spoke for a modernist consensus: interwar liberal world order, with its commitments to progressive democratic reform, promise of rational relations between nations, and hopes for a cosmopolitan perpetual peace, merely veiled the rot of the old bourgeois order.[1] Scholars thus traditionally understood the modernist relationship to liberal interwar government as either a directly antagonistic anti-liberalism or a displaced cultural agonism.[2]

Our contemporary evaluation of modernism's relation to the postwar liberal world lacks the clarity of that assumed antipathy. Recent scholarship has articulated the variety of modernism's liberal entanglements, prominently in the lasting groundswell of scholarship on Virginia Woolf, the Bloomsbury group, and British feminist writers. Vincent Sherry's essential account of the modernist reception of liberal rhetoric describes how the reworking of liberal syllogisms generated modernist poetics, and work by Michael Szalay and others has uncovered the multitude of ways that modernists inhabited liberal institutions.[3] A larger institutional turn in modernist studies has decisively moved toward thinking about state institutions, international law, liberal politics, and literary aesthetics as interconnected rather than divided intellectual topographies.[4] We have conclusively moved past the paradigm of an antinomian modernism essentially opposed to liberal political commitments, as earlier work moved past the conflation of modernist politics with fascism.[5] Modernism has been articulated not just to imperial and neo-imperial discourses and archives, but to the liberal governmental order that connects imperial and colonial rule to metropolitan autonomy.[6]

What these waves of reconstructive scholarship still leave unclarified, however, is the question of modernism's specific response to liberal institutions and ideas between the wars: how were modernists addressed by postwar liberal institutions, and by the formalization of a new liberal world order after 1919? In what ways did they adapt the postwar liberal language of pedagogy, paternalism, and self-determination, particularly within the new Mandate territories? How did they respond to late interwar failure of liberal institutions, premises, justifications, and finally liberal democracy itself? One century later, when the liberal international order is once again in crisis, when a once-settled neoliberal consensus has come under sustained attack, these are vital questions for the past and the present of modernist politics.

This book traces the arc of a difficult intimacy between modernism and liberal world order between the wars. Modernists ordered the interwar liberal world and were ordered by it, in my account, even in modes of resistance and refusal. Some writers founded international governmental institutions, participated in the daily life of international governance, and planned aesthetic and political projects informed by liberal internationalist ideas. Other modernists vehemently opposed all these projects, rejecting their premises and promises. Modernism confronted different liberalisms, as liberal world order intersected differently with English, Irish, Anglo-American, Francophone, and Black Atlantic literary modernities. The literary relationship to political liberalism after Versailles extended far beyond the traditional European capitals of modernism, to Beijing, Harlem, West Africa, Egypt, India, and South Africa, and to "liberal" wars in China and South Africa. In all these settings, interwar liberal order provided a geopolitics and geopoetics crucial to a variety of literary modernities.

A global history of modernism simply must account for the moment of liberal reconstruction around 1919. Recall that Leonard Woolf drafted the first plans for international governance after the Great War, with Virginia Woolf's help, and that their Cambridge mentor G. L. Dickinson named and planned the liberal internationalist institution that resulted, the League of Nations. The philosopher Henri Bergson formed an institute under League auspices, led in part by the symbolist poet Paul Valéry, with the collaboration of Thomas Mann. In his day job at Lloyds, T. S. Eliot processed the Versailles war indemnities, while writing a poem that evinces its debt to the failed peace. Anglophone and Francophone Pan-Africanists converged on Paris in 1919: W. E. B. Du Bois wrote that the Paris Peace

Conference would "center the destinies of mankind" as he planned the First Pan-African Congress there.[7] Chinese literature marks its modern vernacular epoch from the day student protests broke out against the terms of the Peace Treaty, May Fourth, 1919. The contest over liberal world order in all of these cases appears intrinsic to any literary history that would couple the vast territories of the colonized, the Mandated, and the occupied to the imperial metropoles.

Given its reach and importance, why have liberal interwar order and its institutions so often been absent from our accounts of modernism's political projects?[8] Even after feminist critics, and later the New Modernism, reclaimed a variety of New Woman novelists, queer cosmopolitans, and associated Bloomsbury figures, even after waves of work on feminist, liberal, and transnational modernisms, we remain leery of interwar liberals. Too political for the New Critics, too colonial for postcolonial critique, they have been consigned to the status of a belated Victorianism or, equally bad, a premonition of the neoliberal and neocolonial world to come. Vincent Sherry has argued that the anti-elitist revolt in the New Modernist studies obscures the response of key modernists to liberalism as the "master language in collapse," a collapse to which Eliot, Pound, and company responded with "an attempt at their own answering mastery."[9] Jane Garrity has noted the significant disinterest within the new transnational modernist studies for compromised semi-colonial writers like Winifred Holtby, Rosamond Lehmann, or Gertrude Bell.[10] Yet recent work in modernist studies and allied fields has decisively moved toward thinking about state institutions, international law, liberal politics, and literary aesthetics as interconnected rather than opposed fields.

This book proposes three connected strategies for reading modernism's relationship to the liberal world and its institutions. First, it places modernist history in the framework of the new world history of 1919–1939, from the May Fourth Movement in China to the fascist invasion of Ethiopia and the ensuing response of the African diaspora. It thus argues for the implication of European and non-European modernisms within the global reconsideration of the period now underway in modernist literary and historical studies, supporting its case with an expanded historical and literary archive.[11] Second, the book develops a newly materialist mode of reading liberal order within literary texts, a reading influenced by the work of Bruno Latour, Cornelia Vismann, Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Kafka, and work in media studies and "paperwork studies" devoted to the analysis of the material mediations of official political

power.[12] How does liberal world order get imposed, transcribed, enacted, deferred? Through what mechanisms, institutional forms, filing cabinets, secretariats? How is power and agency displaced within the official technologies of liberal rule? These key questions bring us to rather different agents, actions, and readings of interwar liberalism than those found in our standard accounts of the relation between a text and its political world.

Third, the book reflects throughout on the occlusion of interwar liberal aesthetics and institutions in the creation of the modernist canon, persistent omissions within the current self-understanding of modernist studies as a discipline to which I return in the coda. This occlusion derives from the figuring aversions of the key anti-liberal modernists, the inheritance of that aversion by the first generation of left and right anti-liberal criticism, and the elision of certain strands of modernist engagement with liberal order. Interwar liberal order and its institutions were crucial political actors for literary modernities within and without the Northern metropoles, and an essential part of the politics of modernism in its canonical, non-canonical, and critical formations. We need both new critical genealogies and new methods of reading liberal order if we are to recover these actors and these histories.

Definitions: Liberal World Order, Liberalism, and Interwars Modernism

When we say "liberalism," we should know what we mean, as Helena Rosenblatt notes in her revisionist history of that political concept.[13] Just so for liberal world order and "liberal international order," widely used and widely misunderstood terms of political art. Because the idea of liberal international order is a historical achievement of the modernist period, and even of the modernists themselves, we require some analytic definitions and historical context. (Readers uninterested in the *long durée* evolution of liberalism may desire to skip to the next section.)

From the commencement of Anglo-American modernist criticism, "order" serves as a mediating term of art in modernism's own political self-description. "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth," T. S. Eliot's response to the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1922, inaugurates modernist criticism through an appeal to myth on the part of a highly self-mythologizing group. "In using the myth [of the *Odyssey*], in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him," Eliot writes.[14]

> They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. [The mythical method] is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. . . . Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward that order and form which Mr. Aldington so earnestly desires. And only those who have won their own discipline in secret and without aid, in a world which offers very little assistance to that end, can be of any use in furthering this advance.

This is among the most famous passages in modernist literary criticism. Yet we often fail to note the specific "contemporary history" which is indicated by Eliot in 1922: not just the catastrophe of the war, but also the anarchy of the postwar world still shaken by mass refugee movements, ethnic cleansing, and boundary wars, even as the period of liberal reconstruction had formally commenced. Nor do we note Eliot's particular position within the post-Versailles order, in his role as a "little banker" at Lloyd's adjudicating debts and reparations. Modernist order here responds to liberal crisis as a necessary supplement, a method that would shape anarchy.

Liberalism and liberal institutions have often been left out of modernist accounts because of the sheer difficulty of delimiting the liberal world, interwar or otherwise. Liberalism is a slippery term: neither left nor right, neither cleanly of the past nor comfortably part of the present. When we engage liberalism as a concept, we are immediately confronted by the multiplication of overlapping and conflicting descriptions, the politicization of disputed political ideas, and our own historical implication in the political concept we want to define. This difficult hermeneutic circle shapes the horizon of our political understanding and the shape of our political readings. Histories of liberalism all begin from some relation to "liberalism" in the present, whether expressly (as in Edmund Fawcett's apologia for British liberalism) or implicitly (as in Pierre Manent's counter-history).[15] Helena Rosenblatt's exhaustive work on the history of "liberal" in political thought challenges some standard formulations: "liberal" connoted generosity and nobility long before the nineteenth century, for example in association with the republican civic virtues espoused by Cicero.[16] The original "liberal" parties were Spanish and French, not British, and they allied themselves with a "liberal" Protestant Christianity, not against religion.[17] Even mid-nineteenth-century liberals had widely divergent views on laissez-faire economics, government intervention, and

the duties of the state: "classical liberalism" is thus an invented tradition of the twentieth century.[18] The progressive development of the "free individual," that supposed signature of the liberals, always came accompanied with social duties and public morals. The historical conjunction of liberalism with slavery is not only possible but necessary, as Ian Baucom has argued.[19] Domenico Losurdo commences his counter-history of liberalism with the noted "liberal," white supremacist, and apologist for slavery John C. Calhoun.[20] Nor was liberalism always cleanly distinguishable from its others: liberal conservativism and liberal socialism are intelligible positions for Edmund Burke and L. T. Hobhouse respectively.

The ambivalent engagement of modernism with ideas of the state, citizenship, and "national character" arises in part out of the "crisis of liberalism" in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, when older liberal notions of universal state citizenship clashed with the increasing emphasis on the ethnic and racial unity of the nation, a clash which would have catastrophic consequences in the aftermath of Versailles.[21] Liberalism, for the modernist avant-garde in particular, was both part of the old Victorian world they set out to explode, and the escapable framework outside of which their provocations were meaningless. In modernist studies, the complexity of this dialectic has resulted in an overreliance on such simplifying figures as the Enemy (as in Wyndham Lewis), the Enclosure (as in one lineage of Marxist ideology critique), the Leviathan of governmentality, or the "Liberal Tradition," understood variously as originating in Locke, Hobbes, Hegel, even Machiavelli.[22] The avant-garde against liberalism: we find ourselves in the antagonism before we know it, and that unvoiced opposition structures our thinking on art's relation to politics and the social world. No amount of objective historical work will let us out of the hermeneutic circle: we are within the problem we want to analyze.

Liberal world order, by contrast, here refers to a specific interwar project. Liberal world order has a grandiose ring because it was a grandiose project: Woodrow Wilson and other important actors envisioned something like the end of global history in a Kantian perpetual peace after the "war to end war." "We were preparing not Peace only, but Eternal Peace," notes Bloomsbury intimate Harold Nicholson in his diplomatic memoir of Versailles.[23] This first sense of liberal world order centers on the active political project of 1919–1922, the period in which the wartime Allies formed the institutions and laws that embodied interwar order, exactly the period when the most canonical works of Anglophone high modernism were under composition.

Within the field of international relations, the liberal world order of the interwar period has a precise definition: the system of autonomous nation-states set out by the Versailles Treaty, the institutions that manage those states, and the development of an international law that binds and defines them.[24] Interwar liberal order was primarily a British and French project, one that reached across the global territories of the Mandate system administered by the League of Nations, into the Commonwealth nations and colonial territories of the British Empire, as well as extraterritorial "concessions" in Shandong, Shanghai, and elsewhere. The idea that there was such a thing as "international order" that required institutions, laws, and an academic discipline called "International Relations" was itself an important invention of the modernist period. Bloomsbury intimate G. L. Dickinson's book *The International Anarchy* (1926) and E. H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939) are crucial documents of the "idealist" and "realist" approaches to international order, respectively, approaches that survive into the next century. This first cluster of definitions centers on institutions and laws, and clearly leaves out almost everything essential to both base and superstructure: culture, economy, relations of trade and force. For Leonard Woolf and the interwar founders of international government, the legal-institutional definition leaves out the need for an international culture, or "international mind," that would form the necessary support for supranational norms and rules. For T. S. Eliot and conservative theorists, as differently for later postcolonial critics, these institutional definitions leave out the centrality of Europe and the "European mind" to any project of interwar order.[25]

Anglo-American liberal international order, after its reinstitution in 1945, defines itself as a coherent set of interlocking rules and norms, as in this description by the international relations scholar G. John Ikenberry: "Open markets, international institutions, cooperative security, democratic community, progressive change, collective problem solving, shared sovereignty, the rule of law," all under American hegemonic leadership.[26] For Immanuel Wallerstein and world-systems theory, as for Marxist materialists, this self-conception of the liberal bourgeois order erases precisely the relations of trade and inequality that support it: the systematicity of the world-system must be found in its economic foundations, not its institutional cladding. Liberal order, between the wars as later, was simply the capitalists' club, liberal institutions their clubhouses. That belief would be central to the competing Third Communist International between 1919 and 1935, as it would for many anti-colonial and Pan-African modernists. For Carl Schmitt in *Nomos of the Earth*, working

on a different scale, the period between the wars was the last breath of a Europe-centered era of liberal state sovereignty that had persisted since the Renaissance.[27] Deciding on the nature and duration of the "world order" at hand is already a deeply contested and political act. But no definition of interwar world order can do without the term "liberal," either as epithet or allegiance.

Let us concretize the familiar abstractions "liberalism" and the "liberal tradition" through a thought experiment, adapted from the political historian Michael Freeden.[28] Imagine a sheaf of papers laid one atop another, each containing a different liberal message: freedom, liberty, equality, natural rights, property rights, the national right to self-determination, and so forth. Each sheet contains a mixture of transparent and semi-opaque holes, some covered with wax paper. Through the top sheet we can read some of the lower sheets, but other parts are rendered fuzzy or obscured entirely. Then too, the sheets have been frequently rearranged, cut apart, with marks of erasure or revision. The fundamental sheet of paper, if we were to dig to the bottom, reminds us that liberalism comes into English from the Latin for "free man" in the fourteenth century, and refers first to a social distinction. The "liberal arts" were those appropriate to "men of independent means and assured social position," against the mechanical arts of the lower classes: therefore the first specific freedom of liberalism is the freedom from labor.[29] For hundreds of years, "liberal" keeps this association with aristocratic values and morals. Only much later in our sheaf of papers, after a period in the eighteenth century when liberal implies the licentious and unorthodox, can we find a layer of usage in which the term refers to the political positions of early nineteenth-century Whigs and Radicals.[30]

The first and most permanent strata of liberal paperwork – Freeden calls it "layer one liberalism" – refers to the establishment of constitutional states, natural rights, social equality, and the simultaneous freedom and constraint of liberal government as theorized by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. A second layer, "classical" economic liberalism, emphasizes free markets, laissez-faire, and imperial expansion, enlisting the state to secure and expand economic liberalism across the globe through the "civilizing" work of liberal empire. A third layer of mid-nineteenth-century liberalism, exemplified in Britain by J. S. Mill's political and personal writings, aims at the progressive maturation of the individual whose identity unfolds only in and through time: the protagonist of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman, in fiction, and in political theory, the Hegelian liberal-nationalist State. Yet another layer of liberal paperwork outlines the famous "New

Liberalism," centered on a notion of society as an organic, harmonious whole, with individual and collective ends secured by the active participation of the state, the liberalism of L. T. Hobhouse and Mr. Ramsey in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, despite his Tory affiliations. And the coversheet of the whole bundle is the contested liberal present, in which new forms of social equality, identity formation, and power compete in what can only be called a radically expansive, yet hardly unconstrained market of ideas, identities, and affiliations.[31]

Imagine as well that liberals continuously rearrange the order and arrangement of the sheets, except for the sheet concerned with liberty and rights. That early sheet can be seen through all the other layers of the liberal tradition, but other layers will be concealed or brought to light depending on how we arrange this stack of liberal papers. Later sheets with messages about market competition or social equality will be relatively emphasized or diminished. And, finally, liberals may just tear up and throw away one of the sheets, leaving a "thinner" version of the liberal tradition. Liberals thus compose a progressive tradition imagined as continuous with the present, but built in fact on "a composite of accumulated, discarded, and retrieved [historical] strata" that exist in intricate, interacting layers within any actual moment of liberal ideology. Though liberals imagine their political ideas as a unity developing over time, in fact liberalism undergoes fits of change, radical transformations, periods of equilibria punctuated.[32] Sheets of liberal paperwork are transposed, inverted, occluded, erased, in the production of the liberal tradition itself.

The utility of this paper-sheaf metaphor for an account of liberal world governance lies in its union of the material life of governance – paperwork itself, made into the bearer of history – with the ideological tradition that was always supposed to be beyond the base materials of governance, determining it remotely. As with the Foucaultian reclamation of Bentham's Panopticon, the vehicle here offers itself as a new theoretical tenor: the liberal theory and practice of governance, on this model, operates much like the stack of paper above, available for reshuffling, cutting, or erasure. Liberal order *as* paperwork, procedure, but also as an implied narrative of progress that continually rewrites its own internal composition. This materialist notion of liberal order will be essential to the argument of the book: liberalism not only as an ideology, a discourse, a tradition of political ideas, but also as a set of figures, forms, and mechanisms – the parliaments, the procedures, the paperwork – that order the interwar world.

But who is doing this shuffling and rewriting of papers? Liberal politicians, economists, and clerks, certainly, but not just as they will. Here the history of liberalism's development in intimate conjunction with the practice of empire, as epitomized by the career of J. S. Mill at the East India Company office, provides a crucial supplement. These are not just any sheaves of paper, nor just any traditions, but rather papers compiled through continual reference to the constitutive outside of the subject of liberal government, the imperial territories and the undeveloped "periphery." The balanced Millsian equilibria of liberty and restraint, political childhood and maturity, import and export, all shaped the language of liberalism inherited by the early twentieth century.[33] A long lineage of liberal economics, from Mills to Keynes, develops in direct official relationship to an imagined Indian economic dependency. In the offices of empire, particularly the India Office familiar to J. S. Mill and John Maynard Keynes, liberal economists develop fundamental notions of the relative roles of the individual, state, and economy. In so doing, liberal paperwork actively mediates the practices of liberal imperialism.

Living liberalism entails negotiating a set of practices, values, norms, and dispositions, as Elaine Hadley, Amanda Anderson, and others have argued for Victorian liberalism. But these political practices and beliefs are often misunderstood, through confusion over the very different economic, political, and philosophical layers of liberal thought. The economic "liberalism" of Adam Smith and the later free-market absolutists of the nineteenth century cannot be simply equated with the strand of social and political liberalism that advocated emancipation from inherited inequality from Rousseau onwards – except perhaps in the writings of economic liberalism's major ideologists, from J. S. Mill to the latest issue of *The Economist.* The apologists for "classical" liberalism, again, intersect inconsistently with the lineage of political philosophy that runs from Hobbes to Hegel to Rawls and Habermas. Nor can even the dominant British political thought of the early to mid nineteenth century be described as dedicated to the "abstract individual" or *homo economicus* as against various collective goals and needs. As Rosenblatt emphasizes, those who made claims for "liberality" or "liberalism" in government always did so within a conception of the duties of the citizen to contribute to the common good, as early as Cicero's *On Duty.*[34] On this view, C. B. Macpherson's famous critique of the liberal tradition as the "political theory of possessive individualism" appears reductive at best.[35]

British intellectual history contains not one but many liberalisms, not one but many practices, as Stefan Collini has argued, even if we engage it