

Introduction

On June 2, 1914, a prominent modernist author wrote in correspondence with a friend, “I think the only re-sourcing of art, re-vivifying it, is to make it more the joint work of man and woman.” While there were definitely more celebrated suggestions for fulfilling the modernist desire for novelty we now associate with Ezra Pound’s phrase “make it new,” few must have sounded so progressive, inspired, and apparently simple all at once.¹ Ironically, few scholars today would be able to guess the remark’s author. Since the early 1970s, critical focus on that author’s misogyny has so tarnished his standing in academia that it is easy to forget he once numbered among modernism’s leading advocates for improving relations between the sexes. Yet if we look at the rest of the paragraph in which he elaborates on his idea, a pontificating voice emerges that should strike many readers as familiar:

I think *the* one thing to do, is for men to have courage to draw nearer to women, expose themselves to them, and be altered by them: and for women to accept and admit men. That is the only way for art and civilisation to get a new life, a new start—by bringing themselves together, men and women—revealing themselves each to the other, gaining great blind knowledge and suffering and joy, which it will take a big further lapse of civilisation to exploit and work out. Because the source of all life and knowledge is in man and woman, and the source of all living is in the interchange and the meeting and mingling of these two: man-life and woman-life, man knowledge and woman-knowledge, man-being and woman-being.

Only one modernist could have employed such hyperbolic language with complete seriousness, described men and women “revealing themselves each to the other” with no intention of titillating, and welcomed the apocalyptic image of “a big further lapse of civilisation” – all in a single paragraph. That author, of course, is D. H. Lawrence.²

Lawrence’s wish for a world made new through dynamic yet conflictual meetings of the sexes encapsulates the main argument of this book.

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I contend that many British, Irish, and US modernists viewed literary collaboration between the sexes as a valuable strategy for energizing art because of the opportunity it provided for men and women to bring their differing perspectives into productive dialogue while harnessing the creative potential of the gendered discord between them. Placing Lawrence's sermon in its historical context reminds us how pressing the need for such innovative strategies seemed to the creative luminaries of his time. Critics often identify 1914 as a key year for modernism, not only because it saw the outbreak of World War I (the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand would occur less than a month after Lawrence's letter) but also because Wyndham Lewis famously pronounced it as marking the ascendance of himself, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce as "the Men of 1914."³ In contrast to Lewis's posture of macho exclusionism, however, Lawrence's desire for men *and* women to create art together emphasizes how, from this early stage in its development, modernism contained an inclusive countercurrent. Moreover, while Lawrence's penchant for extreme positions might lead some to dismiss his call as grandstanding or to regard him as an outlier, his letter epitomizes a vision that a diverse range of writers from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century articulated with similar seriousness and ardor. At the start of their 1886 pamphlet *The Woman Question*, the English socialists Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling asserted that "the treatment of such a question as [the arguments of socialists] is a[t] its best when it is that of a man and a woman thinking and working together."⁴ In a 1902 letter to her friend Violet Dickinson, a young Virginia Woolf described her plan to write "a great play . . . so exciting you'll squirm in your seat" together with her brother-in-law and longtime confidant, Jack Hills, about a man and woman who lead parallel lives, "never meeting—not knowing each other—but all the time you'll feel them come nearer and nearer," revealing that the premise Woolf would develop more than twenty years later into her novel *Mrs. Dalloway* originated from her interest in cross-sex collaboration.⁵ Writing in 1917 to his then-fiancée, Georgie Hyde Lees, W. B. Yeats envisaged that the integration of their work might one day "become a part of the strange legendary life of this country," as if presaging the pair's famous automatic writing sessions that would provide the basis for much of Yeats's great poetry of the 1920s and 1930s.⁶ And in 1940 while composing *Under the Volcano* with his second wife, Margerie Bonner Lowry, Malcolm Lowry felt that the pair had begun to achieve "that very quality of intensity which work in the dark against time . . . has given the Gogols and the Kafkas" and that they might go on to "produce not just one book

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but a large body of work stamped at last with an individual imprint.”⁷ Such ambitious statements reflect a sincere modernist hope for the far-reaching political and aesthetic possibilities that collaboration between women and men might hold. This book aims to document and trace the contours of that pattern of desire by elucidating the collaborative dynamics of several cross-sex literary pairs – some well-known, others less so.

To better appreciate why cross-sex collaboration held such appeal for so many figures, I want to return to Lawrence’s letter, which brings into focus three major facets of my argument that I will develop in subsequent chapters. First, cross-sex collaboration offered a practical way of using gender difference as a source of creative energy. From T. S. Eliot’s description of the seer Tiresias, who was born a man but lived several years as a woman, as the unifying voice of *The Waste Land* to Virginia Woolf’s theory of the androgynous mind in *A Room of One’s Own*, some of the most influential modernist works yearn for a sense of order brought about by meetings of masculine and feminine perspectives. Lawrence’s belief that a “re-sourcing” and consequent “re-vivifying” of art would result from men and women “revealing themselves each to the other” literalizes this desire. Certainly Lawrence’s generalizing about “man-life and woman-life” or “man-being and woman-being” suggests that essentialist notions of gender difference influenced his vision for cross-sex collaboration. Yet he was well acquainted with some of the most advanced feminist thinking available in 1914, largely from his time in the circle of the radical socialist Alice Dax.⁸ His focus on the importance of “woman-knowledge” as distinct from “man knowledge” suggests that he understood at least some aspects of gender to be socially constructed, especially insofar as women’s unequal educational opportunities and rigidly circumscribed marital roles often led them to develop different viewpoints, perceptions, and ways of being from most men. Lawrence’s call for closer interaction between the sexes anticipates that bringing together men’s and women’s different ways of being would open a previously unutilized storehouse of creative potential. As we shall see, many other modernists shared this belief that the meeting of what we now call gender differences made male–female collaboration highly desirable.

Second, both Lawrence and many of his contemporaries viewed shared creative activity between women and men as deeply and positively subversive. Lawrence’s very need to articulate the possibility of such activity reveals how unusual it seemed in 1914. I have found just a handful of cross-sex couplings that predate Lawrence, and most of these would not have been known to him, since they went unacknowledged or

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unadvertised in their own time. The most renowned examples include Philip Sidney and his sister, Mary Sidney Herbert; Margaret Cavendish and her husband, William Cavendish; Anna Laetitia Barbauld and her brother, John Aikin; William Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy; Mary and Percy Shelley; Charles and Mary Lamb; Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning; John Stuart and Harriet Taylor Mill; and George Eliot and George Henry Lewes. As important as these examples are, however, they are also historically sporadic and lack the deliberate, sustained investment in utilizing gender difference that Lawrence envisioned for his own time. To borrow a phrase from Jeffrey Masten's account of the Mary and William Cavendish partnership, we are dealing when it comes to the history of literary collaboration with "an arena in which heteronormativity is nonnormative" ("Material Cavendish" 62). If we remove legally married couples from consideration, as I will do in the majority of my modernist examples, the pre-1914 list shrinks even more, leaving us mostly with brother-sister pairs. Thus, if collaboration between women and men *per se* has been "nonnormative" throughout most of literary history, the nonsexual version of such collaboration has been virtually unheard of, and the nonsexual, nonfamilial version downright transgressive. A publicly acknowledged cross-sex collaborative text, then, could make a powerful political statement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by calling attention to what men and women could accomplish together if traditional gender hierarchies were dismantled. Moreover, for the collaborators themselves, participating even in an unacknowledged cross-sex collaboration could prove desirably subversive, since it often provided a space where a man might explore his "feminine" side or a woman her "masculine" side. Far from seeking to reaffirm fixed gender roles or heteronormative relationships, such collaborations at their most radical granted a measure of freedom to experiment with gender flexibility or to inscribe a jointly made material text with strategically destabilized gender codes. We shall see this possibility developed further in such examples as the Yeatses's automatic script and in Marianne Moore's publication of her poem "Marriage" with her gay friends Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott (both discussed in Chapter 3). However, we already have a hint of it from Lawrence. His wish for men to be "altered" by women without fully giving up their masculinity suggests that the promise of more fluid gender permutations informed his own interest in cross-sex collaboration.

The last and most important idea to take from Lawrence's letter is really an elaboration of the previous two that explains *how* meetings of gender difference might function as both a source of creative energy and a

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subversive writing practice. Rather than envisioning cross-sex collaboration as a harmonious synthesis of opposites, Lawrence revels in the prospect of its leading to unresolvable gender conflict. His description of the “great blind knowledge and suffering and joy” that would accompany men and women’s struggles to channel their differing worldviews into aesthetic creation suggests that he imagined such conflict as painful but also profoundly worthwhile. Discord of one sort or another has long been viewed as a great spur to creativity, a point that Yeats echoes in *Autobiographies*: “All creation is from conflict, whether with our own mind or with that of others, and the historian who dreams of bloodless victory wrongs the wounded veterans” (454). Few sources of conflict held more urgency for the modernists than conflict between the sexes. Certainly much of that conflict was rooted in the inequalities dividing men and women during the period, which could make collaboration challenging, even testy, in ways that were not always beneficial. As we might suspect, these imbalances tended to favor men, though not always. For instance, while male writers usually had more formal education and freedom to advance in society, women who collaborated sometimes had greater financial resources (Violet Hunt and Lady Gregory are two examples I shall return to), as well as the clout of their well-documented roles as editors of the “little” magazines where many of modernism’s most celebrated works first appeared.⁹ Moreover, several accomplished women chose to engage, often repeatedly, in cross-sex collaboration in spite of the challenges it presented, including, in addition to the figures just mentioned, Eleanor Marx, Marianne Moore, Laura (Riding) Jackson, H.D., Elizabeth Bowen, and Gertrude Stein.¹⁰ Without denying the harmful institutions and prejudices that made authorship more problematic for women than men, I will stress how the spirited conflict underlying modernist cross-sex collaborations typically cut both ways, leading in many cases to the creation of texts whose vigorous interplay of gendered voices made them truly “new” in the best Poundian sense. By examining that interplay across the linguistic and material dimensions of modernist texts, we gain a better understanding of how deeply imbued gender conflict was in the foundations of modernism itself, and how creatively valuable many writers found that conflict to be.

The modernists’ tendency in the collaborations I examine to use conflict between the sexes as a creative catalyst and infuse the texts they made with evidence of that conflict is a phenomenon central to this study that I call the “discord aesthetic.” The discord aesthetic challenges the assumption, common not only during the modernist period but also today, that the writers’ voices in an ideal collaboration should blend seamlessly and

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indistinguishably together.¹¹ As a result, it often manifests by juxtaposing the distinct contributions of a text's creators in striking or unusual ways – for instance, in the competing viewpoints articulated by the ostensibly monovocal narrators of Lawrence's collaborative works (Chapter 2); the sparring of Ford Madox Ford's footnotes with Violet Hunt's main text in their 1913 travel book *The Desirable Alien* (Chapter 3); or the contrast between the traditional realism of Leonard Woolf's story "Three Jews" and the experimental stream-of-consciousness technique of Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" in their Hogarth Press pamphlet *Two Stories* (Chapter 4). I use the word "aesthetic" to emphasize that many modernists imagined a special beauty in texts that women and men created together. At the same time, a key tenet of the discord aesthetic is its resistance to idealizing the often-contentious processes that helped bring those texts into being. The Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism provides a useful framework for understanding this discord aesthetic. Scholars of collaboration have invoked Bakhtin before, but they have tended either to reject his terminology or to downplay the conflict between opposing voices that I see as central to his well-known celebration of the novels of Dostoevsky for presenting the characters' worldviews as "unresolved and unresolvable dialogue" (349).¹² Like Lawrence and Yeats, Bakhtin values friction between discordant perspectives, though he treats this friction as unavoidable for *all* users of language, even beyond the domain of art: "Within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other" (354). As we shall see, leaving male and female voices "interanimat[ing] each other" in "unresolvable dialogue" is a strategy many modernists used to make their cross-sex collaborative texts embody the "intense interaction[s] and struggle[s]" that helped to generate them in the first place. The discord aesthetic makes those "interaction[s] and struggle[s]" visible and allows them to exist in creative tension rather than hiding or attempting to transcend them.

Given its basis in conflict, the discord aesthetic can also be usefully related to recent scholarship on modernist responses to violence. Yeats's "wounded veterans" metaphor quoted earlier offers a sobering reminder of the costs involved not just in fostering gender conflict but in attempting to direct it creatively without glossing over its traumatic realities. In her 2012 study *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland*, Sarah Cole writes that the "formalization of violence stands as one of modernism's central endeavors," and she proposes terminology for

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understanding how some of the writers I consider, especially Yeats and Woolf, dealt with violence in their works (5). Cole argues that the modernists approached violence through a dichotomy of “enchantment” versus “disenchantment.” She defines enchantment as “the tendency to see in violence some kind of transformative power,” while disenchantment is “the active stripping away of idealizing principles, an insistence that the violated body is not a magic site for the production of culture” (42).¹³ Although she finds instances of both “enchanted” and “disenchanted” violence throughout modernism, Cole stresses that “it is not always possible to separate a disenchanted state of awe . . . from an enchanted desire to make that awe culturally productive” and that the “very essence” of modernism was “profoundly shaped by the mixing of the two systems of imagining violence” (44). Through its mixing of these systems, she concludes, “modernism simultaneously placed violence at the center of its consciousness and found ways to reframe, contain, and aestheticize it, without needing to glorify or valorize it” (295). Applying this conclusion to my study, I argue that the discord aesthetic functioned as a strategy for combining enchanted and disenchanted violence, since it left contentious expressions of gender conflict plainly visible (disenchantment) but aimed in doing so to make such conflict “culturally productive” (enchantment). In other words, the modernists’ deployment of the discord aesthetic in their cross-sex collaborative texts served as a way of formalizing the violence involved in their efforts to destabilize traditional gender divisions.

Scholars have long recognized the prevalence in modernism of violence that stems from collisions and exchanges between the sexes, but the discord aesthetic reveals that such violence was more multivalent than has generally been acknowledged. In particular, it compels us to refine the view of modernism as a “sex war” in which women and men compete more than cooperate. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar popularized this notion with their three-volume study *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (1988–94). One of Gilbert and Gubar’s underlying claims is that, “especially in the twentieth century, both women and men engendered words and works which continually sought to come to terms with, and find terms for, an ongoing battle of the sexes” (1: xii). This statement has shaped much of my own thinking about sex relations in modernism, and I still agree with it broadly speaking. However, I depart from Gilbert and Gubar in that I see the key players in this “battle of the sexes” more often reaching across lines of sexual difference, even if they still end up battling each other – indeed, often with the intention of battling each other in a productive way – rather than

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sequestering themselves in embittered, diametrically opposed camps. I also aim to resist assigning villains and victims in this “battle of the sexes,” an unfortunate tendency in Gilbert and Gubar that may have damaged the image of cross-sex collaboration for some scholars by suggesting that men generally collaborated with women as a ruse to “preclude the threat of contemporary competition” through “the usurpation of women’s words” (1: 152). I do not deny that instances of male “usurpation” occurred or that the perceived appropriation of a writer’s words by his or her collaborator sometimes led to rifts between friends or partners. However, that part of the modernist story has been emphasized enough in my view. It does little good to stress once again the proprietary sexism some men unsurprisingly exhibited, when one could list examples of men taking credit for the words of fellow male writers (one thinks of Ford Madox Ford’s controversial claims to have contributed to major works published under Joseph Conrad’s name alone), or even of women exerting proprietary control over men’s words (as with Violet Hunt’s framing of historical vignettes by Ford Madox Ford in *Zeppelin Nights*, discussed in Chapter 3).¹⁴ Certainly some modernists clung in theory to an ideal of solitary textual ownership held over from the eighteenth century.¹⁵ But the collaborative practices in which they repeatedly engaged made the boundaries of such ownership more fluid than even they often anticipated. Modernist scholarship in the twenty-first century has begun to acknowledge this more complex picture, but vestiges of the old model still persist. In her introduction to the high-profile 2007 anthology *Gender in Modernism*, for example, Bonnie Kime Scott asserts that, even though that book “includes the work of nearly thirty men, many working cooperatively with women” (Scott’s forerunning 1990 anthology, *The Gender of Modernism*, had included works by only five men), “there remains the specter of male co-option, or reinforcement of contentious lines of opposition” (4). This statement assumes a false dichotomy: that we should expect to find evidence of *either* cross-sex cooperation *or* a sex war grounded in “contentious lines of opposition.” Rather, I argue that women and men created a place for gender conflict and even “contentious lines of opposition” *within cooperative contexts*. The drive to enshrine differences, tensions, and disagreements between the sexes within the domain of art was a defining part of the modernist project for men and women alike. Cross-sex collaboration facilitated that goal.

As my focus on the modernist interest in reconfiguring relations between the sexes and expanding the possibilities of gender suggests, many aspects of my project dovetail with current work in gender studies, a field

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whose landscape has grown as daunting in recent years as that of modernism itself. Although I do not aim to offer a “gender studies reading” of modernism per se, my work is indebted to much of the scholarship that has come out of that field, particularly those books that emphasize modernism’s foundation in networks of cross-sex relations rather than in the minds of isolated male and female geniuses.¹⁶ I also adopt the field’s important distinction between the terms “sex” and “gender.” As Gayle Rubin argues in her well-known extension of Lévi-Strauss’s work on kinship, “The division of labor by sex can . . . be seen as a ‘taboo’: a taboo against the sameness of men and women, a taboo dividing the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories, a taboo which exacerbates the biological differences between the sexes and thereby *creates* gender” (178, italics original). Rubin here aligns “sex” with the physiological categories of male and female, while “gender” for her is “a socially imposed division of the sexes” or “a product of the social relations of sexuality” (179). Broadly speaking, I follow Rubin’s distinction, using the phrase “cross-sex” to describe collaborations involving at least one biological woman and one biological man. However, I contend that the range of socially constructed behaviors and identities encompassed by “gender” was more fluid and potentially empowering for the modernists than Rubin’s definition of gender as a “socially imposed division of the sexes” suggests. This is especially the case since, as we shall see, the sexes of the participants in any given collaboration do not always predict the gender dynamics of that collaboration. Judith Butler offers a more useful description of how gender operates at the conclusion of her landmark work *Gender Trouble*. Butler famously argues that “gender reality is created through sustained social performances,” as opposed to being the “expression” of a preexisting and “true” set of fixed characteristics (192). For Butler, the recognition of this fact presents a welcome opportunity for “proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality” (193). Butler’s vision of a world that embraces the subversive possibilities of innovative gender “configurations” – rather than wishing, as Rubin does, for a “genderless” utopia (204) – better accords in my view with the spirit of those modernists who sought not to escape from gender but to bring differently gendered identities together and explore what their interactions might yield. In that sense, cross-sex collaboration functioned as one of the key “social performances” through which the modernists sought to problematize their own “gender reality.” It is certainly true that some of the modernists who took progressive stands on the controversial sex and gender issues of their time tended to think about sex

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and gender differences in more binary or essentialist terms than scholars do today.¹⁷ For instance, as a senator in the 1920s for the Irish Free State, W. B. Yeats argued for legalizing divorce on the grounds that it led to greater sexual happiness for women, and he supported a woman's right to work after marriage, but he also believed that women were more attuned than men to a spiritual "otherworld" whose mystical energies he wanted to access; so apparently did the female writer H.D. And modernists of both sexes accepted and even valued the existence of "masculine" and "feminine" writing as distinct types of discourse. This does not mean, however, that writers and artists during this period viewed masculinity and femininity as transcendent, immutable categories or as the exclusive purviews of one sex or the other. On the contrary, we shall see a great deal of effort expended to challenge such limiting beliefs. The novelist Dorothy Richardson captures this tension well in the 1938 foreword to her novel sequence *Pilgrimage*. After recounting her decades-long effort to develop a uniquely feminine prose style, Richardson singles out with approval two men for writing in a similar mode: "Feminine prose, as Charles Dickens and James Joyce have delightfully shown themselves to be aware, should properly be unpunctuated, moving from point to point without formal obstructions" (12). Richardson's assertion of her desire as a woman to employ "feminine" language, only to acknowledge mastery of that language by members of the opposite sex, exemplifies the flexibility regarding fixed or proprietary notions of gender that many cross-sex collaborative texts also explore.

This study also builds on the body of scholarship begun in the late 1980s on literary collaboration, much of which illuminates the intersections between modernism, gender, and literary couplings. At the same time, it fills a gap that scholarship has left with its nearly exclusive focus on same-sex pairings. In his pioneering monograph *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (1989), Wayne Koestenbaum lays important groundwork for understanding how collaborative acts can challenge dominant power structures. Focusing on partnerships between men from 1885 to 1922, Koestenbaum argues "that men who collaborate engage in a metaphorical sexual intercourse, and that the text they balance between them is alternately the child of their sexual union, and a shared woman" (3). He adds that "within male texts of all varieties lurks a homosexual desire which, far from reinforcing patriarchy, undermines it, and offers a way out" (5). His examples show how collaboration can both redirect latent sexual energies and create a space for imagining reproductive possibilities outside of patriarchally sanctioned heterosexuality or biological offspring.