

SARAH TRYPHENA PHILLIPS LECTURE IN AMERICAN
LITERATURE AND HISTORY

THE OUTLAND DART: AMERICAN WRITERS
AND EUROPEAN MODERNISM

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MY topic in this lecture is a special affinity: the close connection that seems to me to have existed between an old spectacle, the presence of a considerable number of American writers resident in or expatriated to Europe, and a new one—that dramatic disturbance in society, and even more in thought and all the arts, that we roughly date between about 1890 and 1930 and have come to call ‘modernism’. One of the things that has struck the literary critics and scholars, and there are now many, who have examined in detail this crucial and experimental change in style, epistemology, and culture is the large part that was played in it by writers who were, in one way or another, expatriates or *émigrés*. ‘A rootless affair’, Graham Hough has called the entire episode; while George Steiner has identified a large element of the ‘unhoused’ in modern art. Perhaps the truest way to say it is that a good deal of modernism has been the result of writers taking a cosmopolitan perspective on their national literary traditions. I shall be suggesting that one of the characteristics of American writing has long been to see the arts in just this way, to intersect cosmopolitanism and nationalism; and that as a result Americans, particularly expatriate ones, became significant observers of, important participants in, and finally influential developers of, the western development of modernism.

What do we mean by modernism? It is recognized as one of the most difficult tendencies or movements to define. This is in part because it is a relatively arcane, or *avant-garde*, tendency offering itself, to by no means total consent, as our modern art; and in part because, on inspection, it dissolves into a great plurality of different, often substantially conflicting, movements or tendencies, with many different sources, many different culture-readings and philosophies, many different

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views of the nature of the modern situation and the deliverances required of the modern arts. Thus, when inspected closely, even its most obvious surface-characteristics—like *vers libre*, or atonalism in music, or stream-of-consciousness or spatialization of form in the novel—turn out to have been explained or justified in very different ways by the artists who chose to explore them. Moreover, modernism has been more than the sequence of movements for which it has become the collective name. Indeed many of the most important ‘modernist’ writers were not direct subscribers to any single movement, while others were in and out of several of them.

However, that modernism does exist is certain; one proof is that James McFarlane and I have just devoted a very large book in the Pelican Guides to European Literature series to it. There are many other large books; the term or title has become common usage, especially lately. A fair part of *our* large book appropriately perplexes itself about a definition, a who, a where, a what, why and when of it; I direct you there if you enjoy these perplexities. But let us, for our present convenience, say that for many writers and thinkers in the west a nineteenth-century synthesis visibly dissolves or comes to crisis in or around the 1890s—when positivism struggles with intuitionism, sociology with psychology, naturalism with aestheticism, when there is a sense of perceptual crisis which throws attention on to consciousness, when world-views pluralize, dusks and dawns in consciousness and civilization are much thought of, and ideas are in radical ferment. The result in ideas is a period of outstanding intellectual innovation, a general upheaval of the western world manifest in much of its science and its thought; this has some prophetic or precursory relation both to the cultural dislocation of the Great War and the postwar re-synthesis. It is a disorientation and resynthesizing that is notably manifest in the arts, one which shifted the role of the artist, privatized and specialized him, in some way dislocated him from his familiar culture. It is primarily a European affair; it has social roots in the processes of late nineteenth-century European change, in the political upheavals of growing democratization, secularization, urbanization, and intellectual ones in the changing and evolving art-tendencies of the nineteenth century. It is also an international affair; indeed it is certain that if anything distinguishes modernism it is its international interfusion—by which I mean that, whether because of simultaneous generation, or because of clear and traceable flows of ideas

and influence, we find related artistic phenomena occurring right across the western nations, from Oslo to Rome, from Moscow to Chicago. One then has to add that they occur, however, not quite at the same time, not necessarily in the same order, not always with the same aims or underlying philosophies, with different degrees of hope or despair, different historical expectations, and against different socio-cultural contexts.

But, even so, I think we have now come to settle on three central episodes as counting toward a definition and a history. The first is the struggles of naturalism and aestheticism, or of naturalism yielding to aestheticism, in the 1890s, usually taken as the starting-point, the first trembling of the veil. The second is the accelerating events of the years 1908 to 1915 or so, the period of many movements in the European arts, from futurism to expressionism, cubism to imagism, and of display, magazine, manifesto, the phase that Ford Madox Hueffer called the 'opening world', and Wyndham Lewis the era of 'titanic stirrings and snortings' which he saw as the great effort of modern collective advance in the arts, later lost; it is also the period when, in the Anglo-American line, the American contribution starts to take on especial visibility, and the waves from this reach right across to Chicago. The third is the replay of the 1920s, after a war that had seemed both to confirm and extend the sceptical cultural vision of the *avant-garde*, its sense of anarchy and the abyss, its note of withdrawal from romanticism, its ironic despair, its effort to form salvage from chaos; in this phase we find the largest number of English language texts identified with the tendency, including 'The Waste Land', the early *Cantos*, William Carlos Williams's most imagist phase, key Stevens, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's most experimental novels, early Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos. Now, too, the American constituent is yet larger and more central. Indeed if you stand in London, you may feel the whole affair more or less petered out and died; while if you stand in New York you may well see a continuity passing through into a new stylistic epoch, called 'post-modernism'. It is a rough map, not the one you would come up with if you stood in Berlin, or Moscow. But it serves, if with variations, as a version of the international picture, though a German view would strengthen the 1880s and 1890s, and a French one emphasize yet further the period through from 1930.

But, since this is essentially the story as told from London or New York, let me just remind you again how international

the affair was, how large and various the funds, how enormous the thought-flow that ran through the range of European capitals, in complex motions, making some of them centres and others provinces at different phases. We might note that Ibsenite Naturalism started out of Scandinavia, went to Germany to happen, and there turned, in late Ibsen and Strindberg, toward Expressionism. Meanwhile in France Zolaesque Naturalism turned toward aestheticism, Symbolism and an art of the soul and the senses; and both traditions seem to cross to feed the German Expressionist explosion of the immediately prewar years. Paris was also giving London much of its 1890s Naturalism and aestheticism (this much helped by injections from Ireland); for London scarcely noticed Germany, though Ibsen and Nietzsche won attention, and D. H. Lawrence had German Expressionist contacts. In Russia, another version of Symbolism was growing. In Vienna, another entrepôt of ideas, various tendencies were merging, from psychologism to new linguistic theories, which were to push ideas in many directions, east and west. In Paris, in addition to local movements like Unanisme, Marinetti was inventing the Futurism that he would take home to Italy; but this reached Germany, and emerged in another and very important form in Russia, whence it cast large radiations that still survive in modern aesthetics. Imagism in London was derived from French Symbolism, crossed with theories of hardness from Worringer; it was largely an American affair, though many English ideas went into it too. Vorticism, on the other hand, was both abstraction from and attack on Futurism, and one of its founding figures, Wyndham Lewis, was aptly if confusingly born at sea, on a ship off the North Atlantic coast. Dada, with German Expressionist antecedents, was synthesized in a Zurich that, as fans of Tom Stoppard know, also contained Lenin and Joyce; the war over, it took off in two directions, one to Berlin, the other to Paris, where it interacted with French Surrealism. If internationalism is the theme, then it would be hard to find a more eclectic setting than 1920s Paris. And, suitably, the Revolution of the Word, accumulating in the 1920s, culminating in the 1930s, could claim derivation from contingents from France, the States, England, Ireland, Germany, and Romania, to name but a few.

So this much we can say; that modernism was an affair of many movements, of commonly *avant-garde* tendency, with international origins, much change of personnel, and a great capacity for transit. It was also an affair largely of cities,

especially ones with cultural-bohemian facilities and fluidity of population, usually the large modern capitals at points of cultural intersection, where old values crossed with the speed and race, the street architecture and mechanical innovations, of modern life. In these cities was usually a bohemia; in practical terms an international, cheap-rent enclave or ghetto, where specialists in a thought-system could gather and find others of like disposition, spending ideas they could afford over drinks they could not. These were usually polyglot communities, manifesting many characteristics of modern art: linguistic and formal anxiety, cultural unease, ambiguity of intellectual role and status, apocalyptic sensibility coupled with revolutionary hope. And the contingent, polyglot, and apocalyptic nature of modern capital cities penetrates many of modernism's central texts, as locus or underlying metaphor: so, for example, Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, Stephen Crane's *Maggie*, Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, Eliot's 'Waste Land', Joyce's *Ulysses*, Hart Crane's 'The Bridge', Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, and you can add more. This urban *émigré* sensibility is recurrent in modernist writing. And the emigration is usually not just internal, from province to national capital, but to external capitals as well. Behind modernism is not just metropolis, but cosmopolis. Its roots may reach back into national materials, its sources to specific social changes and tensions, but it is the art of form as distance; hence, then, Graham Hough's 'rootless affair'.

But let me now turn to the American part in all this. Modernism, Al Alvarez once observed, 'has been a predominantly American concern'. It can hardly be said to have started as such. It began in Europe, and it took a considerable time to cross the Atlantic as a stylistic mode; American writers in the 1890s were just becoming newly preoccupied with the Naturalism from Zola that was, in Europe at this point, largely exhausting itself. Indeed, the full impact of the modernist tendency came in America at least a generation later than it did in Europe; we normally date it from the American mental and technical ferments of 1912, when Freud and Cubism, experiment and radical protest, began to cluster on American soil. Modernism was a European movement, but from about that date it started to matter to Americans; much of its modern importance, and the current sanctification it has acquired, come from that fact. But even then it would not do to suggest that this was solely a matter of imports from Europe. One of the signals of the new

in America was the starting of the little magazine *Poetry* in Chicago in 1912; it had Ezra Pound in London as foreign editor, posting in the foreign developments. But *Poetry* felt there was an *American* modern art, and it quickly tired of being told by Pound that American bards must study Remy de Gourmont, Henri de Regnier, Francis Jammes and Tristan Corbiere. 'Mr [Vachel] Lindsay did not go to France for *The Congo* or for *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven*. He did not even stay on the eastern side of the Alleghenies . . .,' it complained. There was an anti-European streak to the American modern, a streak of nativism; some of the major writers, like William Carlos Williams and William Faulkner, scarcely set foot in Europe, and if we now know that they had their European influences, that was not what they felt mattered.

But others did think Europe mattered. Indeed part of the fascination of the episode is the mediating part played by a significant group of Americans from the 1890s to the 1920s who came to Europe, and did much in the way of stimulating European developments, adapting them, bonding them on to the American scene. Over this period, and with a special and famous point of culmination in the 1920s, you could find in certain European capitals, but especially in London and Paris, a good number of American writers up to an old American custom—literary expatriation—in a new form. They had come to look, in their different ways, for what Americans had long understood lay on the further side of the Atlantic, the Old World, an entity polarized against the New World, of course, and with certain well-established associations: it was past tense by contrast to America's future, static to America's process, female to America's male, dense to America's lightness, feudal to America's democratic, artistic to America's bustling commercialism. In fact they found not the Old World but the New Arts, and to some degree they found them by what T. S. Eliot would call 'great labour'; that is to say, by making them happen. Moreover, operating, on the whole, with sensitive antennae, they managed to catch many of the strongest and most relevant signals, to move when there was moving to be done, and in general to act as a convenient line for attention if we want to know what was going on in various capitals at various times. Their version usually started in London, not usually thought of as the most modernist of cities, reached to Paris and finally centred there; it also touched Italy, glanced at Germany, largely ignored Russia. It was very selective, in some

ways provincial, and often conducted on the borderline between an old American notion of a European aesthetic adventure and a new American sense that the arts were everywhere on the boil. But their version has now become a very important historical account of modernism. And, as I have said, it signals a primary bifurcation in the American tradition as such, a contention between naturalism and modernism, between redskin and paleface, between the art of the American breath-rhythm and the polyglot or cosmopolitan cadence.

There are, I suppose, two substantial explanations for American literature now familiarly in existence, notions that have been held both by writers and by critics. One, ancestrally rooted in Sydney Smith, who asked in 1818 'Who reads an American book?', assumes American writing to be an appendage or derivative from English writing in particular and European writing in general. We do read American books (how else do we get through an airport?); but are they not just English books with skyscrapers? It is, in the current balance of power, a fading view, but it once had some prominence in university English departments; now, with Oxbridge fallen, these are most likely to be found in the United States themselves. The other, by compensation, asserts the Americanness of American literature; its ancestral roots are in the many declarations of literary independence that America produced in the nineteenth century, reactions to what Melville called 'literary flunkeyism', or Henry Adams saw as the American 'on his literary knees to the European'. It sounds in William Carlos Williams's view that American English was learned from the mouths of Polish mothers. For modern critical versions of this Americanist bias, the real ancestor is probably an Englishman, D. H. Lawrence; we have now, however, a whole lore of readings of American literature which see it as a totally national phenomenon, with distinctive metrics, styles, epistemologies, cadences, breath-speeds, and above all cultural mythologies—those myths of the frontier and the virgin land, of American Adams and paradisaical gardens, which are frequently made manifest to us by demonstrating their formal, stylistic, and mythological distinctiveness from the activities of European writers. Such arguments are substantially true, but often want in effective comparison; indeed it is a small embarrassment that many of the techniques, preoccupations, and myths so distinguished—Richard Chase's 'romance' tradition in the novel, Leslie Fiedler's 'gothic', or Richard Poirier's 'self-made style'—have

been used by revisionist critics of European writing, to explicate *its* texts, and so to explode the notion that the predominant tradition of European fiction has been a social realist one. Nationalism is rarely a totally good guide to history in literary matters. So perhaps a truer view is that American writing, perhaps more than most writing, has lived in a persistent tension between nativism and cosmopolitanism. The origins of America as a nation, and of American writing, roughly coincided with the emergence of romantic nationalist aesthetics. The post-revolutionary generation, influenced by Herder and Mme de Staël, quickly sought declarations of literary independence; equally quickly, many writers, like Irving and Cooper, went for extended periods to Europe, in order to find romantic sensibility, storied associations, social densities, accumulated customs. Most subsequent generations re-experienced the problem, on the axis of a new aesthetic: neo-classical, romantic, transcendentalist, realist, naturalist, and modernist versions therefore exist. But the list suggests the problem; transcendentalism is the only American brand name here; American writing had its own distinctive motion, preoccupation, thematics, but it was also bonded into the broad stylistic development of the western nations in general. It belonged not just to the nation, but to the international republic of letters, which had its own frontiers and capitals, these, until latterly, largely assumed to be located in Europe.

Inevitably, then, throughout the nineteenth century, many American writers followed this secret artistic chart and took the path to Europe. They established its imaginative existence in the form of a distinctive metaphoric geography, attaching different meanings to different nations, though one large meaning to the Old World in total. Hence a significant, even if partial, area of American literary experience took place in Europe; some of the best declarations of independence were made there; for a wide variety of motives, from a wide variety of origins, the expatriates came. Now most nations of liberal character produce literary expatriates, particularly if they are post-colonial ones with a sense of provincial status. But America produced a significant number, and they were moving against the migrant tide, the motion of history; this became a public issue and in the expatriates a private drama, an inward tension very manifest in their writing itself. This did not stop the traffic. The pattern not only continued but intensified. And toward the end of the century, when old political hostilities had gone,

and new anxieties about American monopoly capitalism and its displacement of the arts had increased, American expatriation to Europe peaked. For some of these pilgrims, passionate or otherwise, Europe was a social recourse, a place where the civilization, manners, and deferences dying in America could be recovered: these were the 'old expatriates', usually distinguishable clearly by residence and lifestyle from the newer ones, whose dispositions were more bohemian, whose sought milieu was usually the artistic ghetto, whose model of expatriation was one of atelier instruction. This was often expressed as a choice between London and Paris, capital and anti-capital, though the London of this period had explicit experimental attractions.

So over the significant years, then, successive waves of American writers came, to the London or the Paris or to a lesser extent the Italy, first of aestheticism and Symbolism, then of the Cubist and Imagist phases of the opening world, finally to the twenties of the 'lost generation', when, if you wanted to find the American writers who were lost, you looked in the cafés in Paris. And they came, in part, as a result of an internal oscillation that had grown up in American culture: between that insistent American realism 'on native grounds' which had, by the 1890s, turned toward a systematic, American version of Naturalism, and the aesthetic deliverance, which had been isolated out and identified with the voyage into art and sensibility, which in turn was the voyage to Europe. This meant that their quest still contained within itself something of the American fancy about Europe as culture, and it had a highly aesthetic or abstract character. So it was form and novelty that mattered; the underlying social turmoil that pushed modernism into existence did not affect them so directly, and, if it was interpreted at all, was often interpreted in a distinctively American way, as I think it is in 'The Waste Land' or *The Cantos*; they detached what they found. But they did find it, and indeed helped to ferment what was going on. And they did assimilate it—with such success that today we see the American arts as modern, not just because they explore an advanced or futuristic society, but because they have incorporated into themselves the lore of the modern art forms.

II

It seems appropriate to begin with the transition into this 'new' expatriation, and where better to start than with that

insistent explorer of the American complex fate, Henry James. One of the quieter events we celebrated amid last year's Bicentennial fun was the centennial of Henry James's famous 'choice', his decision to settle in London. As you might expect from James, it was a symbolic one. He had looked first at Italy's 'golden air', rich in resonances, and found it stood for the aesthetic sliding into the corrupt; then at the Parisian spectacle, rich in bohemia, Turgenev, Flaubert, and found it stood for the aesthetic as a coterie affair. And so, in 1876, he elected for London, his 'murky Babylon', 'the most possible form of life', 'the biggest aggregation of life', art mitigated by morals, social decor, material substance, human variety, and society hostesses. It was, you might say, the London of the aesthetic realist. The task was to penetrate it in depth rather than in its full range; James's fictional world was substantially an upper middle class one with bohemian fringes. But social complexity was the novel's stuff; around this time, he told Howells that it needed a complex social machinery to set a novelist in motion, that it was on 'manners, customs, usages, habits, forms' that the novelist lives. The theme of the old American romance of Europe being mitigated toward realism fuels his novels of the 1870s and 1880s. But then he dropped his international theme, even, for a time in the early 1890s, the novel form itself. However, in the later 1890s, when the aesthetic and epistemological pressures in European culture, and in James's own evolving sensibility, were increasing, he returned to fiction, and then to the international theme. And, over the turn of the century, he produced his last three great novels, *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*. Though these have their detractors ('James the Old Pretender'), they constitute, I think, his greatest achievement, and they certainly constitute the basis of his claim to being a founding father of the modernist novel in the Anglo-American line—as Gertrude Stein (who said of him: 'Henry James never came amiss. He did not come slowly nor did he come to kiss'), Virginia Woolf, and others would later see.

James's transition into modernism is not entirely easy to explain. It certainly has some American sources, in his brother William's pragmatism and psychological curiosity, also to influence Gertrude Stein, who was taught by William James. But one feature of it is a relative dissolution of James's old Europe. Now our apprehension of the strange coming of modernism is surely part-based on our responding to transitions like this, moments when writing moves over the border, beyond the

realist or the naturalist synthesis, into something other; it is this sort of thing we find in Ibsen's work, or Strindberg's. In James's case you could define it, crudely, as a shift from being in the apostolic succession from George Eliot to being in a modern force-field. For, in these late novels of James, there occurs some clear solvency of the realistic mode, and also of the moral support that this mode gets from the social fabric. Instead, consciousness and modes of perception become central facets of experience (as a title like *What Maisie Knew* suggests); society and material phenomena become inert or else coherent only in so far as active apprehension and mental ordering make them so; grammar itself has trouble in forming the relation of subject to verb to object. These are also, of course, the distilling years of the famous prefaces for the New York edition of the novels; and James's delight there in 'a deep-breathing economy and organic form' as the novel's essence also displays a symbolist compact. Gertrude Stein explained this too: 'He saw that he could write two ways at once which he did and if he did he did. And there is nothing alike in heard and saw. Not now or even by itself, not now. / Owen Young said that everything should be clear and everything is now clear.' In some ways, in fact, James became more American, and hence more exposed to the mental shifts and motions of the European new arts; it is significant that the same period saw a new preoccupation in him with the nature of expatriation, and a fear that his was a mistake. He attentively watched the spectacle of Americans wandering through the vaunted scene of Europe, their minds and spirits caught up with its aesthetic rewards: Whistler, Millet, Abbey, and Sargent in painting, Berenson, Santayana, Logan Pearsall Smith, Leo Stein in aesthetics, in writing Howard Sturgis, Edith Wharton, Henry Harland, Constance Fenimore Woolson, as well as antecedents like Hawthorne. He wrote a life of the American sculptor expatriate William Wetmore Story, remarking on Story's 'plenitude of feeling—in the fullness of time and on due occasion—that a man always pays, in one way or another, for a detachment from his plain primary heritage, and that this tax is levied in an amusing variety of ways'. We all know about the amusement of being taxed; it has its dark side. The comedy and the anguishes, the rewards and the disillusiones, the psychology and the pathology of expatriation thus became obsessions of this phase.

And they were evidently in his mind when he made his trip of 1904 back to the States which he recorded in *The American*

Scene (1907). It is not surprising that James should take occasion to visit Newport, Rhode Island, that social resort which was both manifestation and patrician criticism of Gilded Age America; nor that his eye should light on a group of people—a collection, he said, of the ‘detached, the slightly disenchanted, and casually disqualified, and yet of the resigned and contented, of the socially orthodox; a handful of mild, oh delightfully mild, cosmopolites’—whose symptoms he understood. They had been to Europe, not sacrificed to the American ‘black ebony god of business’, and had formed critical habits. James imagined them, over their winter whist, ‘pending constantly their return of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*’ and added: ‘I find myself tenderly evoking them as special instances of the great—or perhaps I have a right only to say of the small—American complication; the state of having been so pierced, betimes, by the sharp outland dart as to be able ever afterwards but to move about, vaguely and helplessly, with the shaft in one’s side.’ James came now to specialize in such vignettes of consciousness displaced against social reality, and he saw them as a distinctly American phenomenon, the result of the ‘great ebony god’ and the unmitigated nature of American life. And so such figures convert into heroes like Strether, in *The Ambassadors*, the man of incompleteness who seeks to redeem from the contingent largeness of experience, represented by Europe, the framed picture, which, in the impressionist way, becomes real by transmitting itself as form and knowledge. They also convert, for the worse, into the ‘dispatriate’—which is what James called Henry Harland, who went through a familiar late nineteenth-century motion from writing realistic novels about America, set in the New York Jewish ghetto, to becoming a London aesthete, editor of the *Yellow Book*, author of abstract, fanciful European romances like *The Cardinal’s Snuff Box*, books which sacrificed, said James, to aesthetic unreality, to ‘the composite spectacle and the polyglot doom’. James thus saw his experiment as a crisis affair in which what was unreconcilable in America should not be simply displaced onto Europe, but actually reconciled there.

It is for this reason that one puts James at the centre of the impressionist axis. There were writers, like Harland and Henry Blake Fuller, who expatriated in order to oscillate between two worlds: the world of American Naturalism and the hard, unmitigated American fact, and a wonderfully aestheticized, mysterious Europe, without depths or anxieties of its own. There

were some, like Stephen Crane, who crossed the Atlantic simply to shift in reputation, to have what his American critics identified as Naturalism recognized, by peers like James, Wells, and Conrad, as a novel Impressionism. James attempted to stand at the centre of, and map, a larger situation, to function as a cosmopolitan intelligence relating the evolution of style to the evolution of modern cultural relations. The outland dart could penetrate to varying depths and with varying effects. And, when the century turned, there were to be two kinds of American expatriates: those who inherited some of the cultural concern, and saw modernism as a crisis of perception and tradition, a promise of and a disaster for form in the European tradition, marking its shift into a new condition, and demonstrating the problem of creating significant culture in a fragmented world; and those who took it as pure style, a joyous event detached from historical determination. You could call it the difference, say, between Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein, or between London and Paris; it was to give two different lines of American modernism.

III

And so, said Gertrude Stein, 'the twentieth century had come, it began with 1901', and it brought a new phase of American expatriation. By 1914 English literary life had deeply changed, and somewhere in the centre of that change was a considerable contingent of Americans. The outstanding figures are, of course, Ezra Pound, who came in 1909, and T. S. Eliot, who came in 1914, but there were more, including Robert Frost, Hilda Doolittle, John Gould Fletcher, Conrad Aiken; along with other expatriate figures like Joseph Conrad and Wyndham Lewis, they helped give London one of its most cosmopolitan phases. In all this Pound and Eliot stand at the centre. They had left America with considerable lore; Pound was a product of comparative literature, a man with words like 'Villon' and 'Lope de Vega' and 'the European mind' much on his lips, who approached England via Spain and Italy; Eliot had emerged from a Harvard where symbolist issues had penetrated deeply, not just from Europe, but, by the western route, from Japan. They came at once for artistic modernity and for the 'tradition', and they identified an affinity with James—most articulately in the special Henry James number of *Little*

Review, organized by Pound in 1918. Here Eliot remarked that it was 'the final consummation of an American to become, not an Englishman, but a European—something which no born European, no person of any European nationality, can become'. He noted the value of being 'everywhere a foreigner', and the American need to know a special and larger Europe, won by his own mind and sensibility. The American had his own potential; still, it needed the sanctification of a central, civilizing metropolis. Pound had said much the same in *Patria Mia*, written for *The New Age* just before the war. Here he had spoken of America as 'the great rich, Western province which has sent one or two notable artists to the capital. And that capital is, needless to say, not Rome, but the double city of London and Paris.' For Pound at this time the task was to report the city back to the province, to induce a Risorgimento there by importing models, for painting, sculpture, writing. 'If we are to have an art capital [in America] it also must be made by conscious effort', he said. For Eliot, the task was to mediate between tradition (which was, roughly speaking, Europe) and the individual talent (who was the modern poet). For both, contemporaneity was a distinct condition, with the tradition lost, words and consciousness gone away. The need was for a new synthesis, a revised poetic, requiring an *avant-garde* posture from the artist, who was, as Pound said in his James essay, 'the antennae of the race'.

The expatriate was thus both explorer and mentor, a guide by virtue of his American cosmopolitanism both to those in Europe and back home. Pound started his visit to London in expatriate deference; he had come to be near Yeats, and he told William Carlos Williams: 'There is no town like London to make one feel the vanity of all art except the highest. To make one disbelieve in all but the most careful and conservative presentation of one's stuff.' He attended, at first as willing provincial, the London coteries, notably those around *The English Review*, *The New Age*, and the splinter group from the Poets' Club, centred round T. E. Hulme, which met at the Eiffel Tower restaurant to discuss poetry. He saw himself much as an English man of letters, involved in aesthetics and cultural affairs. He picked up late Symbolist principles and the new classical ones, Hulme's distillation from Bergson, de Gourmont, Husserl, Sorel, and Worringer. F. S. Flint was drawing attention to the new French movements, in which he showed much interest; Ford Madox Hueffer was promoting post-impressionism: this

Pound fed back to America. But at the same time he was gradually inventing a scenario for modernism, devising his own modern poetic. The *avant-garde* and movement model of the arts, which he took from the French, seemed especially congenial, and he set to work to campaign, to make it new. He was a good tactician of the arts, a sound organizer; someone once called him a Baden-Powell, trying to get all the young artists under canvas. He captured magazines, and determined to start a movement; so came Imagism, founded in a Kensington teashop in 1912, partly a tactical ploy, partly a serious attempt to distil an organized poetic from recent developments. It was a version of poetry that clustered elements from various symbolist and post-impressionist theories going back to the 1890s, but in its move toward the 'hard' image and the defeat of abstraction and romantic overspill it took constituents from Cubist and Futurist aesthetics. Much of this came directly out of the London sequence, but there was a substantial American element. It was partly one of personnel, for he drew on his fellow Americans, getting Hilda Doolittle, for example, to sign her poems 'H. D. Imagiste'. It was also one of perception; the concentrated technique, the emphasis on superpositioning, the introduction of *haiku* and *tanka*, seemed to describe best the developing innovations of his American coterie, and it linked not just with Browning but with Whitman. Hence it passed readily on to American poets like Williams and Marianne Moore. Pound later revised the history appropriately: 'All the developments in English verse since 1910 are due almost wholly to Americans', he said in *How to Read*. It was not entirely true; but it was the Americans who were to prove both the largest synthesizers and the most significant exploiters and developers of the cosmopolitan theories of London between 1909 and 1914, first with Pound and soon with Eliot, then with many writers of the 1920s back at home.

By 1914, Pound was taking the affair further, as he grew more and more conscious of the pressure of cultural decline. His cosmopolitanism enlarged, and London itself began to seem less creative and energetic, despite his growing access to magazines, and the arrival of Eliot. He took his theories of hardness further with Vorticism, with its more distinctly futurist dimensions, its mechanistic substitution for old culture. By the end of the war the traditional expatriate appeal of London seemed to him finished—indeed so did the English literary inheritance itself. His sense of cultural despair had started in America,

but he carried it over into his vision of England, now equally damaged, provincialized, vulgarized, by a false cultural economy. He needed a global theory of economies and culture; this underlay the new poetic. Expressing his disillusion with Anglo-Saxon civilization—the text is ‘Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’—he moved on to Paris in 1921. The contemporary state of French society did not impress him, but that was not now the issue: Paris was ‘the laboratory of ideas’ and it had an active experimental scene. ‘Find Cocteau and Picabia intelligent’, he noted. ‘Fools abound but are less in one’s way here, or at least for the moment.’ The paths of Eliot and Pound here distinctly divide; while Eliot stayed in England, to feel his way beyond the apocalyptic modern city he too perceived, disjunct and in fragments, into Classicism, Royalism, Anglo-Catholicism, and British citizenship, Pound formed his alliances differently. He flourished for a while amid the detached experiments of Paris, though the new expatriates coming into Paris who sought him as mentor did not entirely impress him: ‘The new lot of American *émigrés* were anything but the Passionate Pilgrims of James’s day or the enquirers of my own. *We* came to find something, to learn, possibly to conserve, but this new lot came in disgust’, he wrote. The desire to conserve persisted and took him further, to Rapallo in 1924, and then into the new cultural economics and efficiencies of Mussolini’s state. Eliot won the Order of Merit; Pound ended after the war in St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, Washington, unfit to plead on a charge of treason.

IV

It was the culturally apocalyptic note, the sense of lost coherence and the desire for recovery, which led Pound and Eliot to be identified as the bleak version of modernism, even the fascist version; it is an excessive view, but it explains why Pound’s friend William Carlos Williams could regard *The Waste Land* not as a breakthrough but as an event that set modern poetry back twenty years. But no such cultural anxieties bothered Gertrude Stein. The twentieth century came, as she said; but, she also explained, it came in America and then moved across to France to happen. England, she said, was refusing the twentieth century ‘knowing full well that they had gloriously created the nineteenth century and perhaps the twentieth century was going to be too many for them . . .’, while the

French simply accepted its arrival, since 'what is was and what was is, was their point of view of which they were not very conscious'. The task fell to Americans: 'Of course they all came to France a great many to paint pictures and naturally they could not do that at home, or write they could not do that at home either, they could be dentists at home.' It especially fell to Gertrude Stein: 'I was there to kill what was not dead, the nineteenth century which was so sure of evolution and prayers.' Miss Stein was never greatly troubled by modesty; she once identified herself as one of the three great twentieth-century geniuses. When she and her brother Leo came to Europe, in 1903, looking for 'glory', they inspected London and rejected it ('Gertrude Stein was not very much amused', she said, so summing up the London episode). They chose Paris, though a different Paris from a fellow expatriate, Edith Wharton, who sought French society; they were atelier expatriates, wanting Montparnasse, and they finally settled at 27 rue de Fleurus. Here they began art-collecting, a family custom, were guided toward Post-Impressionism, collected painters as well as paintings, and so found themselves amid the ferments of cubism. Sitting under a Cézanne, thinking of Flaubert, Gertrude Stein wrote, between 1904 and 1906, *Three Lives*, where, she said, she established the principle of the continuous present, the 'first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century in literature', she said. It was also Picasso's 'long struggle with the portrait of Gertrude Stein' which led him from Harlequinism to cubism, she claimed: a fascinating view of the causalities of that movement. And in turn she applied cubism to fiction, in *The Making of Americans*, her one novel, a massive text of some 1,000 pages based on the proposition that Americans were cubists, products of the new composition. In prose terms, this required the defeat of the realist noun, the principle of composition by paragraph, the elimination of remembering as a source of causality in fiction, and abstraction by collectivity, the history of one being the history of all. But the novel was narrative, and narrative itself was not enough; the task was to produce a spatial or synchronic object, more like a painting. So now she turned to prose still-lives, portraits, collages, abstracts—gnomic objects which she part-collected in the volume *Tender Buttons*, published in 1914. It was this book that sparked off her recognition in America; she was taken up as the literary wing of the Armory Show—the post-impressionist exhibition displaying Matisse,

Picasso and Duchamps which stirred the radical wing of the American arts in the years just before the war.

Miss Stein's was, in a sense, a studio expatriation. She was in Europe to discover new techniques and art-forms, mostly from painters, and make them into literature. The deeper agonies of the outland dart were not for her; she had no great concern with the progress or the crises of European civilization. She denied that she was an expatriate, and, when a reporter called her one, cried: 'I get so mad, all of a sudden.' She said America was her country and Paris was her home town. As for cubism, she held that, though it may have been invented by Frenchmen and Spaniards, it was really an American art, fitting the American sense of time, and prairie space, its skyscraper cities, its filmic speed. Not surprisingly, her tactics of direct takeover were not universally accepted. There was the famous *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, produced by *transition* magazine in 1935; here many European cubists rejected her, finding her work modish, superficial, untheoretical, uncaused. Braque, for example, said: 'Miss Stein obviously saw everything from the outside and never the real struggle we were engaged in. For one who poses as an authority on the epoch it is safe to say that she never went beyond the stage of a tourist.' Certainly she perceived in terms of detachable, abstract styles justified by broad reference to twentieth-century needs; nothing of the cultural or perceptual *angst* that inhabits much modernism shows in her work; the aesthetic behind it was largely explained in terms of speech-pattern and Americanness. Modernity was the issue, and modernity was an American speciality; cubism was the progressive art aptly being mastered by a progressive nation. Yet in her way she was right. Americans had a taste for stylistic mobility and fashion, for the forms that suggested a radical conception of man. They found a relevance in the cubist mode, and American modern style became close to *modernist* style. Moreover modernism seemed to pull together the apparently lonely and eccentric history of American artistic endeavour right through the nineteenth century; the modernist affair could appear to be the coming of age of the American arts. Thus, by the 1920, modernism began to seem the spirit of the new American movement. Writers like Faulkner and Dos Passos took both modernist and more traditional modes as part of their stylistic compendium, moving thus not from a sense of crisis or outrage but from intrinsic necessity, the need to distil form out of modern material.

V

You could also polarize America as material, Europe as technique, and journey between the two. This many did: in the early 1920s, when Gertrude Stein became a cult, she was there to receive that striking third wave of American expatriates in Europe, who flooded with the force of a migration into Paris once the war was over. Indeed a significant part of a whole new literary generation attended, for brief or longish periods, at the expatriate ceremonial. They avoided London, which they saw as part of their provincial and Anglo-Saxon bondage; and chose atelier Paris. They associated it with three things: with the new styles and with formal experiment in general, an aesthetic release, therefore, from a naturalist view of literature, which saw the world as an experience to be reported in journalistic or scientific modes, and which needed the qualifications offered by Stein's cubist novel, Joyce's verbal revolution, Pound's redeemed image, Proust's new structures of consciousness; with an alternative or opposite to the new isolationism and provincialism that the United States seemed to have espoused once the war was over and the Red Scare begun; and with a realm of modernized and reordered experience which came not from a new style of art but from a new condition of man, the postwar condition as such, felt especially in Paris or Germany.

These writers were aware of, but did not, on the whole, go directly to, the new movements of Europe—dada, surrealism and late expressionism. They got their instruction rather through the mediating offices of the previous generation of expatriates: Stein, Pound, Joyce, Ford Madox Hueffer, now Ford. 'Begin over again—and concentrate', Gertrude Stein told Hemingway. One striking feature of this phase of expatriation, and a clear evidence of its scale, was that it was built on the importation into Paris of many primary literary institutions: in came the expatriate English-language magazines (*Transatlantic Review*, *transition*, *Broom*, *Secession*, *This Quarter*, etc.); small presses like the Black Sun; bookshops like the Shakespeare. Cafés like the Rotonde and Dôme were commandeered; Montparnasse seemed like an extension of Greenwich Village, except here you could drink openly and at a very favourable rate of exchange. Indeed Malcolm Cowley, in the one good analytical book on the period, *Exile's Return*, identified these writers as *valuta* expatriates, following the advantageous rates offered to the dollar, rather than

the radical protesters against American life they sometimes were judged to be. There *was* an element of direct protest, against the confinements and limitations of contemporary American life, which seemed to be dominated by small-town sensibility. The dissent was ambiguous, as we see in the writing. It expresses a new generational coherence, a modernized, postwar sensibility that could not, as Thomas Wolfe puts it, go home again, but must face the racing modernity, the minimalized language, the lost myths, of Twenties experience. Yet the lost home town is also the repeated subject of this writing. And if, on one side, there was the search for the city of modern experience, there was on the other a search for the primitive simplicities for which the small town had once seemed to stand—for the deep woods that drew Hemingway and Faulkner, the dream of the clean green world that drew Fitzgerald. The modernism that was pursued in Paris was largely a way of looking backward—an urban, aesthetic or generationally modernized angle of experience taken on materials that lay back in America, 3,000 miles away.

By the end of the 1920s, the issue was in effect finished. Politics came back in radical form; the Great Crash cut off the cheques; and for many of the writers the last thing they had expected from a provincial America in the hands of its booboisie had been given—they had become successful writers. A modernism of sorts had settled as an accepted American style, just as Freud and Jung, Picabia and Picasso, the skyscraper and the futurist lines of the motor car had. And with the 1930s, when, thanks to Hitler and Fascism, the tide of migration was reversed, and the European modernists came to America, it seemed as if Miss Stein's hope had come true. Modernism had become the twentieth-century American style, the language of its progressivism, pluralism, cultural convergence. In short, if by 1939 you went looking for Modernism, you were likely to look to the States. It also became successful. Pound ended in the asylum, but Eliot, Hemingway and Faulkner won the Nobel Prize, and now in any history of modern literature the American province has come to seem remarkably central. It *was* a selective version, and we have now to struggle to identify and imagine many of the European aspects of the affair that did not enter the American view. But in 1914 what an unpredictable version of it all this must have looked, not only to Russians, Germans and Frenchmen, but to the Americans themselves.