

Making the New: Literary Periodicals and the Construction of Modernism

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We are told that we live in a postmodern world, experiencing unprecedented innovations, delights, and anxieties. Rather than rehearse these here, I want initially to touch briefly on one theoretical attempt to make sense of this condition, one that defines Postmodernism in relation to its presumed antecedent, Modernism. I want to use this as a way of questioning the “monumental” view of literary Modernism, in which a massive landscape abounds with canonical texts carved by mythical giants: Joyce, Eliot, Woolf, Pound, Stein—the usual suspects. I do this by considering the role of literary periodicals in the construction, production, and initial reception of those texts. The later part of this discussion focuses on *transition*, the Paris-based journal of the 1920s and 1930s whose aspirations, pretensions, vigor and perilous existence typify the complex forces in play. I emphasize the point that while individual periodicals consciously adopted distinct identities, they need to be understood collectively for the vital functions they performed: they printed avant-garde work as well as advanced criticism and theory; acted as nurseries for experimental young writers, and as platforms for the already-established; forged and maintained international links between writers and groups; provided avant-garde writers with sophisticated readers, and vice versa; and maintained an interactive plurality of cultural discourse. Alive with the energy of experimentation, they register the fertile, complex, yet intriguingly tentative development of modern literature.

In his inquisitive and provocative work, *The Postmodern Turn*, Ihab Hassan moves towards a concept of postmodernism by constructing a table of “certain schematic differences from modernism” (91). Included in Hassan’s catalogue of Modernist qualities are design, totalization, hierarchy, narrative, depth, determinacy, and transcendence. Postmodernism, by contrast, promotes chance, anarchy, deconstruction, anti-narrative, surface, indeterminacy and immanence. While acknowledging that “the dichotomies this table represents remain insecure, equivocal” (92), the thrust of Hassan’s argument tends to validate an elastic, exploratory Postmodernism over a monumental and elitist Modernism. But this defines the

latter from the vantage point of the former, from which position (to change the metaphors) Postmodernism appears the triumphant mammalian successor to the doomed dinosaur of Modernism. Hassan's critique is symptomatic of Postmodernist accounts, but Modernism itself was never a fixed entity, was never an "ism" in a clearly definable sense. Rather, the term loosely names a changing and often competing set of aesthetic and cultural energies operating internationally over several decades, with no founding manifesto, single site, group of participants, or agreed program. No better evidence exists for this more dynamic and substantially less monumental view of Modernism as it came into being than the multitude of periodicals established in the early twentieth century as experimental laboratories for advanced literature.

Not that what has come to be termed Modernism was entirely unbidden. "Make it new," implored Ezra Pound, so giving modern literature its pithiest, most emblematic slogan. One of literature's great midwives, Pound repeatedly coaxed and (if required) forced newness into the world. He understood that novelty is not always welcomed, however, and that the provocative and challenging work he and others like him wished to promote might not be commercially viable. Nevertheless, if new works were to revolutionize literature they had to be published. The available and repeatedly utilized mechanisms for Pound in this endeavor were literary periodicals—he had some form of editorial interest in over a dozen journals, including *The Egoist*, *The Little Review*, *Blast* and *Poetry*, and was an inspirational and often intrusive force behind several others. The "Contributions to Periodicals" section in his Bibliography runs to over 140 pages (Gallup 223-365). Nor was he unique, for most major writers, and many minor ones, were regular periodical contributors, critics, editors, or even financiers. Alan Judd tells how Ford Madox Ford contributed the money from the sale of a cottage to help subsidize *the transatlantic review* (344-5). Not all editors were so selfless or so reckless, of course, but established and unheralded writers regularly utilized periodicals to publish creative and critical work. Bibliographies of such eventually central figures as Eliot, Joyce, Stein, and Lawrence readily attest to the significance of periodicals in establishing and sustaining their literary careers and introducing material that eventually would enter the literary pantheon.

Eventually, but not inevitably enter that pantheon, for new writing had to fight for its place and was not necessarily accorded the accolades it or its author would later enjoy. The Lewis-edited *Blast*, for example, carried untrumpeted in its first (June 1914) number Ford Maddox Hueffer's (sic) "The Saddest Story" (87-97). This was the opening section of what would be published a year later as *The*

Good Soldier by the renamed Ford Madox Ford. (That number also presents work by Ezra Pound, Rebecca West, and Lewis himself.) Its second (July 1915) number contains two poems, "Preludes" (48-9), and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (50-1), by the then largely unheard of T. S. Eliot. Additionally, amidst the soon-to-be or already established figures are some now largely forgotten, such as Jessica Dismorr, who has six poems published to Eliot's two, as well as two "designs." Any surprise at this disparity stems from their subsequent trajectories: Eliot would become a key figure in twentieth-century cultural life, while Dismorr remained a minor Vorticist. But, in July 1915, none of this was knowable; even eventual giants like Eliot need time to grow. In any case, we should view Eliot and Dismorr and the rest of the twenty-or-so artists and writers who contributed to the two numbers of *Blast* collectively as well as individually. And *Blast* was only one voice promoting new cultural discourses by way of the periodical medium. Recognizing the diversity and sheer number of creative figures involved in the dozens of journals operating over several decades leads to better understanding of the powerful and various energies unleashed. Not that creativity or diversity ensured longevity, for though Lewis declared that "two further numbers will probably come out before next January" (7), the second *Blast* was the last. The survival prospects for avant-garde literature were significantly enhanced by literary periodicals, but the journals themselves were all too mortal.

The fact that *Blast* appeared with the onset of war did nothing for those prospects, of course, but most literary periodicals endured a precarious existence. Circulations were often in the hundreds or low thousands, and revenue from advertising in many periodicals was minimal. As a result, patronage could prove vital. Lawrence Rainey records in *Institutions of Modernism* that *The Little Review* (circulation roughly 3,000) received donations of \$2,350 in 1918, and that *The Egoist* (circulation closer to 200) was supported by Harriet Shaw Weaver to the tune of \$1,265 per year from 1917 to 1920 (92-4). The secret of the Eliot-edited *Criterion's* longevity (1922-1939), despite a circulation that did not rise above 800, was the patronage of various backers, including Eliot's employers, the publishers Faber and Gwyer, who derived a certain cachet from their association with the journal. Without such assistance, none of these periodicals would have survived as long as they did. Beyond the sheer economic pressures, survival mostly depended on the enthusiasm and energy of editors and often unpaid contributors, and this could wane in the face of the huge commitment required. Only a year after the establishment of *The Criterion*, notes Peter Ackroyd, Eliot complained about the crushing workload, and "expressed the wish that he had never become in-

volved in the Criterion” Ackroyd quotes from a letter in which Eliot wails: “I am worn out. I can’t go on” (133), but like a good Beckett character, he went on.

The problems of individual periodicals, or of their editors, should not distract us from recognizing their collective importance and impact, especially in terms of the networks they created and sustained. Eliot provides an instructive example of Modernist networking, for he tapped into a multiplicity of nodal points via periodicals. Though he might have contributed only two poems to *Blast*, he would be published in *The Little Review* and in *The Egoist*, where he also became literary editor. His work appeared in *The Adelphi*, edited by John Middleton Murry, as well as *Arts and Letters*, *The Dial*, Wyndham Lewis’s 1920s vehicle *The Enemy*, Ford Madox Ford’s *transatlantic review*, and many others. He was on the editorial board of *Coterie* and the *New English Weekly* and, most famously was editor and commanding presence behind *The Criterion*. Even this small selection contains periodicals published in Britain, France, and America, and as the title of *the transatlantic review* suggests, many were geared towards forging international ties. One of Eliot’s treasured hopes, in fact, was to utilize *The Criterion* in order to create a pan-European sensibility. Its pages glittered with work on or by such figures as Croce, Cocteau, and Kafka, as well as British and American luminaries and rising stars. Indeed, Eliot argued in *The Criterion* that literary periodicals were vital to sustaining cultural discourse. Rather than the “large organs of opinion” and the “old periodicals,” he wrote, “it must be the small and obscure papers and reviews, those who are hardly read by anyone but their own contributors, that will keep critical thought alive, and encourage authors of original talent” (274).

The continued appearance of new periodicals in the early decades of the twentieth century, and their utilization by nearly all writers, signals that Pound and Eliot were not alone at the time in recognizing the crucial role such organs played. They had been a critical element in cultural life in the nineteenth century, when such journals as *The Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, and *The Quarterly Review* exerted enormous influence. But the demise of the great flagships of Victorian culture in Britain preceded the rise of more consciously avant-garde vessels catering to relatively small, aesthetically adventurous audiences. These later journals were predicated on publishing experimental work or on integrating the old and the new in order to refresh a stale literary and cultural environment. An initially successful example of this type of project was *The English Review*, especially under its first editor, Ford Madox Ford, who ran the review for a year from 1908. Mark Morrisson, in examining the journal, argues that Ford saw “heterodox experimentation as vital both to literary and cultural renewal” (524-5) but that he wanted to avoid

creating a coterie magazine for a small elite. To do so, Ford brought together such great Edwardian writers as Conrad, James, Wells, and Bennett, placing them in the same textual and discursive space as such invigorating newcomers as D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound. Morrisson proposes that Ford was attempting to reach a broad, informed audience and in so doing “to restore to the dominant public sphere, both political and literary, a critical character” (513).

Morrisson draws on Jurgen Habermas’s concept of a public sphere of rational discourse, initiated in the eighteenth century by the emerging bourgeoisie. Attempting to challenge a political structure based on tradition and entrenched authority rather than reason, the bourgeoisie employed rational and critical debate—often through early newspapers and periodicals—to transform the rules and methods of political and social discourse (*Structural* 28). However, by the nineteenth century, according to Habermas, the rise of a commercialized press and the expansion of the public sphere beyond the boundaries of the bourgeoisie determined that the public sphere—and with it critical, rational public debate—went into decline (“Public” 53). Morrisson suggests that Ford was in some sense trying to reconstruct such rational, disinterested, and sophisticated critical debate through the pages of *The English Review*. Ford, Morrisson writes, was concerned about trying to create such a journal in an age fragmented by such forces as partisanship, cultural commodification, gender battles, and the specialization of knowledge: “His intention to include... a broad range of social and cultural topics and political opinion reflects his desire for a culture so cohesive that the entire range of its concerns, including the heterodox, might be represented in a single organ” (515).

This reading provides an intriguing assessment of Ford’s intentions, but if Morrisson is correct, Ford’s project appears naïve, or prescriptive, and ultimately doomed: naïve given that the heterodox, by definition, resists incorporation within a cohesive and inclusive whole; prescriptive in that Ford as editor must become the arbiter of heterodoxy, and of the type or degree allowable within the confines of his journal. But is the “allowable” heterodox at all, or simply engagingly unorthodox? In the event, rather than witnessing the containment or integration of heterodoxy, the first decades of the twentieth century saw a continuing proliferation of new, provocative and experimental journals. All of which suggests that any hope Ford had of substantially resurrecting the disinterested public sphere was doomed. If Habermas is right, the public sphere developed as a result of the collective efforts of an emerging class, and while Ford might have hoped that *The English Review* would contribute its small part to the reinvigoration of critical debate, clearly no journal could accomplish such a task alone.

Suggestive though it is, then, there are problems with employing Habermas to analyze *The English Review*. Yet what theoretical model can deal adequately both with the functions and significance of Modernist or avant-garde periodicals in the twentieth century? Pierre Bourdieu's work on cultural production offers a useful approach. As with Habermas's public sphere, Bourdieu considers discourse in spatial terms, conceiving of cultural production as occupying a "field" within a larger space of economic and political power (*Rules* 124). The field of cultural production is itself divided into subfields of large-scale and small-scale production (*Field* 53). Large-scale literary production is geared towards the mass-market (and therefore must take account of economic determinants), while small-scale literary production is the home of the experimental, the avant-garde. Here, autonomy from the market is prized, and instead of desiring to accumulate economic capital, the avant-garde values aesthetic prestige or legitimacy, what Bourdieu terms "symbolic" capital (*Rules* 75-6).

This avant-garde space can itself be divided between what Bourdieu describes as the consecrated and the as-yet-unconsecrated avant-garde. The latter individuals not only do not generate economic capital but also fail (in the present, at least) to accumulate the symbolic capital accruing to the consecrated. Gaining economic capital, however, is not the primary motivation of the avant-garde, consecrated or otherwise. Bourdieu notes that this subfield operates as a kind of "inverted economic world" (*Rules* 216), where the economic loser is the symbolic winner. Its most radical members, he suggests, "make of temporal failure a sign of election, and of success a sign of compromise with the times" (*Rules* 217). Not that temporal failure need be permanent. Bridget Fowler points out that for Bourdieu "each avant-garde movement is like a double-barreled shot gun: it is fired once at its start but then goes off again after a long period of social aging" (59). The unconsecrated may eventually be consecrated, and elements of the consecrated avant-garde may eventually become part of the field of large-scale production.

Such a possibility suggests the dynamic quality of Bourdieu's model. The field of literary production is, he argues, "a force-field acting on all those who enter it, and acting in a differential manner according to the position they occupy there... and at the same time it is a field of competitive struggles which tend to conserve or transform this force field" (*Rules* 232). He later adds that "when a new literary or artistic group imposes itself on the field, the whole space of positions and the space of corresponding possibilities... find themselves transformed" (*Rules* 234). Bourdieu's ideas offer a fruitful means of dealing with the relationship between avant-garde literary production and the mainstream, one that takes account of the distinctive forms of

“capital” accumulated in the respective fields. He recognizes the relative marginality of avant-garde journals but allows this recognition to form the basis for understanding the full significance of the vivifying activity taking place. The primarily spatial perspective of the field metaphor allows for synchronic analysis, while the notion of an ever-adjusting force field adds a dynamic, diachronic aspect, so that the inevitable changes can be considered in the relationships between particular journals or in the constituency of the subfield itself.

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to turn to *transition*, first published in Paris in April 1927. From Bourdieu’s perspective, most literary periodicals, and certainly the little magazines and reviews emerging in the early decades of the century, can be placed squarely within the subfield of small-scale production. As I have already made clear, circulation figures for many periodicals ran in the hundreds rather than the thousands. Not that such figures were published, except at moments when they were historically high (and cause for celebration) or nearing the terminally low (and cause for a frantic SOS to actual and potential readers). Though often recognized as one of the most influential Anglophone journals of the Modernist period, *transition* was no exception to the rule. Dougal McMillan writes enthusiastically in an extended study of the journal: “Almost as soon as the first issue appeared, orders came in from all parts of the world, with New York, London and Paris accounting for the largest number of sales” (25). But the reality still was that, as Thomas Dasher records, the editors “would never have more than 4,000 copies of any issue printed, nor would they ever have any more than 1,000 paid subscriptions” (223).

The small scale of production was not necessarily a sign of failure, as Bourdieu recognizes. Some journals, *transition* amongst them, consciously rejected the lure of popularity in favor of the liberty to experiment: “Works of great originality, the result of long labor on the part of a superior mind, are not grasped in a moment by hasty, lesser folk,” the editors contend in May 1927 (135-6). And in the Spring-Summer number of 1929, a 12 point “Proclamation” formalizes the argument for aesthetic liberty, the final two points announcing ostentatiously in bold capitals: “THE WRITER EXPRESSES. HE DOES NOT COMMUNICATE,” and “THE PLAIN READER BE DAMNED” (1). *transition* was not alone in adopting this adversarial or independent stance in relation to the plain reader and, by extension, the conventional writer. *The Little Review*, for example, at one period carried on its masthead the slogan: “Making No Compromise with the Public Taste.” *The Egoist* styled itself “An Individualist Review,” and Lewis’s *Blast* was antagonistic to anything going, “blasting” England, France, the British Aesthete, Humor,

the specialist, the amateur, and the years 1837-1900 (11-18). A decade later, in his no-less-aggressive new periodical, *The Enemy*, Wyndham Lewis provided a rationale for all such stances: "Outside I am freer" (xxxiii).

Renato Poggioli would view such statements as typical of the avant-garde journal. In *The Theory of the Avant Garde* Poggioli describes such an organ as "an independent and isolated military unit, completely and sharply detached from the public, quick to act, not only to explore but also to battle, conquer, and adventure on its own" (23). One can set aside the overtly macho and martial imagery of the latter part of that sentence for the more substantial truth that avant-garde literary periodicals clearly prized their independence and with it the potential symbolic capital. But independence from the mass public did not preclude making connections with like-minded readers and writers. In the second issue of *transition*, for example, its editors reach beyond the European and Europe-based writers who made up most of its early contributors, explaining that "*transition* wishes to offer American writers the opportunity to express themselves freely... To the writers of all other countries, *transition* extends an invitation to appear, side by side, in a language Americans can read and understand. The result should be mutually helpful and inspiring" (137). This overtly transatlantic approach owed much to the first editors, Eugene Jolas and Elliot Paul, both American expatriates. Jolas, the driving force behind the journal throughout its existence, was particularly interested in using *transition* as a bridge across which the most innovative literature might pass—and cultural benefits flow—in both directions.

In proclaiming such aims, *transition* functioned along the archetypal lines for the Modernist literary periodical: fostering new talent; encouraging experiment; introducing innovative writers to discriminating audiences; and forging international links. Or at least it hoped to perform these tasks, if it survived. As I noted, the economic realities of producing literary periodicals (printing costs, rent of premises, distribution, and advertising) were constant threats to all but a few periodicals. Jolas and Paul explained in the first number that the physical appearance of *transition* (no illustration, plain black type on the cover) was "purposely modest to insure its regular appearance," adding that "it will greatly facilitate distribution if readers wishing to receive the magazine subscribe promptly and directly through the Paris office" (155). (The lower case title was used as a provocation). Despite that unprepossessing appearance, the first number carried an impressive array of writers, as well as reproductions of paintings by Max Ernst and others. But undoubtedly the star of the first number was James Joyce, and *transition's* place in Modernist history derives chiefly from the publication over the next eleven

years of sections of *Finnegans Wake*, then called “Work in Progress.” Sections of Joyce’s slowly developing nocturnal epic had been published in other periodicals before 1927: Ford Madox Ford’s *transatlantic review* had published the first instalment as far back as 1924 (4: 215-33); *The Criterion* had also published a section in 1925 (12: 498-510), as had another Paris-based English-language journal, *This Quarter* (2: 25-6). But *transition* produced the authorized serial publication, and *transition* garnered the symbolic capital.

When the sections of “Work in Progress” were first published in *transition*, Joyce, by dint of *Ulysses*, was already a member of what Bourdieu would call the consecrated avant-garde. But others of the anointed also adorned the first number, most obviously Gertrude Stein and Andre Gide. Especially in its early years, *transition* repeatedly published and championed Stein’s work and again benefited from the symbolic capital generated by her and by such writers as Marinetti and Alexander Blok. The benefits might be mutual, of course. Craig Monk, for example, argues: “In terms of their own careers in the late 1920s, Joyce and Stein appeared in *transition* because both were in need of championing...Stein [for example] was still largely unread in either Europe or America” (17). This might be true more for Stein than for Joyce, given the undoubted celebrity of *Ulysses* and the place its author enjoyed in the upper reaches of the literary and cultural firmament. Even so, the importance of *transition* to the continued development and ultimate completion of *Finnegans Wake* was substantial. Indeed, serial publication became part of the process by which “Work in Progress” progressed. In his introduction to the Penguin Classics edition, Seamus Deane explains that Joyce, “to whom deadlines acted as a spur to creativity,” accepted the offer of serialization in *transition* with delight, adding that, “with serial publication now available to him [in the late 1920s, Joyce] began to refine all of Parts I and II” (xxii). Ultimately, *Finnegans Wake* would not only be completed but, eventually, as its publication as a Penguin Classic signals, would be resituated from the field of small-scale production to one approaching the large-scale. In this development one can hear the second barrel of Bourdieu’s avant-garde gun going off.

The publication of Stein’s “An Elucidation” in the first number of *transition*, however, was less successful. The editors apologized the following month in the second number: “Since, unfortunately, the version of Miss Gertrude Stein’s *An Elucidation*... while containing the correct words, presented them in the wrong order (through an inadvertence in the printing establishment), the text has been rearranged and is offered as a supplement” (2: 192). A free supplement, one should add. Despite this embarrassing lapse, Stein continued to contribute new work to

the journal, as well as having work republished there: "The Life of Juan Gris. The Life and Death of Juan Gris," "Studies in Conversation," "Tender Buttons," and others. *transition* also published defences of both Stein and Joyce, including Laura Riding's "The New Barbarism," in which she writes of Stein: "Everybody is unable to understand her and thinks she is too original or is trying too hard to be original. But she is only divinely inspired in ordinariness" (160). A clear case, it would seem, of the consecration process in operation. Later, however, and in contrast to Joyce, Stein's relationship with *transition* soured appreciably, most obviously after *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* included what Jolas and others took to be sleights and inaccuracies. She downgraded the importance of Jolas (more a supporter of Joyce) in favor of Elliot Paul (more a champion of Stein), and Stein contended fallaciously, and no doubt knowingly, that once it stopped publishing her, "*transition* died" (260). In a belated response, the *transition* of July 1935 carried as a supplement "Testimony Against Gertrude Stein" by Jolas and others denouncing *The Autobiography* as "hollow, tinsel bohemianism and egocentric deformations," that may become the "symbol of the decadence that hovers over contemporary literature" (2).

The gap of eight years partly explains the radical change of attitude to Stein between the "Elucidation" and this denunciation. But more generally, any periodical that survives very long inevitably changes or actively deviates in stance and direction as the result of new motivations from editors and contributors and in response to innovations and trends in the larger cultural environment. If, as in the case of *transition*, the editors consciously worked to spark novelty and to challenge convention, realignments and refashionings were likely. In the July 1927 number, for example, the editors argue the need for a "New Magic," contending: "Without unrest we have stagnation and impotence" (179). True to this credo, *transition* was restyling itself as "An International Quarterly for Creative Experiment" by Summer 1928, devoting itself in this number to American writing. In June 1929 Jolas famously called for a "Revolution of the Word," proclaiming: "THE IMAGINATION IN SEARCH OF A FABULOUS WORLD IS AUTONOMOUS AND UNDEFINED [sic]" (15), and suggesting in the following number that expressing the "prelogical" "is the prime factor in poetic operations" (19). By 1932, the masthead of *transition* bore the banner, "An International Workshop for Orphic Creation," while by the time it attacked Stein in 1935 this had been amended to "An International Workshop for Vertigalistic Transmutation." These changes of stance or direction often were inspired by the particular and sometimes peculiar enthusiasms of Jolas (Elliot Paul effectively had left *transition* after a year), but

many, such as the increasingly obscure subtitles, were less substantive than cosmetic. Jolas was astute enough to recognize the need to advertise as well as to produce novelty.

But novelty was not sufficient, and between 1927 and 1935 *transition* enjoyed feast and endured famine. While the first numbers were published monthly, it would take seven years for the next thirteen to appear. Unlike *The Criterion*, *The Egoist*, and *The Little Review*, *transition* was not subsidized by wealthy backers, and as Jolas explained in the twelfth monthly number, it was essentially “hand-made” by the enthusiasm of amateurs (181). The tremendous amount of effort involved in that production had overwhelmed Jolas and his colleagues and necessitated moving to quarterly publication. *transition* 13, published in the Summer of 1928, was both larger in format and in length than previous numbers, and it came adorned with a cover by no less an artist than Picasso. *transition* had always contained avant-garde art and photography within its pages, but number 13 began a trend that came to include covers by such cutting-edge figures as Miro, Duchamp, and Kandinsky. Despite these extensions and the general refurbishment, and despite publishing work by Joyce, Stein, Italo Svevo, William Carlos Williams, Samuel Beckett and many others, the hope of extended rejuvenation collapsed. While four numbers appeared in 1929 (one of these a double number) Jolas announced in the solitary double number of 1930 that:

I am now suspending the magazine indefinitely, as I can no longer afford the expenditure of time and labor necessary to its preparation.

The transitional period in literature appears to be drawing to a close. But our experimental action, I feel sure, will constitute an impulsion, and a basis for some time to come. (369)

As it happens, Jolas, like Stein, was premature in signing the journal’s death certificate, but though seven more issues of *transition* would appear over the next seven years, the original “impulsion” had dissipated. The journal’s most significant days were behind it. Nevertheless, in its first years especially it established itself as a vital player in the subfield of avant-garde literary production.

Bourdieu, remember, argues that when new forces appear, the whole space of positions and possibilities are transformed. And *transition*, in its initial years, established a presence in this interactive cultural world, one that extended beyond

the geographical boundaries of Paris, France, or even Europe. Its overt efforts to construct networks between Europe and America meant that *transition* attempted to function in a transatlantic context. Given its relatively small circulation, the extent of this presence should not be over-played, but the response of commentators, writers, and other journals to provocative and sometimes febrile activities of *transition* registers the degree of its impact within a defined subfield. Its critics might not agree with the poses and passions of *transition*, but neither did they ignore them: Henry Salpeter, of *New York World*, described *transition* as “generally unintelligible,” while Lewis Garnett of the *New York Herald-Tribune* declared it an “irritating hodgepodge of genius and nonsense.” Rather than cower in the face of such attacks, the journal relished them as signs that its provocations were having an effect on the drab and the dull. It published such damning assessments within its own pages as badges of honor (288-91).

More substantial attacks came from rival journals, especially as a consequence of *transition*'s call for a “Revolution of the Word.” French critics attacked the proclamation; Jolas later recalled in his autobiography: “In London the commentators had a field day” (110). Some Americans were also antagonistic, including the journal *The Modern Quarterly*. An announcement in the *transition* of November 1929 declared that under the banner of the “Revolution of the Word”

transition has declared war on the banal word.

Must the artist work with implements which the people have rejected?

transition says NO!

THE MODERN QUARTERLY says YES!

This vital debate is now appearing in the two magazines...Do not fail to follow this controversy with which the whole future of writing in English is closely allied. (7)

Not surprisingly, the whole future of writing in English was not determined by the debate in the two journals. Given, though, that *transition* was dedicated to aesthetic revolution—to the undermining of what it took to be staid convention—such controversies were welcomed as means of constantly reinvigorating the cultural environment. (And, as the last sentence in the announcement suggests, it might also have a positive effect on circulation.) Additionally, by presenting itself as a provocative member of the vanguard, *transition* fulfilled similar aspirations in its readers to be in the forefront of cultural innovation.

Not all debates were instigated by *transition*. Wyndham Lewis launched a full-scale attack in 1927 through the pages of his platform, *The Enemy*. From his London base Lewis directed a number of “Campaigns” against various foreign foes, one of these being the expatriate artistic community in Paris, what he described as a “mixed alien colony” (xxii). Chief among this group for Lewis were Stein and Joyce, along with other figures such as Jolas, Elliot Paul and Sylvia Beach, and their affiliation, he contended, was “manifested beyond dispute in a Monthly journal, *transition* [sic]” (xxiii). Lewis accuses *transition* of being a conduit for the translation of Dadaist and “Super-realist” material into English, as well as of the Dada-influenced “jazz-sybil” and “noted stammerer” (xxv), Gertrude Stein. The Dadaists, Lewis informs his readers, became Super-realists, and because he believes that the Super-realists “are declared adherents of moscow communism” (xxiv), the line of associations leads inevitably to the conclusion that *transition* “is a political paper essentially” (xxvii). Lewis warns that in future issues of *The Enemy* he will detail “the fundamental significance of such publications as *transition*, and suggest means of ridding ourselves of those convulsive, politico-artistic forms of radical propaganda, with a view to getting a purer form of art” (xxx). Not surprisingly, the editors of *transition* ridiculed this assessment. In an extended piece titled “First Aid To The Enemy,” they attacked the rival journal, and wrote Lewis off as a pamphleteer who always needed “a Red-Hot Vital Message” (163), a charge that might have been laid against themselves. Assessing Lewis as being “seven tenths bluff” (164), they suggested: “Gouge the camouflage out of The Enemy and you will have the London Times” (165).

One must balance any account of the fervor of the skirmishes between *transition*, *The Modern Quarterly* and *The Enemy* with the recognition that they were played out on the subfield of small-scale avant-garde production. When Jolas claims in his autobiography that the “‘Revolution of the Word’ provoked an intercontinental controversy that raged for years” (110), we need to keep in mind the highly circumscribed number of participants involved in this controversy. Against this necessary caution, though, we must appreciate and account for the importance of such interactive debate. The particular controversies between *transition* and its rivals represent only one set of examples from the myriad struggles, adjustments and interactions taking place throughout avant-garde literary production. And these struggles were occurring not only between journals but also within them. Collectively, such arguments, critiques, and responses had a material effect on literary production, on the initial reception of texts, and on broader cultural debate. Nor was it all controversy and antipathy, of course. Periodicals provided vital outlets

for advanced literature and analysis for the vivid spectrum of individuals and groups contesting for supremacy or simply for space, and *transition* provides a powerful example of the importance of this generative function. As Stein herself claims, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, to have commented when encouraging Elliot Paul to start up *transition*: “After all . . . we do want to be published. One writes for oneself and strangers but with no adventurous publishers how can one come into contact with those strangers” (259).

Even figures such as Stein and Joyce, recognized now as giants of twentieth-century literature, initially needed places to publish work that might take years to find commercial or wide aesthetic acceptance. If economic capital was not available, publication in periodicals at least offered the temporary succor of symbolic capital. Certainly, without periodicals the process whereby newness came into the world would have been retarded or derailed. This sense of the rather more tentative paths by which texts first appeared, texts by writers as eventually important as Joyce, Stein, Eliot, and Ford, must call into question any monumental account of Modernism. Later, undoubtedly, when reputations were established and hierarchies formed, such a view of Modernism might appear plausible. As any sustained investigation of periodicals uncovers, however, the reality at the time was far more undetermined, and more exploratory and dynamic because of this. Periodicals in fact provide unrivalled contemporary documentation of such ongoing literary developments, of rivalries and collaborations, of short-lived enthusiasms and failed projects, and of rich and illuminating work of lasting value. I would argue that without such journals as *transition* the debates carried on and the experiments carried out would not have occurred as regularly and productively as they did. *transition* and periodicals like it added materially to the ideas, impulses and experiments that invigorated the literary and cultural life of the early twentieth century. Their profound effect on the genesis and subsequent development of what came to be known as Modernism is only now beginning to be recognized. But with that recognition comes a more informed understanding of the variety of forces that shaped Modernism itself.

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