



MODERNISM AND
CULTURAL CONFLICT

1880-1922

ANN L. ARDIS

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Baskerville Monotype 11/12.5 pt System L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Ardis, Ann L., 1957-
Modernism and cultural conflict, 1880-1922 / Ann L. Ardis.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 81206 2

1. English literature - 20th century - History and criticism. 2. Modernism
(Literature) - Great Britain. 3. Culture conflict - Great Britain.
4. Culture conflict in literature. I. Title.

PR478.M6 A74 2002

820.9'112 - dc21 2002067060

ISBN 0 521 81206 2 hardback

CHAPTER 5

*“Life is not composed of watertight compartments”:
New Age’s critique of modernist literary specialization*

BLAST GRAMMAR,	BLESS CLICHE,
BLAST SPELLING,	BLESS BIG PRINT,
BLAST REASON,	BLESS BLOOD,
BLAST SENSE, SO	BLESS SELF, SO
BLAST THE NEW AGE.	BLESS WYNDY LEWIS.

C. H. Bechhöfer, “More Contemporaries,” *New Age*, July 30, 1914¹

Twinkle, twinkle, Ezra Pound,
Like a candle underground.
Cubes, potatoes, prunes and prisms
Summarise your witticisms . . .
Twinkle, twinkle, my NEW AGE;
Star shells burst on every page,
By whose light you boldly tilt
At the mills of England’s guilt.

L’Hibou, *New Age*, July 15, 1915²

The advertising flyer for Brown University’s “Modernist Journals Project” introduces this exciting, and massive, new digital research initiative by noting its commitment to “providing on-line editions of English-language journals that were important in shaping those modes of literature and art that came to be called modernist.” “At the MJP site,” the flyer continues,

readers will find keyword-searchable texts of modernist journals, as well as essays on general topics related to modernism, and discussions of particular publications and their historical and cultural background. Our first project is an edition of *The New Age: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature and Art*, edited in London by A. R. Orage from 1907 to 1922. *The New Age* offered its readers an in-depth view of the political, social, and cultural landscape of England at the time. During the 15 years when A. R. Orage presided over the paper, it published many of England’s best writers and became one of the chief organs for cultivating public opinion about modern art and literature.

On the one hand, by making a previously all-but-inaccessible archive available to many on-line researchers, digitalization of the *New Age* promises to facilitate the kind of “ric[h], thic[k]” historical contextualization that scholars such as Michael Levenson have described as one of the unique contributions of “the new modernist studies.”³ The *New Age* was indeed one of the most interesting political and literary journals of Edwardian Britain; moreover, it is an excellent source of information about the entire British newspaper industry in the early twentieth century because its range of references to dailies, weeklies, and monthly periodicals across the political and literary spectrum – from large-circulation dominant culture newspapers and periodicals such as the *London Times*, the *Spectator*, and the *Daily Mail*, to mid-range as well as small-circulation regional and special-interest literary and political weeklies and monthlies such as the *New Statesman*, the *Christian World*, the *Liverpool Courier*, the *Bristol Venture*, the *English Review*, and the *Clarion* – is truly extraordinary. Because of its commitment to reporting on “politics, literature and the arts” and its refusal to separate the aesthetic from the political sphere, its coverage is unusually synthetic as well.

On the other hand, the fundamental assumptions about the *New Age* as a *modernist* journal that saturate the MJP’s promotional materials should give pause to anyone who has worked extensively in the *New Age* archives. Certainly it is easy to see how this characterization of the *New Age* has been perpetuated, given all the famous modernist manifestos redacted from its pages and published subsequently elsewhere under separate, and more prestigious, cover – in Sam Hynes’s edition of T. E. Hulme’s essays, *Further Speculations*, for example; in T. S. Eliot’s *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* as well as in the more recent and inclusive edition of his writings for periodicals, *Ezra Pound’s Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals*.⁴ To read the journal cover to cover, issue by issue, year after year, however, can leave a very different impression. For every article or letter to the editor or sample of modernist writing or art that is featured in its pages is counterbalanced by a parody or critique or countermanifesto. We are used to seeing modernist avant-gardists dismiss rival aesthetic traditions in intemperate and idiosyncratically colorful terms. But over and over again in the pages of the *New Age*, modernists themselves are critiqued with gusto, in feature articles, regular columns, letters to the editor, and the dialogue essays with which the periodical so often pursues its case about the need for “brilliant common sense.”⁵ If Netta Syrett “talks back” to the modernist avant-garde in her Edwardian middlebrow fiction, she does so quietly, and with a great deal of self-deprecation. By contrast,

the *New Age* shouts its “quarrels” (as Orage himself describes them) with modernism.

Studies to date of the *New Age* have, alternately, either emphasized Orage’s “catholic editorship”⁶ or described its evolution from Socialism to modernism in terms very similar to those frequently used to characterize the *Freewoman*’s transformation into the *Egoist*.⁷ In his fascinating study of Orage’s early involvement in the Leeds Art Club, Tom Steele, for example, describes the *New Age* as a vehicle for “such divergent emergent currents that it was almost impossible to label politically.” Taking the opposite tack, Wallace Martin (one of the consulting editors for the Brown Modernist Journals Project), concentrates exclusively upon “those aspects of the magazine that are of enduring interest in relation to cultural history” – and assumes *a priori* that these are limited to, in turn, its promotion and subsequent rejection of (socialist) realism in drama and fiction (1908–1910) and its presentation of modernist movements in art (1911–1914).⁸ I would like to suggest in this chapter that the *New Age*, as Orage himself insists, is anything but eclectic in its literary and social views. It was, indeed, determined to provide “some neutral ground where intelligences may meet on equal terms” in a public debate about politics, literature, and the arts, and it voices strongly its objections to monologic special-interest literary and political periodicals alike whenever possible because of their failure to do just that.⁹ It was equally committed, though, to promoting Guild Socialism’s unique theory of economic reorganization and to radicalizing turn-of-the-century Arts and Crafts and Clarion movement socialisms, which Guild Socialists perceived as, respectively, too complacent about art’s association with luxury in a capitalist commodity culture and too willing to harness the lures of mass-market advertising in support of an allegedly revolutionary socialist cause. In other words, to call the *New Age* a modernist journal is to ignore its very unique political and aesthetic commitments to Guild Socialism, a radical fringe socialist movement in the early twentieth century in Britain that sought “the mould of a new civilization” in the creation of national labor guilds.¹⁰ As this chapter will show, these commitments color the journal’s presentation of modernist visual and literary art quite strikingly – and often quite negatively.

Insofar as one of the real strengths of literary modernism lies in its ability to incorporate its opposites, it could be argued that the *New Age*’s presentation of nonmodernist and even antimodernist material alongside modernist art and literature is precisely what makes this a quintessentially modernist journal. I would insist, however, on recognition of a

crucial distinction between the journal's modernist *style* of presentation and its socialist politics, which are insistently and consistently differentiated from modernism's by the editors. Granted, the journal dedicates considerable real estate to the promotion of modernist art and literature. Nonetheless, the *New Age's* willingness to feature work by critics and artists such as Pound, Lewis, and T. E. Hulme should not be confused with an unqualified endorsement. This is not to suggest that modernists weren't capable of mocking themselves, contradicting themselves, and changing their stances on any given topic. Rather, it is to emphasize that the *New Age* is a journal whose agenda is not contained by modernism's own anti-modernist impulses. As a proponent of Guild Socialism, Orage harbored the modernist avant-gardist for quite some time within the pages of the *New Age* – but he never unequivocally approved what he in fact terms its “fads,” “absurd theories,” and “charlatanism.”¹¹

“Good God, I have almost made them significant,” he notes sarcastically in 1914 at the end of a review in which he ridicules fawning references to Pound and Imagism in a recent issue of the *Little Review*.¹² When the first issue of *Blast* had appeared several months earlier, he had written:

I can see now, from the appearance of “Blast” and from the number and quality of its probable victims, that THE NEW AGE must be more definite than ever in the future. To tell the truth, the work is at present incredibly difficult. Even to think straight in these days requires an effort; as the alienist often finds it hard to preserve his sanity among his patients.¹³

In reviewing the second issue of *Blast* almost exactly a year later, he details his specific disagreements with Wyndham Lewis, then throws down the gauntlet:

J'accuse Mr. Lewis of being, to the best of his ability, disloyal to Nature. We agree that Nature should not be imitated. The second commandment must be obeyed in art as well as in ethics. But we are hopelessly at variance when the next step is to be taken. Mr. Lewis is for creating a “Nature” of his own imagination. I am for perfecting the Nature that already exists in strenuous imperfection. He is for Vorticism; I am for the idealization of the actual. *It is worth quarrelling about.* (emphasis added)¹⁴

Orage's “quarrels” with modern avant-gardists are both reiterated and supplemented by the witty but nonetheless pointed criticisms offered by other contributors to the *New Age* – as exemplified by the poems featured as epigraphs to this chapter. The *New Age* can be canalized into the history of modernism, I would thus like to suggest, only by ignoring these very prominently displayed debates with and ribaldry at the expense of the modernist avant-garde. Undoubtedly, the *New Age*

under Orage's editorship was an important venue of publication for these modernist critics and artists. What this chapter will demonstrate, though, is that the journal's commitment to the kind of "revival of the arts" Guild Socialists viewed as a "necessary factor in social salvation" (read, a socialist revolution) was never satisfied by modernist experimentalism.¹⁵ The historical record this early twentieth-century socialist journal leaves us, of open, spirited, and acrimonious debate about art and art's role in culture, allows us to gain a much better sense of the competition among emergent aesthetic and political traditions animating British cultural life at the turn of the century than we will ever find in modernism's own histories of the period. The new modernist studies' historical recontextualizations of modernism must include awareness of such competition – if, that is, we're not to be accused of preserving modernism "in intellectual amber," to borrow Michael North's phrasing, retrospectively accomplishing "by critical consensus" modernism's "insulation from the cultural world into which it was introduced."¹⁶

"LET DERISION BE OUR WELCOME"

So be it. For I know that the dark comes before the light and that, like the gods, new movements usually come to birth hindparts foremost. I see, moreover, in imagism what perhaps the imagists themselves would be shocked to discern – the prefiguration of a more brilliant common sense than we have known before: common sense in the sphere of the aesthetic emotions. But until this side appears it is wise to laugh at the side now presented to us. *Let derision be our welcome.*

"R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers", November 19, 1914
(emphasis added)¹⁷

Several examples of the *New Age's* characteristic humor at the expense of the modernist avant-garde were featured as this chapter's epigraphs. But consider the following as well. Having published several of F. T. Marinetti's Futurist manifestos in 1913, the journal offers "A Post-Impressionist Parable" lampooning Futurism and Cubism on January 1, 1914, which traces, in the form of a parable, the "progress" of modern aesthetic ideologies from Impressionism through Cubism and Futurism and ends with the following dismissive remarks:

In course of time these two groups fell into controversy. But in order to win the public ear each wrote in the public language. So busy were they in mutual destruction that they had neither time nor energy for their peculiar practices. Thus they cancelled one another out, and mankind was restored to sanity.¹⁸

Publishing this broadside does not, however, preclude the publication of more of Marinetti's work. A translation of "Geometric and Mechanical Splendour in Words at Liberty" will be featured five months later, on May 7, 1914, without any kind of editorial over-voicing, positive or negative.¹⁹ As is so often the case, though, the *New Age's* presentation of avant-garde work is then counterposed again in the next week's issue, May 14, 1914, by a brilliant parody exposing the gender politics of this experimental writing:

FUTURISTICS A LA MARINETTI

AT THE RESTAURANT

Sinuosity and woman. Wine and barren passion. Waiters
and the lusts of the flesh. Stagnation.

Cease, breath; and let me whirl in geometric splendour
amongst the whizzing spheres.

A comma crawls upon the menu card. My sluggish heart
faints at a full stop.

Joy! Geometric and mechanical joy! A half-brick –
dear cube – sweet architectural slab – shatters the wide
window, and in irresistible [*sic*] impetuosity hisses by me.

What triangles of space appear in yonder glass!

What parellely fissures! – opening parellelier fissures in
my swelling heart!

A flying trapezoid of clear-cut glass severs my fair com-
panion's jugular with a dispatch that defies Time
and Space, while Lightning hides its head.

The scintillating perfection of the speedy act carries away
my spirit like a feather in a hurricane.

A waiter clears up the bloody mess and removes
the inanimate female.²⁰

Four weeks later, on June 18, 1914, the journal offers yet another devastating, and hilarious, send-up of Futurism in "Futile-ism. Or, All Cackle and No Osses," one of a series of dialogue essays Charles Brookfarmer wrote that takes issue, on other occasions, with Fabian Socialism, the suffrage movement, Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, and mysticism ("Mrs. Tism"). Reporting on Marinetti's and C. R. W. Nevinson's lectures about "Vital English Art" at the Doré Galleries six days earlier, Brookfarmer begins his essay by mocking the audience in attendance: "The hot room is full for the most part of elderly (*passées?*) ladies, including such half-forgotten crimes as Messrs. Cunninghame-Graham and Nevinson père." Then he savages the keynote speakers, mainly through very roughly edited quotations, parenthetical commentary, and descriptions of the audience's

response. Both the ellipses and the parenthetical exclamations in the following are Brookfarmer's phrasings:

MR. NEV.: . . . Also important from a commercial point of view . . . barbarians of the West End (some giggles) . . . putting a pony on Durbar Two . . . backwoods of Chelsea (more giggles) the modern artist must advertise . . . Selfridge's . . . materials are extremely expensive . . . Nobody listens to the singing of a corpse or the histrionics of a dead actor (more giggles) . . . virile, original, and, above all, English . . . (He reads the manifesto, in which occurs, "Immortality in art is a disgrace"!! As he cries, "Forward! hurrah for motors! hurrah for speed! hurrah for draughts! hurrah for lightning!" an assistant fires a small piece of magnesium wire. Tremendous Futurartistic effect. Then, "We call upon the English public to support, defend, and glorify the genius of the great Futurist painters or pioneers and advance-forces of vital English art: Atkinson, Bomberg, Epstein, EtcHELLS, Hamilton, Nevinson [!!!], Roberts, Wadsworth, Wyndham Lewis." MR. NEV. sits down amid laughter and shouting of names. MARINETTI rises and commences to wander on and on and on with much emphasis and gesture and mopping of sweaty brow.) (Exclamation marks in brackets in the original)²¹

By no means is Italian Futurism the only avant-garde movement singled out for this kind of treatment in the *New Age*. Cubism comes under fire, for example, not only in the "Post-Impressionist Parable" mentioned earlier but also each time T. E. Hulme weighs in to educate the *New Age* readers on the pleasures of contemporary art. Critics such as Wallace Martin have viewed Hulme's critiques of Walter Sickert and the representational artists he was promoting throughout the spring of 1914 as proof of the *New Age's* commitment to modernist aesthetics. This ignores, however, the simple fact that Hulme himself is quite moderate in his initial presentation of "Contemporary Drawings." Readers familiar with the swagger and bluster of "Romanticism and Classicism" or "The Kind of Rubbish We Oppose" might be surprised by the patient and teacherly manner with which Hulme explains innovations in style and technique to *New Age* readers in this particular essay – without demanding their agreement with his own assessment. The jury is still out on contemporary artists' work, he insists. "You have before you a movement about which there is no crystallised opinion." And thus readers of the *New Age* will have "the fun of making your own judgments" about contemporary art.²² The journal itself demands this kind of "fun," this level of independent judgment, from its readers because of its simultaneous publication of critics and artists on both sides of the current debate about representational versus abstract art. When, however, the *New Age* features Hulme's and Walter Sickert's and Anthony Ludovici's art criticism side

by side in issue after issue; when it publishes in quick succession "Tom Titt"'s caricatures of Anthony Ludovici and Roger Fry, Will Dyson's cartoon, "Progress," and a host of verbal equivalents of these artists' visual mockery of modernism, the strong aftertaste of critique in its presentation of modernism is hard to miss.²³

Given the journal's current reputation as a vehicle for modernism, the frequency with which proponents of modernism are challenged in letters to and from the editors as well as in leaders and columns might also seem surprising. Yet they are a very telling index of the skepticism with which readers and editors of the *New Age* greeted all of the feature articles propagandizing on behalf of the modernist avant-garde. Letters to the editor written in response to T. E. Hulme's essay, "Mr. Epstein and the Critics," sound a characteristic tone in this regard.²⁴ On January 8, 1914, Arthur E. Hight writes:

Sir – Could you not persuade Mr. T. E. Hulme to explain to us, in an Essay not "clumsy, hurriedly-written, and unrevised," "Why it is the duty of every honest man at the present moment to clean the world of these sloppy dregs of the Renaissance"? and especially why we shall benefit by substituting God Epstein for God Michelangelo. Some of us also would like to know with what credentials Mr. Hulme sets himself up as an Apostle, and rides his silly hobbyhorse into your classical columns, shouting his war-cry, "Modern feeling be damned!" when he ought, were he consistent, to be squatting naked in Easter Island surrounded by the pre-historic Art he admires, and dieting himself on roots and toadstools after the manner of savages.²⁵

Douglas Fox Pitt chimes in next in the lineup of letters to the editor, taking issue with Hulme's *ad hominem* remarks about Ludovici's inability to appreciate Jacob Epstein's work:

Sir,—Although I admire Mr. Epstein's work, I do not admire the methods whereby he expects to inculcate appreciation of his work amongst the public. Mr. Epstein must know that he only makes himself ridiculous in threatening to blacken the eyes of an individual who dares to write adversely of his work. Mr. Hulme as the champion of Mr. Epstein was equally unfortunate in his choice of language toward Mr. Ludovici, who had ventured to refer to the sculptor as a "minor non-value-creating ego." Liberty to express oneself freely in marble implies equal liberty to criticise in writing.²⁶

Two weeks later, two additional readers weigh in not so much in Ludovici's defense but to object to Hulme's rhetorical pugilism. "If I were Mr. Ludovici, I would run away," J.A.M.A. writes. "After due consideration, it seems clear to me that Mr. Hulme's remarks on 'plastic criticism' (see his 'hasty notes,' *NEW AGE*, December 25) resolves itself

into a desire to re-mould the curvature of Mr. Ludovici's spine. Why? Because Mr. Ludovici talks sense, I suppose."²⁷

Arthur Rose literalizes the metaphoric violence of the conflict over Jacob Epstein's work between the two art critics and develops the conceit still more elaborately when he offers the following suggestion:

If Mr. Hulme will state his weight, I will undertake to match him with a pugilist of equal weight. The said pugilist shall sincerely hold and state similar opinions of Mr. Epstein's art to those stated by Mr. Ludovici. . . . And I will lend my garden for the contest. It is a very large and secluded garden, capable of accommodating as many of THE NEW AGE readers as would care to witness so interesting an encounter.

When the pugilist has punched Mr. Hulme's right eye into Mr. Hulme's left ear, and Mr. Hulme's remains have been carried to a surgery on a shutter (I have several shutters in the garden). . . . I mean when the contest is over, those present will have leave to foregather to see whether the result aids them to a better understanding and appreciation of art in general, and Mr. Epstein's art in particular.²⁸

Wyndham Lewis makes his first appearance as an author in the *New Age* in letters to the editor on this conflict by describing Ludovici's work as the "grimest pig-wash vouchsafed at present to a public fed on husks."²⁹ When he begins providing feature articles for the journal, he too earns the ire of readers and editors alike. While C. H. Bechhöfer's "More Contemporaries," an excerpt of which is the first epigraph to this chapter, mocks not only *Blast I* but also Lewis's play, *Enemy of the Stars*, and his involvement in the Omega Workshop, the editors' column, "Readers and Writers," finds fault with *Blast's* philosophical and spiritual limitations in the following manner:

Mr. Wyndham Lewis' new quarterly magazine, "Blast" (Lane 25 6d.), has been announced as the successor of the "Yellow Book." But that, I imagine, is no great credit to it, for who, looking back to that period, can admit that there was any philosophy in it? Aubrey Beardsley was something of a genius, but his mind was never equal to his talents; in other words, he was a decadent genius; and who else was there of the smallest importance on the "Yellow Book"? "Blast" has the relative disadvantage of being launched without even a decadent genius to give it a symptomatic importance. It is, I find, not unintelligible. . . . – but not worth the understanding. Blake, it is certain, has gone into the making of it – but Blake without vision, Blake without spiritual certitude. More, no doubt, will be said of it in these columns, for in the absence of any movement of ideas, any movement must be discussed. All the same, its significance will have to be put into it; for of its own self it contains none.³⁰

The following week, "Readers and Writers" opens with an admission that the editors hadn't read *Enemy of the Stars* before writing the previous week's column, and concedes that "it deserves to be called an extraordinary piece of work" – in sharp contrast to Rebecca West's short story, "Indissoluble Matrimony," which has "all the vices of the 'Blast' school, excessive and barbaric ornamentation, violent obscurity, degraded imagery; but unmixed with any idea."³¹ Undoubtedly, "Readers and Writers" then admits, *Blast*:

will provide in the end fresh material for reason to elucidate. But for the moment the movement [Vorticism] appears to me to be the very devil. Brilliant common sense, which we of THE NEW AGE have taken as our watchword, is obviously in peril from the neo-mysticism; so, too, I fear, is reason itself. I'm afraid, however, that the plunge into the dark is going to be seductive of the young. It sounds romantic, it makes a great clatter both in the mind and in the world, it stirs the solar plexus, and it produces the illusion of life. All the same, it is past racial history; and the time-spirit will be revenged on such as stir its bones. I will return to the subject if nobody else deals with it. (253)

If Hulme and Lewis take some hard knocks in the *New Age*, Ezra Pound's treatment at the hands of its readers and editors is still more strikingly and wittily hostile – and hence exemplary of the journal's less-than-laudatory stance toward the modernist avant-garde. Pound published extensively in the *New Age*. As noted earlier, many of these articles found their way eventually into Eliot's *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*; the rest surfaced again much more recently in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Poetry: Contributions to Periodicals*, Volume I (1991). While Eliot's edition of Pound's writings redacts Pound's wide-ranging cultural writings into more narrowly "literary" fare, as Michael Coyle has noted, both Eliot and Pound's more recent editors isolate his writings from the controversies they inspired in the *New Age*, thereby creating a kind of authority for these essays that they certainly did not have in their original context.

Interestingly enough, Pound himself goes on record publicly as being very appreciative of the *New Age's* interest in operating as a forum of open debate about the arts and politics, not an in-house modernist publication, so to speak. The second installment of his series, "Affirmations," for example, opens with the following endorsement of the *New Age's* editorial policy:

THE NEW AGE permits one to express beliefs which are in direct opposition to those held by the editing staff. In this, THE NEW AGE sets a most commendable example to certain other periodicals which not only demand that all writers in their columns shall turn themselves into a weak and puling copy of the editorial

board, but even try to damage one's income if one ventures to express contrary beliefs in the columns of other papers.³²

This comment is undoubtedly a tribute to the *New Age's* commitment to providing its writers and readers with an independent arena for public debate about politics, literature, and the arts. Still, the sheer number as well as the intensity and the range of negative responses Pound's work elicited from *New Age* readers and columnists are striking reminders that its presentation of modernist movements is not, *per se*, an endorsement.

Pound's reaction, for example, to a typographic error in the January 28, 1914 *New Age* printing of "Affirmations IV. As for Imagisme" certainly suggests his awareness of *New Age* readers' less than sympathetic response to his work. He writes – entirely without bluster, perhaps surprisingly – that "Your printer has put 'primary figment' instead of primary pigment' in the last paragraph of my last article (January 28). The phrase as it stands will doubtless give pleasure to many of your readers, but it does not convey my original meaning."³³ Yet even this concession doesn't prepare contemporary readers who think of the *New Age* as a modernist journal for the level of animosity (and hilarity) at his expense in the letters to the editor spawned in response to his work.

Writing under the pseudonym "Alice Morning," Beatrice Hastings, the *New Age's* Paris correspondent and a "virtual co-editor" of the journal for a number of years while she was living with Orage and Katherine Mansfield in London,³⁴ leads the assault on Pound in a series of counter-manifestos in 1915. "I almost was about to believe," she writes,

while reading his article, "Affirmations," that Mr. Ezra Pound was about to wake up. But he sank quietly deeper on the pillow in his final paragraph, which is only an affirmation that he is a hopeless cultist. Bless my heart, Vortices and Quattrocentro! Why drag in physics? "Is it," asks Mr. Pound, "that nature can, in fact, only produce a certain number of vortices? That the Quattrocento shines out because the vortices of power coincided with the vortices of creative energy?" It is all fiddling with terms; and creative energy *is* power. Were there no vortices in nature before the Quattrocento? Yes; and whirlpools, and surges, and Charybdis, and the wheel of Ixion, whereon was bound the poor diable who embraced a cloud thinking it was Juno. I knew a woman once who had decided that everything went in spirals: and, by the way, she played little tricks on you with magic candles and perfumes that arose out of nowhere. The state of things in Art which Mr. Pound deplures is somewhat due to just such florid, pedantic, obscurantist critics as himself – Ixions whom not even an introduction to the almighty gods can clear of pretension.³⁵

A slew of letters to the editor in the weeks that follow reiterate Hastings's objection to Pound's pedantic allusiveness. John Riddle complains of "the muddle" Pound has given us; Herman Scheffauer writes that "Mr. Ezra Pound might as well mask himself with the name of Ezra Ounce," and John Duncan writes: "It would be a delight to follow Mr. Pound into his magic wood of ribble-rows to stalk pattern-units and plunge the quivering spear into curlicubists, but bread and philosophy are very scarce nowadays, and we are not all fairy knights." "Be clear, Mr. Pound. Never say exiguous for narrow; nor talk of the intellectually-inventive-creative spirit when you mean what Englishmen once called wit, quick-parts and fancy."³⁶ And D. Lawrence concludes this series of exchanges with the following:

Your contributor, Miss Alice Morning, is right as usual when she describes Mr. Ben Ezra Pound as muddled. He is so busy borrowing ideas from all sources that he has no time to examine their meanings. He tells us that the present search is for intensity; but intensity by itself is of very little value. It must be intensity efficiently applied. Some verse-makers have intensity without efficiency; some have efficiency without intensity; only poets have both. Mr. Pound has no intensity and but little efficiency. If Mr. Pound wants to be efficient he must economise his means and stop running to waste like a British Museum on the loose.³⁷

Other readers and editors of the *New Age* will take issue with other aspects of Pound's work even as the journal continues to allow him prime space in its pages. "Current Cant," for example, a regular column that cameos very brief excerpts from other periodicals, ridicules Pound's scientific rhetoric in "The Serious Artist,"³⁸ while Beatrice Hastings, writing as "T. K. L.," mocks Pound's seven-part "Approach to Paris" series quite uproariously in a counterpoint set of essays that occupies readers throughout the fall of 1913. The following excerpt from "All Except Anything," the penultimate piece in her series, epitomizes her deliciously wicked mockery, which is inspired primarily by Pound's championing of French poetry at the expense of English traditions.

Reader, when I began these articles I had no notion that there were so many Frenchmen! I thought they were doing these things better in France. But, alas, France is swarming; and every second individual is a poet exactly as over here in these chilly, but prolific islands. Exactly, too, as over here every one of these poets is unique, incomparable, defiant of computation; every one make his poems his very own; every one challenges in his especial person all the old poets and poetical trappings; every one sings of the commonplace, the ordinary you and the ordinary me; every one talks "normally" instead of posing as a Bard; every one prints his Bare Statement of Things in metrical lines. It begins to beat me to know one from another in spite of the fact that they are all unique.³⁹

Although Pound isn't exactly handled with kid gloves in these pieces by both regular contributors and *New Age* readers, his toughest critic, and the one who offers the most sustained critique of his work, is the editor's column of the *New Age*, "Readers and Writers," which was written not only by Orage himself but also by Beatrice Hastings and other regular contributors to the journal under the pseudonym "R. H. C."⁴⁰ In September 1914, "Readers and Writers" calls attention to Pound's recent essay in the *Fortnightly Review* on Vorticism – and dismisses both Pound's promotion of the movement and his characterization of the relationship between Imagism and Vorticism in the following manner:

Whether or not [Mr. Ezra Pound] knows it, Vorticism is dead. It was, at best, only a big name for a little thing, that in the simmering of the pre-war period suddenly became a bubble, and is now burst. Of the magazine "Blast," which was devoted to the propaganda of Vorticism, I doubt whether another issue will appear. Compared with the war it is incomparably feeble. Mr. Pound, however, tries to establish some connection between "Vorticism" in painting and design and "Imagism" in verse. As usual, he is very obscure and the more so for the pains he takes to disguise the real relations. Mr. Pound happened to like Mr. Wyndham Lewis, and there you are! That this is a thousand times more probable than Mr. Pound's explanation appears from this: that while he defines Imagism, his own contribution to the common stockpot, quite clearly, he nowhere in the article has a clear word to say on the subject of Vorticism.⁴¹

Lest readers assume this is an endorsement of Imagism if not of Vorticism, the column concludes by challenging the formal innovativeness of Pound's most famous Imagistic poem, "In a Station of the Metro." After reprinting the poem, the column continues:

The image here, you are to understand, is Mr. Pound's imaginative equivalent for the scene of which he was a sensitive witness; and we ought further to conclude that it is the perfect image. But is it? On the contrary, I could invent a score of other images of quite equal equivalence. So could anybody. Meredith was perpetually doing such things: his "dainty rogue in porcelain" is the most familiar instance. Shelley was prolific in them. The Japanese have made their only literary art of such bon-bons. What of these, for instance, as other images of the same scene: white wheeling gulls upon a muddy weedstrewn beach; war medals on a ragged waistcoat; patches of blue in a sky of smoke-coloured clouds; oases in a sand-storm; flaming orchids growing upon a gooseberry bush; mistletoe on bare trees snow-clad; iridescence upon corpses; a robin's song on a dark autumn day. Had enough? I could go on ad infinitum. But I should not set up as an Imagist, but only as a journalist, on the strength of them! (449)

Reminding readers that the *New Age* "had the honour of first publishing" Pound's translation of "The Sea-Farer," which is "without doubt one

of the finest literary works of art produced in England during the last ten years," but offering qualified praise for *Cathay* and characterizing Pound's poetic contributions to *Blast I* as "a hybrid . . . between the commonplace and the incomprehensible," "Readers and Writers" disparages Pound's aesthetic theorizing in an August 5, 1915 column. "However often we may have mentioned Pound's name, it is at least certain that we have never countenanced his theories," the *New Age* insists. "But then," the column goes on to note,

Mr. Pound is so much better than his theories that to dispose of them is by no means to dispose of him. What, in fact, he does in the company his theories keep, it is hard to say; for they do not distinguish him, but link him with inferior schools; they do not influence his work, except when he is wilful [*sic*] like an American child; and they afford him no help. I would part Mr. Pound from his theories as often as I found him clinging to one, for they will in the end be his ruin.⁴²

Condemning artists who "worship" Pound, and taking significant umbrage with the suggestion that Pound was "invented" by the *New Age*,⁴³ the *New Age* points up over and over again, in column after column, its differences with Pound – and its right to publish Pound nonetheless.

A 1913 "Readers and Writers" nicely summarizes this policy of both featuring and quarreling with Pound, and through him the modernist avant-garde more generally. Responding to readers' challenges regarding the appropriateness of publishing "T. K. L."s parodies of Pound while the latter's series of essays on French poetry, "Approach to Paris," was still being published, "Readers and Writers" defends this decision by making an analogy with the *New Age*'s presentation of Hillaire Belloc's critiques of Guild Socialism:

Nobody, I suppose, thinks it odd that Mr. Belloc should write in THE NEW AGE in criticism of the National Guilds System; and nobody will think it odd if the editorial exponents of that system reply either currently or at the conclusion of the series. Why, then, should it be thought strange to publish Mr. Pound's articles and to subject them to criticism while they were still before our readers? But Mr. Pound, it will be said, was not attacking THE NEW AGE, he was only defending certain tendencies in French poetry. This view assumes too readily the eclecticism of THE NEW AGE which is much more apparent than real. We have, as discerning readers know, as serious and well-considered a "propaganda" in literature as in economics or politics. Why should it be supposed that the economic writers are jealous to maintain their views and to discredit their perversions or antitheses; and the critics of literature be indifferent? It will be found, if we all live long enough, that every part of THE NEW AGE hangs together; and that the literature we despise is associated with the economics we

hate as the literature we love is associated with the form of society we would assist in creating. *Mr. Pound – I say it with all respect – is the enemy of THE NEW AGE.* (emphasis added)⁴⁴

The *New Age's* respectful hostility – but hostility nonetheless – toward Pound in particular and the modernist avant-garde more generally cannot simply be ignored. Once the *New Age* is on-line it won't be buried in the archive either. If the above material from a multiplicity of articles, editorials, reviews, letters to the editors, and weekly columns suggests the inappropriateness of labeling the *New Age* a “modernist” journal, some background information on Guild Socialism and its equally tension-filled relationships with other British socialist movements of the period can help us understand the political commitments powering this critique of the modernist avant-garde, which the editors allude to in the above passage through reference to the *New Age's* “serious and well-considered” “propaganda” in literature and economics/politics.

“THE TRAGEDY OF THE LAST THIRTY YEARS”: REFORMIST V.
REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

British Guild Socialists were opposed to the political gradualism and the narrowly class-based politics of both Fabian Socialism and the Independent Labour Party. Although half of the funding for the *New Age* was provided by Bernard Shaw when Orage and Holbrook Jackson first took over the journal in 1907, the journal quickly outgrew its Fabian Art League support, and Shaw was featured along with Beatrice and Sidney Webb and H. G. Wells in political caricatures that provide visual reinforcement of the verbal critiques offered in the journal's regular columns.⁴⁵ Taking issue in particular with the Webbs, who believed in the gradual transformation of a capitalist economy through the nationalization of industry and development of the heavily centralized bureaucratic infrastructures of a modern welfare state – and were all too willing, in the view of Guild Socialists, to work with any government that would accept their advice – Guild Socialists wanted to “free workers from the unrelieved tedium of mass production and restore a sense of craftsmanship which would make labour satisfying and its products beautiful.”⁴⁶ Unlike French Syndicalists, British Guild Socialists did not envisage the disappearance of the State; instead, as Wallace Martin notes, they proposed that citizens would elect a state government to regulate the guilds, enact a national legislation, and conduct international affairs. Borrowing

heavily from John Ruskin and William Morris, but also challenging the latter's complacency regarding the association of art with luxury, A. J. Penty and Orage sought, in studies such as *The Restoration of the Guild System* (1906) and a multitude of editorials, feature articles, and letters in the *New Age*, to assist in creating a form of society that would be a genuine alternative to either capitalist commodity culture or Fabian Socialism. In such a society workers would no longer regard their labor as a market commodity. In such a society the words of the Apocrypha, which served as the motto of the movement, would come true: "They shall maintain the fabric of the world, and in the handiwork of their craft is their prayer."⁴⁷

"Press Cuttings" is a regular column in the *New Age* in which the editors reprint a passage (usually a substantial paragraph) from another news source as a means of endorsing the latter's view without adding any additional commentary. A "Press Cuttings" from the Bristol socialist paper, the *Venture*, demonstrates the legacy to Guild Socialism of both Arts and Crafts and Clarion movement socialisms, while also hinting at the critique of science that places Guild Socialism in relation to Fabian Socialism as well.

Of the 'movements' which aspire to modify the social order, that which aims at instituting National Guilds is the most inclusively human, and appeals most completely to the whole gamut of Nature's finest faculties. It is scientific, but it always subordinates science – whether it be economics or sociology – to art, to the great art of living. We need to realise that economics alone, and that even science in general, is quite unequal to the task of controlling the destinies of man. To live, or rather, to live well, is an art. This is as true of human society as of the individual. The government of man is more than science; it is an art, based not on economics but on philosophy, and the building of an ideal, well-ordered society, such as Socialists dream of, is emphatically a work of art... The new order of society, if it is to be attained at all, calls for imagination, courage, devotion, and high-spirited allegiance to its great ideals. It is in that spirit that some of us see in National Guilds the mould of a new civilisation. The mark of that new fraternal civilisation will not be a false and impossible equality, but fair play and freedom in the fellowship of the Guilds. The Guilds will raise and expand the standard of life for the whole of their members. Leisure and plenty, culture and fine character will no longer be buried out of bounds for the many, as at present. To work for the coming of the Guilds is to work for the re-establishment of fellowship in the world of Labour. It is to work not merely for a new economic system, but for the humanising influences that would be liberated thereby.⁴⁸

Guild Socialism's attempt to redirect, and thereby radicalize, not only the Arts and Crafts movement's commitment to the humanization of

labor but also the Clarion movement's faith in human "fellowship" is fairly obvious in the *New Age's* silent endorsement of the *Venture's* views. On the one hand, Guild Socialists such as Ivor Brown follow William Morris's lead in suggesting that the two central human desires "neglected by socialists" and "crushed, mocked and perverted by the capitalists" are "the will to do good work" and the "craving for some freedom in personal choice and expression."⁴⁹ But on the other hand, Guild Socialists such as Penty and Ramiro de Maetzu criticize the Arts and Crafts movement for not having "a social theory which accords with its artistic philosophy."⁵⁰ Art needs to take "in hand the work of social reconstruction," rather than allowing itself to be "thrust out of society by the ever-increasing pressure of commercial conditions of existence," Penty writes.⁵¹ Taking this same critique still further, de Maetzu stresses over and over again in his many articles for the *New Age* that Ruskin, Morris, and Oscar Wilde (presumably in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism") went wrong when they dreamed of turning society into a "corporation of artists who . . . discover their joy in the production of beautiful things."⁵² "You cannot make workmen happy by utilising their energies in the production of beautiful things," he insists, arguing that the production of beautiful things, in a capitalist commodity culture, is harnessed inevitably "to the service of luxury, vice, and decoration."⁵³ Failing to distinguish between, for example, Kelmscott Press fine art editions and copies of the *Yellow Book*, which sold cheaply and were available at railway stations as well as in other venues, de Maetzu associates the Arts and Crafts movement with bourgeois luxury and seeks a more radical collectivism in a national guild system.⁵⁴

As noted in Chapter 2, the modernist avant-garde's relationship with *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism is deeply complex and contradictory. Guild Socialism's is equally so. On the one hand, *New Age* Guild Socialists view aestheticism's alleged characterization of art's autonomy from the political sphere as counter-progressive;⁵⁵ on this basis they collapse any distinction between aestheticism and decadence. "The association of art with luxury, of beauty with disease, of aesthetic emotion with strange and sought sensations, is the unholy union of god and ape that we have set ourselves to annul," "Readers and Writers" announces definitively.⁵⁶ If *Blast* describes itself as a successor to the *Yellow Book*, this is a mark against it rather than in its favor. Indeed, this is "another sign of the spiritual anarchism of modern society," confirmation that the "spiritual character of our intellectuals has been declining. "There is no life in decadence . . . nowadays; its future is past . . . Only those writers belong to the new age and have a future before them who can write sense," the

New Age declaims. And the *New Age* “must be more definite” if it is going to succeed in battling the intellectual decadence of the age.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the *New Age*'s borrowings from Wilde are more pervasive than it was willing to acknowledge. As noted in Chapter 2 was also the case with T. S. Eliot, there are “skeletons of influence” (to borrow Richard Shusterman's phrasing) in Guild Socialists' critical closet that could not be brought into the light of day, in this case not only because of Wilde's status as a “social pariah,” an “isolated figure removed from ‘the main current’ of tradition,” but also because of Guild Socialism's participation in what Christopher Hitchens has characterized as contemporary scholars' willful erasure of “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” from the record of turn-of-the-century British socialist debate.⁵⁸

This last point moves the discussion too far afield from my main argument, however, which is to explain what the *New Age* means by “writing sense” versus succumbing to the intellectual decadence of the age. *New Age* Guild Socialism's insistence upon the value of logical, rational argument needs to be understood in the context of its strong antagonism to turn-of-the-twentieth-century idealizations of science and scientific method by both Fabian Socialists and modern avant-gardists alike. Although the *New Age*, as noted earlier, began its life under Orage's editorship with Fabian Art League support, it severed its association with Fabianism fairly quickly and Fabians are critiqued alongside Futurists and Vorticists for their “decadent” fascination with efficiency, machinery, and scientific objectivity. Recall the Bristol *Venture*'s claim: “[E]conomics alone, and . . . science in general, is quite unequal to the task of controlling the destinies of men. To live, or rather, to live well, is an art.” As Guild Socialists use the term, “decadence” refers to both short-sighted scientific materialism and spiritual anarchism. Examples of decadent scientism include both the Fabians' neglect of “the spiritual and psychological qualities” of the proletariat and the Vorticists' “cantings about Life-Force.”⁵⁹ Examples of “decadent” spiritual anarchism include not only the writing in *Blast I* but also the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. The fact that W. B. Yeats and Pound are promoting Japanese Noh drama and that Tagore's “mysticism is just now so much the rage of a large following” is, from a British Guild Socialist's perspective, as sure a sign of the failures of modern society as *Blast*'s “savage” views on “God as Energy, Action, and Dynamic Philosophy” and its “affection for gore.”⁶⁰

Rejecting all such efforts to map the “progress” of modern British society either through the achievements of science or through a false (false because it's non-English) spiritualism, Guild Socialists instead hold out

hope for a “real revolution,” a socialist revolution: “The tragedy of the last thirty years,” Orage writes in his 1913 essay, “Journals Insurgent,” a crucial statement of his editorial principles and commitments, “is now known to be this: a propaganda [i.e., socialism] assumed to be revolutionary was not revolutionary, but merely reformative.” “[T]he real revolution is to be found in the destruction of wavery and not in political action; . . . the real revolution is the transformation of the wage-system into a labour monopoly,” which “can only be effective in the form of a guild – an organisation, that is to say, that can produce wealth more efficiently and distribute it more equitably than under present conditions.”⁶¹

A second passage from “Journals Insurgent” can help us understand the *New Age*’s commitment to the presentation of literature and the arts as a key component of any truly revolutionary socialist platform for cultural change. “Not the least of the revolutionary journal’s troubles,” Orage writes, “is the difficulty to drive into the minds of its readers that life is not composed of water-tight compartments.” “Although [i]t is quite usual for many so-called revolutionary journals to assume that the economic struggle can be maintained without affecting the canons that govern the writing of books, the painting of pictures, the preaching of sermons, and even the fabric and texture of religion,” “[w]e are under no such delusions” (51). Thus, unlike the *New Statesman*, the official journal of Fabian Socialism, the *New Age* perceives itself as having literary and artistic as well as political work to do. Not only does it feature regular “literary” columns such as its theater review series; still more importantly, it conceptualizes its participation in debates about literature and art as part and parcel of its political work. Specifically, Orage argues that:

the literary work of the revolutionary journal, whether creative or critical, must cut across all modern canons of conduct, or literature, or of art. It is our experience that reviews and critiques so inspired hurt far more than our analysis of the wage-system, our attacks on the political parties or our advocacy of labour monopoly. But we know in fact as well as in reason that the economic emancipation of the workers is a dream until its conception has entered into and coloured and changed the minds and hearts of all who minister to our reason and imagination. (51)

Note how much further Orage goes here than in the “Readers and Writers” discussed above. Rather than simply claiming that “every part of THE NEW AGE hangs together,” that the editorial stance taken on economic matters is related to that taken on literary and artistic concerns,

Orage insists that the “revolutionary journal’s” literary and artistic reviews and critiques are even more effective politically than political commentary *per se*. They “hurt far more” than rational analysis of the wage system, because literature and art “chang[e] the minds and hearts” of readers by “minister[ing]” to reason *and* imagination.

This commitment to a view of the aesthetic realm as an integral component of the political and economic order, not a separate (and subordinate) sphere fuels many of the *New Age*’s harshest criticisms of other periodicals. If anything is “eclectic” about the *New Age* under Orage it is the editorial staff’s reading habits, not its political and literary commitments. As noted earlier, its range of reference to other periodicals in regular columns such as “Current Cant” and “Press Cuttings,” as well as the editor’s column, “Readers and Writers,” is truly extraordinary. And yet, precisely because of its political and literary commitments, the *New Age*’s line of argument about the periodical literature of its day is unmistakably partisan. Anxious to combat the fragmentation of the public sphere exacerbated at the turn of the century by the proliferation of periodical publications; anxious, too, to reach and radicalize a newly literate working-class populace, which it worries is increasingly drawn to the spectacular attractions of commodity culture, it criticizes quite sharply any and all periodicals that fail to live up to its own high standards of integrative and politically progressive debate about politics and the arts.

Its hostility to the narrowness of special-interest literary and political periodicals is particularly telling in this regard. Robert Blatchford’s *Clarion*, for example, one of its chief socialist competitors, is taken to task regularly not only for its patent medicine advertisements but for its failure to provide coverage of the full range of developments within British socialism at the turn of the century. Similarly, the *Labour Leader* is described as never having “risen higher than a parish magazine; it is spiteful, narrow, and ignorant.” And *Justice* is noted as having “lost in intellectual power” when it “occupied itself more and more [restrictively] with politics.”⁶² Special-interest “little magazines” promoting one or another avant-garde-ism fare no better. The concern the *New Age* expresses regarding *Blast*’s eminent publication exemplifies this vein of criticism: “I hear that a magazine, to be named “Blast,” will shortly appear under the editorship of Mr. Wyndham Lewis to provide a platform for the discussion of Cubism and other aesthetic phenomena,” “R. H. C.” notes in the editor’s column, “Readers and Writers.” “It will, of course, be amusing for an issue or two, and connoisseurs will purchase early numbers as an

investment for their old age.” “[B]ut *will it encourage discussion, the one thing needed?*” he then asks (emphasis added).

My own experience is that effective discussion can take place only in an independent arena. Arguments must meet on common ground. But the conductors of “Blast” will naturally be more concerned to propagate their ideas than to defend them.⁶³

The quarrels waged between *New Age* Guild Socialists and all manner of both socialists and modernist avant-gardists can thus be summarized as follows. On the one hand, what Guild Socialists, Arts and Crafts and Clarion movement socialists, and modern avant-gardists value in common is craftsmanship, understood not narrowly as a matter of formal technique but as a vehicle of cultural uplift. Pound’s emphasis on the poet’s craftsmanship in the third and fourth installments of “The Serious Artist,” for example, bears an important resemblance to Penty’s distinction between “the technical side of craftsmanship” and its “aesthetic side”; the latter is the means by which a “revival of the arts” shall be a “necessary factor in social salvation.”⁶⁴ Care for the “aesthetic side” of craftsmanship also serves as a rationale for the linguistic eugenics that runs through both Guild Socialism and the work of many modernist avant-gardists. Recall, for example, Eliot’s commitment to purifying the dialect of the tribe or Pound’s defense of the public utility of accurate language. And compare these with Orage’s praise for writing that deserves to be considered “genuine utterance” because of the way it sounds as well as what it says: “What matters is that when a sentence is completed it is a living organism, as simple as life and at the same time as complex . . . The manifesto remains a noble piece of English.”⁶⁵

On the other hand, Guild Socialists quickly diverge from both Fabian Socialists and modernist avant-gardists in their characterization of the need for a larger sense of history and a more expansive conceptualization of literary tradition. If there are certain surface similarities between, for example, Pound’s arguments about the need for a “uniform criticism of excellence” and Guild Socialists’ interest in raising aesthetic standards, this does not shelter Pound from the *New Age*’s criticisms of his insufficient knowledge of contemporary English literature – and hence his misguided valorization of French poetry. In fact, Pound’s characterization of “an international standard of prose writing”⁶⁶ flies directly in the face of Guild Socialists’ aesthetic nationalism, as exemplified in Orage’s dismissive remarks about Pound’s promotion of Japanese Noh drama in a 1915 editorial:

Japan is quite welcome to them. Mr. Pound does his best to make them intelligible and even to link them with his own little cult of imagism; but I understand them quite as little as their modern twig. The plays have atmosphere, and many of the speeches are charming; but head or tail of the whole I cannot make. Mix Maeterlinck with Mr. Pound under the influence of Mr. Yeats, and stir with modern spiritualism, and the result to my mind is that of the 'Noh-dramas.' It is not really encouraging."⁶⁷

If in some regards Pound shares with Guild Socialists a sense of the need for what the *New Age* terms "a common standard, a high culture and a terrible pen,"⁶⁸ Pound's commitment to an ideal of world poetry nonetheless differs significantly from *New Age* Guild Socialists' nationalistic, working-class educationalism.

What a "terrible pen" means is no doubt fairly clear from the *New Age* material included here. What the *New Age* editors mean by "a common standard" and "a high culture," however, and what I mean here by working-class educationalism, deserve some discussion before continuing with this inventory of the journal's "quarrells" with both the modernist avant-gardists and other socialists.

"Common" is, crucially, always a politically inflected term for the *New Age*. It does not mean, as it does for Pound, universal. Instead, along with "popular," it bears the full weight of Guild Socialism's critique of the British class system in its characterization of cultural values that are accessible to all. Thus, when *Blast I* describes itself as "popular" and equates popular art with "the art of individuals," the *New Age* is quick to ridicule these assertions by featuring them in "Current Cant" alongside other objectionable sayings in the recent press such as Desmond MacCarthy's request, in the *New Statesman*, for a more satisfying theatrical representation of "squalidness," a Supreme Film Company's advertisement for "The Baboon's Vengeance, or the Conscience of the Great Unknown," and the *Daily Herald's* association of women with logic.⁶⁹ Scholars such as Marjorie Perloff and Colin MacCabe have argued for the radicalness of avant-garde discourses before the war, but the *New Age* clearly and consistently distinguishes between the work of an avant-garde coterie culture or submarket (before, during, and after the war) and what Raymond Williams has termed the work of "the long revolution."

For example, Rowland Kenney's series of articles for the *New Age* on "Education for the Workers" in the spring of 1914 situates the journal very clearly on a spectrum of working-class educational efforts, and can help us understand the political values informing its trumpeting of both "high culture" and "a common standard." Kenney distinguishes among three

kinds of working-class education: technical, civic, and revolutionary. "To say that [a technical education] can make any appreciable difference in the conditions of the masses" is an insult to labour's intelligence, Kenney begins by noting, for "a technical education for the labourer is simply a means of making him into a more profitable machine for his employer."⁷⁰ Because the skilled labor market is as overcrowded as the unskilled labor market, a competent craftsman "may tramp from London to Dundee without getting one day's work at his own skilled trade," while "carpenters, metalworkers, skilled workmen of every kind are driven to take jobs as labourers, and no further improvement of their knowledge of their [new] trade will lift them out of the unskilled labour rut (652)."⁷¹

The Workers' Education Association and the Ruskin College movement in Oxford epitomize Kenney's second type of working-class educational effort, whose object is "to give discontented workers an education in politics, economics, and in all sociological matters." That this kind of education becomes a means of "draining off" "what brainy men the labour movement possesses" and "turning... [them] into university slimed prigs" is "one of the most terrible wrongs a man can inflict upon the working classes," Kenney contends. The alleged "non-party, non-sectarian" stance of the Workers' Education Association and the Ruskin College movement's anxiousness "to steer clear of the idea that it is out for the workers as a class" earn both associations Kenney's contempt (652).

"Revolutionary" working-class educators alone garner Kenney's praise, but, notably, their ranks are slim: the *New Age*, the Central Labour College, and "in a less degree, one or two other journals" (which remain unnamed) are working all but single-handedly "to keep the minds of workers clear from the cant and lies that are being so widely disseminated by and in the interests of the profiteering classes." "So far," Kenney writes,

labour has had but a limited consciousness of the fact that its position of inferiority was imposed upon it by its superiors. It has struck out blindly against oppression when the intensity of that oppression has become unbearable, but few of the workers have understood, or have been helped to understand, what they were striking against exactly, or to what end their blows and campaigns were waged. Each struggle has seemed something apart from the general course of their lives; a sudden disaster, some strange phenomenon. In short, revolting labour has been an almost blind and unintelligent force. Now the workers are gradually learning that a battle between themselves and the profiteers is no strange outburst due to some sudden change in their relations, or increase in the price of bacon, but simply an incident in one long campaign that must end

either in the overthrow of wagedom or in their own eternal enslavement. And, as we have seen, labour has so far been the losing party in the campaign. The process of enslaving the worker is now going on, and the civic educators are helping it along; the technical educators are, at the very best, doing nothing to prevent or hinder it. (653)

“The Bondage of Wager: An Open Letter to the Trade Union Congress” on August 28, 1913 offers additional evidence of the *New Age*’s goals as a revolutionary working-class educational forum. Contrasting the “artificial excitement” of contemporary Parliamentary politics with the “thrilling interest” to be inspired by a transition from capitalism to a national guild collectivism, the *New Age* identifies its opposition before asserting its own claims: “There is a coterie of thinkers who now assert that capitalism has finally subdued our population into a servile state.” Not only has the *New Age* “combated that view” “intellectually,” it has “passionately resented it,” and it writes now to the Trade Union Congress in order to urge the latter to understand “the evils” that “flow out” of a capitalist wage system. “[F]ounded as it is upon wavery,” modern capitalism is “by no means the last word in social or industrial organization,” the *New Age* insists. “Our belief in the principles of democracy remains unshaken,” the editorial continues: “[Ou]t of the mass of the working population can be developed genius and character as great as can be found under any aristocratic or autocratic system of life and government.”⁷²

But how is such “genius and character” to be nurtured? Through exposure to “high culture” and “a common standard,” rather than through absorption in the spectacular attractions of a burgeoning commodity culture – a commodity culture with which *New Age* Guild Socialists perceive the modernist avant-garde establishing an all-too-comfortable relationship. *New Age* Guild Socialists insist upon the radical democratization of education. (“But first let us object to our correspondent’s suggestion that the average boy will not read the Iliad if he gets the chance. He does not get the chance. He is made to plough through a little of Homer in the Greek; but the English translation of the Iliad still costs twelve shillings, and we dare swear that not one English boy in forty thousand has ever seen it.”⁷³) At the same time, however, they refuse to endorse art’s commodification – whether the culprit is Selfridge’s, the department store giant that dabbled in educational politics in the 1910s, or whether it’s the end product of what the *New Age* will term the modernist avant-garde’s “faddish” “charlatanism.”

The *New Age*’s dismissal of a variety of avant-gardists in a March 1915 “Readers and Writers” is a particularly telling example of its attitudes

in this regard. "The most serious complaint we can make of our age," this column opens by observing, "is that nothing dies of criticism. Fads arise, absurd theories, charlatans and humbugs of every kind, and are duly criticized here or elsewhere; whereupon they continue as if they had passed the tests with flying colours."⁷⁴ Given the obscurity into which the *New Age* itself has fallen, it is impossible for a contemporary reader to read the following remarks unironically. Note, though, how "Readers and Writers" charts the "progress" of the modern avant-gardists' descent into commercial success:

Time, it is true, puts an end to them [fads, absurd theories, charlatans and humbugs of every kind]; but for a considerable period, long after they have been failed with contumely, they enjoy public reputation and other marks of public favour. The cubist, the vorticist, and similar freaks of irresponsible 'artists' are a case in point. I venture to say that there is not one sincere vorticist in the world – or ever was. The most simple of them has never even deceived himself; and, as for the public, not a living soul, I believe, has affected to himself to understand or to relish the 'school.' For all that, the movement goes on, impervious to war as well as to criticism; but its end is approaching! A friend of mine has invented an automatic cubist-vorticist picture-maker that turns you out a Bomberg "Mud-bath" or a Wadsworth "City" with the turn of a wrist. A frame contains coloured pieces of flat wood which shift themselves into 'arrangements' (as Mr. Pound would have said) expressive of profound emotions! Specimens, I understand, can be seen at the Chenil Gallery at Chelsea. The invention will shortly be placed upon the market. (509)

The editors stop just short in this particular "Readers and Writers" of accusing the modernist avant-garde of going commercial. The "friend" who has figured out how to mass-produce Bombergs and Wadsworths isn't himself identified as an avant-gardist. But the alliance between the avant-garde and what Rowland Kenney had termed the "profiteering classes" is being forged nonetheless, and the *New Age* is adamant that this effort will succeed in accomplishing what criticism and the war have failed to do: namely, end the "irresponsible" avant-gardism of Cubists, Vorticists, and "similar freaks" through their assimilation into commodity culture.

Two points need to be made here in conclusion. First, the *New Age's* critique of the avant-garde for its cozy relationship with bourgeois consumer culture is part and parcel of its materialist critique of consumer culture itself. That is to say, the *New Age's* critique of modernity encompasses its critique of the modernist avant-garde: the former drives the latter, not vice versa, even as it powers *New Age* Guild Socialism's antagonism to

other socialisms as well. And second, it is impossible to read these fighting words, as we would now term them, without noting their irony. The editors speak with great confidence in the "Readers and Writers" discussed above about the way "time will put an end" to avant-garde fads. Yet, of course it was Guild Socialism, not the modernist avant-garde, which quickly receded into the backwaters of history, superseded in Orage's own life first by an interest in Freudian psychoanalysis and then by Gurdjieffian mysticism in the early 1920's. Always a minority culture within British socialism, Guild Socialism quickly lost its visibility as a venue of open debate about politics *and* the arts. It was roundly trumped in the political arena by a version of Labour Party Parliamentaryism that solidified not only the rarification of the aesthetic sphere that Guild Socialism had resisted so fiercely but also the professionalization of intellectuality and literary study we've seen the Joyce-Pound-Eliot nexus of modernism promote as it secured its own safe housing in the modern academy.

NOTES

1. C. H. Bechhöfer, "More Contemporaries," *New Age* 15, 13 (July 30, 1914), 308.
2. L'Hibou, *New Age* 17, 12 (July 15, 1915), 258.
3. Michael Levenson, "Introduction," *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1.
4. Sam Hynes, *Further Speculations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); T. S. Eliot (ed.), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*; Baechler, Litz, and Longenbach (eds.), *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals*. See also *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
5. For a useful discussion of this watchword of the *New Age*, see Wallace Martin, *The New Age Under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), pp. 40-1.
6. Tom Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Art Club 1893-1923* (Brookfield, V.T.: Scholar Press, 1990), p. 15.
7. This is Wallace Martin's approach in *The New Age Under Orage*.
8. Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Art Club*, p. 15; Martin, *The New Age Under Orage*, p. xi.
9. "To Our Readers," *New Age* 2, 6 (25 April 1908), 503.
10. "Press Cuttings," quoting the Bristol *Venture*, *New Age* 17, 19 (September 9, 1915), 464.
11. "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 13, 14 (July 31, 1913), 393.
12. *Ibid.*, *New Age* 16, 3 (November 19, 1914), 69.

13. *Ibid.*, *New Age* 15, 10 (July 9, 1914), 229.
14. *Ibid.*, *New Age* 17, 13 (July 29, 1915), 309.
15. A. J. Penty, "Art and Plutocracy," *New Age* 15, 1 (May 7, 1914), 10; Penty, "Aestheticism and History," *New Age*, 14, 22 (April 2, 1914), 683-4.
16. North, *Reading* 1922, p. 11.
17. "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 16, 3 (November 19, 1914), 69.
18. T. W. Pateman, "A Post-Impressionist Parable," *New Age* 14, 9 (January 1, 1914), 282.
19. F. T. Marinetti, "Geometric and Mechanical Splendour in Words at Liberty," trans. Arundel del Ré, *New Age* 15, 1 (May 7, 1914), 16-17.
20. George A., "FUTURISTICS A LA MARINETTI," *New Age* 15, 2 (May 14, 1914), 45.
21. Charles Brookfarmer, "Futile-ism. Or, All Cackle and No Osses," *New Age* 15, 7 (June 18, 1914), 154.
22. T. E. Hulme, "Contemporary Drawings," *New Age* 14, 22 (April 2, 1914), 688. Hulme does go on to stack the deck a bit in favor of modern art in his next sentence when he hints at his antagonism toward conservative art critics that will soon be played out over responses to Jacob Epstein's work in the pages of the *New Age* (as will be discussed further below). Nonetheless, his initial invitation to *New Age* readers is uncharacteristically gracious in its acknowledgement of readers' right to decide for themselves what they think about modern art.
23. Many of "Tom T." [Jan de Junosza Rosciszewski]'s cartoons for the *New Age* are reproduced in Martin's *The New Age Under Orange*, and those at issue here will also be available shortly on the Modernist Journal Website. See "Tom T.," "Anthony Ludovici," *New Age* 14, 14 (February 4, 1914), 448; "Tom T.," "Roger Fry," *New Age* 14, 26 (April 30, 1914), 828; see also Will Dyson, "Progress," *New Age* 14, 12 (January 22, 1914), 376.
24. Hulme, "Mr. Epstein and the Critics," *New Age* 14, 8 (December 25, 1913), 251-3.
25. Arthur E. Hight, "Art," *New Age* 14, 10 (January 8, 1914), 319.
26. Douglas Fox Pitt, "Mr. Epstein and His Work," *New Age* 14, 10 (January 8, 1914), 319.
27. J.A.M.A., "Letter to the Editor," *New Age* 14, 12 (January 22, 1914), 382.
28. Arthur Rose, "Letter to the Editor," *New Age* 14, 12 (January 22, 1914), 382.
29. Wyndham Lewis, "Letter to the Editor," *New Age* 14, 10 (January 8, 1914), 319. See also his letter to the editor on April 2, 1914, in which he describes Walter Sickert as "the scandal of the neighborhood" thirty years ago, and a man who now "sits at his open front door and invents little squibs and contrivances to discomfot the young brigands he hears tales of, and of whose exploits he is rather jealous" (*New Age* 14, 22 (April 2, 1914), 703).
30. "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 15, 10 (July 9, 1914), 229.
31. *Ibid.*, *New Age* 15, 11 (July 16, 1914), 253. Subsequent references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text. Rebecca West is consistently

reviewed poisonously in the *New Age*. See *ibid.* 13, 9 (June 26, 1913) on the *New Freewoman* in general (“a great deal of cackle, but mostly lively cackle”) and the characterization of West’s “clever travel sketch,” as being “marred . . . by some immature atheisms of the very dogmatic sort.” “Indulgence in such senseless and insensitive audacities must not be prolonged if this writer wishes to be read by any but a clique,” the reviewer suggests in closing (p. 237). See also “Current Cant,” *New Age* 14, 5 (December 3, 1914), which holds up for ridicule West’s statement in a recent issue of *The New Republic* that “There is now no criticism in England” (p. 115).

32. Ezra Pound, “Affirmations II,” *New Age* 16, 11 (January 14, 1915), 277.
33. Pound, “Letter to the Editor,” *New Age* 16, 14 (February 4, 1915), 391.
34. Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Art Club*, p. 39.
35. “Alice Morning” [Beatrice Hastings], “Impressions of Paris,” *New Age* 16, 12 (January 21, 1915), 308–9.
36. John Riddle, “Letter to the Editor,” *New Age* 16, 12 (January 21, 1915), 327; Herman Scheffauer, “Letter to the Editor,” *New Age* 16, 15 (February 11, 1915), 415; John Duncan, “Letter to the Editor,” *New Age* 16, 15 (February 11, 1915), 415.
37. D. Lawrence, “Letter to the Editor,” *New Age* 16, 16 (February 18, 1915), 438.
38. “Current Cant,” *New Age* 13, 27 (October 30, 1913), 780.
39. T. K. L. [Beatrice Hastings], “All Except Anything,” *New Age* 13, 25 (October 16, 1913), 733. See also “The Way Back to America,” *New Age* 13, 21 (September 18, 1913), 604–5; “The Clear Tongue plus Pindarism,” *New Age* 13, 22 (September 25, 1913), 636–7; “Humanitism and the New Form,” *New Age* 13, 23 (October 2, 1913), 669–70; “Aristophanes or Tailharde?,” *New Age* 13, 24 (October 9, 1913), 702–3.
40. Beatrice Hastings notes in her autobiography that Orage wrote very few of the “Readers and Writers” columns and that she herself “had entire charge of, and responsibility for, the literary direction of the paper, from reading and selection of MSS to the last detail of spacing and position” between 1907 and 1914 (*The Old ‘New Age’ Orage – and Others* [London: Blue Moon Press, 1936], p. 3.) I note this problem of attribution but also set it aside for further consideration elsewhere.
41. “R. H. C.,” “Readers and Writers,” *New Age* 15, 19 (September 10, 1914), 449. Subsequent references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text.
42. *Ibid.*, *New Age* 17, 14 (August 5, 1915), 332.
43. This particular “Readers and Writers” opens by noting that “Mr. James Douglas has half accused THE NEW AGE of inventing Mr. Ezra Pound” (*New Age* 17, 14 [August 5, 1915], 332).
44. “R. H. C.,” “Readers and Writers,” *New Age* 14, 2 (November 13, 1913), 51.
45. See “Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb,” *New Age* (April 10, 1913); “Tom T.” [Jan de Junosza Rosciszewski], “Mr. George Bernard Shaw,” *New Age* 14, 19 (March 12, 1914), 608; “Tom T.,” “Mr. G. Bernard Shaw,” *New Age* (June 5,

- 1915), 160; and "Tom T.," "Mr. H. G. Wells," *New Age* (May 29, 1913), 128. As noted above, many of these are reprinted in Wallace Martin's *The New Age Under A. R. Orage*, and will also be available soon on the MJP website.
46. Martin, *The New Age Under Orage*, pp. 202, 206.
 47. As quoted in Martin, *The New Age Under Orage*, p. 209.
 48. "Press Cuttings," *New Age* 17, 19 (September 9, 1915), 464.
 49. Ivor Brown, "Towards National Guilds," *New Age* 17, 3 (May 20, 1914), 54.
 50. Penty, "The Restoration of the Guild System VI," *New Age* 13, 18 (August 28, 1913), 511.
 51. Penty, "The Restoration of the Guild System VII," *New Age* 13, 19 (September 4, 1913), 545.
 52. Ramiro de Maeztu, "Not Happiness, But—," *New Age* 17, 10 (July 8, 1915), 224.
 53. For further discussion by de Maeztu of aestheticism's inappropriate association of beauty with luxury, see "On Art and Luxury," *New Age* 16, 24 (April 15, 1915): 640–2.
 54. I'd like to thank Margaret Stetz for this insight into his mis-characterization of aestheticism's exclusivity.
 55. See Jonathan Freedman for a very different view of the way in which aestheticism is "always already" politicized, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*.
 56. "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 17, 6 (June 10, 1915), 133. The editors' remarks here are inspired by the first quarterly issue of the *Gypsy* featuring the work of Jacob Epstein and others, which the *New Age* views as retro-aestheticism. "Really it is an astonishing revenant from 1892," "Readers and Writers" suggests. "How those old ghosts do walk to be sure! They are, however, a little faded from their detention among the earth-bound shades. Mr. Odle is Beardsley without genius; and the writers are either dead, decadent or desirous of soon becoming one or the other." The *Gypsy* in this regard is a "challenge" to the *New Age*: "The war should have completed our work rather than have made it, as it now appears, all to be done over again. However, no cause is better to spend one's life in. Have at them!" (p. 133).
 57. "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 15, 10 (July 9, 1914), 229.
 58. See Shusterman, "Wilde and Eliot," p. 142, on the "skeletons of influence" in Eliot's closet; "social pariah" is his phrasing as well. For further discussion of the *New Age*'s borrowings from Wilde, see my "Oscar Wilde's Legacies to *Clarion* and *New Age* Socialist Aestheticism," in Joseph Bristow (ed.), *Oscar Wilde in Context* (forthcoming, University of Toronto Press). On the erasure of Wilde's contributions to socialist debate, see Christopher Hitchens, "Style and Socialism," in Regenia Gagnier (ed.), *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1991), pp. 88–90.
 59. "The Death of an Idea," *New Age* 18, 11 (July 10, 1913), 287; "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 16, 13 (January 28, 1915), 346.

60. *New Age* 16, 13 (January 28, 1915), 346. On *Blast's* association with *Yellow Book* decadence, see *New Age* 15, 10 (July 9, 1914), 229. On Tagore see also "Present-Day Criticism," *New Age* 12, 25 (April 24, 1913), 608, where he is described as a bengali Yeats: "wordy, pathetically sensuous, self-complacent, careless of the better example of better men." In December of 1913, the *New Age* will note with relief that "the indecent debauch is now over or nearly over, and one by one the victims of Mr. Yeats' frenzy [in promoting Tagore] will awake to discover that their discovery was illusory" [*New Age* 14, 7 (December 18, 1913), 209].
61. "Journals Insurgent," *New Age* 13, 15 (August 7, 1913), 414, 415. Subsequent references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text.
62. See, for example, "Retrospect," *New Age* 14, 1 (Nov. 6, 1913), 8. In this unsigned editorial reviewing the previous twenty-five years of socialism, the *Clarion* is accused of having "thoroughly imbibed the doctrine of State Socialism." Here and elsewhere, the complaint is also that the *Clarion* provides no opportunity "for 'living' discussion or controversy" because Robert Blatchford remains caught up in 1890s socialist paradigms (Geo. Brimelow, letter to the editor, *New Age* 13, 26 [23 October, 1913], 773).
63. R. H. C., "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 14, 10 (January 8, 1914), 307.
64. Penty, "Aestheticism and History," *New Age* 14, 22 (April 2, 1914), 684. See also "Art and Revolution," *New Age* 14, 26 (March 19, 1914), 617; and "Art and Plutocracy," *New Age* 15, 1 (May 7, 1914), 10.
65. "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 13, 26 (October 23, 1913), 762.
66. Pound, "Affirmations VI," *New Age* 16, 15 (February 11, 1915), 410.
67. "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 17, 12 (July 22, 1915), 282.
68. *Ibid.*, *New Age* 14, 6 (December 11, 1913), 176.
69. "Current Cant," *New Age* 15, 12 (July 23, 1914), 268.
70. Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*; Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979); Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975).
71. Rowland Kenney, "Education for the Workers," *New Age* 14, 21 (March 26, 1914), 652-3. Subsequent references to this essay will be made parenthetically in the text.
72. "The Bond of Wager: An Open Letter to the Trade Union Congress," *New Age* 13, 18 (August 28, 1913), 505.
73. "R. H. C.," "Readers and Writers," *New Age* 13, 14 (July 31, 1913), 393.
74. *Ibid.*, *New Age* 16, 19 (March 11, 1915), 509.