at the Slade, and who (like Edward Wadsworth) did work on camouflage. Carlisle is presented as foolish and excitable about his inability to paint landscapes in wartime, particularly about the air. He then remarks that the war is the fault of "Fry and his buddies". Asked to explain, he says that "Soon as the cork popped at the Grafton and the poison genie seeped out, this war was a foregone conclusion. Just a matter of time" (147). Many conservative painters objected to Roger Fry’s second post-impressionist exhibition of 1912 at the Grafton Galleries, and – such was the furore – somebody might later have thought that modern art caused the war. But why does McCarthy introduce this character, with these views? It is an example of ideological thought by which ideas alter the world, and precisely the kind of thinking that McCarthy doesn’t need if a content-free technology is to be admired. So this way of thinking is given to an hysterical artist, and discredited. As to relevance, would not Lewis’s eerily predictive painting from 1913, Plan of War, have made a better example?

McCarthy does like certain modernists, as he told us in the Guardian article already mentioned (July 24, 2010). When Serge’s car crashes on top of him, he declares to his rescuers: "It’s my carapace." This is crude Futurism, pure Marinetti, who similarly crashed in a ditch. McCarthy also lifts from Joyce, taking the moment in Ulysses when Bloom imagines a gramophone being buried in a coffin to allow the dead to send back messages. When Serge’s sister is buried, her grief-stricken father cannot imagine that she is really dead, and distractedly suggests that a Morse key be put in the coffin so she can transmit when she comes alive. It is significant that McCarthy’s conservative modernism should embrace the obvious Marinetti, and the loveable Joyce, the safe alternatives to the ideologically critical Lewis. No wonder the literary establishment should be so fond of the fiction of Tom McCarthy, which is at once too full of information, and largely free of significant meaning. Too much noise, not enough signal. ☝

The end of Modernism
Nathan Waddell


Near the end of What Ever Happened to Modernism? Gabriel Josipovici suggests that mid-20th century accounts of the history of artistic modernism that portray the emergence of modernist aesthetics as a simple passing of the flame from snugly confident genius to brilliant, equally snug inheritor now ‘seem not merely inadequate, but quaint’ (183). However, the same might be said of What Ever Happened to Modernism? itself, which throughout reads like a curiously out-of-date polemic on behalf of an ‘aggressive’ view of modernism with which anyone working in the field of modernist studies will be more than familiar. This reading stresses that modernism should be understood ‘as the coming into awareness by art of its precarious status and responsibilities’ (11). Signalling his scholarly indebtedness to Kierkegaard, Josipovici variously defines his object of study as ‘the effort, through art, to recognise that which will fit into no system, no story, that which resolutely refuses to be turned into art’ (113); as ‘deeply intertwined with the emergence of a critical conscience’ (139); and as produced by ‘a tradition of those who have no tradition’ (185). At the centre of all this is Josipovici’s leitmotif that the best creators of artworks are those who ‘sense vividly what is lacking [in life] and then endeavour to convey a sense of this lack, between works that illustrate and works that live’ (167).

Josipovici’s dust jacket blurb suggests that the contemporary novel in English is but a pale imitator of its ground-breaking modernist forebears, and openly states that ‘this agile and passionate book asks why’. And yet, agile and passionate though it is, the text never really addresses this (in any case questionable) assertion with the amount of detail that so provocative a statement necessitates. Josipovici instead offers a history of a modernism that originates in the early 1500s, and which evolves through the work of such artists as Cervantes, Mallarmé, Hofmannsthal, Kafka, and Beckett, in addition to many others. Such innovators as Wyndham Lewis, Jacob Epstein, Ford Madox Ford,
Dorothy Richardson, and Marinetti, to name but a few, do not feature in this text. Josipovici’s sense that modernism refers to a condition of an emergent modernity, as opposed to a more or less identifiable phase and condition of late 19th and early 20th century cultural history, allows him to posit some surprising examples of (what he takes to be) modernist writing in a text that is consistently well-written and elegantly phrased. However, this sense is accompanied by an unwelcome attempt to negate almost the entirety of the new modernist studies – here principally represented by Peter Gay – against which Josipovici situates himself. Gay’s Modernism: The Lure of Heresy (2007) is dismissed as a ‘dreadful book [that] exemplifies everything that is wrong with positivist history’ (5) and as a text that attempts to ‘make a show of impartiality’ while being ‘just as partial as any other account’ (178). Josipovici is entitled to his opinion (and his opinions are nowhere lacking), but the unnecessary viciousness with which he rejects the ‘naively positivist’ underpinnings of accounts like Gay’s – again, a questionable take on not only Gay’s book but also on the general cultural historiography to which it belongs – left this reviewer feeling short-changed.

The most disturbing instance of Josipovici’s dismissiveness comes early on. For him there are good books on modernists – ‘such as Hugh Kenner’s The Invisible Poet (on Eliot)’ – but ‘hardly any good books’, so far as he is aware, on modernism more generally (xi). Anyone working in modernist studies, especially in the new modernist studies of the past thirty or so years, will no doubt take pause here. At best this comment will rile scholars trying to navigate their way through the difficulties of a ‘self-knowing’, positivist cultural history of modernism. At worst it will offend those who have invested time, effort, and, indeed, hard-earned salaries in the act of constructing readings of modernism located in well-researched contextual details and buttressed by an awareness of the partiality of their interpretative strategies. It is tempting to speculate on which contemporary critics Josipovici’s ‘hardly’ – of his ‘hardly any good books’ – includes in, and excludes from, the supposed minority of good books on modernism, but right the way through What Ever Happened to Modernism one gets the sense that that minority goes no further than the handful of critics (T. J. Clark especially) of which Josipovici explicitly approves. In short: an always intriguing, but ultimately exasperating, account of a modernism that seems already to have been incorporated into the very critical tradition Josipovici seems so intent on subverting.

Obituaries

Omar Pound (1926 – 2010)

James Dolman

Omar Pound died on 2 March 2010. I first met Omar in the early 1970s. He came to my office with his US lawyer, Parker Hayden, to talk about royalties due to the estate of Ezra Pound. Ezra had died in 1972 and Omar’s mother, Dorothy, in 1973. Omar was very informally dressed, in stark contrast to the two lawyers sitting around the desk in compulsory tie and suit. At that time Omar was living in Cambridge with his wife, Elizabeth, and his young daughters Katherine and Oriana, whilst teaching Persian, Arabic and Islamic Studies at Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology.

Omar at first appeared to me to be a shy, quiet, self-effacing man. But I soon discovered that here was a man exuding warmth and affection, with a vast knowledge of the arts – and in particular of the literature of the ancient civilizations south and east of the Mediterranean. I also learned that he admired Ezra’s long-term friend Wyndham Lewis, a name that at that time did not readily connect with my imperfectly-informed mind. This was soon to change when Omar turned up with that bundle of energy and good company, Cy Fox, who – I was informed – had from his Oxford days been Lewis’s lone apostle in the wilderness. Omar and Cy told me that they were concerned about the welfare of Gladys Anne Wyndham Lewis (Froanna), who was by all accounts without sufficient means of support. Both Omar and Cy had kept in touch with Froanna, and visited her at her rented accommodation in Torquay.

By his Will, Lewis had left the copyright in his paintings and written work to Froanna. He had little else to leave. Omar and Cy were concerned that Froanna, out of necessity, was and had been granting rights to publish which were, from her point of view, very unfavourable. I believe that Omar and Cy went to see her in Torquay to discuss the long-term destination of the copyright. They found that Froanna had not