

# Modernism, Steam and the Vaporised Self

Tuesday, 24 July 2018 10:00 AM

## Overview

### Assessments

1. 800 word close reading (24/08)
2. 1,200 word global reading (21/09)
3. 2,000 word critical/imaginative essay (29/10)
  - Cannot write on the same text more than once

## Modernism and Modernisation

Stevenson: "Modernism is a critical construct, a recognition, some years after writers completed the works involved, of substantial similarities, even a collective identity, in the initiatives they took and the styles and concerns which they made a priority."

Modernism literature encompasses:

- Naturalism
- Symbolism
- Decadence
- Imagism
- Vorticism
- Futurism
- Surrealism
- Dadaism

Modernism is a set of cultural practices that emerges in response to the rapid and radical changes brought about by modernisation

- Modernism was a ripe period for people who wanted to write manifestos
- Temporal dislocation: being ahead of oneself
- Pointing to something and saying it exists, even though that very act is an attempt to bring it into being

\*See lecture slides for modernist authors' response to advents of modernisation\*

## "All that is solid melts into air..."

Steam is a metaphor for:

- Things in modernity incessantly changing their shape, hurrying forward, dispersing and growing impalpable
- Shifting and impalpability getting into the texture of life
- The freedom of the imagination
  - Evanescence
- Change, advancement, power, bridge between nature and man
- Control, compression, objectivity

## Modernist Selfhood

Woolf: "On or about December 1910, human character changed."

Susman: one of the hallmarks of 20th century culture is a shift from a culture of character to a culture of personality

- From a culture oriented around a vision of the self defined by its submission to a higher moral law and its commitment to the Protestant work ethic, towards a culture in which the self was defined by its attempt to differentiate itself from the crowd while at the same time appealing to it

Eliot: interest in depersonalisation

- We know that someone has talent on the basis of the way in which they embody this main-line living tradition, rather than what is idiosyncratic to them
- The most recognisable talent is also the most self-effacing talent
  - Paradox
- Submitting oneself to something higher, in this case, tradition
  - Yet this is how one asserts themselves

# Close Reading, Criticism, and English Lit

Wednesday, 25 July 2018 3:24 PM

## The critical revolution - literary criticism and its institutional history

Why is "criticism" so important for an understanding of the discipline of "English"?

- Simon During: "The reason for literary criticism's special status is that, unlike various forms of historicism and theorization, unlike the more technical practices of textual or digital scholarship, linguistics or philology, it does not rely upon procedures shares with other disciplines. So criticism alone harbors the promise of pure disciplinary autonomy."

What did we have before "criticism"?

- Stefan Collini: "German-spired form of positivist-historical scholarship"/ "a heavy emphasis on philology and on the accumulation of biographical and historical information *about* literature"
  - More concerned with the conditions of literature, not literary, but in regards to literature

When/where was literary criticism first implemented?

- 1917 Cambridge, when a English examination paper was approved to be separate from Medieval and Modern Languages

Why was literary criticism implemented?

- There was a general dissatisfaction with philology and its tendency toward sentimental nationalism

I.A. Richards

- Invention of modernism in the human sciences - Richards' fixation with the central nervous system and sensory responses to literature
- Criticism isn't about the texts or about ranking the texts
  - It's about readers' response to the texts, emulative of therapy
  - Art is only good insofar as it allows you to control yourself and your experiences
  - i.e. "hours when the varying possibilities of existence are more clearly seen and the different activities which may arise are more exquisitely reconciled, hours when habitual narrowness of interests or confused bewilderment are replaced by an intricately wrought composure"
- Richard's practical criticism
  - He commented on protocols (responses to poems)
  - He was reading the readings
- One of the key points of literary criticism is self-sufficiency
  - You should be able to evaluate a poem without knowing the author or history of the poem
  - But the other side of this is a crushing transparency: if you can't get this right, there is something wrong with you

## Close reading across the Atlantic

|             | British Practical Criticism   | American New Criticism   |
|-------------|---|--|
| Key figures | Cambridge School <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I.A. Richards</li><li>• William Empson</li></ul> Scrutiny <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• F.R. Leavis</li></ul> Cultural Studies | Southern Agrarians <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• John Crowe Ransom</li><li>• Allen Tate</li><li>• Robert Penn Warren</li></ul> Yale Critics <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cleanth Brooks</li></ul> |

|             | • Raymond Williams  | • W.K. Wimsatt   |
|-------------|---|--|
| Differences | Poems are a site of communicable experience<br>Poem's meaning as readily communicable through paraphrase<br>Literary discourse is not apart from natural or ordinary language | Poem as an "ontologically irreducible" artefact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not about meaning, but about being</li> </ul> Poem's meaning as unsusceptible of paraphrase<br>Poetry is a distinct "language game" from everyday communication |

### "The Heresy of Paraphrase"

- Brooks: in turning a poem into a paraphrase, you distil it into separate disciplines
  - There is a tendency to judge the poem on the truth or validity of the doctrines that you separate it into, as opposed to the truth or the intrinsic value of the poem itself
- Empson's paraphrasing is a critical crux necessary to engage with a poem
  - Turning a literary poem into a dramatic monologue
  - Irreverent of the original text
  - In spite of philosophical differences, both groups of critics are interested in the nuance and richness of language

### "The Completest Mode"

Richards: "Poetry is the completest mode of utterance"

Verbal art is thought of being complete, rich and heterogenous

Poetry, compared to Science, leaves less out

- In order to explain something, a scientist has to exclude a lot more
  - In contrast, poetry has a more inclusive view

John Crow Ransom: "Men become poet, or at least they read poets, in order to atone for having been hard practical men and hard theoretical scientists."

- Poetry can compensate for all the losses and all the gaps in your own life