ROMANTICISM REGAINED. Viorica Patea and Paul Scott Derrick, eds. *Modernism Revisited: Transgressing Boundaries and Strategies of Renewal in American Poetry*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 243 pages.

Revisiting may mean the holding on to a memory one should start to let go of, and nobody has made better escape artists than the Modernists themselves. "Revisiting Modernism" may thus ring an ironic note, but there are good reasons for playing it; and that may simply be that we have not gotten much farther, that there is no 'post-' in Modernism. We may never have left Modernism behind after all and like good would-be-modernist we are inclined "to generate a journey that becomes a mythic narrative of the self and the language of the Poet" (188). These are Manuel Brito's words in his excellent overarching treatment of Modernist American poetry: "Instances of the Journey Motif Through Language and Self in Some Modernist American Poets." But he may as well be referring to our own reception of Modernist poetry in the 21st-century as part of this as yet ongoing journey. Even if Paul Scott Derrick asserts in the Introduction that this book is not attempting to answer the questions "what is Modernism? When and how did it begin? And has it really ended?" (5), the truth is that this collection of essays testifies for a kind of answer, namely that Modernism has not really ended and that the answer to its meaning lies in our midst. The pertinence of *Modernism Revisited* is that, unlike *Brideshead Revisited,* it is not looking back as a way to reconcile us with what cannot be helped but to make present what is still with us as a kind of celebration. Thus, Derrick adds: "Modernism revisited: this is not another exercise in disingenuous critical positioning" (4), but rather a solid choreography of multiple critical voices which profitably speak to each other due mainly to the effective editing of this book by Viorica Patea and Paul Scott Derrick.

It is important to note that the volume under review is not just about Modernism but, namely, American poetry. Most of the essays in this collection are devoted to single authors representative of the high canon of 20th-century American poetry arranged within two main sections that echo the books subtitle: "Transgressing Boundaries" and "Strategies of Renewal." The first is really about Modernist American poets proper, while the second focuses more on how later American poets have responded to their Modernist inheritance. But the greatest contribution of *Modernism Revisited* lies on its presumption that there is something unique about American Modernist poetry which, unlike the Modernist Classicism of, say, the English T.E. Hulme, is unashamedly Romantic in line with its own cultural heritage —that of Emerson and Whitman. Of course T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are major anomalies due to their long-term European residence, not to mention the former's British citizenship. And one is tempted to pose the question that Pound put to Harriet Monroe: "Are you for American poetry or for poetry?" (Bradbury and Ruland 278). The editor of *Poetry*'s sin had been the setting of an epigraph from Whitman on the first edition of the magazine. The history of American poetry in the 20th-century may be the tale of its exclusion from the High Modernism of those who chose to leave for Europe. Yet, is Modernism a historical period now gone, a place one had to

attend in person? Or is it, rather, a state of mind, between memory and desire? Perhaps a bit of both in the words of the Imagists themselves: "We believe that 'Imagisme' comes from a city which all good Americans are supposed to visit late or soon" (Jonas 13). Those poets that stayed home may have simply replied that the city Pound refers to was in American, though more like a country town than an urban monster.

William Carlos Williams is an interesting case. He did appear in Pound's *Des Imagistes* (1914), yet soon opted out of the project to "create somehow by an intense, individual effort, a new —an American— poetic language" (Jonas 171). Hélène Aji could have made more of it in her "Pound and Williams: The Letters as Modernist Manifesto"; but, as it is, she does offer a very interesting case study of Modernist transatlantic tensions through a close and enlightening close reading of the letters these two poets exchanged. However Aji's interests lie elsewhere, more on the friendship between the two poets and in constructing their correspondence as a *proto*-Modernist Manifesto. Furthermore, "what started as a manifesto in the making has turned into an ideology" (60); an ideology that uses poetics as a means for political liberation. Aji unites their efforts, despite the poets' differences, in "the formal liberation of poetry from the constraints of fixed meter to a desire to free America from the cultural imperialism of Europe" (66). Yet, questions about the ideology of Modernism should not be taken lightly, and a quick glance at Georg Lukacs or Fredric Jameson would not have gone amiss if only to throw some light over what may be inversely understood as the tyranny of Modernism's ideological formalism. That Pound and Williams presented a common ideological front is going a little too far if only in hindsight of the impact of European Fascism on Pound as opposed to Williams increasing commitment to "American" poetry. But the strength of this article lies in the way it teases out the epistolary aesthetics that erupt from the friendship of these two poets as the letters brushed pass each other mid-Atlantic as it were.

William Carlos Williams's second thoughts towards European Modernism is nicely complemented by Ernesto Suárez-Toste who notes the poet's "ambivalent coupling of enthusiasm and boredom with the Surrealist project" (163). In his "Spontaneous, not Automatic: William Carlos Williams versus Surrealist Poetics," Suárez-Toste explores Williams resistance to Surrealism, which along with Symbolism, he saw as the Old World's ties to tradition. There is influence in the resistance, Suárez-Toste argues, and naturally so. And the subtext is that Williams's American poetry belongs to the true Modernist line —the Imagist to which Suárez-Toste unproblematically tags Objectivism (170). This is probably wanting to say more than is necessary; the opposite, in fact, of what Suárez-Toste really wants to say. But the point carries that Surrealism is no Modernism, even if Symbolism is presented as somewhat a mediator between the two, but which begs the important question: what is Modernism without the avant-garde? But if there is a Modernist theme Suárez-Toste felicitously stubbles upon is that of resistance and influence; a covert classicist anxiety which no Romanticist make-over can ultimately hide.

Bart Eeckhout's "Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Resistance" is all about a close reading of the poet's own version of the Modernist tell-tale struggle between form and content: "Poetry must resist the intelligence almost successfully." The thing about close readings, and that is the fragility of this critical tool, is how the resulting in-reading can happily turn into a misreading. But Eeckhout does make the most of it, carving a magisterial line along the semantics of "intelligence." Not an easy term to define, it becomes in turn, "intelligibility" (125) or "reason" (129ff.), as opposed to "intuition" and "emotion." The adverb "almost" becomes, in turn, the focus of a fruitful debate over the true meaning of resistance; not as transgression, but as a strategy that injects "his poetry with and insatiable desire" (131). The subtext is that there is no misreading Stevens, if only one is guided by an 'almost' resistance. And that is a beautiful thought. But one cannot help feeling that his final philosophical flourish with reference to Steven's inherent American Pragmatism is not a greater concession to "intelligence" in detriment of "desire" than Eeckhout intended. But that does not upset his argument for, as T.S. Eliot once con-

sidered, Pragmatism is an emotional philosophy. As President of Harvard's Philosophical Club in 1913, Eliot asserted that "[William] James' philosophical writings constitute an emotional attitude more than a book of dogma" ("Relationship"). But we all know how Eliot felt about emotions and he is not expressing a kind thought towards Pragmatism.

Barry Ahearn's "Frost's Sonnets: In and Out of Bounds" follows nicely on from Eeckhout, though his take on 'form' is slightly different. The difference is that Aheran is intent on redeeming constraint by virtue of "its inseparability from form" (36). Or is it the other way round? Perhaps more the latter as Ahearn adds, "Frost adopts the sonnet to help defend himself against or inhibit an illusory freedom, and suggests that what many people call 'freedom' is simply a relaxation or abolition of salutary restraints" (40). What Ahearn means is that poetic form, here the sonnet, can distil the "salutary" from the "restraint." Here, Stevens's "almost" becomes Frost's "something," which by virtue of not being "anything" in particular restrains but without being an imposition. Ambiguous? May be. And if we are still wondering which *form* would this "intelligence" take one need only capitalize the first letter. Plato's theory of forms does come to the rescue in what is the vanguard to the Romantic troops that follow: Kant and Coleridge (47). But Ahearn has the good sense to resist such simplification, just as he shows Frost himself resisting the Romantic temptation, though it might have been useful to refer to the European Romantic tradition's own struggle with the Classical forms in, say, William Wordsworth's own sonnets. In Frost's hands, Ahearn argues, the sonnet is the distillation of Nature Poetry into the Poetry of Human Nature.

Frost's sonnets find a useful mirror in Japanese haiku of which Gudrun M. Grabher is a self-confessed pseudo-practitioner. The story starts with her visit to Japan on a two-month scholarship to study the shortest of poetics forms. There is, however, a certain defeatism in her admission that she only brought back from Japan "the frustrated insight that some things are, indeed, incomprehensible, utterly and ultimately impenetrable" (136), which stands uneasily with her praise: "[The haiku] photographically paints a picture" (140). And here Grabher invokes Eliot's objective correlative to establish the cross-reference between the haiku and Modernist poetry. It is a tricky exercise in comparative literature which, however enlightening, is not here drawn with the conviction that convinces. There is not only ambivalence and contradiction between the haiku's impenetrability and, then, about its photographic quality, about the absolute differences between the Western and Easter mind, but bringing intuition into the equation is problematic in the light of the objective correlative itself. Grabher may have done better sticking to Pound, who explicitly endorsed Oriental poetics, rather than Eliot's critical statements whose complexity do exceed the limitation of name-dropping. Grabher does, indeed, do better to invoke Imagism's determination to write a "poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed" (141). All the same, the haiku becomes the source of an ambitious reflection upon the linguistic mediation of reality as the measuring-pole for good close readings of key Modernist poems —predictably Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," but also an excellent reading of e.e. cummings's "loneliness/a leaf falls." The only danger is that of elevating the haiku to a poetic universality which cannot afford to ignore the cultural specificity that gives rise to it, and whose impenetrability to the Western mind was the very point of Grabher's Japanese experience. Instead, Zhaoming Qian's "Pao-hsiken Fang and the Naxi Rites in Ezra Pound's *Cantos*" is less ambitious but very effective in presenting the reader with very enlightening unpublished material about Pound's later life and his interest in Chinese culture.

The persistence in this volume of the least American of all Modernist American Poets, T.S. Eliot, must need trouble us all. But the beauty of Charles Altieri is the deliberateness with which he takes it on in his "Modern Realism and Lowell's Confessional Style," in what is a rethinking of that touchstone Modernist cry "Impersonality," which must compete on even terms with Pound's "Make it new." Altieri contends that Modernist "new realism," such as the stress on impersonal objectivity, made the poet choose formalism as against political commitment —be-

cause it could not theoretically be divorced from the distortions of "rhetoric and rhetorical self-congratulation that were also fundamental aspects of its heritage" (209). Altieri's theoretical framework combines Lacan and Hegel, in that the former "creates an intimate social psychology out of Hegelian themes" (211), in an effort to overcome the incompatibility between private (formal) sincerity and public (political) concerns. Formal impersonality is all very good where the perception of the world as object is concerned, though not so good where animated beings and interpersonal empathy is required. Inversely the political turn of poetry, which may be compensating for the limitations of formalism, for its part easily falls pray to the insincerity of over-imaginative empathy. For Altieri, the Confessional Poetry of second generation Modernists stands as the test case of a possible reconciliation between these two poles; a formal realism that is not in tension with the imaginary. What Altieri is getting at is a theory of impersonality that may incorporate the imaginary, and he thinks Robert Lowell fulfils that possibility. This poet relocates "new realism" within a confessional style "that does not so much create grounds for dismissing the impersonal as it elicits ways of reading those activities as continuous with more overt modes of problematic but inescapable personal investment" (n6, 217). The argument is fascinating and it lends itself to a most profitable reading of Modernist reinventions, but which may not be that inventive after all if one considers Eliot's impersonal theory of art as already an strategy to distil, not override personality, for "only those that have personality and emotions know what it is means to want to escape those things" (*Sacred* 58). And one would have liked to see Altieri take his argument farther and defend a confessional reading of T.S. Eliot's poetry. That would really have been revisiting Modernism with a vengeance.

The European strain, that is, Eliot's literal and phantasmagorical presence in this volume, threatens to contaminate American Modernist poetry beyond nativist recognition—if that was ever the aim of this volume. And Viorica Patea's contribution 'T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the Poetics of the Mythical Method' brings the point home, though not exactly to America. Her point is precisely that Eliot seeks locus not in geographical space but in the spiritual localism of anthropological primitivism. This is not a place but a state of (the Western) mind. This is not romantic melancholia for a past revisited but a call for a present regained and which Patea insightfully frames within the Impersonal Theory of Art reinterpreted as a form of radical personality seeking out the universal underlining of the instincts. Patea's Jungian reconfiguration of psychology suitably supplements Altieri's own reworking in Lowell's confessional poetry; not so much away from personality but weary of impersonation. Instead, "psychology brought about the scientific re-discovery of ancients truths" (97). Patea's ensuing close analysis of *The Waste Land* is an overwhelming exercise in erudition involving an all-encompassing knowledge of the more rare of Eliot's journal contributions. It is an unusual presentation of Eliot, the academic, whose disparate —and lesser known— early writings on philosophy and anthropology are successfully brought to bear and combined with an acute sensitiveness for the poetry. Patea effectively argues for Eliot's transcultural dialogue with the "other" (110) which defies more critical receptions of what has been perceived as his cultural elitism.

Saving first for last, Marjorie Perloff's star opening contribution is the most obvious, yet most direct address to the volume's theme: "The Aura of Modernism." Her argument wants to bypass the sentimentality of recovery by suggesting that Modernism has been made out —Frank Kermode as prime suspect— to be more culturally elitists than it really was, rather, it was already "contaminated" as she puts it "by its rapprochement with the discourses of everyday life" (19). The argument is clinched once she establishes that literary modernism continues to be part of popular literary experience. There is nothing to revisit, there is "survival rather than revival" (14), and there is truth to the chime. If obscurity has traditionally been modernism's cultural Achilles' heels, then Amazon.com is here to slay the slanderer. And Perloff quotes at length from Amazon customer's book reviews to prove the point of just how enthusiastic 'non-academic' readers still are about Modernism; how una-

shamed to knock and enter the now virtual door of the once —but not really— exclusive Modernist literary club. No cultural reification, Perloff assures us, but "sheer enthusiasm" (22). Yet, sentimentalism may have sneaked in after all, no offence to the bloggers, but rather for underestimating the impact of online marketing ready to sell anything in quantity, which cannot be an adequate rule of thumb for artistic success even if John Cage says so himself (29) —but I think he meant something else. And the truth comes out when, in a footnote added after completion of the article, Perloff reveals that Amazon costumer reviews, by virtue of their anonymity, are often covert marketing ploys intent on promoting the sales of particular books. Well, there goes the 'sheer enthusiasm' of the 'non-academic reader'. But Perloff, all the same, presents us with a very legitimate symptom of a crossroads reached in the question of high art and popular culture in the field of Modernist literature. It is true that Marxist criticism may have sung its swan song struggling against the current of a consumer society that is here, for the moment at least, to stay. But it still has important things to say, if only testified by some recent work that follows in the steps of Fredric Jameson's *A Singular Modernity*. Seth Moglen's *Mourning Modernity*, for example, is a forward looking Marxist critique bearing the torch for what he calls "new modernism studies" (8). Moglen's suggests there are two literary modernisms: one canonical High Modernism that deals with loss through the acceptance and political inaction of melancholy, and the "other" Modernism —women, the proletariat, the minorities— that mourns as a way of refusing to accept loss by taking up political arms against a capitalist sea of troubles. In this light, Perloff's argument about survival rather than revival shows her as uneasily balancing an all-embracing literary commercialism with the perpetuation of elite Modernist works come "bestsellers." But one knows what Perloff means, yet one has to wonder whether it is worth "surviving" at any price —bargains are not always the cheaper.

The magic twist afforded by *Modernism Revisited* is that rather than make us question whether American poetry deserves its own Modernist brand, it actually makes us wonder how much European Modernism is not really American in the first place. And yet one would have liked to see the term Modernism pluralized; that, say, the Harlem Renaissance should have had a mention, if only to problematize the canonization of "American" Modernism in its own right. Other critical works —Walter Benn Michaels's *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*— have dealt with the interesting issue of identity and American Modernism, and this is not the concern of *Modernism Revisited*. In short, one would have wanted to hear some more about the "other" modernisms, not to mention women poets such as H.D and Marianne Moore to whom only Manuel Brito gives sustained attention. Perhaps the implication is that American Modernism is, however canonical its treatment, that "other" always within Modernism. The Romanticism no European Classicism, however "modern," can ultimately suppress. In this the preset volume amply succeeds in what should be essential reading for all those interested in both American poetry and Modernism.

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