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The Composition of the Modernist Book:

Ulysses, A Draft of XXX Cantos and The Making of Americans

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Doctor of Philosophy

2005

University of Sydney

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Acknowledgements

This thesis has taken shape under the rigorous and attentive supervision of Dr Bruce Gardiner to whom I owe an enormous debt of thanks for his intellectual generosity, challenging insights and encouragement. I would also like to express my thanks to Dr Melissa Hardie, who supervised the first year of my candidacy, and to Associate Professor Anthony Miller, Dr William Christie and Dr Margaret Rogerson of the Department of English, the University of Sydney, for their support in all matters departmental.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Timothy Myers and the staff at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, and the Reader's Services Staff at the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. In writing this thesis, I have been the grateful recipient of an Australian Post-graduate Award from the Australian government. Research undertaken in Paris and the United States was made possible by the Gladys Myers Scholarship and a grant-in-aid from the Faculty of Arts, the University of Sydney.

It is a pleasure to thank the friends who have sustained me in the writing of this thesis for their patience, interest and affection: Jasmine Bruce, Andrew Burns, Mark Byron, Anthony Cordingley, Hope Earl, Jenny Green, Nigel Hoffman, Emma Kearney, Prue and Tony Smith, Damian Spruce and Sharath Srinivasan.

I would like to thank my aunt, Anne Pike, my grandfather, Bruce Menzies, and most importantly, my sisters, Lucinda, Claudia and Laura Pike for their support throughout my tertiary studies. Finally, without the encouragement to read and write offered by my late parents, Jane and Ian Pike, this thesis would have been an inconceivable endeavour. It was written with their memory close to hand.

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**The Composition of the Modernist Book:
*Ulysses, A Draft of XXX Cantos, The Making of Americans***

Abstract

This is a study of the composition of three Modernist first editions: *Ulysses* (1922), *The Making of Americans* (1925) and *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930). The bibliographical and figurative commitments made to being in print by *Ulysses*, *A Draft of XXX Cantos* and *The Making of Americans* set a coherent program for reading Modernist texts in their perfected form: in print. The editorial reception of the Modernist book has proceeded, however, with reference to the editorial and bibliographical principles established by the New Bibliographers. In deferring to the authors and manuscripts of Modernist books as the highest source of textual authority, the vital significance of being in print to literary Modernism is obscured.

The figure of the ideal Book concentrates the central aesthetic, intellectual and bibliographic problem posed the Modernist book: the *making* of literature. The rhyme with *The Making of Americans* is appropriate: this book intensifies and consolidates the propositions made about objective and autonomous composition made more hesitantly by *Ulysses* and *A Draft of XXX Cantos*. These three books display a gradual refusal to equate inscription and intention; their composition effaces all traces of a sovereign creative subjectivity. The vision of the book guides Modernist composition, and requires a critical distinction be drawn between manuscripts and printed letters. Modernism must be read in print.

The vestigial nostalgia for Romantic modes of textual production and creation in *Ulysses* is repeated on the *placards* and proof-pages for the book. Printed drafts are revised and reformed by the pen of the author. The finality asserted by the printed letter is only reluctantly ceded on the publication of *Ulysses*. The composition of *A Draft of XXX Cantos* represents a further transition away from the script economy of Romanticism. The interplay between authorial typescripts, early publications and the first edition of *A Draft of XXX Cantos* assert an intermediate order of Modernist textuality which takes the printed page as its foundation. *The Making of Americans* relies on the absolute objectivity and anonymity of its composition for the effect of its narrative. Objectivity is the intellectual and aesthetic strategy which produces literature rather than the personality and memory of the author. The impersonality of the apparently automatically written manuscripts and scarcely revised typescripts for *The Making of Americans* severs the visible links between the writing author and her page.

In their unwillingness to corroborate the modes of textual generation described by the New Bibliographers, these three books thematise their own composition as the exemplary Modernist and modern mode of textual generation. The Modernist book attenuates or

denies a Romantic connection between the creative hand of the author and the surface image of the page: the mechanisms of print deliberately detach the author from the literary text. The distance of the author from the scene of textual reproduction is measured by the printed book. The composition of this analytical object is not a fallacy but an actuality, commemorated in the archive, enacted by the book. Modernism is the literature of the imprimatur rather than of authorial inscription and accordingly it is towards the first editions of Modernist texts that the attentions of editors and textual scholars must be directed.