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Georg Lukács is widely credited with having offered a compelling defence of literary realism, specifically what he terms 'critical realism', in opposition to 'modern' (in his view less committed) artworks as a suitable means for culturally repoliticizing early twentieth century Europe, and the complexities of life under widespread social reconstruction. In what follows, I aim to provide a tractable outline concerning the emergence of literary modernism, followed by a synopsis of Lukács' critique. Henceforth, the spoils of 'High Modernism' will be defended through an examination of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which I argue, employs a highly sophisticated and self-critical use of aesthetics in differentiating between a bourgeois or 'false' modernity, and what may be regarded as 'authentic' modernism's concern for reinvigorating history; by arresting time, though only in appearance. Moreover, we discover this antinomy developed to a yet higher level of abstraction in Samuel Beckett's *Trilogy*, whereupon Molloy/Moran's descent into the 'Unnamable' raises ontological questions surrounding the very possibility of 'Art after Auschwitz' – to use Theodor Adorno's well noted proclamation. In this respect, the *Trilogy* facilitates a unique lens upon the debate, since its inchoate postmodernism allows us to evaluate the absolute limits of the modernist genre, and to what extent Lukács' critique proves exhaustive in its condemnation – a standpoint that demands revisiting in light of Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*; excogitating the meta-ideological Lukács whom Lukács himself neglected.

The argument so begins that 'modernism' – a somewhat over-extended term including, but not limited to a range of anti-realist aesthetic and experimental movements – may be set apart within the history of literature, in virtue of what Randall Stevenson identifies as its "readiness to address a changing, challenging modern life by transforming not only the subjects and themes of art, but more radically, its form and style" (Stevenson 30). Subsequently, Orwell further cautions:

> *What is noticeable about all these writers is that what 'purpose' they have is very much up in the air. There is no attention to the urgent problems of the moment, above all no politics in the narrower sense… when one looks back at the 1920s… in 'cultured' circles art-for-art's sake extended practically to a worship of the meaningless. Literature was supposed to consist solely in the manipulation of words.* (Orwell 557)

Encapsulated in this sense of frustration is thus a growing antinomy between proponents of the realist genre (broadly construed) and 'modernism' which finds its critical vortex occurring in a series of debates amongst writers of the German Left around this time, and an implacable denunciation by Lukács in 1934 which precipitated further exchanges between himself, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. In particular, Lukács' held the view that all art concerns the same ultimate goal: to establish an objective basis for the judgment of its 'social content'; and to the degree that the artist has succeeded in portraying the "content of life" as "systematically divided up into spheres of greater and lesser importance," then he has successfully achieved 'perspective' (Lukács 405). Perspective therefore embodies a corrective to the "valorisation of 'point of view', both as a narrative technique, and as a symptom of modern society's increasing belief in the radical relativity of value" (Hale 346), whilst furthermore, it presupposes a world that only seems chaotic, but which, beneath its surface ideologism, constitutes an underlying totality (exemplified, Lukács claims, in the work of Balzac, Scott, and Tolstoy).

This neo-classical appropriation of the 'total' viewpoint – finding its origins in the Aristotelian notion of *entelechy* – adopts its later conceptualisation within the philosophy of Hegel via his romantic understanding of 'potentiality' versus the 'actual'. Lukács thus writes that "potentiality – seen abstractly or subjectively – is richer than actual life", and that although "innumerable possibilities for man's development are imaginable… only a small percentage are realized" (Lukács 398). He claims that modern subjectivism, "taking these imagined possibilities for actual complexity of life, oscillates between melancholy and fascination, and so only in the interaction of character and environment can the concrete potentiality of a particular individual be singled out from its *bad infinity* of purely abstract potentialities." Hence, if the 'modern' human condition – man as a solitary being, incapable of forming meaningful relationships – is accorded with reality itself, Lukács claims that "the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality becomes null and void… the categories tend to merge" (399). Substantively, this rejection of "narrative objectivity" and "surrender

to subjectivity", may "take the form of Joyce's stream of consciousness, or of Musil's 'active passivity'… carried *ad absurdum* where the stream of consciousness is that of an abnormal subject or of an idiot" [such as in Beckett's *Molloy*] (400). It is thence deduced that modernism (that is to say Expressionism and High Modernism in particular) asserts fetishized relations between subject and object in which the human personality is forced into an unrealistic condition of disintegration… what Eliot describes in the *Hollow Men* as:

> Shape without form, shade without colour,
> Paralysed force, gesture without motion. (1. 2. 11-12)

Yet in a noted response to Lukács in 1938, Ernst Bloch endeavours to ask, "what if authentic reality is also discontinuity?" since for the modernist critic, "the experience of capitalism is an experience thoroughly characterised by confusion and fragmentariness" (Haslett 94); a world unavoidably dominated by hollow men. And should this prove true, "expressionist art will explore the real fissures in society… an experiment which might be 'in demolition' but is not necessarily, as Lukács would argue, a 'condition of decadence'" (Bloch 22). The realist novel, following this line of reasoning, then offers a deceivingly tractable sense of completeness which disincentivizes the reader from honestly confronting genuine social problems which expressionistic forms of modernism – in their apparent chaos – bravely address. Following Bloch, Theodor Adorno therefore dismisses the potential of realism for offering "the existing world a kind of solace", given that positing a well-rounded totality… "creates the false impression that the world outside is such a well-rounded whole too" (Adorno 1984: 2) – a sentiment which accords with Virginia Woolf's identification that "like a chasm in a smooth road, the war came" and "cut into" the lives of men and women (Woolf 167). Concerns are therefore raised regarding whether Lukács himself has fallen into 'timeless formalism' by attempting to deduce norms for writing purely from literary traditions, that is, without a due regard for history which subsumes all literature within its own processes of change. 'True realism', it is thus argued, is *not merely an aesthetic optic*, but "a political and philosophical vision of the world and the material struggles that divide it" (Jameson 1977: 63).

Indeed, Wyndham Lewis' view – and one shared by the other 'Men of 1914' – was that modernity's aestheticisation of post-War Europe "called for an antagonistic art that would save history from being dissolved into mere style" (Nicholls 252). Exactly what 'history' implied was to be a matter of contention amongst these modernists, but there

emerged an overarching sense of agreement about the need to reinvigorate constructive social narratives, especially at a time when politics was being overtaken by an oppressive hegemony of fashion and advertising. Moreover, although these Men invoked literary forms that were overtly modernist, their modernism issued a call to attention in the name of values that were explicitly anti-modern… seeking to rectify the amnesiac dispositions of modernity by reconditioning it within a valued cultural tradition. In *The Waste Land* accordingly, Eliot both acknowledges the apocalyptic inertia of modernity, but resigns from an absolute pessimism about the modern world by employing the broken shards of history as the very material for providing a recyclical construction. The poem begins with the 'Burial of the Dead', whose first lines make plain that desire will remain chained to memory, that no delusions of the 'absolutely modern' will be entertained:

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain. (1. 1. 1-4)

Eliot's modernism thus engenders the possibilities explored in Pound's early work (especially his Noh plays), for writing becomes a form of re-writing, "the self saved from the passive mimesis of modernity by imitation of a higher order": an order which, most notably, inhabits a space between [historical] memory and the imagination – a domain construed by modern writers (such as James Joyce) as 'myth', and 'epic' (Nicholls 253). Consequently, Eliot heralds Joyce's innovation of the 'mythical method' as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history", and claims that in his discovery of this method, Joyce had killed off the novel – Eliot now calling it "a form which will no longer serve" and which effectively "ended with Flaubert and James" (Eliot 1965: 177). Fiction, thus argued, is rendered impotent by its on-going association with forms of realism and its nineteenth-century legacy which precludes the novelist from adopting a sufficiently external or distanced view of modernity. For in contrast with the mythical method, realism, for Eliot, is incapable of making the modern world possible for art because it remains imprisoned within it, its moral edge blighted by the nineteenth-century vices of "cheerfulness, optimism, and hopefulness (words which stood for a great deal of what one hated in the nineteenth century)" (Eliot 1972: 262). The mythical method will reveal what is absent in a modernity progressively degraded

by imitative forms of mass politics and culture, and so, like Pound and Lewis, Eliot will remain contemptuous of romantic models of expressivity and authenticity – models which, for an author like D.H. Lawrence, could still provide innovative solutions.

In contrast with Lukács' understanding of history bound on the wheel of 'progress', the effect of myth in *The Waste Land* is therefore to freeze history – as Franco Moretti writes, "History must no longer be seen as irreversible as regards the past, and mainly unpredictable as regards the future, but as a cyclical mechanism, which is, therefore, fundamentally static: it lacks a truly temporal dimension" (Moretti 222). The varying movements of the poem, from 'The Burial of the Dead' to 'What the Thunder Said', do not assert a strong sense of forward momentum, but tend rather to cause a concurrency of effect. Eliot's suggestion of April conflating memory and desire therefore poses an oblique connection with Freud's account of trauma, since in each case, "it is the articulation of past and present together which promises release from a merely repetitive history and from a perpetual present lacking any hope of transformation" (Nicholls 253). *The Waste Land* therefore exposes a cleavage between what might be regarded as 'aesthetic modernity' on the one hand, and a 'bourgeois' or 'false' modernity on the other (Calinescu 40), whose superficial momentum conceals its profound sameness, the unceasing reproduction of the bourgeois world within its conservative limitations. For as Walter Benjamin identifies of 'modernity': the market has arrested the continuation of history, establishing in its place a procession of ever 'new' commodities, and so 'fashion' becomes "the eternal recurrence of the new" (Benjamin 46).

Eliot thus appears in one sense to celebrate the past's negation of the present, even as the vacuity of the poem alerts us to a somewhat 'Jacobean' terror of personal and cultural breakdown. This is his manner of turning against romantic individualism, proclaiming a mode of heroism that, as one critic puts it, "would end the human mythology that a countervailing hope seems to reside than in a lyric intensity which produces a sudden lifting of the burden of anxiety and fear which presses upon our daily life so steadily that we are unaware of it" (Eliot 1964: 144). This lifting of repression which admits to a deconstruction of cultural pathology, signals towards a momentary frame of social connectedness, but crucially, one that is captured only through an intensity of art. The 'momentary' for Eliot thus inflects Lukács demand upon literature – that it provide a perspectivized mimesis of the objective totality – supplanted instead by an understanding which views history, conversely, as the immanent effect of the artist's construction. Modernism, under this conception then, circumvents its allegations concerning a "surrender to subjectivity" and "denial of history", by ridiculing the very idea of an immutable 'perspective' within an epistemically volatile

reality which unveils itself as nothing other than spontaneity itself (what Benjamin will call 'Dialectics at a Standstill'); rendering in the process such binary neo-classical oppositions between the fixed subject and object as merely ideological.

As we move further through the development of modernism, this dissolution of perspective to which Lukács remains contemptuous is both taken to its limitations, and exceeded, in the work of Beckett - only, insofar as we find *The Waste Land* collapsing notions of past and present within a static infinity, Beckett, moreover, dispenses with a rudimentary metaphysics of spatio-temporal orientation altogether, in sublating existence to non-existence, and erasing being itself within a final act of dialectical negation; one lacking even the shadow of objectivity which Eliot, in his archaeological pastiche, had attempted to save. We thus observe the epistemic relation between myth and text which *The Waste Land* assumes, succeeded by a yet greater ontological crisis concerning the very existence of meaning, as the mythical method is reduced from dream to nightmare, and finally comatosed. Arguably, what we take to be the *Trilogy's* protagonist, Molloy, therefore embodies, or fails to embody, a state of change: evolving over the course of the narrative, as "the familiar liaisons with familiar reality dissolve; as though Molloy is rather a myth than a character, with a myth's hold on its believers" (Kenner 97) – a myth that ultimately we find our propensity to believe, subsumed within a troublesome principle of disintegration, "not confined to the instability of the wanderer, but further requiring that Molloy be mirrored, doubled, that he become *another…* Moran" (Blanchot 96). Hence, by the time we reach *The Unnamable,* there is no longer any natural sense of character continuing under the reassurance of nominality, no longer any identifiable narrative which emerges from within the engorging density of text, and so the voice of the novel – concerning less of a 'who', and more of a 'what' – proceeds to assert: "There is nothing, nothing to discover, nothing to recover, nothing that can lessen what remains to say" (Beckett 314); a suffocating nihilism which leads to Lukács rejection of Beckett's "straightforward portrayal of the pathological, of the perverse, of idiocy all of which are seen as types of the 'condition humaine'" (Lukács 32).

For Adorno however, "Beckett's *Ecce Homo* is what human beings have become… his primitive men are the last men", and hence, "the minimal promise of happiness they contain, which refuses to be traded for comfort cannot be had for a price less than total dislocation, to the point of worldlessness" (Adorno 1977: 191). This follows from his belief that the modernist 'portrayal' can never be authentic in the same manner as social reality, since the relationship between the object of literature (or 'totality' in Lukács' terms) and its subject (the artist) is regulated by the creative process itself; the formal laws of art. Art seen

in this way is then not a reproduction of the real, but rather, an aesthetic representation of it. And so Adorno notably proclaims that "art is the negative knowledge of the actual world", and so it must be read attentively in order to bring out its "double reality" (Forgacs 190) – something we find exemplified through Beckett's dialectical awareness in *Molloy*:

> Finding my spirits as low in the garden as in the house, I turned to go in, saying to myself it was one of two things, either my house had nothing to do with the kind of nothingness in the midst of which I stumbled or else the whole of my little property was to blame. To adopt this latter hypothesis was to condone what I had done and, in advance, what I was to do, pending my departure. It brought me a semblance of pardon and a brief moment of factitious freedom. I therefore adopted it. (168)

Molloy is unsure about whether his property is in any sense to blame for his manifest anxiety, and yet, an overwhelming suspicion persists that leads him to intuit such… He therefore adopts this 'hypothesis', uncertain, but the very pragmatics of doing so grant the semblance or *appearance* of relief, and a freedom which is 'factitious', in other words, one that is perhaps not entirely 'free' *per se*, but rather, inextricably bound to the artifice of positive logic and language. Counterfactually then, as the reader, we are left under no obligation to take Molloy at his word when he defines freedom under such terms, but rather, understand his statement as something of a rhetorical ploy. The subtextual disparity between 'freedom' proper, and the 'hypothetical', 'factitious' freedom admitted to, thus reinstantiates the Lukácsian binary between actual and potential modes of being, since the oxymoronic status of 'freedom' for Molloy (its factitiousness), and the syntactic conflict hidden in this duality, estranges the term from itself, and so renders its meaning self-contradictory. The effect is then to polarise Molloy's words from the ideas to which they might fairly be assumed to reference, until the point at which the ability of language to actualize itself in the world is destroyed; until Beckett has reduced all processes of reasoning and speech to a *bad infinity* of intractable choices. Consequently, a Lukácsian analysis of the text will adopt an unflattering understanding of Beckett which regards Molloy's failure in committing to a substantive vision of freedom as an evasion of the political totality. Yet precisely for this very reason, for its depiction of the modern world as indecipherable, Adorno will praise such work as achieving a state of negative knowledge, claiming that "Kafka and Beckett arouse the fear which existentialism merely talks about… By dismantling appearance, they explode from

within the art which committed proclamation subjugates from without, and hence only in appearance" (Adorno 1977: 191).

More recently however, other neo-Marxist interlocutors such as Fredric Jameson have disputed Adorno's understanding of the realist aesthetic, since it is alleged that he merely elevates Lukács' principal concerns with illuminating the social totality to a higher level of abstraction, yet to little avail through a negative inversion of dialectical philosophy. Jameson claims that "Adorno was right to point to the epistemological aporia of realist aesthetic theory, to reaffirm the relative autonomy of the literary 'series' and to stress the productive function of literary form", however, "the fundamental categories of Adorno's aesthetics remain opaque: 'autonomous art', the 'laws' and 'logic' of artistic form… none of these crucial terms is assigned a clearly delimited meaning" (Jameson 1977: 146). Jameson himself therefore presents *The Political Unconscious* as an attempt to re-examine the relation between ideology and literary theory - indexed to a poststructural understanding of textuality – raising concern with the Lukácsian model's susceptibility to self-ideologization given the now ambivalent relation between base and superstructure in light of post-Marxist, neo-Althusserian thought, since: "if the objective forces of production no longer enjoy the clear ontological distinction of their own materiality, if the forces of production are themselves texts indistinguishable from other texts, then how does the post-structuralist preserve his belief in the stability of Marxist perspective?" (Hale 353)

Jameson views culture under capitalism as a dark night for humankind, an epoch steeped in social contradiction, claiming that "no society has ever been quite so mystified in quite so many ways as our own, saturated as it is with messages and information, the very vehicles of mystification" (Jameson 1981: 10). Given therefore late capitalism's exposure and assimilation of the modernist aesthetic, and given the clandestine and progressive effects of ideology, he subsequently alerts us to the possibility that modernism – as a once critical movement – might now itself be reduced to within the normalizing processes of late capitalism. And assuming some truth to this diagnosis, it may prove ironic that Lukács' – unjustifiably dismissive of modernism's potential as he was in the 1930s' – provides the necessary corrective to High Modernism and early Postmodernism which have now lost, or are losing, all critical charge.

Where modernism once exposed the bourgeois agenda lurking in the conservatism of nineteenth century realism, it is so argued that realism – through a reversal of context – exposes the modernist genre and its unconscious subordination to advanced capitalist structures. Since, "when modernism and its accompanying techniques of 'estrangement'

have become the dominant style whereby the consumer is reconciled with capitalism, the habit of fragmentation itself needs to be 'estranged' and corrected by a more totalizing way of viewing phenomena" (Jameson 1977: 212). The once avant-garde works of Eliot and Beckett have then, it is argued, been reduced in their present form to rather banal objects within the architecture of contemporary and depoliticized 'general knowledge'. And so the paradox aroused concerns whether "the ultimate renewal of modernism, the final dialectical subversion of the now automatized conventions of an aesthetics of perceptual revolution, might not simply be… realism itself!" (212)

It should at this stage of the analysis prove clear then, in determining the ultimate victor of the polemic between realism and modernism, that such an answer must be adduced from the historical context in which the debate itself occurs. As what for the Men of 1914 provided an innovative remedy to the mimetic anachrony of nineteenth century realism, becomes ironically, the very form of reification itself under capitalism today; by virtue of the twenty first century's estrangement to imperial warfare, and with that, the very epistemic conditions which imbued writers such as Eliot with an explosive political charge. Of course, what to us now appears a somewhat alien world of totalizing global violence, has been supplanted instead by a rather banal hegemony of intangible economic relations and administrative processes; imitated likewise by a shift between the post-traumatic condition from which *The Waste Land* seeks to delivers us, towards the evacuation of human spirit entirely, self-destructively mythologized in *The Trilogy*. And yet, hope ascends from the existential abyss, insofar as the negative knowledge of social conditions which Beckett's work bequeaths to us through the fear which it evokes, provides critics like Adorno with the rudimentary materials necessary for art after Auschwitz. The question that we must presently ask in determining the fate of modernism in light of the Lukácsian critique, thus holds less concern for any binary opposition between genres, but somewhat more adroitly, ponders the extent to which realism and modernism have moved towards synonymy.

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