



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MODERNISM UNVEILED: A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON EXPLORING MODERNISM*

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ABSTRACT

This is a review of "Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism" - an interdisciplinary study which casts a new light on the epistemology and discourses brought to bear upon the literature of modernism. Issues of modernist genre, aesthetics, history of ideas, characteristic tropes, cross disciplinary paradigms, etc.) are examined in the nexus of modernist culture. This has been the fourth book published by Dr. Maria Ana Tupan, affiliated with the Doctoral School of Alba Iulia University, Romania, as Director of Research. The reviewer is Senior Lecturer affiliated with the Aero-Space University in Sibiu, Romania and a Fulbright grantee.

INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism is yet another thought-provoking and meticulously researched book in a series of works by Maria-Ana Tupan, that delve into the intricacies of the modernist movement. It offers a nuanced account of modernist aesthetics, providing well referenced research on concepts that can be explored in relation to modernism. When considering the intersection of phenomenology and cultural difference in high modernism, the author examines structures specific to psychology and its kindred disciplines (psychological phenomenology, phenomenological existentialism) to ascertain how these influenced modernist authors' manner of interpreting the world and understanding their own selves. Taking New Historicism as the framework for formulating her scholarly analysis, Tupan manages to develop a timely and innovative contribution to modernist criticism. The book represents the author's endeavour to create both an inter- and multidisciplinary analysis of important modernist figures, thus opening new avenues for interpreting and understanding modernism as an artistic and cultural movement. Her study opens a broader perspective on epistemic resources and discursive bearings, thereby joining both critics of different persuasions and researchers of distinct disciplines in an effort to reach a more diverse and comprehensive understanding of modernism. The first chapter, *The Making of Modernist Aesthetics*, starts out with a discussion of Nussbaum and Brown's collections of

essays that managed to widen the academic paradigms and the parameters traditionally associated with the idea of modernity. The author traces the epistemological turn in philosophy back to Immanuel Kant whose *Anthropology* basically set the stage for the progress in physiological psychology. Tupan introduces the reader to Wilhelm Wundt's contributions to the experimental study of conscious mental processes described as phenomenological constitution in his 1880 *Logik*:

Inside consciousness, the representations of external objects obey psychological laws, the laws of thinking (*Denken*). The inner experience takes priority over the external one. Thinking will distinguish between *Passenden Gatuungsmerkmale* und *charakteristische (unpassende) Eigenschaften* (random and characteristic features, those which remain unchanged in the chain of experiences). The characteristic features will serve the constitution of a concept. (p.17). Mill's critique of syllogistic reasoning, Washington Allston's objective correlative as eidetic constitution, and Alfred Binet's reasoning through images frame the structure of modernist fiction and verse. Thus, the generative depth models of the literatures of modernism can be found in the progression from physiological psychology to phenomenology:

Could the mind make sense of personal or collective experience in light of what the new, physiological psychology, revealed about the mind's reasoning through images rather than concepts? Immanuel Kant had wondered whether, in the post-metaphysical, post-teleological age, metaphysics was still possible, and he had located its inquiries within the Transcendental Dialectic.

In mid-nineteenth century H.L. Mansel relocated metaphysics within a Phenomenological Dialectic (*Metaphysics; Or, The Philosophy of Consciousness, Phenomenal and Real*, 1860), in which representation replaced transcendental concepts. (p. 3). The book draws on phenomenology, as defined by philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, who emphasizes the study of first-person subjective experience. It takes a broader perspective, seeking to understand the essence and meaning of human experience as it is lived and perceived while also exploring the ways in which individuals make sense of the world through their subjective experiences rather than reducing them to isolated elements. Phenomenological theories highlight the role of the viewer or reader in the creation of meaning and emphasize the embodied experience of art. This perspective challenges the traditional notion of the passive spectator/reader and encourages active engagement and interpretation on the part of the audience. Phenomenology offers a philosophical framework that aligns with the modernist project and, by focusing on lived experience and the subjective viewpoint, it focuses on the site of the individual's relationship to the world, not directly, but as mediated by a precedent cast in polemical metalanguage:

In the third chapter (Proteus) of *Ulysses*, Joyce seems to be defending the idea of art as phenomenology rather than transcendence of the world of things. Who is he referring to in the opening of the chapter? We think the allusions to Walter Horatio Pater are too numerous to be overlooked [...] It is not only details - such as being rich (while preaching otherworldliness and sanctity), being bold, or being the author of an essay entitled "Diaphaneité" (1864), knowledge of Italian art -, but the logic of the whole argument that makes us think of Pater. As well as Pater in the aforementioned essay, in fact, alluding to it, Joyce sets in polarity the coloured sensuous world of material things and transcendence. (pp. 17-18)

Modernists emphasized the individual experience and subjective perception of reality, by appropriating scientific methods and concepts:

Setting out from the commonsensical statement that existence cannot be the object of an individual experience, that it cannot be reduced to "the collection of things and persons which makes his world", Bradley proposes what he himself qualifies as a "revolution". The language he uses sounds familiar to citizens of the quantum world. Appearances are defined in a way which allows them to pass for realities, receiving an ontological rather than psychological status. Why not allow each appearance to be real as an independent state in a time-series, he wonders, building a model similar to a wave function. (pp. 52-53).

Max Dessoir is discussed in light of his significant contributions to aesthetics, particularly his work on phenomenology. Dessoir explored the nature of the art object and its relationship to the viewer, indicating that aesthetic experience is not solely based on the inherent qualities of the art object but is also influenced by the viewer's background, personal associations, and cultural milieu. Dessoir proposed the concept of "psychological aesthetics," which emphasizes the psychological and emotional impact of art on the viewer, suggesting that aesthetic experiences elicit a range of emotions, from pleasure and fascination to awe and transcendence.

The second chapter, *Cognitive Hybridity and Birth of Discourse*, glosses on the emergence of new concepts, perspectives, and modes of expression, incorporated in the creation of a "new epistemology", attainable through a progressive shift in the traditional Kantian interpretation of the fundamental opposition between science and humanities:

Defining for the mental make-up of the newly founded society [the Heretics] was an address delivered on the 7th December 1909 by Jane Ellen Harrison entitled "Heresy and humanity". Although a classical scholar and the first English female academic, Harrison was an impassioned advocate of social and cultural change in the sense of breaking up traditional modes of thought and action. [...] To be a heretic, it seemed to her, had become a duty for all those who refused to go on living a "good soldier life" of obeying commands and observing an ossified tradition. Two solutions she could envisage: science and humanity. [...] Science had become a question of attitude, habit of mind, ideology, and as such, common property of the whole intellectual community

Several key factors specific to modernism are considered in *Historicizing the Aesthetics of Genre*, the third chapter of the book; these are reviewed, not from the point of view of the most commonly discussed parameters, but by taking as subject matter various non-literary contexts which allow for novel interpretation. Such is the empathetic aesthetics of the German philosopher and psychologist, Theodor Lipps:

Lipps distinguishes between objects with an autonomous existence, to which we are indifferent, they simply swimming into our awareness, and the objects which become the props of our projection of an inner content (our feelings, emotions, etc.).[...] Our memory treasures not only these objects of experience but also the complex of feelings and emotions associated in the context.[...] The pain of not being able to recover past emotions, the motif of the impossible return is running through Thomas Wolfe's entire fiction. A more important effect on literary form which can be associated with the aesthetics of empathy is the doubling up of the plot according to different generic conventions. Books written in parallel, as fictional and nonfictional narratives ... (pp. 89-90) A particularly interesting and satisfying aspect of this book is the emphasis on the importance of lived experience and understanding reality through the lens of subjective experience and the diversity of human perception across different cultures. Chapter four, *From Barbarian to Citizen: The Constitution of the Racial Other*, describes the subjective experience of consciousness and the concepts that led to the incorporation of cultural references, and the challenge to Eurocentric perspectives. For example, the author discusses *Three Guineas*, by Virginia Woolf, which at its core is a writing against imperialism, but which sunders Woolf's political unconscious. The expansion of the concept of *Racial Other* characterizes the turn of the century as the British Empire augmented. The author concludes that "to the scientist and the philosopher of modernity, primitive man was generally the racial foil of the civilized European, inspiring repulsion or pity".

In the last chapter of her work, *The Otherness of the Sexed, Raced, and Classed Body in Mircea Eliade*, Tupan focuses on three of Mircea Eliade's fantasy writings in order to call attention to a typology of otherness produced by the representation of the female body, "cast in flesh or in word".

Eliade's ideas about the sacred and the profane may provide some insights to this interpretation. According to Eliade, the sacred refers to a realm of existence that represents a higher reality beyond everyday life and that is qualitatively different from the profane. He argues that religious rituals and symbols serve as vehicles for individuals to connect with the sacred and transcend the limitations of their worldly existence. In this context, the female body can be seen as part of the profane, mundane realm since femininity is always associated with "sin, seduction, doom". The classed body is constrained by the material concerns of the world and lacks the transformative potential associated with the sacred ("Mademoiselle Christina"), the racial body (represented by the gypsies in "The Gypsies' Way") is identified at the intersection of witchcraft and civilization, while the textual female body ("Les Trois Grâces") transgresses traditional ideas of femininity.

Overall, the book brings an insightful interpretation and an impressive new outlook on modernism, while it provides a critical literary framework that allows for an innovative interpretation that goes beyond surface-level examination, contributing to a gratifying departure from traditional forms and conventions and exploring new ways of interpreting and understanding the modernist movement. What sets *Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism* apart is the author's critical lens and her ability to use a contextual approach which enhances the reader's understanding of the motivations and intentions of modernist writers, providing a more nuanced interpretation of their works. Furthermore, Maria-Ana Tupan's discussion incorporates excerpts from original texts and quotes from relevant authors, which lends credibility to her arguments and allows readers to engage in a broader conversation with modernism. Maria-Ana Tupan's *Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism* is a valuable contribution to the field of literary criticism and serves as an excellent resource for both scholars and readers interested in understanding the complexities of modernism.

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