

MOCK MODERNISM

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EDITED BY LEONARD DIEPEVEEN

Mock Modernism

An Anthology of Parodies,
Travesties, Frauds, 1910–1935

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MOCK MODERNISM

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Introduction

In late March of 1913 the International Exhibition of Modern Art arrived in Chicago from New York City, its New York-sized scandal provoking Chicago's press corps to generate an even larger and more rambunctious reception. As the local press set to work on the "Armory Show," laying the groundwork for what would indeed become a greater fracas than what had entertained New York for a few weeks, a curious convergence in early twentieth-century culture was becoming clear, a convergence in which P.T. Barnum could become the interpretive frame for the austere products of modernism, for the chilly pleasures of work like Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase." Eyeing the baffling works of Picasso, Matisse, and Duchamp, and anticipating plausible modes of public interest for what was being called "freak" art, the *Chicago Record-Herald* plastered its 25 March edition with the large headline: "Step In! No Danger! Cubist Show Now On." It followed this with:

La-d-ie-s and gentlemen, step closer, please, a little closer. Before visiting the palatial palaces of sculpture and art in other portions of this famous institute see the cubist sideshow – the show they are all talking about.

Here, here, here we have the famous one-eyed lady, brought from the wildes of France; the human skeleton carrying a heliotrope owl and leading a camel with elephant ears; the horse with legs like a bullfrog; the greatest galaxy of normal and abnormal nudes ever assembled on this or any other continent.

Remember, this is the uncensored sho. It's there – there – there – on the inside, ladies and gentlemen. It's continuous. It's different, and it's art – art of the present and the future. A thrill every minute. Something new to tickle the fancy and feast the eye. (25 March 1913: 1)

Juvenile, no doubt. But entangled within the fun there was a serious argument, based on parody, being conducted about modernism – here, an argument that

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modernism was Barnumism, recast for the arts. So omnipresent and captivating were these kinds of parodic interpretations that modernism became inextricably understood through them. The *Record-Herald's* reporter and many others in the opening decades of the twentieth century deployed parodic forms to produce an interpretive frame for modernism – sometimes, as here, ponderously so. Here, as elsewhere, the frame's application was clear. Moving on from his routine, the reporter provided its interpretation:

That was all that was needed – just a real old-fashioned bally-ho at the head of the marble staircase in Art Institute [*sic*] yesterday – to make the first-time visitor to the international exhibition of modern art believe he had done a Rip Van Winkle act and awakened in the old Clark Street Museum.

Decorative screens bearing pictures of every known animal, and a few others, done in colors that would have made P.T. Barnum's circus "front" look like bunting after a rainstorm – these hedged in the entrance to the show.

As his argument goes, Clark Street Museum, the old Chicago vaudeville theatre, provided a more plausible interpretive frame for the Armory Show than the exhibit's actual location – the Art Institute, whose grand and earnest new building Chicagoans had erected to coincide with the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. That redirection away from sincerity's location applied not just to the show's publicity, but to all aspects of the show's interactions with its public. The reporter continued:

"On the inside" a group of first-viewers, some critics and some just plain reporters, carried catalogues and tried to figure out why the Chinese puzzle was labeled "King and Queen Surrounded by Nudes," how the "Man on the Balcony" had ever got through Ellis Island, and where the antediluvian animals and men had been resurrected to pose for "A Pastoral."

The Armory Show was taking mimesis for a carnival ride, with the reporter proceeding to argue that many of the show's "pictures" "might be mistaken for pictures of Sunday night's cyclone." The *Record-Herald* also gestured to interpretive frames other than these of its own devising, though the sardonic edge never disappears. Consider the reporter's take on the earnest experts who had brought the show from New York: "There were a few serious individuals – Walt Kuhn, Frederick James Gregg and Walter Pach, all of whom are officially affiliated with the show. Near them could be heard whisperings of 'wonderfully blended color' and of futurists and post-impressionism." Serious approaches lampooned, whimsical approaches presented as plausible – how

was an innocent audience to know how to approach these objects? More than a little tongue in cheek, the reporter again archly gestured to the workings of art-world power: despite the odd nature of the works in front of them, the audience knew it was looking at “real works of art because the catalogue said so.” As one might expect, though, the *Record-Herald* did not give the catalogue the last word on the show. That was reserved for an apparent onset of madness. In the face of these works of art, dangerous delusion would inevitably find a place. Noting that “Uniformed guards constantly strolled through the rooms or stood near the ice-water tank in the corridor,” the reporter claimed that they were primed to intervene with anyone who might take the claims of the show seriously:

“You’ve got to hand it to this show, though,” admitted a “plain reporter.” There’s a “punch” in every picture. Now, just look at that color, that, that, or that – ”

Just then a keen-eyed guard interposed.

“Come, young man, come out into the hall. You’ll be all right in a few minutes,” he said.

We may be sceptical whether this last event, like many others reported in the Chicago press, really happened – although the world would be a better place if an inmate of Dunning (Chicago’s local asylum), actually *had* threatened, as reported, to sue the show’s artists for plagiarism. But more interesting for understanding modernism is the work writing like this did in providing an entertaining yet far-reaching interpretive frame. The *Record-Herald* article, for example, shows that a blunt understanding of mimesis was central to public understandings of art, and works that seemed to contest its place led people to wonder if in fact these works still could be *art*. Could one assume that these works were sincere, or did modernists offer them as sincerely as P.T. Barnum had offered his Feejee mermaid?

To answer this question, modernism’s audience speculated about the surrounding institutions and theories that brought this work to an audience, because one needed some way to account for what one had just seen. Modernism’s sceptics, then, frequently asked – and posited answers to – questions about the conditions that allowed such art to garner serious attention. Publicity, certainly, but publicity of a certain kind. It was the unstable publicity of hype, the kind of instability that leads to grand claims, injudicious estimations that border on panic, and downright fraud. No surprise, then, that caricatures of attempts to “explain” modernism were usually couched, as here, in a palpable distrust of the experts, who seemed too eager to justify it, and were importing odd criteria in their estimation, criteria based, among other things, on theory. Those who

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weren't experts, and yet manifested an appreciation for the work, were suspected of being mad. Modernism, the *Record-Herald* reporter implies, was not just a categorizable group of art objects, it was a system of presenting those works as serious. And it was an event, an event whose meaning extended well beyond its objects and literary texts.

In an age of rapidly increasing print venues, modernism (by which I mean works that either through their subject matter or form – or both – engaged with what their creators saw as the new conditions of modernity) attracted a stunning wealth of printed response: hoaxes, doggerel, cartoons, accounts of staged trials, mock interviews, parodies in adjacent media (such as futurist fashion shows), mock manifestos, even a special “children’s” book, *The Cubies ABC*, which was published in response to the New York manifestation of the Armory Show, and which began:

A is for Art in the Cubies' domain –
 (Not the Art of the Ancients, brand-new are the Cubies.)
Archipenko's their guide, Anatomics their bane;
They're the joy of the mad, the despair of the sane,
 (With their emerald hair and their eyes red as rubies.)
– A is for Art in the Cubies' domain. (Lyall)

These burlesque readings of modernism, mirroring the widespread uncertainty about modernism's sincerity with an unstable sincerity of their own, came from august litterateurs, like Stuart Sherman, professor of English at the University of Illinois, who in 1924 attempted by mechanical principles to reproduce a replica of Stein's writing – and in a bizarre twist protested all the while that he *wasn't* being parodic. In fact, Sherman argued, the following passage was better work than Stein's “gray and protoplasmic” writing:

Real stupidity; but go slowly. The hope slim. Drink gloriously! Dream! Swiftly pretty people through daffodils slip in green doubt. Grandly fly bitter fish; for hard sunlight lazily consumes old books. Up by a sedate sweetheart roar darkly loud orchards. Life, the purple flame, simply proclaims a poem. (268, 267)

It's not just modernism's antagonists who perpetrated these interpretive send-ups, but modernists themselves, as James Joyce did in his parody of *The Waste Land*, or Alfred Kreyborg, who used the pages of the *New York Morning Telegraph* to imagine what his home life would look like should his wife come home from a shopping expedition speaking Steinese. Most voluminously, mock

modernism extends to reporters and columnists for local newspapers, like the *New York Evening Sun's* Don Marquis, as well as to their indignant readers, who occasionally contributed their own "modernist" works and interpretations, as did the following reader of Don Marquis's column:

Sir: My 8-year-old niece is a devoted admirer of Miss Gertrude Stein's. She believes that Miss Stein has solved the problem of self-expression that now chains an unenlightened world to school benches and its ABCs. School cuts into one's play time frightfully, you know. Miss Stein's way is so much more satisfactory – you just write it, and there it is! After a preliminary course, my niece wrote me the following letter:

"Pig you the pap is you by my you bear the Jack you bear is a cat and the cat is. – Elsiette"

I see in this letter a great and revolutionary meaning. Don't you? – D.

Given the wide range of their authors, parodic reframings of modernism are found in multiple kinds of locations that range from avant-garde magazines like *The Little Review* to major journals like the *Times Literary Supplement* to the *New York Times* to the *Toledo Blade*; and employing a wide sweep of genres and positing a wide variety of relationships to modernism, ranging from the hostile, to the burlesque, to tongue-in-cheek *homage*. The plethora of responses was instigated not just by the perceived newness and strangeness of modern art forms, but by how this newness proposed to rearrange aesthetic standards. Standards were in flux, making it hard to judge quality. J.C. Squire, editor of the *London Mercury* and an excellent parodist himself, questioned the Muse in one of his verse editorials:

What can have happened to you, Muse?
 Time was you never held such views.
 You used to sing like a canary
 With quite a small vocabulary
 Of trees and grass, the sun, the moon,
 Which then you always rhymed with swoon,
 So simply, with such innocence,
 And such a lack of deeper sense
 That any passer-by could tell
 If you were singing ill or well.
 'Twas usually ill, no doubt,
 But you were easily found out.
 Now you bewilder me: how could

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I tell if that were bad or good,
That gnomic stuff you sang just now,
That cacophonous senseless row ...

(“Editorial Notes,” August 1928: 342–3)

Like Squire, many others saw modernism as merely a “cacophonous senseless row,” which meant that it was difficult not just to figure out what might be the relevant standards for evaluating its qualities. It was also, during the early years of modernism, an adventure to figure out exactly what the relevant features of these works *were*. Nowhere is modernism’s flirtation with featurelessness more strenuously and oddly asserted than in Wyndham Lewis’s *Time and Western Man*, where Lewis denounces Stein’s work in the following awkward terms:

Gertrude Stein’s prose-song is a cold, black suet-pudding. We can represent it as a cold suet-roll of fabulously-reptilian length. Cut it at any point, it is the same thing: the same heavy, sticky opaque mass all through, and all along. It is weighted, projected, with a sibylline urge. It is mournful and monstrous, composed of dead and inanimate material. It is all fat, without nerve. Or the evident vitality that informs it is vegetable rather than animal. Its life is a low-grade, if tenacious, one; of the sausage, by-the-yard, variety. (77)

Never writing straightforward estimations or interpretations, the writers in this collection arrived at their target’s features circuitously, aware that their own writing’s success depended on its ability to entertain. Laughter, indeed, is the big response to modernism’s difficulties. Laughter, though, needs to be understood as part of a larger, publicly understood argument. Consider the *Daily Sketch*’s response to the 1912 Post-Impressionist show:

The Post-Impressionist, however, obviously scorns mere beauty, whether of form or colour. His is the cult of the immensely, hideously, hopelessly, crazily Ugly.

How do they do it? One guesses that the game is played by standing so many yards away from the virgin canvas and then hurling your paint-box at it just as hard as you can. If the blue sticks it’s a sky; if the green sticks, it’s grass; if they don’t, it is something else! (“Art Gone Mad”)

The joke’s simultaneously ponderous and banal wit depends for its success on some measure of public agreement that Post-Impressionist art has an at-best tenuous relation to beauty, and that this work’s significant features can be understood – and evaluated – by their method of construction, which seems more related to chance than to skill of execution. The article’s title and subtitles say much about how far this methodology had stepped outside the standards of

good art: “Art Gone Mad. Queer Perversions of the Post-Impressionists. Paint-Box Freaks. Cult of the Crazy Ugly and Its Childish Results.” The laughter generated by the works collected in *Mock Modernism*, then, was the laughter of assent; laughter indicates social agreement, and the same joke repeated indicates not only a possible reportorial laziness but, very likely, broad public agreement. Consider, for example, how the *Chicago Examiner* used agreement about skill, speed, and banality to parody modernism. A group of prominent local artists who called themselves the Cliff Dwellers (in reference to a novel by Henry Blake Fuller, skyscraper Chicago, and the lost cultures of the American Southwest), staged a demonstration of how to make advanced art of the kind being shown at the Art Institute. The result, according to the reporter, was “an explosion of mirth over a brilliant satire on the cubists, futurists and post-impressionists”:

Earl H. Reed, who with Louis Betts constitutes the art committee of the Cliff Dwellers, started the ball rolling by dashing off sixteen cubist works in a couple of hours. A. M. Rebori did a cubist impression of the head of Hamlin Garland in less than twenty minutes. T. J. Keene pictured the explosion of a cold storage egg in an incredibly short space of time, and Lorado Taft captivated every one with a picture of “A Nude Eating Soup With a Fork,” done in sixty strokes. (“Cliff Dwellers’ Satirize”)

This laughter isn’t simple; it’s central to a complex response to modernism, in this case a send-up of the apparent skill needed to make this art – and an assertion that technical skill was central to good art. The responses collected in *Mock Modernism* don’t just mock, then; they interpret modernism’s works and the movement as a whole, the social conditions that were granting it attention, and the conditions under which someone could take such work seriously. *Mock Modernism*’s texts are negotiations about, and interventions into, what their source works really signified – what they meant, but also how they inserted themselves into contemporary culture. Parodies, travesties, and frauds are arguments – arguments not only about the value of a work or movement, but arguments about what constitutes its relevant features, and what allows it to attract attention. These explanations, then, didn’t assert that modernism could be completely explained by its texts and works of art; they argued that modernism also needed to be understood through, and *as*, its enabling conditions. According to modernism’s sceptics, these enabling conditions reached far, to the aesthetic that spawned modernism, the forms of reading that canonized it, and the social conditions that gave it attention. Sometimes these writers recreate interpretive versions of the context, or the motivating aesthetic, or the forms

of interpretation that attempted to situate these works as *important*. Indeed, the works were so bizarre one needed these speculative contextualizations to understand how they might command attention. Mock trials, fashion shows, etc., all do the polemical work of parodies – the strategies of parody have simply moved to a larger context.

This larger context provides a wealth of interpretive frameworks for modernism, and reveals something important about how modernism was initially understood, an understanding quite different from the terms by which it would soon become canonized by New Critics like Cleanth Brooks's 1939 *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, or by F.R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) and *The Great Tradition* (1948), or by Alfred Barr's work at New York's Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s. To get an initial sense of this wide initial range, consider J.C. Squire's skewering of modernist poetry through his figure of the poet Sidney Twyfold in "The Man Who Wrote Free Verse." Squire's story notes that Twyfold's "collected volume 'Ourang-Outang' marked an epoch: all the papers had long reviews, enthusiastic, hedging or denunciatory" (261), and it goes on to quote from one of Twyfold's poems:

Autumnal abscesses relent
 The twilight of ancestral days
 But, smiling at the parsnip's scent,
 The Nubian girl undoes her stays! (250)

Neither Squire's *Ourang-outang* (a reference to Eliot's "Sweeney Erect") nor the Nubian girl are insignificant details. Undeniably, Squire bases a large part of his parody on Eliot's mix of polysyllabics and the ambiguous, slightly menacing context of Eliot's quatrain poems. But that's not all. Squire's parody asserts that Eliot, and modernism more largely, was fashionably fascinated with the exoticized sex of primitivism. Literary critics didn't get back to examining *that* aspect of modernism until the 1990s.

For its parodists, then, modernism was only partially understood as a revolution in aesthetics. Its aesthetic was accompanied by an inseparable, enabling context, made up of manipulations of publicity, performances of machismo, lightweight but portentous analogical references to science, and obfuscating theoretical justifications and explanations. Now parodists, for the most part working with an aesthetic in which art was a retreat from the social world, did not think that modernism's social aspect was a good thing about it. And neither were modernists themselves comfortable with attention being drawn to this larger context. Critics have returned to these larger contextual understandings, albeit with a new sense of their value, only in the modernist studies of the past twenty years.

As their invocations of a larger cultural context indicate, parodic reframings of modernism had complex public *work* to do, work illumined by their relation to more general theories of parody. The works in *Mock Modernism* corroborate Simon Dentith's understanding of parody as "any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice" (9). Parody's polemics are set into play through citation that either exaggerates aspects of the targeted source, or that uses techniques of bathos to deflate the ambitions of its source. Parody's imitation and polemics have large implications for the nature of art, and for modernism. In their partial and allusive imitation, parodies talk back to their sources, their very existence announcing that modern art is a conversation – and not just a conversation between works of art, but between different works of art, their social contexts, and their readers. But in the particularities of how they set about that conversation, the works in this collection redirect the insights of dominant theories of parody, narrowing and making more productive and socially nuanced parody's focus. The difference arises from how the range and pointedness of parody is understood. For example, Giorgio Agamben, in his *Profanations*, turns to the implications parody may have for understanding language in general:

If ontology is the more or less felicitous relationship between language and world, then parody, as paraontology, expresses language's inability to reach the thing and the impossibility of the thing finding its own name. The space of parody – which is literature – is therefore necessarily and theologically marked by mourning and by the distorted grimace (just as the space of logic is marked by silence). And yet, in this way, parody attests to what seems to be the only possible truth of language. (2007: 50)

In pointing out parody's entanglement with larger concepts of literature and language, Agamben gives parody ambition and theoretical heft. But he is not very helpful about parody's social uses, and does not account for the characteristics of the particular kind of parodic interventions collected in this volume, interventions based on polemical interpretation. Although one might extrapolate these larger implications from some of these sources, the works in *Mock Modernism* don't direct themselves so much at all language or human expression as at *these uses* of expression and language, *these forms* of art.

In her central *A Theory of Parody* (1985), Linda Hutcheon conceptualizes parody less broadly than does Agamben, as a recreation, with irony. Her argument about the broad cultural place of parody does not see laughter or ridicule as integral to parody's function, and polemics, being filtered through irony, has an uncertain function. Hutcheon's book, and her later *The Politics of*

Postmodernism, usefully expanded our understanding of parody's functions. Coming as it did at a defining moment in postmodernism, and as her differences with Jameson reveal, Hutcheon's position is as much an argument about postmodernism as it is about parody as a genre. More centrally, she and Jameson both look at parody as the defining characteristic of modernism or postmodernism, and do not consider what happens when modernism itself is parodied. That difference, resulting in a much more focused set of parody's attributes and functions, is important. The materials in *Mock Modernism* show how parodies work as polemical interpretations of their sources, and how they do so by using laughter as central. Thus, *Mock Modernism's* parodies do illustrate some of Hutcheon's larger functions, such as the double-edged character of parody, which both subverts and reinscribes the values of its targets. But the parodies of modernism collected here always foreground a polemical interpretation, and they always filter those interpretations through laughter.

Laughter's filter allows parody to perform complex work, for the laughter always has a thesis, arguing about what modernism meant or how it moved. The mechanics of this work are partially illuminated by the theoretical frame Freud provides in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. To some degree, the works in *Mock Modernism* share the characteristics of what Freud calls tendentious jokes, jokes that under the cover of laughter allow things to be said, and aggression to be released, that would otherwise be socially unacceptable (103ff.). The assertion behind the joke is incomplete without the aggression and the mediated manner in which that aggression is released. For Freud, and for the works in *Mock Modernism*, laughter reframes what is being said and sublimates the aggression. Sublimation, as it always does, complicates the unsublimated, socially unrespectable response. At times, the aggression is sublimated more transparently than at others: a mock court's burning of imitations of Matisse's work and sentencing him to be hanged sublimates the aggression against Matisse more by ritualizing than by deflecting it. As parodies, the works in *Mock Modernism* perform the work of sublimation in three ways: they draw attention to the wit of the parodist; turn the focus of the response from anger to analysis; and, as Freud recognized, compel agreement from those who laugh along. (Although complicit laughter can at times be assumed, the effect of these parodies on the beliefs and actions of readers is tough to measure, and lies outside the scope of this book.)

Is the work of parody's laughter by default socially transgressive, as Freud and other theorists of jokes and parody maintain? In *Mock Modernism* that analysis goes only so far, moving in a more curious direction. Parody as rebellion against power, of course, is absurd on one level, given modernism's outsider cultural status at the time. How could the habitués of, say, Margaret

Anderson's *The Little Review*, with a circulation of perhaps three thousand, really threaten William Randolph Hearst's chain of newspapers, with a readership of perhaps 50 million? Yet, despite the power discrepancies by most measures, the parodies in this book structure their laughter as a rebellion against a threat. Defining modernism's threat as one of incipient rather than established power, these parodies attempt to expose the tawdry power of elitism, of difficulty, of the opaque, of fashion, of publicity, of relevance. While the actual cultural power of modernism at the time may have been more notional than true, the parodies show us where their authors argued the threat in modernism lay, and in that they were, at times, surprisingly prescient.

As it is exhibited in *Mock Modernism*, parody's cultural work of liberation finds its most nuanced model in Bakhtin, particularly his "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse." Freud, after all, deals primarily with jokes, with a nod to parody near the end of his book. Bakhtin sees parody as a subset of satire, although his preferred form, Menippean satire, has an intertextuality so pronounced that it looks parodic, so that parody and satire are hard to disentangle. Bakhtin's implied distinction is that parody bases itself on mimicking linguistic form, and is less pointed, less clearly polemical, than is satire. The interpretive aspects of parody are part, then, of their satirical thrust, and Bakhtin sees parody as a subversive genre, one particularly useful for upsetting power structures by introducing a disruptive voice. But in modernism, and probably elsewhere, the power relationships are more flexible than how Bakhtin and others, including Freud, describe them, often also being used by the powerful to attempt to shut down an uprising.¹

Parody's laughter goes beyond aggression and unmasking modernism's incipient power. Laughter's filter pushes parody's argument to be based on generally held, communal beliefs and principles that it presents as commonsensical. The laughter is generated by a stretching that is understood to be, after all, not that much of a stretching – one has only to apply Gertrude Stein's prose to the rules of polo to immediately see its ludicrousness. One doesn't have to *argue* for the ludicrousness so much as merely point to it. By basing the laughter on a simulated earnestness and on taking a principle and stretching it, parodies have a peculiar "reining-in" effect. *Mock Modernism's* parodies define their objects as extreme in some way, which helps to account for why the parodies tended to be directed at high and avant-garde modernism. In their recontextualizing and stretching, parodic interventions simultaneously rein in their source works' ambitions, inherently adopting a middle-of-the-road position, arguing for an aesthetic that does not take aesthetic principles too far, an aesthetic that presents itself as common sense. Along with the laughter, this presenting of an aesthetic as common sense appeals to and tries to define a public, communal

understanding. Henry James responding to the simple question “What is your name,” or Ezra Pound trying to catch a train – these show what happens to modernist principles when they hit the real world.

“Common sense,” of course, is a loaded concept, and it had much work to do in responding to the changing aesthetic of the time. Evocations of common sense asserted a shared social understanding that went without saying, that did not have to be *argued* for. That gesture also implies a historical understanding: activities, points of view, forms of art become commonsensical over time, over repeated iterations. And, of course, “common sense” has great cultural power: it is what one evokes when something ideological has been questioned. This is why commonsense-based parody does not have the liberating functions claimed for parody more largely. Liberation depends on who is doing the parody, and what the target is. Not surprisingly, the *new* things seen in modernist art seemed an assault on common sense: new ideas of representation, specialization, professionalism, and the idea of art as socially involved in contemporary conditions.

Common sense inevitably reaches to many areas of human activity, and this has implications for the content of many of the parodies in this book. In the dominant aesthetic of the early twentieth century, art did not exist as a special case outside of common sense, or outside of common sense’s deep alliance with the pragmatic. Consequently, the more avant-garde a work appeared to be, the more simply could a parody reach to pragmatic objections, the most basic of which was that art was referential. Stein’s *Tender Buttons* was often the target. A writer for the New York *Evening Sun*, in all probability Don Marquis, wrote:

“A curving example makes righteous finger nails,” says Gertrude Stein, for once hooking a subject and a predicate together with a cheerfulness which need deceive no one concerning her real opinion of grammar. As for the thought-content of Gertrude’s observation, can you deny it? (Anonymous, Untitled)

Common sense wasn’t just about reining things in via pragmatic objections; these parodies also rein in their sources’ too-earnest, ambitious seriousness. Even when it is presented as homage, the parody and its reframing portray the target author as unduly taken in by his or her own seriousness, a seriousness deflated for readers by a new, commonsensical and often banal context for the work. James Joyce, for example, in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, complained of the rain on a recent trip to Rouen:

Rouen is the rainiest place getting
 Inside all impermeables, wetting
 Damp marrow in drenched bones.

Joyce's historical / geographic specificity and banal subject matter deflates Eliot's mythic time of regeneration, a strategy Joyce continues when he takes Eliot's sighing Dantesque crowd, and transforms them:

I heard mosquitoes swarm in old Bordeaux
 So many!
 I had not thought the earth contained so many
 (Hurry up, Joyce, it's time).

By doing so, of course, he is also, tongue in cheek, making his own miserable context more important, more epic. These are mosquitoes of mythic proportions. In the poem's ending, to which all of Eliot's parodists turn, the poem's final gesture towards a potential benediction finds its re-expression in bathos, a trivial hope for a much-too-specific, much-too-casual future:

But we shall have great times,
 When we return to Clinic, that waste land
 O Esculapios!
 (Shan't we? Shan't we? Shan't we?) (Letters, vol. 1: 231)

The works in *Mock Modernism* don't stop at banal recontextualizings. They also identify and critique the spongy characteristics of their sources by stretching them, as Christopher Ward does with Henry James's prose:

"Tea?" asked Marion.

Through the long casement window, which lazily unfolded its unaustere yet deliberate length in a benediction of sunlight, not more interminable than the crepitant genuflection of the waveless ocean, came the tall dark cry of the curlew, as it lashed its angry though querulous tail in intermittent certitude. Perhaps that was why the shiny, untarnished mud flats, blue veined with the tortuous eternal channels of the running tides, interspersed with the nostalgic counterparts of antiquity, and the gray green marshes, where the red shanks choired in uninterrupted but not unvexed prolixity, despite their propinquity, had always seemed to her as remote from the perpetual imbroglio with spiritual things that makes man the most ridiculous of animals, though just emerged from a brave dive in some pool of vitality, whose whereabouts are the secret that makes the mouth vigilant.

"Yes, please," answered Ellen, smiling. (Ward, "The Judge" 79–80)

Although Ward does not quite manage to pull off an exaggeration of James's periodic structure, James's characteristics are pulled taut here, from his

vocabulary to his sentence length and structure, to his disproportionate vocabulary-to-action ratio, to the way in which the banality of the surface speech far exceeds the apparent richness of its implications in the somewhat omniscient narrator's silent, lengthy meditation.

Finally, the works collected here playfully create a simulacrum of an authentic and sincere point of origin, having an "as-if" quality that creates an instability central to how their argumentative claims work. They act like they are the real thing, but the public awareness, of course, is that they are not, and the slippage between their appearance of sincerity and *prima facie* absurdity, while at times hard to stabilize, is always productive and polemical. Sincerity, simultaneously proffered and withheld, is a little off-kilter in these works, and this ungainly sincerity is central to their characterization of modernism (and, one could profitably argue, is central to many modernist works as well).

As the above examples and argument show, parodic interactions with modernism often approach their targets with elements of hostility, homage, and interpretation all rolled into one. While laughter is central, the response isn't *just* ridicule. The "mock" of this book's title points to that, "mock" being a term that points both to counterfeit *and* derision. When one puts the word "mock" in front of a noun, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it amounts to "designating a person who or thing which parodies, imitates, or deceptively resembles that which the noun properly denotes." And, of course, "mock" suggests a certain kind of imitation: "To ridicule by imitation of speech, manner, or behaviour; to parody." Always, with its disguise, using the comedy of the *appearance* of sincerity, mock modernism had complex work to do.

A few words on this book's boundaries, and what those boundaries mean. Reaching to both sides of the Atlantic, I include responses from a wide variety of parodists, both the famous and the completely unknown. Headnotes to different items, therefore, vary in terms of the amount and kinds of information they include. Dates (when available) and other information on individual parodists appear the first time their work appears in this collection. Given the range of authors, it is no surprise that publishing venues also vary widely, both geographically and in the *type* of print sources. London's *Punch* in 1911 differed widely from the whimsy of the University of Wisconsin's undergraduate literary review, or the more combative pages of the *Egoist*. As the response to modernism in Chicago and other places shows, modernism can't be understood as a history of what happened within a relatively small circle in three great literary capitals. Its interactions went across class lines, and had wide-ranging, localized inflections. And, thanks to new distribution methods of mass culture, modernism was both widespread and timely: responses to *Tender Buttons*, for example,

rapidly spread across the United States. Despite its having been printed in an edition of only one thousand, the book could in a few months become a national occasion, suggesting, as Karen Leick points out, that many responses and reviews were written solely on the basis of having read other reviews (41–2).

The decentring of modernism has added nuance. A journal, a publishing house, and on occasion even an author, did not always represent a single point of view. There was great interconnectedness within single locations, with the work of parodists appearing in the same journals in which their target authors published. Herbert Palmer, author of *Cinder Thursday*, was published by Eliot's Faber and Faber. *The New Age*, as Ann Ardis has shown in her *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, was a place where multiple viewpoints met.² The Imagist Richard Aldington's send-up of Imagism, "Penultimate Poetry," appeared in *The Egoist*, which also published Pound, his target. Modernism, before it was clear what its properties were, and who was on what side, was a place of confusing and indeterminate locations.

In its organization, *Mock Modernism* distinguishes between targets of parody and modes of parody. The book's first two major sections are given over to parodies of individual authors and movements. The first turns to poetry, the second to fiction. These sections present an asymmetrical picture of what we now understand as modernism. Parodists weren't interested in showing the diversity of modernist responses to the contemporary world; they presented modernism as a single entity, and an extreme one at that. No surprise, then, that more attention was given to the more spectacular writers, and to those writers, like the Sitwells, who seemed most eagerly to seize the mechanisms of publicity. The works in *Mock Modernism*, then, tend to target those manifestations of art that engage with the conditions of modernity in an extreme manner. That is entirely predictable, it being more fun to mock things that are excessive, that walk far outside of traditional aesthetics and subject matters. Parody, indeed, inherently defines its source as somehow being excessive. The consequences for the contents of this book are striking: given the default aesthetic of the time, which based itself on pragmatics, mimesis, and commonsense, it is unsurprising that one finds Ezra Pound lampooned much more often than Robert Frost.

The issue of representation and exclusions is, of course, one about which readers will speculate. The organization of *Mock Modernism* has shaped its inclusions: given that many of these parodies are directed at larger aspects of modernism such as manifestos and methodologies, many targeted authors appear in more than one location, including those who don't have their own, author-specific section. Their representation is larger than a quick glance at the table of contents would indicate. (The headnotes and index clarify all locations where individual authors appear.) Issues of organization aside, my strategy has

been to register accurately modern artists' place in the public consciousness of the time, and, as one can clearly see, Stein, Pound, Picasso, and Masters were the major parodic targets. (This book also includes a few parodies of modes of producing traditional art that were seen to be implicated in the devices of modernity.) As for exclusions or limited representation in *Mock Modernism*, the chronological boundaries of the collection have had a significant effect. Wallace Stevens, for example, had very little exposure in the early years of modernism, even in the pages of little magazines. The 1923 edition of *Harmonium* has a very small reception history, and no parodic reframings that I have found. This belated register on the public consciousness, and the consequent lack of early parodic reframings, is also true for writers like William Faulkner, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams.

After the opening two sections on poetry and fiction, the second half of *Mock Modernism* turns to different genres of parodic intervention, showing the period's surprising range of parodic engagement. This second half of the book demonstrates that modernism wasn't understood just as its finished works of art, but that it was, instead, seen to be a complex social phenomenon, and a shared project. The second half begins with perhaps the most dominant genre of parodic intervention: verse commentary. Typically written in doggerel quatrains (a favourite genre of American newspaper columnists in particular), these commentaries tend to direct their parody at the social positioning of modern artists. Modernism was quickly seen not just as an aesthetic movement, but as a broader struggle for cultural power. Three sections then follow – “Manifestos,” “Modernist Methodologies,” and “Modernist Criticism” – the contents of which assert that modernism was inseparable from theory and its institutions. These parodic engagements mimic modernism's theoretical justifications, its composition processes, and its interpretive explanations. *Mock Modernism* ends with the section “Modernist Performances,” consisting of newspaper accounts of ritualistic public engagements with, and enactments of, modernist principles.

As for the temporal range of this book, the works in *Mock Modernism* were written while modernism was still fresh, when the parodies still exhibit the baffled outrage of surprise. They satirize a *current occasion*, not an *eternal text*. Thus, as I have alluded to earlier, parodies written during this time are much more likely to reach to the larger social context, and not, like later parodies, restrict themselves to skewering the formal/thematic properties of the work in question. Further, these responses were not written when modernism was an already-constructed edifice, but when the survivability of this new, jury-rigged assemblage was in doubt. Indeed, even *what was being proposed* was uncertain. The works in this book were created when modernism was in the ascendant,

but also when it was still under contention, and when its central properties weren't all that clear. Writing in his 1931 *Survey of Burlesque and Parody*, George Kitchin noted the consequent and peculiar difficulties faced by modernism's parodists:

Modern poetry would seem to invite the wittiest kind of parody, because it has taken refuge in a world which is rather like the world of nonsense verse ... But for that very reason it is the harder to parody in any true sense. How is the parodist to satirise what already, on the surface, looks like luminous nonsense? And how he must perspire to give his verse the admitted delicacy of the original, nonsense or no nonsense? The truth is we are at one of those critical junctures in art, when a new philosophy of art "puts all in doubt." (345)

These are also parodies of writers and artists before they were *important*, when things were still radically uncertain. It was a volatile time, in which power was uncertain, outcomes in doubt, authenticity debatable. It was a time when modernism was being defended by uncertain standards, with an unclear sense on its own part as to what exactly it was doing. Modernism wasn't figured out yet, and these parodies' immediacy is startling. Later parodies, by contrast, work with the sense of someone like Eliot already established, and of a history of how his work has been taught in the classroom. The parody becomes a knocking down of the arthritic king, not the deflating of a pretentious arriviste.

Beyond its temporal limitations, *Mock Modernism* restricts itself to those works that have a parodic intent, that with an implied earnestness attempt to stretch characteristics of modernism to expose it, to make an argument about it. By simulating an aesthetic impulse, whose features the audience is expected to know, the works included here foreground their target referent. And they silently stretch that referent's putative characteristics, locating their argument in the tensions between their audience's implied understanding of the referent and the stretching that unmasks its ludicrousness. By taking characteristics and silently stretching them, the recreation mimics seriousness. Except in their moments of meta-commentary, there is thus a deadpan quality to many of the works included here, with the dominant pleasures being those of complicity and social consensus, of being in on the joke. For inclusion in this volume, then, negative assessments of modernism weren't enough, no matter how spectacular. Works needed to be more than polemical, they needed a parodic subtext to inflect the polemic.

These respondents to modernism returned repeatedly to several meanings in their reframings. The first, given the terms under which modernism would eventually become canonized, is surprising: modernism, instead of being too

aloof from mass culture, was parodied as being too immersed in it, which made it easy to pick up in modernist art the greasy imprint of its surrounding culture. Modernism wasn't allied with eternity, but had sold itself to the *now*. Parodists suspected that these aspects of mass culture were being used to dodge aesthetic standards. Moreover, modernism's immersion in publicity, fashion, speed, mass replication, professional organization, and culture of celebrity created problems of trust. Movements, fashion, and mass behaviour all made these parodists nervous about the sincerity of these writers and artists. For many of these parodists, modernism wasn't "natural"; it worked too consciously at what it set out to do.

A more abstract meaning is suggested by these parodists' scope, their skewering a wide range of modernism's media and genres. Modernism's wide range, in fact, is often indicated and argued about within individual works themselves, for many of the pieces in *Mock Modernism* assert that modernism had an aesthetic and context that was transferable, with individual modernist works having clear implications for work in other arts. For modernists, this generalizable reach was a sign of their art's ambition, a point not lost on a sceptical audience. These parodies show that, early on, modernism was recognized to be making ambitious claims: for its reach, its critique, and the value of its technical innovations. These claims linked modern works to each other in a movement that stretched across genres and media, and resulting in modern works that were not just about themselves, but about *modernity*.

That recognized linkage led to a standard deflating move, which was to take the seriousness of these terms down a notch, sometimes head on, but often by showing how easily modernism was transferable. Modernism's large claims did not reveal profundity, but glibness. To many parodists it was often suspiciously easy to accomplish this transfer, as when Stein's work, say, was transferred to other social contexts, such as the unlikely pages of the *New York City Daily Trade Record*, which offered the following migration of Steinian prose into the commercial context:

Gertrude Stein, if she made a prose poem of our lines, might well say: Woolens, alas, alas, and again – the Northeast, warps, warps and no woof but sorrow. See far, far away the distant but unfeeling scope. A mill – a thing but not a person, all or none, but none so much as yesterday not tomorrow. A gum shoe – a feeling, but not pink – bitter. Worsteds, too – or worst. A thread but not spun. Cloakings – a riot, a dance, a minuet, a tango, but slow music, and hearts break in distant woe. What is a cloak? no wrap, but rainbows, not hosiery, no, not ever. But when? Ah! (“The Futurist on the Trade,” 18 June 1914)

There was much fun to be had transferring Steinese to a variety of social contexts, but more central to early understandings of modernism was that the aesthetic principles revealed in a particular work or form of art – and their enabling social context – were transferable from one art form to another. This is the logical motivation behind futurist fashion shows, and the many claims of Stein as a cubist. The possibilities for parody lay in extending the absurdities of one aesthetic manifestation into another medium, exposing even more starkly its obvious banalities. For example, Don Marquis, writing in the *New York Evening Sun*, created the characters of Hermione and her Little Group of Serious Thinkers. Enchanted with all things modern, their portentous experiments and pronouncements allowed the unthinking application of one medium into another. At an evening soirée, for example, the narrator approaches Fothergil Finch, the Poet of Revolt, in order to get an explanation of composer Voke Easeley, the featured performer for the night's entertainment. Fothergil's response is initially baffling:

“A New Art!” said Fothergil. And then he led me into the hall and explained.

What Gertrude Stein has done for prose, what the wilder *vers libre* bards are doing for poetry, what cubists and futurists are doing for painting and sculpture, that Voke Easeley is doing for vocal music.

“He is painting sound portraits with his larynx now,” said Fothergil. “And the beautiful part of it is that he is absolutely tone deaf! He doesn't know a thing about music. He tried for years to learn and couldn't. The only way he knows when you strike a chord on the piano is because he doesn't like chords near as well as he does discords.” (*Hermione and Her Little Group of Serious Thinkers* 86–7)

As the above example suggests, modernism was generalizable: the responses were as often a parodic reframing of how whole genres of modernism and their methodologies generally worked as they were overtly of specific texts. (This aspect of modern parody has big consequences for how one understands things like the place of theory and fashion in modernism, for example.) Modernism wasn't just free verse, or atonal music, or cubism in isolation; these manifestations were related. Part of this connectedness was because they all arose from a single social context; in particular, from a new engagement with mass culture. But this transferability was possible also because many parodists thought theory was starting to play too large a role in aesthetic production. Indeed, a sign of the perceived prominence of theory in modernism are the many moments of sustained and direct meta-reflection in this collection. Many of the items included in *Mock Modernism* show anxiety about professionalism, and about a

mode of artmaking that had moved away from the “natural” to something much more deliberate and self-conscious. This self-consciousness was related to nervousness about writers’ and artists’ motivating impulses and the conditions under which they made their artworks, with the result that sceptics spent a fair bit of time figuring out composition practices.

In a final, related point, these parodies all argued that modernism – its artworks, its theories, its criticism – were all *easy* to produce. In a display of faux humility, parodists more often stated how easy it was to parody this work than they crowed about their skill in doing so. Modernism, given a few starting principles, was completely predictable. A.R. Orage, writing in his *New Age* in 1915, claimed,

A friend of mine has invented an automatic cubist-vorticist picture-maker that turns you out a Bomberg “Mud-bath” or a Wadsworth “City” with the turn of a wrist. A frame contains coloured pieces of flat wood which shift themselves into “arrangements” (as Mr. Pound would have said) expressive of profound emotions! Specimens, I understand, can be seen at the Chenil Gallery at Chelsea. The invention will shortly be placed upon the market. (R.H.C., “Readers and Writers” 509)

A letter to Orage at *The New Age* a few years earlier had argued that “we must not forget that there is no excessive difficulty in the invention of ‘advanced’ theories. They are an easy sport for winter evenings, in fact; but ruinous and perplexing at last if wit is reckoned sufficient in art, and life no more than a lark.” The writer concluded that, in fact, one of the weakest aspects of Picasso’s work was “the ease with which he may be imitated and caricatured” (Guthrie, 1911: 141–2). Belief in and irritation at that apparent ease motivates the authors collected in this book.

But were they right? Were modern works effortless to produce? At times, as Kitchin has pointed out, featureless modernism seems hard to parody, and the parodies seem laboured, with the features of Stein’s work especially being hard to parody. But occasionally, readers of *Mock Modernism* will find it as hard to distinguish the parody from the original as I have (whether this means that parody, at its most successful, becomes forgery, is a question beyond the reach of this introduction). Is it not plausible, at least, that Masters could have written “Birdie McReynolds,” or Eliot written “Einstein among the Coffee-cups”? What does it imply that one can’t, at times, tell the difference between parody and original? It implies, I believe, several important things about modernism. First, it suggests that modernism’s more heightened forms and traditional aesthetics were so far apart from each other that what was ridiculous within one aesthetic made perfect sense within another. Second, it suggests that bathos,

one of the central tools of parody and burlesque, came under stress at this time. For artists who used as their central aesthetic principles realism, the ordinary, or the unexceptional – writers like Masters, Woolf, Cather – parodies struggled to make the bathos register. It is hard to use bathos in response to a work that uses the ordinary as one of its central aesthetic principles. And at the other end, it was difficult to stretch extreme changes in register, such as in Eliot's quatrain poems (which use bathetic shifts in tone and diction as one of their central poetic registers), or the work of the deliberately eccentric, such as the Sitwells. As Mark Jones argues in his examination of parody in Wordsworth, at times a work emerges as parody only when we know the "relevant 'background'" (64).

The kinds of responses collected in *Mock Modernism* have played an at best anecdotal role in histories of modernism. That limited role has led to a truncated understanding not only of how modernism gained notice, but, even more important, how it was constructed, interpreted, and came to power both fashionable and institutional. Modernism wasn't just a series of texts and artworks; it was an *event*, and an event whose meaning was under constant negotiation. Further, the items collected here show that we impoverish our understanding of modernism if we understand its reception primarily in terms of extended reviews in serious journals and major newspapers. Modernism isn't just a story of major centres, of a few little magazines, and of major newspapers of record. The public sphere was much more diverse than that, and it played a more significant and diverse role in the construction of modernism than has usually been granted. One of modernism's central interactions with its public, one that helped the public posit what modernism *was*, was laughter, and laughter did some serious work. This shift in understanding how modernism interacted with its public early on has significant consequences: when brought to light, these responses show the energy with which modernism was negotiated, and what the surprising terms of those negotiations were.

As fits the purpose of this book, my texts are printed as they appeared at the time – I have not turned to later, edited versions, and, except for obvious misprints, I have made no editorial corrections. Given the interconnectedness of many of these works, many of these parodies could have been inserted into different sections of the book. In particular, Gertrude Stein, who appears with more frequency than many other modernists, is scattered throughout this book, and not in an individual section. This dispersal occurs because Stein so often appears as an explanatory context for other aspects of modernism. My index helps both with locating repeating authors and topics (such as Cubism and Futurism), and with making conceptual connections more clear.

I have kept explanatory notes to a minimum. My elucidations are found either in headnotes, or in notes at the back of the book, whichever I thought was most useful for reading. The few *footnotes* that appear indicate notes that were in the original sources. The endnotes are used primarily to explicate possibly unfamiliar contemporary references, provide translations, and at times point out what features and which authors were being parodied. Occasionally, the notes engage in the queasy pleasure of explaining puns on names and other jokes. I apologize for unnecessary explanations – as anyone familiar with Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* can attest to, a joke explained is no longer a joke.

PART I

Literary Targets

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I. Poetry

Surveying the landscape, literary types in the early twentieth century often commented, with some wariness, that poetry publishing was booming. Harold Monro, poet, anthologist, editor of the *Poetry Review*, and proprietor of the Poetry Bookshop, wrote in his 1920 anthology *Some Contemporary Poets* that “younger men and women of education enjoy the practice of making clever rhymes or noting down their own feelings in loose sentences, vaguely termed ‘free verse.’ The periodicals and newspapers make a large demand for these exercises in rhyme and rhythm: it is not difficult to be accepted” (9). Across the Atlantic, and looking back from some years’ distance, Fred Lewis Pattee, professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, and often considered to be the first professor of American literature, noted the same phenomenon, but with less placidity. In his 1930 *The New American Literature*, in a chapter entitled “The Poetry Debacle,” he referred to what had been the fashion for the “new poetry”: “Everybody was reading it, or professing to read it, or intending to read it.” Quoting Don Marquis, Pattee went on:

It burst even into the Sunday “funnies” and the comic journals:

There’s a grand poetical “boom,” they say.

(Climb on it, chime on it, brothers of mine!)

’Twixt the dawn and the dusk of each lyrical day

There’s another school started, and all of ’em pay.

(A dollar a line!

Think of it, Ferdy, a dollar a line!)

(1930: 386)

To a cynic, it seemed that virtually *anything* could get published. Across the Atlantic and a decade earlier, J.C. Squire despairingly noted an ad from the London Correspondence College that had appeared in the *Times Literary*

Supplement. What drew his ire was the text that read “The field for Verse is much larger than most people suppose. Hundreds of journals publish and pay for poetry. Anyone with aptitude can learn to write the kind of Verse editors will pay for” (“Short Cuts” 26).

From some historical distance, one can look back and articulate numerous reasons for the poetry boom: the invention of linotype; changes in distribution methods; the cheaper cost of paper; the discovery that advertising, not subscriptions, could pay for the cost of a magazine; urbanization; the rise in accessible education and the consequent need for poetry anthologies to educate the lower classes. At the time, however, these possible reasons for the poetry boom were noted much less often than was the increase in publication itself, and particularly the increase in new *forms* of poetry. For most commentators, that increase signalled a crisis: what did this increase in poetry, and poetry of a new kind, have to say about aesthetic standards? About modernity? This instability, apparently, was well suited to parodic interventions, leading Squire and others to set pen to paper and busy themselves lampooning the excesses of modernism.

FREE VERSE

Its most galvanizing instance being the publication of *Spoon River Anthology* (see the parodies of Edgar Lee Masters collected later), free verse generated an enormous number of responses. This was due to the novelty of the form, certainly. But it was also due to the form's association with publicity. Lawrence Gilman, reviewing Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* in the *North American Review*, noted:

Since the famous discovery of Paris by Mr. Richard Harding Davis some years ago, there have been few more edifying happenings of a similar kind than the recent disclosure, by our always alert "general public" and our no less alert newspaper paragraphers, of a strange and hitherto unheard of poetic phenomenon: "vers libre." Letters to the papers from sarcastic and jocose readers, parodies by the paragraphers, solemn discussions by reviewers, have marked this momentous emergence into public view of a novel and arresting verse-form. (217)

The parodic engagements with free verse collected in *Mock Modernism* raised, more often than not, questions about evaluative standards (how might one distinguish good from bad), and suspicions about composition practices. Some of the suspect composition practices were those based on an application, to poetry, of a larger aesthetic context. Volumes like the painter Max Weber's *Cubist Poems*, published in 1914 by Elkin Mathews, suggested to some that modern culture offered some easy ways to poetry. Weber's opening poem reads:

The Eye Moment

Cubes, cubes, cubes, cubes,
 High, low, and high, and higher, higher,
 Far, far out, out, out, far,
 Planes, planes, planes,
 Colours, lights, signs, whistles, bells, signals, colours,
 Planes, planes, planes,
 Eyes, eyes, window eyes, eyes, eyes,
 Nostrils, nostrils, chimney nostrils,
 Breathing, burning, puffing,
 Thrilling, puffing, breathing, puffing,
 Millions of things upon things,
 Billions of things upon things
 This for the eye, the eye of being,
 At the edge of the Hudson,

30 Literary Targets: Poetry

Flowing timeless, endless,
On, on, on, on ... (11)

A more successful painter than poet, Weber only once tried his hand at publishing a book of poems. Most modernist poetry, of course, was not so mannered as Weber's, but parodists tended not to want to make distinctions of quality and sophistication. Generalized summings-up were more useful; as one writer noted, "It's so damnably easy!" Bert Leston Taylor grumbled:

The verses of the modern pote,
The things he labels "free,"

Resemble much a little boat
That's rudderless at sea.
The pote rides in his cockleshell,
Not knowing where he's bound.

And, tossed about from swell to swell,
Goes round and round and round. (1921: 6)

The typical subject matters of free verse were often poked at, with worries that free verse had no sense of the appropriate. A standard device for exposing this was bathos – sweeping shifts in tone and subject matter, as in J.C. Squire's send-up of a free verse poem:

Gyrating cowls.
Ink.
Oh God! A Lobster! ("Man Who Wrote Free Verse": 248)

At one end, the rewritings of free verse were very detailed, taking on such conventions of free verse as lineation, punctuation, capitalization, aporia, and melodramatic juxtapositions. Simultaneously, however, the critiques were broad – parodying free verse through exaggerating its associations with democracy, immigration, Bolshevism, intellectualism, and suspect sexual practices. This aspect of aesthetic critique, like much of the work in this anthology as a whole, was less like the pleasures of a chess game than those of a food fight.

John Collings Squire, “The Man Who Wrote Free Verse”

London Mercury, June 1924: 127–37; rpt. in *The Grub Street Nights Entertainments* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924; New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924), 239–64.

A prolific author, J.C. Squire (1884–1958) was, for a while, the most successful British literary journalist of his day. His journal *The London Mercury* had a circulation of ten thousand at its high point, rivalling that of the *Times Literary Supplement*. An anthologist writing in 1922 claimed of Squire that “no living poet has a wider influence on the literary views and tendencies of his age” (Wetherell 1922: 36), a judgment echoed, apparently, by newspaper columnist Franklin P. Adams. An excellent parodist, Squire was described in 1935 as “immeasurably the greatest of our parodists to-day” (Richardson 1935: 24). Squire also projected himself headlong into literary politics, setting himself squarely against high modernism. Squire’s support of the Georgian poets, and distrust of experimental modernism, led high moderns to disparage the “Squirearchy.” T.S. Eliot, having written for Squire initially at *The New Statesman*, had by 1920 distanced himself, writing in a letter to John Quinn that Squire “knows nothing about poetry; but he is the cleverest journalist in London. If he succeeds, it will be impossible to get anything good published” (25 January 1920: 435). Lytton Strachey described Squire as “that little worm,” and Virginia Woolf thought of him as “more repulsive than words can express, and malignant into the bargain” (qtd. in Pearson 147).

Squire’s social engagement ranged widely. A founding member of the Fabian society, he stood for parliament for both Labour and the Liberals. He was knighted in 1933. During the last two decades of his life Squire’s views on literary matters were more and more pushed to the margins by the rise of international modernism.

THE MAN WHO WROTE FREE VERSE

I

This is a very short story. It is hardly a story at all. It might even be described as all moral and no story: a lamentable thing, but the fit is upon us.

It was Sunday afternoon; the sky blue, the sun hot, the shade cool because of a slight breeze. The Manor House, its ancient stones mottled yellow and grey, its