

Editorial

Where the Dead Voices Gather

‘Mr Yeats has been speaking to me of your writing...’
In December 1913, Ezra Pound¹ wrote to James Joyce asking permission to include a poem of his, ‘I Hear an Army,’ in the anthology *Des Imagistes*. Joyce, living in self-imposed exile in Trieste and struggling to make ends meet—he had yet to make money from his writing²—readily agreed. ‘This is the first time I have written to any one outside of my own circle of acquaintance (save in the case of French authors)... I am *bonae voluntatis*—don’t in the least know that I can be of any use to you - or you to me. From what W.B.Y. says, I imagine we have a hate or two in common—but thats [*sic*] a very problematical bond on introduction.’

Joyce sent Pound more work, and Pound, drawn to Joyce’s tribulations with censorious publishers—it took Joyce almost ten years for *Dubliners* to be published without expurgation—took up the cause. Acting as Joyce’s unpaid agent, Pound used his connections as literary correspondent and editor to shepherd *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—as a serialisation in Harriet Shaw Weaver’s *The Egoist* in 1914—and parts of *Ulysses*—first serial publication in *The Little Review* in 1918—into print.

‘Enter a skinny, shabby Irishman and a natty, quietly sinister American,’ as Kevin Jackson describes them³, ‘hell-bent on exploding everything that realistic fiction and

1 *Pound / Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce*, ed. Forest Read (New Directions 1967)

2 *Chamber Music* was published in 1907, but the contract required sales 300 for royalties to be paid. It had sold 200. See *Joyce & His Publishers*, Ira B. Nadel (National Library of Joyce Studies 2004)

3 *Constellation of Genius, 1922: Modernism Year One* (Hutchinson 2012)

Georgian poetry held dear ... Language has rebelled against the tyranny of subject matter and character, and become the leading character in its own right. The horror!

As the ‘unconscious mind, like the city, spends its time recycling events,’⁴ so too did the moderns reuse the ‘debris of previous literature.’ Pound and co.—as Darran Anderson discusses in the opening essay⁵—picked up signals from ancient sources, remaking it new.

‘I want a place I and T.S. Eliot can appear once a month,’ and where Joyce can appear when he likes, and where Wyndham Lewis can appear if he comes back from the war,’ writes Pound to *Little Review* editor Margaret Anderson⁶ in 1917. Those places, the ‘little magazines’—*The Little Review*, *The Dial*, *Poetry*, *Broom*, *The Egoist* and others—were crucial in getting the work of the ‘men of 1914’ (as Lewis dubbed himself, Eliot, Pound and Joyce) in print. Often publishing outside of the mainstream and challenging the very notions of what literature could be, they were the perfect venues for the exiles to explore new modes of writing. More significantly, the little magazines welcomed important work other editors had dismissed or ignored. They fast became hotbeds for innovation in new forms: first surrealism, then modernism.

4 *Modern Times, Modern Places*, Peter Conrad (Thames & Hudson 1998)

5 ‘The Magnet has a Soul & Everything is Water: How modernism is ancient,’ *gorse*, pages 11-39

6 Quoted in *Eliot, Joyce & Company*, Stanley Sultan (OUP 1990)

Their relationship, though, cooled—Pound had no love⁷ for Joyce's new 'Work in Progress,' Joyce was alarmed (and rightly so) at Pound's politics. The reversal of support from a former champion was disappointing, but Joyce was to find other encouragement in American ex-patriates Eugene and Maria Jolas. The Jolas' *transition* journal ran extracts from André Breton's *Nadja* and the surrealist manifesto 'Hands Off Love,' introduced Kafka to an English readership with 'The Sentence' and 'Metamorphosis,' ran dadaist work by Hans Arp and Kurt Schwitters, published bits of Hart Crane's 'The Bridge,' some Gertrude Stein and early Samuel Beckett, and much of *Finnegans Wake* as 'Work in Progress.'

The frontline of the avant-garde in Paris, *transition* was the firecracker the middle class, middlebrow, patrons of the arts needed: their 1929 manifesto⁸ was incendiary stuff. It began,

Tired of the spectacle of short stories, novels, poems and plays still under the hegemony of the banal word, monotonous syntax, static psychology, descriptive naturalism, and desirous of crystallizing a viewpoint...

7 'Nothing short of divine vision or a new cure for the clapp can possibly be worth all the circumambient peripherization.' *The Letters of Ezra Pound*, quoted in *Transition 1927-38: The History of. Literary Era*, Dougald McMillan (Calder and Boyers 1975). It was a book, Beckett said, 'not about something; it is that something itself.'

8 'Manifesto for The Revolution of the Word,' from *transition No. 16-17*, June 1929. The full proclamation can be read at: <http://sites.davidson.edu/littlemagazines/transition-manifesto/>

We hereby decree that:

1. The Revolution of the English Language is an accomplished fact.
2. The imagination in search of a fabulous world is autonomous and unconfined.
- [..]
11. The writer expresses. He does not communicate.
12. The plain reader be damned.

A dismantled syntax, a new multilingual tongue, *transition* was a perfect fit for James Joyce's buckled style. 'The same people,' writes Peter Conrad, 'did not think in paragraphs or logical, completed sentences, like characters in nineteenth-century novels. Their mental life proceeded in associative jerks and spasms... The modern mind was not a quiet, tidy cubicle for cognition. It thronged with as many random happenings as a city street; it contained scraps and fragments, dots and dashes, like the incoherent blizzard of marks on a modern canvas which could only be called an 'impression' because it represented nothing recognizable.'

Joyce, Gertrude Stein and the other *transition* contributors were employing English in radically new ways, bending and regenerating a language made dull by age and usage.⁹ Joyce,' says Peter Gay,¹⁰ 'pushed the dissection and reconstitution of prose to an extreme that nobody could surpass without

⁹ Turn to 'Speeds & Shapes of Consciousness,' David Winters' and Evan Lavender-Smith's conversation on James Joyce and modernism, on pages 57-71

¹⁰ *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (William Heinemann 2007)

landing in sheer incoherence.’ *Finnegans Wake* could not serve as a novel for later subversive writers, Gay continues, but ‘it remains—and will remain—a solitary monument to a bold, learned, and unduplicible venture, serving as Joyce always did to affront dominant literary pieties.’

In the buginning is the wood, in the muddle is the sound-dance and thereinoften you’re in the unbewised again.’



One of the finest Irish novels of 2013, Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, was ignored for nine years, dismissed as being too experimental. English indie publishers Galley Beggars Press took a punt with it and it went on to win the Goldsmith’s Prize, a prize that embraces the enthusiasm of Laurence Sterne—another great Irish innovator—and rewards ‘fiction that breaks the mould or opens up new possibilities for the novel form.’ Novels that are *novel*.

Another, Donal Ryan’s *The Spinning Heart*, a novel in voices, was rejected forty-seven times before being rescued from the ‘slush pile’ by a beady-eyed intern and published to international acclaim by Irish independents Lilliput Press. They—McBride and Ryan, Galley Beggars and Lilliput—are stories of our time.

Donal Ryan has said we are in the eye of a publishing storm; we think he’s on to something. The optimism of the 50’s, and the spirit of Ireland’s own little magazines—*The Bell*, *Threshold*, *Atlantis*, *The Dublin Magazine*—is alive and well

in the *Dublin Review* and *The Stinging Fly*, and in newcomers *The Moth*, *The Penny Dreadful*, *South Circular*, *The Bobemyth*. Though the James Joyces, the Ezra Pounds, the Gertrude Steins, the Ernest Hemingways of today would still be deemed uncommercial (well, perhaps not Hemingway), praise be the independents and the little magazines, for giving voice to innovation, for ushering exciting and unusual authors into print.

For all our talk of the ghosts of Ezra Pound and James Joyce, *gorse* does not wish to raise the dead. We are not nostalgic for the past, but look for the potential in literature today—we believe in the art of words. But we are not only for the *novel*; we champion the unconventional and the under-recognised, writers exiled in their own countries.

I hear an army charging upon the land...'