

uity and the self. His argument that modernism can and should be read through a lens of "macro-history" renders especially rich readings of Joyce's use of allusion, a window, Sultan demonstrates, into the ideological conditions imbued in modernist texts. The chapters on literary autobiography that follow utilize textual and biographical readings of Bishop and Lawrence especially. Sultan's detailed readings of Lawrence's early works, though largely rooted in earlier writings of his on the author, display a deep understanding for the ways in which art and life intersect and influence both the production of text and biography. The section on Joyce is a wonderful supplement to his reading of Lawrence, as Sultan demonstrates quite convincingly, that their respective treatments of autobiography (Lawrence's writing is typically considered "compulsively autobiographical," Joyce's properly detached from autobiography) are not as radically different as is typically believed (85).

Tracing the development of the manuscripts of *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and *The Waste Land*, the book's final section presents an argument construed from Eliot's "Ulysses, Order and Myth" (1923): the "mythical method" that defines modernist innovation is "not a 'continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity,'" but the "manipulating" of such a 'parallel' in depicting 'contemporary history'" (174). This kind of synoptic claim—that modernists are united in their methodological manipulations of history in their art—inform the preceding chapters, forging an avenue for unification amid a rather wide range of subjects.

Undoing categorical divisions—between fixed modes of artistic expression, between life and art, between the immanent and transcendent—was a central aim for much of the moderns, but not, apparently, for much of contemporary modernist criticism. Here Sultan offers a new set of categories, ones that are thoroughly developed and persuasive insofar that they mark modes or *reading*. The divisions of *doing* offered by critics like Gay and Roger Griffin in recent years—the kind suggested by Sultan's use of the term "non-modernist"—enforce false binaries onto the two integrated ways in which modernism occupied time and space: through history and texts.<sup>7</sup> That Sultan's modes of reading are so formally divided would be troubling if not for the fact that this study reveals the ways in which macro history, personal history, and manuscript history overlap in the formulation of modernist writers, their texts, and, in turn, modernism. The fusion of literary and historical scholarship that produces these mythical divisions presents a thorough—and wholly modernist—rendering of modernism's often simultaneously artistic, cultural, and political artifacts.

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the saint  
Of unbelief:  
shrike,  
epistemology,  
and postmodernism

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"I am a great saint," Shrike declares to open his seduction speech, to which he closes with a most debased and equally empowering form of a new omnipotence: "I spit on them all" (*Miss Lonelyhearts* 7). The novel may be titled *Miss Lonelyhearts*, but it is the "dead pan" Shrike that, almost clandestinely, steals the show. One may easily list the reasons for Shrike's memorable presence: the bawdy representation; debauched and sordid domestic life; cold-hearted unconcern for fellow human beings. There is another aspect of Shrike, however, that, I find, fails to get much treatment in the discussions of the novel. What is most appalling about the man may be his sheer disregard, the total irreverence he displays towards all traditional epistemological paradigms; moreover, this irreverence is compounded with his representation that he is nothing more than a walking episteme—a man whose mouth is but a sieve that leaks ages of discourse and narrative. How are we to receive this character—a character created by the West in the throes of the modernist project, yet simultaneously antinomian to that, and, conceivably, any socio-cultural project? Can Shrike be considered a postmodern rogue borne from the determinacy of modernism? In this essay, I will argue that Shrike is indeed a figure of fissure within modernism; a postmodern bastard son of epistemology and aesthetics, who—unlike the modernists who question, refute, and/or re-appropriate the paradigms—simply spits them out, and "spits" on them without any semblance of reverent concern. Further, I will attempt to explain why Shrike is to be seen as American corporate capitalism's "great saint."

The postmodern concern towards the questioning of knowledge has led certain thinkers, particularly Jean-Francois Lyotard, to establish the dependency of epistemology on the narrative form, or, more precisely, what he labels as metanarratives. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge*, Lyotard states: "I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse...making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative" (72). In somewhat reductionist terms, if the

Enlightenment project developed the quite precarious paradigm of the historical world view—or the troubling term a "universal history"—and was subsequently taken up as the *raison d'être* of the German idealists (with Hegel as its avatar), then what they also (maybe unknowingly) developed was a Knowledge appropriated as a type of epic-epistemology—a sweeping narrative of politics, philosophy and aesthetics which told the story of Progress via their chosen collective, or even singular hero (as Napoleon was for Hegel). The meta-narrative, throughout the modern era, became the dominant means of, not only disseminating knowledge, but reifying the knowledge as Knowledge as it was circulated, absorbed, and re-circulated through the generations of specific cultures.

The twentieth-century Modernist movement can itself be seen as a type of fissure, a self-conscious break from this metanarrative tradition in both subtle and radical instances. Examples that range from T.S. Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* to Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* portray a generation with a latent self-awareness to history's influence on consciousness; that the metanarratives that have driven and sustained culture for, at minimum, the previous 300 years have now seemingly been re-dacted upon themselves. Whereas in pre-Modernism history, knowledge and consciousness were entwined in a rather circuitous relationship, in the Modernist movement there is an undoubted gap between history and knowledge on one side, and consciousness on the other. The tale of the "universal history" had come to an emphatic halt where epistemology seemed to be looking back on its own construction. As a rebuttal to Lyotard, there is Jurgen Habermas who, in *Modernity versus Postmodernity* affirms this venerated break from tradition in the Modernist movement:

We observe the anarchistic intention of blowing up the continuum of history, and we can account for it in terms of the subversive force of this new aesthetic consciousness. Modernity revolts against the normalizing functions of tradition; modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative. (93)

What is implicit in Habermas's claim here is the paradoxical notion that if indeed this "new aesthetic consciousness" brings to light the obfuscated and unclear division between past and present (something that Enlightenment and Idealist thinkers failed to do; in fact, the entire notion of Progress in a universal history is predicated upon a linear temporality with a clearly demarcated past and an observable present), then it is this very aesthetic consciousness which seemingly usurps the condition of the present—in other words, the totality of the "continuum of history," at some crucial moment, had to have receded from the consciousness of the artists and thinkers. Modernism itself became a certain type of consciousness that seemed to be looking back on the epistemological metanarratives that constituted history and whether it is was in the salvation project of Eliot to revisit and revision the classics, or in the radical rebellion against the "normalizing functions" as expressed by Duchamp, this new aesthetic consciousness observed this pervasive fissure from history, resulting in widespread questioning, re-appropriation, and revolt against the monolithic paradigms.

One may ask: How is Shrike to be considered so inimical to this Modernist aesthetic consciousness? In certain ways, it may seem as if Shrike is the perfect voice for Modernist sentiment, considering what Habermas goes on to say in the aforementioned essay: "Culture, in its modern form, stirs up hatred against the conventions and virtues of an everyday life, which has become rationalized under the pressures of economic and administrative imperatives" (95). There is no question that rationalized industrialism breeds an angst and psychological anxiety through its systems of efficient reproduction. In fact, Shrike can be seen as the embodiment of the "economic and administrative imperatives" being Miss Lonelyhearts's editor and reducing the title character's efforts at compassion and redemption to mere philistine concerns such as the column's readability and appeal. However, the first half of Habermas's quote fails to encapsulate Shrike. While it may be true that Modernism, in part, was a rebellion against the normalizing functions of urban Babbitry, Shrike, throughout the novel, exhibits none of the symptoms of Modernist reactions to this resent and angst. In the novel, we are told that Miss Lonelyhearts and Shrike and a nascent population of aesthetes like them, "...[H]ad believed in literature, had believed in Beauty and personal expression as an absolute end. When they lost this belief, they lost everything" (14). Here we have the failure of faith—Art being invested with the belief in salvation which, no doubt, was subsequently rendered highly flawed in the face of the Great War, among other reasons. Another of these reasons, for Habermas, was the depoliticizing and de-socializing quality Art had gathered over the years since the Enlightenment.

"A rationalized, everyday life, therefore, could hardly be saved from cultural impoverishment through breaking open a single cultural sphere—art—and so providing access to just one of the specialized knowledge complexes" (100). As philistinism had taken over the modern urban culture, art—being rendered inutile and inaccessible to the everyday mechanized lifestyle through its specialization and privatization as a capitalist institution—proved to be a tremendous failure for those educated on and fortified by those metanarratives of a classic humanist curriculum. The combination of the Great War and a de-politicized aesthetic episteme is a clear explanation for the stirring up of hatred against the rationalism of capitalist modernity and hence, a collective consciousness that awakens to its disconnect from the epistemology of the historical world view.

However, as mentioned before, Shrike does not seem to possess, or at the least, portray these qualities of a disillusioned aesthete with no where to turn to. In fact, he is quite the opposite. Shrike appears to be a man who has completely absorbed these epistemological paradigms without any concern whatsoever towards their veracity and/or utility. He is not only a "machine for making jokes" (15); he is a machine for selling the ephemeral value of knowledge. Hence the reason why "no matter what the motivating force, death, love, or God" (15), Shrike could reduce everything to their surface value as a form of capital in trade. There is nothing at stake for Shrike as there is in the Modernist movement—no re-appropriation of a politicized and socialized art; no refutation in the search for new expressions of knowledge. After running through a tongue-in-cheek litany of simulated alternative lifestyles for the despairing Miss Lonelyhearts, Shrike summarizes his mock

charade by saying, "My friend, I know of course that neither the soil, nor the South Seas, nor Hedonism, nor art, nor suicide, nor drugs, can mean anything to us" (35). As the editor of an advice column, it is his job to know of all the various lifestyles and their correlating philosophies—from the utilitarianism of a humble peasant to the Epicureanism of sybaritic profligates. However, there is no reverent concern that challenges, questions, or reshapes the paradigmatic metanarratives. For Shrike, the truth or falsity of the paradigms is never tested; they are simply accepted as factually averred through their very material and conscious existence in history. The archetypes of philosophy, theology, literature, empirical science, and Western civilization are absorbed into a capacious, yet morally lax conscience; ingested and "spit" out—passively humorous as a slippage of flatus.

What Shrike subsequently comes to be is the reintegration of the Cartesian duality in service of corporate capitalism: the body as vessel for physical consumption, the mind as vessel for information consumption. Returning to Lyotard, the diffusion of these various narratives come to define and maintain the certain cultures they are in. He says:

[A] narrative tradition is also the tradition of the criteria defining a threefold competence—"know how," "knowing how to speak," and "knowing how to hear"—through which the community's relationship to itself and its environment is played out. What is transmitted through these narratives is the set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond. (77)

Narratives as such create cultural competence as well as sustain the values and mores of the given culture. Shrike, as editor and voice of these narratives, trades and transmits this competence as a form of capital—he controls it, he reproduces it, and he broadcasts it. However, he is more than just the American version of the divided Cartesian subject. The *Miss Lonelyhearts* column is not, nor is any column similar to it, an altruistic project. Each addition that Shrike eventually allows for printing is published, not to actually help the person (this would be self-defeating considering if the person is helped by the advice column, and does not find a need to read it anymore, there is one less subscriber), but is there to sell the next addition.

This ephemeral quality to the advice in particular, and metanarratives in general, facilitate the efficient transmission of these epistemological paradigms necessary to match the rapid pace of production, reproduction, supply, and demand in the industrialized capitalist state. A newspaper is the epitome of mechanized reproducibility where the retelling of the adopted metanarratives is a daily occurrence. This, for Lyotard, leads to a different type of fissure than the one proposed by the Modernism of Habermas:

[A] collectivity that takes narrative as its key form of competence has no need to remember its past. It finds the raw material for its social bond not only in the meaning of the narratives it recounts, but also in the act of reciting them. The narratives' reference may seem to belong to the past, but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation. It is the present act that on each one of its occurrences marshals in the ephemeral temporality [...]. (78)

Here the difference between Habermas and Lyotard and their respective views on the distinctive fissure with the past and history are explicit. For Habermas, Modernism's intentions were to reclaim a venerated and utile art which first had to be re-politicized and re-socialized. However, contingent with this project is the fact that content and meaning in art was not a means to an end; making content and meaning an end in itself was the goal of the "new aesthetic consciousness," and whether it was the conservatism of Eliot, or the radicalism of Duchamp, this collective goal as shared by this collective aesthetic consciousness was categorically tied to a concept of "the Past" in its ossified entirety. For, without this concept of the past, of history, there is no fissure whatsoever; there is no rebellion if one does not know the identity to which his rebellion is focused towards. Hence, even in the radicalism of Duchamp, there is an implicit appropriation of value directed towards the past because, as *Nude Descending a Staircase* exhibits, no matter what, the past is what has to be avoided; we can not be the history of our fathers.

For Lyotard, however, the idea of content and meaning as whole is disposed completely. Once art and literature and history and epistemological metanarratives have been adopted into the corporate capitalist state, content and meaning are relinquished of any value beyond their ability to be efficiently traded and to create profits. Thus, Shrike is indeed the new American Saint in that questions of value and purpose are subsumed in his quest to recite and resell these epistemologies. There is no more relation to the past for Shrike the editor. This is why he can claim that those philosophies of living "can mean nothing to us" and why he can make a satiric joke out of the non-believer: "Goldsmith laughed, and Shrike, in order to keep him laughing, used an old trick; he appeared to be offended. 'Goldsmith, you are the nasty product of this unbelieving age. You cannot believe, you can only laugh'" (44). This is the postmodern condition of ephemera: if the "raw material" for metanarratives and epistemology comes in the simple recitation of the narratives, then what, exactly, is the past? If consciousness for Habermas was the entity in direct opposition to the past, then for postmodern ephemera it is as if time and consciousness have caught up to each other; have silently converged in the body and mind of someone such as Shrike. Shrike has inherited a world filled with epistemological metanarratives without root or temporal connection to his ontology; they simply exist in his time and his space within the capitalist hegemony, and, as narratives within this hegemony, they are there to be retold and resold. Ephemera strips Shrike of the reverent concern of modernists such as Eliot, Duchamp, and Habermas.

If the ability to recite is the only inherent value in epistemology in the capitalist system, and Shrike is a saint because he knows the various forms of epistemology and yet can "spit on them" without scruples or reflection, then, as mentioned before, he may be more than just the figure of the Cartesian subject within the corporate framework. Shrike is the epitome of the vessel of information, but he also knows how to deliver that information into the physical world by turning it into a form of efficiently exchanged commodities—turning the stuff of mind into the stuff of the body, the vessel for consumption. In this regard, he comes to represent the realization (albeit the abject realization) of the unified Cartesian subject. Just as time and consciousness seem to have converged in the postmodern Shrike, so too have mind and body converged in the corporate capitalist Shrike. Practically every scene involving Shrike deals with the delivering of knowledge and metanarratives into the physical world, even though the majority of the time it is done in jest. But though it is performed with the levity of a jokester, this jokester is simultaneously a rogue—he is an outsider relaying the information to the consumer public without ever being affected by the information himself. If the body must be emptied of any metaphysical pretensions in order to render it a physical vessel of consumption, so too must the mind be separated from any psychological baggage if it is to be a utility for storing information. Though he does claim to suffer, it is a physical suffering, a suffering of the body due to a lack of consumption that "drives him into the arms of the Miss Farkises of this world" because his wife has been "fighting to remain a virgin" since their marriage (21). If America's burgeoning brand of capitalism is a perverse realization of the unified subject as the intellectual laborer, then Shrike is undoubtedly the apotheosis of this subject. He is more than the dead pan; he is the pineal gland.

The difficulties Shrike presents to the Modernist movement cannot be overlooked. His lack of earnestness and reverent concern directly oppose many of the aspirations of the modernists. To label anything "postmodern" is indeed rather counter-intuitive, since the "essence" of postmodernism is a lack of unifying identity, its signature incorporation of alterity. However, if we are to accept Habermas's juxtaposition that "Postmodernity definitely presents itself as Antimodernity" (91), then the significance of Shrike appearing so inimical to the Modernist project is made explicit. Shrike may be a great saint, but he is also a troubling and unnerving one; for it is through his undermining of epistemological paradigms that threatens the ontology of those that have retained their faith. It is belief, and all the metanarratives that comprise them, that he spits on. Shrike is the great saint of the unbelievers.

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