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### Modernist Literature in the Sleeve of Phenomenology

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#### Abstract

Classifications within the field of phenomenology are usually limited to the twentieth century and to the Husserl (transcendental phenomenology), Heidegger (hermeneutical phenomenology), and Merleau-Ponty (narrative phenomenology) trinity. Sartre (existential phenomenology) is sometimes pigeon-holed in a picture of phenomenological schools of different persuasions. By working with standardized versions and catalogues of authoritative figures intellectual history leaves out the actual process of mutual influences, follow-ups or parallel developments that precipitate in time into synthetic statements and theories. In her book on *Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in*

*High Modernism* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), Maria-Ana Tupan traces the roots of this discipline back into the mid-nineteenth century, providing persuasive arguments in support of her research hypothesis that by the end of the nineteenth century this branch of philosophy had already been constituted in its methods, and basic terminology (*constitution, reduction, appearance, empathy*). The relationship between mind and world is shown to have put in relation psychology, philosophy and art which fed into the poetics of modernism from its *fin-de-siècle* emergence to its bloom in the 1920s.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology, Objective Correlative, Phenomenological Constitution, Reality and Appearance, Narrative Identity

#### Introduction

What Maria-Ana Tupan attempts and successfully achieves in *Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism* is a stand-off from traditional approaches, both to phenomenology, as a distinct twentieth-century outgrowth, and to modernist literature as an aesthetic effect of abysmal psychology. The rise of phenomenology from a nineteenth-century fusion of logic and physiological psychology is associated with a conscious attempt on the part of the builders of fictional worlds to meet the requirements of psychological verosimilarity in accordance with current epistemological assumptions about the relationship (objective correlative) between mind and world.

Setting out from one of her previously stated points of view, according to which “in light of general systems theory, no element can be defined outside a system of relations of increasing complexity” (Tupan, 2015, p. 34) <sup>[4]</sup>, Professor Maria-Ana Tupan, affiliated with the Doctoral School of Alba Iulia (Romania) and author of several books on literary epistemology, goes to considerable lengths to prove the importance of “identifying the ideas which fed into canonical modernism” (Tupan, 2023, p. ix) <sup>[5]</sup>. The holistic perspective of the book is disclosed from the first lines of its argument, or even from the book’s elegant hardback cover, whose intermingling of black with dark violet rays suggests the coming into view process implied in the concept of phenomenology. The *Contents* confirm our expectations based on the first glimpse, announcing aspects explored from *The Making of Modernist Aesthetics*, through various epistemic resources, to *The Otherness of the Sexed, Raced and Classed Body in Mircea Eliade’s* fiction. The list of authors under consideration obviously transgresses geographical borders, but throughout the interdisciplinary approach, Maria-Ana Tupan goes beyond other limitations, as well. Since she equals interdisciplinary tackling to a cross-paradigmatic perspective, through the New Historicist framework, she manages to identify a vantage point in exploring modernism as a complex structure. Bearing in mind the importance of an “insight into the half-hidden cultural transactions through which great works of art are empowered” (Greenblatt, 1988, p. 4) <sup>[2]</sup>, Tupan explains the discursive negotiations between literature and the *science maîtresse* of the age, psychology, in order to shed light on the influences that underlie modernist works. The book’s five chapters, interspersed with textual evidence and pertinent critical views, converge to endorse the up-to-date interpretation of *Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism*, advanced by Maria-Ana Tupan.

The first chapter, *The Making of Modernist Aesthetics*, revolves around the question, “Could the mind make sense of personal

or collective experience in light of what the new, physiological psychology, revealed about the mind's reasoning through images rather than concepts?" (Tupan, 2023, p. 3) [5]. Emulating Isobel Armstrong's views expressed in *Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993) [1], Maria-Ana Tupan considers Victorianism a pathway to phenomenology. Whereas "positivist philosophy served a realist poetics" (Tupan 2023, p. 10) [5], the freshly disclosed world of psychology and similar disciplines gave access to a different type of interpretation, a new way of conceiving identity and the self, related to the other. In the first subchapter, *The Deconstruction of the Logic of Identity*, the author draws on John Stuart Mill and Wilhelm Wundt's ideas to demonstrate the shift towards this new type of understanding.

Wilhelm Wundt's phenomenology was meant to correct the limits of positivism but also the randomness of empirical psychology. The Wundt-James school of pragmatism allowed the subject to let itself be borne upon the tide of associations in the absence of any transcendental reflection. Actually, the self is constituted by the objects present to its senses. It is through the pattern of recurrent impressions that the self finds itself at a remove from the immediate world of sensorial impressions" (Tupan, 2023, p. 15) [5].

The periplus of the intellectuals whose influence the author considers to have been substantial for *The Making of Modernist Aesthetics* includes not only Wilhelm Wundt but also H. L. Mansel with his Phenomenological Dialectic, Washington Allston with his objective correlative perceived as eidetic constitution, Alexander Bain's laws of association, Alfred Binet's focus on psychology as basis of aesthetics, Alfred Adler's web of connectivity and Sándor Ferenczi's "Dialogues of the Unconscious". The demonstration of the book's hypothesis also includes the names of Henri Bergson (who explored the double self), Hermann von Helmholtz (the understanding of external things to the perception of signs), Max Dessoir's theory of empathy, *Das Doppel Ich* (1889), and the Distinct Phenomenology of the Art Object, F. H. Bradley's philosophy, and aspects of phenomenal and real, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and *Simulation Models of Character Construction* and several features related to Arthur George Tansley's "Combustion Chambers". The author considers that:

Modernist poetics was not a matter of communality of style or fashion but of ideas launched into public discourse, especially by psychologists, logicians, anthropologists and phenomenologists. Art was stepping beyond its shadow, borrowing the instruments of science and troping on its concepts (Tupan, 2023, p. 30) [5].

What we find enlightening in Maria-Ana Tupan's approach is that she offers textual evidence using excerpts from various literary resources to demonstrate the movement of *art stepping beyond its shadow* in a parallel examination of literature and other discourses.

The second chapter, *Cognitive Hybridity and Birth of Discourse* sets off with Jane Ellen Harrison's views regarding the heritage that the nineteenth century had advanced and Gaston Bachelard's discourse "from inside the

new epistemological frame" (Tupan, 2023, p. 83) [5]. The author believes that the excitement inspired by the new physics was an outcome of its abrupt and drastic discontinuation of tradition, the fresh scientific reasoning being "not merely a matter of technicality but of ontology, with the concept of matter thoroughly compromised" (Tupan 2023, p. 83) [5]. The rise of new standpoints, concepts and styles within the frame of this newfangled epistemology is ascribed to the fact that science grew into being a matter of attitude, mindset, creed and, hence, a shared trait of the entire intellectual community. In her attempt to capture the polyphony of modernist and postmodernist corpora of texts, the author believes epistemological foci to be an adequate criterion.

In *Historicizing the Aesthetics of Genre*, the third chapter of the book, Maria-Ana Tupan, draws attention to the scholarly tendency to discuss representative artists and how other discourses influence their work. Departing from the safe model of interpretation, the author suggests that non-literary contexts or apparently irrelevant information might become significant either as background evidence of how the human condition was understood or as a purposeful nuance of what had been perceived as hidden or arbitrary details. For instance, considering the theory of empathetic aesthetics, Maria-Ana Tupan mentions the importance of Theodor Lipps' studies, not failing to demonstrate their relevance to literature. Moreover, she engages in finding the concept of empathy as it appears in different literary works, concluding that:

Modernist writers had various names for this empathetic experience- a revelatory one of meaningful moments: moments of being (Woolf), epiphanies (Joyce), living moments (D. H. Lawrence). Empathy, *Einfühlung*, are known mainly as the dominant features of expressionist painting, but fiction also employed the concepts as structuring elements. (Tupan, 2023, p. 93) [5].

In the fourth chapter, *From Barbarian to Citizen: The Constitution of the Racial Other*, the author explores aspects related to the savage, advancing the idea that "to the scientist and the philosopher of modernity, primitive man was generally the racial foil of the civilized European, inspiring repulsion or pity" (Tupan, 2023, p. 97) [5]. In delving into the discussion about primitive man, we are presented with ideas that sprung in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Montesquieu and John Locke's views regarding the savage's incapacity of abstract thinking to nineteenth-century understandings of H. L. Mansel, Washington Allston or Francis Galton. The concept of identity also includes the subject of the racial other, especially since the nineteenth century witnessed the process of colonization and the expansion of the British Empire. Although eugenics and the new discipline of anthropology were designed to study the individual from the perspective of civilization vs. savagery, psychology, philosophy, and literature were also indebted to giving voice to the colonies. The literary pieces Maria-Ana Tupan chooses to examine from the perspective of the constitution of the racial other are Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

In the fifth (and last) chapter, *The Otherness of the Sexed, Raced and Classed Body in Mircea Eliade*, Maria-Ana Tupan returns to Romanian fiction, analyzing "a polar representation of woman's body cast in flesh or in word"

(Tupan, 2023, p. 104) <sup>[5]</sup> in Mircea Eliade's *Mademoiselle Christina, The Gypsies' Way* and *Les Trois Grâces*. Drawing on Jonathan Hart's "poetics of otherness" and Lacan's views, Maria-Ana Tupan defines the other:

The other is not the spirit reified in language, but the body inscribed by the intersubjective order of discourse, the Law of the Father, a normative language whose letter is written in the unconscious. It is only the pre-linguistic human beings that cherishes illusions of autonomy while contemplating their body in the mirror. After joining the discourse community, one's own body and any other body is written over by anthropological narratives, ideological stereotypes, cultural constructs, etc. This seems to have been the philosophy behind Mircea Eliade's representations of the body in three of his stories written according to generic scripts of fantasy or even science-fiction. (Tupan 2023, p. 105-106) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Throughout *Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism*, the subtleties of the modernist movement are explored and glossed upon from a personal perspective. The diversity of arguments provided by literary and non-literary resources grants extensive support for the hypothesis Maria-Ana Tupan advances. The scrutiny of relevant aspects under the threshold of modernism gives the author a range of original interpretive possibilities. We believe that a proper understanding of modernist literature from the perspective of twenty-first-century criticism is possible only using a lens similar to what Maria-Ana Tupan proposes. The depth of her undertaking is emphasized not only by the variety of authors (novelists such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe, Wallace Stevens, T. E. Hulme, Flann O' Brien, Mircea Eliade and other intellectuals, including Washington Allston, Wilhelm Wundt, H. L. Mansel, Alfred Binet, Alexander Bain) mentioned throughout the research but also by the ease with which she shuttles between these authors' bodies of ideas. Summing up, Maria-Ana Tupan's *Phenomenology and Cultural Difference in High Modernism* is an innovative critical work, of interest both for those who simply seek to understand the epistemology bearing on canonical modernist literature and for those interested in some of its features that are usually skimmed in its analytical treatment. On the balance of probabilities, this twin study of literature and intellectual history is likely to trigger subsequent scholarly research of empirical relevance and speculative appeal.

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