Modernism Study Guide

Modernism

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Contents

Modernism Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....3

Themes....4

Style....8

Historical Context....10

Movement Variations....12

Representative Authors....14

Representative Works....18

Critical Overview....22

Criticism....24

Critical Essay #1....25

Critical Essay #2....29

Critical Essay #3....30

Critical Essay #4....40

Adaptations....48

Topics for Further Study....49

Compare and Contrast....50

What Do I Read Next?....52

Further Study....53

Bibliography....55

Copyright Information....56

Introduction

"On or about December 1910 human nature changed." The great modernist writer Virginia Woolf wrote this in her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" in 1924. "All human relations shifted," Woolf continued, "and when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature." This intentionally provocative statement was hyperbolic in its pinpointing of a date, but almost anyone who looks at the evolution of Western culture must note a distinct change in thought, behavior, and cultural production beginning sometime in the late nineteenth century and coming to full fruition sometime around the Second World War. This change, whether art, technology, philosophy or human behavior, is generally called Modernism.

Modernism designates the broad literary and cultural movement that spanned all of the arts and even spilled into politics and philosophy. Like Romanticism, Modernism was highly varied in its manifestations between the arts and even within each art. The dates when Modernism flourished are in dispute, but few scholars identify its genesis as being before 1860 and World War II is generally considered to mark an end of the movement's height. Modernist art initially began in Europe's capitals, primarily London, Milan, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and especially Paris; it spread to the cities of the United States and South America after World War I; by the 1940s, Modernism had thoroughly taken over the American and European academy, where it was challenged by nascent Postmodernism in the 1960s. Modernism's roots are in the rapidly changing technology of the late nineteenth century and in the theories of such late nineteenth-century thinkers as Freud, Marx, Darwin, and Nietzsche. Modernism influenced painting first (Impressionism and Cubism are forms of Modernism), but in the decade before World War I such writers as Ezra Pound, Filippo Marinetti, James Joyce, and Guillaume Apollinaire translated the advances of the visual arts into literature. Such characteristically modernist techniques as stream-of-consciousness narration and allusiveness, by the late 1930s, spilled into popular writing and became standard.

The movement's concerns were with the accelerating pace of society toward destruction and meaninglessness. In the late 1800s many of society's certainties were undermined. Marx demonstrated that social class was created, not inherent; Freud boiled down human individuality to an animalistic sex drive; Darwin provided evidence that the Bible might not be literally true; and Nietzsche argued that even the most deeply-held ethical principles were simply constructions. Modernist writers attempted to come to terms with where humanity stood after its cornerstones had been pulverized. The movement sifted through the shards of the past looking for what was valuable and what could inspire construction of a new society.

Themes

Technology

In very real terms, the entire world and the way that humans understood that world changed between 1860 (when the modernist period is generally understood to have begun) and 1940. In 1860 the idea of travelling at a mile a minute was but a dream, as was the notion of human beings flying. The photograph was new; moving pictures, much less moving pictures that talked, were only fantasies. Electrical signals being sent through wires was a possible dream, but the idea that voices could be transmitted was fantastic. The idea that voices could be transmitted without wires, through the air, was utterly preposterous.

In 1940 the world was a different place. Machines allowed people to see moving, talking pictures; to travel at more than one hundred miles an hour; to fly through the air; to transmit both voices and images without wires; to talk, in real time, with someone at the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Humans relied on machines to a much greater extent than they ever had. It is hard today to conceive of a world without powered machines, but in 1860 many people in the United States lived their entire lives without ever encountering a powered machine. By the 1940s machines had made it possible to communicate or travel□or destroy□with much greater speed and efficiency than anyone had ever dreamed in 1860.

The modernist writers, almost as a rule, feared the new technology and left it out of their writing. Joyce set his masterpiece *Ulysses* in 1904, before motorcars had become widespread. Eliot and Pound move easily between historical periods but rarely mention the technological advances that had permeated all aspects of urban life by 1920. Rather, they look back to the classical or medieval or Renaissance periods, fearing that dependence upon machines will cloud their minds, make them less able to understand what is truly important about being human. The only modernist writer who really engaged with technology, in fact, is the Italian futurist writer Filippo Marinetti. Marinetti was a Milanese who came to London to perform spoken-word pieces that celebrated machines. The glory of airplanes, cars, factories, and machine guns was always the subject of Marinetti's verse. Blinded by his fascination with the clean efficiency of machines, Marinetti ended up advocating the horrific violence of World War I and, in the mid-1920s, became an apologist for Mussolini.

Freud

Modernist novelists had no more important influence than the Viennese psychiatrist Sigmund Freud. Although he did not actually invent the discipline, Freud is considered the father of psychoanalysis. His writings propose a three-part model of the psyche consisting of the id (or the primitive drives), the ego (the sense of the self), and the superego (or the moral lessons and codes of behavior we are taught). Freud believed

that human behavior and "neuroses" have causes of which people are unaware, causes that stem from childhood experiences or from the thwarting of certain basic urges. Psychoanalysis was predicated on the idea that an analyst could pick out certain ideas and reactions in a patient that would indicate the real problem.

Such writers as Woolf and Joyce took this idea and turned it into the basis for fiction. They were reacting against "realist" writers, who sought to simply record the unadorned facts of the world around. This is impossible, the modernists said; the psyche of the narrator will always be affected by unknown forces and thus is never able to capture reality without any kind of bias or alteration. Rather, people should attempt simply to record thoughts, for by this the reader can understand things about the narrator that the narrator him- or herself does not. Joyce's first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, records the thoughts of Stephen Dedalus from the time he is a "nicens little boy" to the time he is a college student. In her short story "The Mark on the Wall," Virginia Woolf captures a moment in time as a woman looks at a mark on the wall. The narration follows her mind as she extrapolates all of the possibilities of what the mark could be and follows all of the subconscious connections her mind makes with seemingly unrelated topics. Modernist writers felt that the "interior monologue" or the stream-of-consciousness technique gave readers access to the character's subconscious.

The "Unreal City"

In "The Waste Land" Eliot describes London as an "Unreal City," a city through which shades of the dead troop over the bridges. Modernism was the first literary movement to take urban life as a given, as a form of experience that was categorically different from any other kind of life. The French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire was fascinated by the "flaneur," the man who strolls the city aimlessly as a way of life. The anonymity of the city, its darkness, its mechanization, its vast power, all inspired the modernists; it attracted and repelled them in equal measure. Modernist writers (most of them, interestingly enough, from suburbs or small cities) gravitated to London and Paris, St. Petersburg and New York, where they found each other, formed movements, drank and fought together, and broke apart.

London was the first home of Anglo-American Modernism, but the city's essentially commercial character eventually sent most of the writers elsewhere. By the 1920s, Paris was the home of one of the greatest concentration of artists in history. In the 1930s, with war looming in Europe, the artistic energy moved west to New York. But no matter what city, the city was almost always the subject of modernist literature. Although he could not stay there and moved between Paris, Trieste, and Zurich during his "exile," everything James Joyce ever wrote was about the vibrant urban life of Dublin. The poet Hart Crane composed his epic poem "The Bridge" about the Brooklyn Bridge, the monument of engineering and architectural beauty that made New York City the center of American urban life. Eliot's melancholy poems point out the loneliness and lack of meaning city-dwellers often feel. The city, where technology and masses of people and anonymity come together, became the master trope of Modernism itself.

Alienation

Alienation is defined as the sensation of being alien, or of not belonging, to one's own milieu. It can also mean separation from something. If the city is the master trope (or image) of Modernism, alienation is its master theme. Almost all modernist writing deals with alienation in some form.

The primary kind of alienation that Modernism depicts is the alienation of one sensitive person from the world. The stream-of-consciousness technique of narration is particularly well suited for this, because readers can see the inner feelings of a person and witness his or her essential self along with the actions of the world outside. Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's protagonist and stand-in, is alienated from his family, his friends, his religion, and his country because of devotion to art and his certainty that nobody can understand and accept him. Woolf's heroines are doubly alienated from the world because of their status as women; because of their sex, they are not allowed to participate in the world of politics, education, or economics. Eliot's narrators (most notably Prufrock in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock") are confronted by a world that is just broken shards of a discarded whole; everyone else seems to walk through the world calmly but they cannot. And for Ezra Pound, it is the world itself that has been alienated, by the forces of greed, from what should truly be historical heritage.

The Presence of the Past

Surrounded by the debris of all of the smashed certainties of the past, modernist writers looked at the contemporary world as a directionless place, without center or certainty. These past certainties, although oppressive and constructed on specious values, were at least some kind of foundation for the world. The modernist age set out to break apart these certainties; World War I then finished the job and horrified the world by demonstrating what humanity was capable of. Writers in the modernist age often felt that they were at the end of history. Because of this, modernist poems and novels often incorporate and mix together huge swaths of history. Allusion□brief references to people, places, things, or even languages and literatures□was the characteristic modernist technique for including history. Partly because of their profound uneasiness in the modern world, modernist writers alluded constantly to the past.

This is not to say that the modernists were uncritical admirers of the past. In his poem "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," Ezra Pound wrote that World War I's vast slaughter was ultimately for the purpose of defending "an old [b□□] gone in the teeth . . . a botched civilization . . . two gross of broken statues . . . [and] a few thousand battered books." Joyce's Stephen Dedalus says that "history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" and the Irishmen who live in past glories are portrayed as buffoons and fools. But both of these writers' works are filled with allusions to the past. And almost all of the important modernist writers, as well, structure their work around the presence of the past.

Pound, for instance, called his *The Cantos* "a poem including history" and the list of allusions in that poem has over ten thousand entries.

Style

Narration

Modernism sought to accurately portray the world not as it is but as humans actually experience it. Modernist literature, then, relied especially heavily on advances in narrative technique, for narration (a voice speaking) is the essential building block of all literature. Interestingly, the narrative techniques in modernist poetry and modernist fiction illustrate the same ideas about experience, but they do so in very different ways.

Modernist fiction tends to rely on the streamof- consciousness or "interior monologue" techniques. This kind of narration purports to record the thoughts as they pass through a narrator's head. The unpredictable connections that people make between ideas demonstrates something about them, as do the things they try to avoid thinking about. In *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom attempts not to dwell on his knowledge that his wife will cheat on him as he wanders the city, so thoughts of his wife, of Blazes Boylan (her lover), or of sex make him veer quickly in another mental direction. Also, a number of small ideas and images recur throughout the book: an advertisement for Plumtree's Potted Meat, for instance, and the Greek word *metempsychosis*. These ideas crop up without any apparent pattern and get stuck in Bloom's head, just as a song or a phrase might resonate through people's minds for hours and then just disappear. This narrative technique attempts to record how scattered and jumbled the experience of the world really is, and at the same time how deeper patterns in thoughts can be discerned by those (such as readers) with some distance from them. That humans are alienated from true knowledge of themselves is the implicit contention of the stream-of-consciousness form of narration.

Modernist poets such as Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot, on the other hand, did not delve deeply into the individual consciousness. Rather, they attempted to model the fragmented nature of minds and civilization in their narratives. Eliot's "The Waste Land" has dozens of speakers that succeed each other without warning: the poem opens with the voice of the dead speaking from underground, then shifts quickly to the unattributed voice of Countess Marie Larisch of Bavaria, then shifts just as quickly to a stentorian, priestly voice. The effect is a cacophony of voices, a mass of talking devoid of connection.

In Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* or William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, this array of voices is taken to its logical conclusion. The poet speaks in many different voices, but historical figures speak, artworks speak, ordinary people speak. In both of these long poems, the poets transcribed letters (Pound used letters of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, while Williams used the letters of his friends and admirers) and included them in the poem. The poet, in this case, is less a writer than a compiler of voices; it is the arrangement of pieces, not the content of each individual piece that is important. The effect is to "decenter" the reader. Readers are no longer sure where the poet (with his or her implicit authority over the text) exists in the poem.

Allusion

An allusion is a brief reference to a person, place, thing, idea, or language that is not actually present. Because of modernist theories about the omnipresence of the past, allusions are difficult to avoid in modernist literature. Joyce, Eliot, and Pound□the three authors generally acknowledged as the leaders of the modernist movement in English□ included allusion as perhaps the central formal device in their writing. The past is everywhere in the writing of these three, and indeed this is the case with most of the other modernist writers.

But it is in Joyce, Eliot, and Pound that the allusion is particularly important. Indeed, it is essentially impossible to understand their work without tracking down their more important allusions, and scholars have compiled long volumes explaining each reference in *Ulysses* and *The Cantos*. Some of their allusions are quite clear: for instance, in "Canto IV," Pound includes the lines "Palace in smoky light, / Troy but a heap of smouldering boundary stones." Most readers would be able to identify those lines as a reference to Homer's *Iliad*, which tells the story of the end of the Trojan War. But not all of Pound's allusions are so clear: "Canto VIII" begins "These fragments you have shelved (shored)"; the allusion is to Eliot's famous line "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" at the end of "The Waste Land." Eliot's line is wellknown, but only those who have studied poetry would know it. And many of Pound's allusions, indeed most of them, are frankly inaccessible. Pound spends a number of cantos alluding to Sigismondo Malatesta, an obscure Italian warrior-prince from the Renaissance. Only because Pound made him famous does anyone recognize his name.

Joyce structured *Ulysses* to work on numerous levels. All of the mundane events in Bloom's day correspond to episodes in Homer's epic *Odyssey*, for instance, but the book also works as a retelling of Irish history, of the growth and development of the human fetus, and of the history of the Catholic Church. Eliot's "The Waste Land" can be read simply as a collection of allusions or "fragments" as he calls them in the last section: appearing in the poem are the Greek seer Tiresias, a pair of working- class women in East London, a number of Hindu deities, Dante, and an American ragtime singer. None of these references are explained; they just appear and the reader must make what sense of it he or she can. In the critical reevaluation of Modernism that has been taking place over the last decade, one of the central questions has been whether one must understand all of the allusions in order genuinely to appreciate the work.

Historical Context

Modernism took place over many decades, and almost no facet of life in the West was not profoundly transformed by the changes that took place between 1860 and 1939. But if Modernism centered around one historical event, it was the unthinkable catastrophe that became known later as World War I. In the years leading up to World War I, the modernist writers thought of themselves as rebels, ruthlessly breaking apart all of the societal certainties of the Victorian age. The American modernists sneered at American middle-class acquisitiveness, while the British modernists chafed at the smug, self-assured conservatism of the Victorian and Edwardian age. Modernist writers broke convention by writing frankly about sex, by insulting religion, and by arguing passionately that the poor were not poor simply because of a moral failing. By breaking these societal taboos, modernist writers found themselves cast in the role of rebels, pariahs, even dangerous men and women. And such writers as Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis began to believe their own hype about being dangerous to society.

The coming of World War I fulfilled the modernist predictions of a coming fragmentation and destruction beyond anything they could have imagined. The war itself came upon an unsuspecting Europe almost in a way that the modernists might have envisioned, for it was society's faith in its own structures that ended up destroying it. Specifically, the complicated network of alliances dividing Europe into two moderately hostile camps (one consisting largely of democracies such as Great Britain and France, the other consisting of monarchies or dictatorships such as Germany and the Austro- Hungarian Empire, but even these categories had exceptions□Czarist Russia fought on the democracies' side) became not a means of stability but the mechanism of Europe's destruction.

The war began when the Serbian rebel Gavrilo Princip assassinated the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. Austro- Hungary sought reprisals against Serbia, the Russians came to the Serbian defense, the Germans came to the assistance of the Austro-Hungarians, and Eastern Europe was at war. At the same time, the Germans took this opportunity to try out a plan they had been developing for years. The German strategic command had worked out a way to march across Belgium and northeastern France and take Paris in six weeks, and in 1914 they attempted to do just this. The plan bogged down and soon the English came to the assistance of the French and Belgians. Pushing the Germans back from the very suburbs of Paris, the Allied forces managed to save the French nation but the armies soon found themselves waging trench warfare in the forests and fens of northern France, Alsace, and Belgium. Millions died in futile attempts to move the line forward a few yards. Among these were a number of modernist artists and writers, including the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Ezra Pound's friend.

The tone of excitement about violence that characterized earlier modernist writing disappeared after the war, for the writers who exalted in the promise of destruction were utterly numbed by the effects of real destruction. Although the soldierwriters like Rupert Brooke and Siegfried Sassoon have left readers with vivid, horrifying pictures of combat,

perhaps the enduring modernist imagery of the war is contained in two poems: Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley." Pound's poem addresses the war directly, saying that "There died a myriad, / And of the best, among them, / For an old [b□□] gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization." Eliot's poem is more evocative of the psychological effects of the war, for it is a collection of fragments, of pieces of culture and society broken apart and without meaning. The poem is perhaps the best verbal portrait ever created of civilized man confronting the possibility that everything has been destroyed.

Movement Variations

Imagism

Imagism is the best-known of the dozens of small movements in modernist poetry in the years leading up to World War I. Ezra Pound formulated the "rules" of Imagism, which were essentially a rejection of Victorian poetry. Imagist poets were encouraged to "simply present" an image; the poet "does not comment." Excessive adjectives and the voice of the poet were anathema. Finally, Pound urged imagists to use the rhythm of the metronome.

From his base in London, Pound published the anthology *Des Imagistes* in 1914. Other poets in the movement included H. D., William Carlos Williams, Richard Aldington, and Amy Lowell; H. D.'s poem "Oread" embodies the imagist project. Pound soon moved on from Imagism but Lowell, from Boston, continued to publish imagist anthologies for years after the movement had become irrelevant.

Vorticism

After Imagism, Pound moved on to Vorticism. This movement (which consisted primarily of Pound, the writer T. E. Hulme, and the painter/novelist Wyndham Lewis) was published in their magazine *Blast: A Review of the Great English Vortex*. It took the basic tenets of imagism, combined them with the painting style of Cubism, and injected an aggressive anger. At this time Pound had discovered the Chinese written character and had decided that its unique combination of sound, text, and image created a luminous "vortex" of energy. The movement fell apart as World War I began, for its anger and violence seemed very small and ineffective when compared to the real destruction of the war.

The Objectivists

The objectivists were a group of modernist poets who formed relatively late during the modernist period. In a way, they can be considered the descendants of the imagists, but their poems tend to be even starker and flatter. The objectivists drew their inspiration from William Carlos Williams but most of the members of the movement were of the younger (born after 1900) generation. George Oppen, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, and a few others are the best-known poets of the objectivist movement.

The Lost Generation

The Lost Generation was a name given by Gertrude Stein to the group of young Americans who migrated to Paris in the 1920s. Ernest Hemingway is the most famous of these Americans (in fact, it was to him that Stein said, "you are all a lost generation"),

but there were dozens. Many of these Americans were artists and writers, but just as many were not and were attracted to Paris because of the strong dollar and the bohemian lifestyle. Hemingway's first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, is the enduring portrait of this group as they wander from Paris to Spain and back, looking for thrills and occasionally working.

The Lost Generation's members constantly crossed paths with the European artists who were already living there. Pablo Picasso, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Stein, Constantin Brancusi, and many others had made Paris their home and had made it into one of the great centers of artistic activity. When the "Lost Generation" arrived, many of the established artists befriended these Americans, took advantage of them, or even worked with them. By the end of the 1920s, though, most of these Americans returned home.

Representative Authors

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 26, 1888. He attended Harvard, the Sorbonne and Oxford, studying philosophy and writing a dissertation on the logician F. H. Bradley. While in college, Eliot began writing poetry, but in 1908 he discovered French Symbolist poetry and his whole attitude toward literature changed. Ezra Pound read some of Eliot's poetry in the 1910s and immediately decided that Eliot would be a member of his own literary circle. Pound advocated for Eliot with Harriet Monroe of *Poetry* magazine and got Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" published in that journal in 1915. Eliot had settled in London at the same time, and married the emotionally unstable Vivian Haigh-Wood. Eliot struggled to make a living, working as a teacher and later at Lloyd's Bank until 1925.

In 1922 Eliot broke through with his brilliant and successful poem "The Waste Land, " although the manuscript of the poem demonstrates that Ezra Pound played a large role in the editing of the poem. "The Waste Land" brought Eliot fame and a place at the center of the burgeoning modernist movement. For the rest of the 1920s and 1930s, Eliot used his fame and his position as editor of a prominent literary journal (*The Criterion*) and as managing editor of the publishing house Faber & Faber to argue for a new standard of evaluating literature. In critical essays and his own poetry, he denigrated the romantics and neoclassicists and celebrated Dante and the Elizabethan "metaphysical" poets. He argued for the central role of "Tradition" in literature and downplayed the cult of individual genius created by the romantics.

For the remainder of his life, Eliot occupied the role of literary elder statesman. He continued to produce poems such as the *Four Quartets* but was never prolific. He became the very model of the conservative, royalist, High Church English gentleman. He died January 4, 1965, the very embodiment of the literary establishment.

William Faulkner (1897-1962)

William Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, on September 25, 1897, to a family with deep Mississippi and Confederate roots. He grew up in Oxford, Mississippi, and briefly attended the University of Mississippi before leaving the state to seek his fortune as a writer. Settling briefly in New Orleans, Faulkner came under the tutelage of Sherwood Anderson and published his first book, *The Marble Faun*, a collection of short stories, in 1924. In 1929 he published the novel *Sartoris*, his first work set in the fictional Mississippi county of Yoknapatawpha. Others followed, including his masterpieces *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Faulkner received a great deal of critical attention for his works, but he never obtained the kind of financial success that he sought. Attempting to

remedy this, he wrote two sensationalistic books (*Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*) and briefly moved to Los Angeles to work as a screenwriter in Hollywood. Faulkner died on July 6, 1962, in Byhalia, Mississippi.

James Joyce (1882-1941)

James Joyce is the most important writer of the modernist movement. He produced relatively few works, but these books ranged from poetry to drama, to short stories to the novel that the Modern Library publishing imprint named the most im- portant novel of the twentieth century. His life, too, became the embodiment of many of Modernism's most central themes: exile, the presence of the past in one's life, familiarity with a broad range of cultures and historical periods, and self-destruction.

Joyce was born in Dublin, Ireland, on February 2, 1882, to a lower middle-class Catholic family. His father died when Joyce was young. Joyce attended Catholic schools in Ireland and matriculated at University College, Dublin. During his youth and college years, he struggled with the rigid structures of Catholic school and Irish nationalism. In 1902 Joyce left Dublin for Paris, but was called back to Ireland when his mother fell ill. He left Dublin again in 1904, bringing with him his companion Nora Barnacle, an uneducated but vivacious young woman (whom he did not marry until 1931). For many years Joyce struggled to make a living and to provide for his growing family. Settling first in Trieste and then in Zurich, he taught literature and enjoyed an occasional monetary grant.

During this time Joyce wrote and published stories, poems, and a novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. *Dubliners*, his collection of stories, was published in 1914 and immediately obtained the notice of the Anglo-American avant-garde and the disapproval of the Irish literary establishment. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) was just that, a stream-of-consciousness narrative of Joyce's own life (barely fictionalized as "Stephen Dedalus") up to the point that he left Ireland. In 1922 Joyce published his masterpiece and the single greatest work of Modernism, *Ulysses*. This retelling of the Odysseus myth through the persona of a Jewish advertising salesman in Dublin is a triumph on every level. The book was immediately banned in England and America for blasphemy and obscenity; it was not until 1934 that it became legal in the United States.

After *Ulysses*, Joyce began work on another long novel, which was simply called *Work in Progress* during its composition. Joyce, by now the leading modernist writer, was living in Paris and had the worshipful admiration of the Lost Generation Americans as well as the more established writers of the city. Celebrations of *Work in Progress* appeared even before any of the work appeared in print. When it finally was published as *Finnegans Wake* in 1939, it shocked readers with its incessant wordplay. It is a very difficult novel, barely recognizable as English in many places, but its intricate structure and brilliant use of all of the English language's possibilities ensure that readers will attempt to decipher it for decades to come. After finishing *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce and

Nora moved back to Zurich to avoid being caught in the Nazi occupation of Paris. Joyce died in Zurich on January 13, 1941, following surgery for a perforated ulcer.

Ezra Pound (1885-1972)

In many ways, Ezra Pound was the father of literary Modernism. If nothing else, he almost single-handedly brought the techniques of Modernism to American poets, while at the same time bringing the talents of American modernist poets to the notice of the avant-garde establishment. Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, on October 30, 1885, but soon after his birth his family moved to the suburbs of Philadelphia. He grew up in that area and attended the University of Pennsylvania (where he met William Carlos Williams and another important American modernist poet, Hilda Doolittle) and Hamilton College. After a short stint teaching at a small college in Indiana, Pound grew tired of what he saw to be American small-mindedness and moved to Venice, Italy.

In Venice, Pound resolved to become a poet. He published a book there, but soon relocated to London. In the decade he spent in London, Pound, through the strength of his own will, created movements and forced himself into the center of those movements. Probably the most important of those movements was Imagism, a school of poetry that explicitly rejected Victorian models of verse by simply presenting images without authorial commentary. In 1920 Pound left London for Paris, where he spent a few years before becoming frustrated by the dominance of Gertrude Stein in the avant-garde scene there. In 1925 he moved to Rapallo, Italy, where he developed a strong affinity for Mussolini and Italian fascism. At this time he also began working in earnest on *The Cantos*, the epic poem that would become his life's work.

Pound stayed in Italy for more than twenty years. During World War II he spoke on Italian state radio broadcasts aimed at American soldiers; in 1943 he was indicted for treason as a result of these activities and in 1945, returned to the United States to face trial. Found mentally unfit to defend himself, Pound was incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Washington, D.C. for thirteen years. Because of the intercession of such luminaries as T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, and Ernest Hemingway, in 1958 Pound was released from his incarceration and allowed to return to Italy. Settling in Venice, he published a few more books but by the mid-1960s he fell into a silence. He died in Venice, Italy, on November 1, 1972.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Born January 25, 1882, Woolf met many eminent Victorians during her childhood. In 1904 she moved to the Bloomsbury district of London, a neighborhood that gave its name to Woolf's literary and intellectual circle. She married the journalist Leonard Woolf and in 1917 she and her husband founded the Hogarth Press, an important literary and cultural publishing firm that published the first English-language editions of Freud's work and T. S. Eliot's early collection *Poems* (1919).

Beginning in the late 1910s, Woolf began to write. She quickly internalized the discoveries of Freud and the literary advances of the modernists and produced a number of novels striking in their sophistication: *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Her novels brought the "stream-of-consciousness" style a new depth and possibility. In addition to her activity in the literary world, she brought her feminist orientation and bisexual lifestyle to the forefront of her writing. In such works as *Three Guineas* (1938), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and *Orlando* (1928) she expressed opinions revolutionary for her time. However, her own life was not entirely happy. During the 1930s she grew increasingly fearful that she was suffering from a mental illness and would become a burden on her husband and friends. Spurred on by this fear and by her dread of World War II, she committed suicide by drowning on March 28, 1941.

Representative Works

Call It Sleep

Perhaps the most notable example of Joycean prose in American literature is this novel, written in 1934 by Henry Roth, the son of Jewish immigrants to New York. The novel tells the story of David Schearl, an immigrant boy in New York. Using the stream-of-consciousness technique perfected by Joyce in his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, readers hear the interior voice of this boy as he grows up poor, watches his parents fight, and struggles with persecution from neighborhood bullies. The novel gained critical acclaim upon publication but was quickly forgotten until its paperback republication in 1964. By this time Roth had given up writing and moved to New Mexico. In the early 1990s, near the end of his long life, Roth returned to writing, producing four sequels to his masterwork.

The Cantos

If *Ulysses* is the most successful and greatest work of the modernist movement, Ezra Pound's long poem *The Cantos* is perhaps its most characteristic. Its composition and contents mirror the ideas of the modernists. It is composed of fragments, of different voices from different times and places. It attempts to diagnose the ills of the modern world, comes up with an ultimately failed solution, and imagines a better world that existed once and could exist in fragmentary form again.

Pound began writing his "poem including history," as he called it, in 1917, when he published early versions of three of the cantos in a litterary magazine. He began working in earnest on the poem in the 1920s after he moved to Italy, and continued working on it, eventually publishing eight installments, until the late 1960s. The poem is an epic, attempting to tell "the tale of the tribe" (civilized humanity) from ancient times to today.

Structured to mirror and include characters from two of history's great epics (Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*), the poem was originally planned to include 120 "cantos," or shorter chapters. There is no plot to speak of, but the poem broadly moves from hell (literally but also in the sense of an utterly fallen civilization) to purgatory, where historical figures such as Confucius, Sigismondo Malatesta, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Mussolini are introduced. Pound wanted to highlight moments in history where a just and aesthetically appreciative society existed or could have existed. The poem veered sharply back to Pound's own life during the 1940s, when Pound found himself working for the Fascists and ultimately was incarcerated in a mental hospital in the United States. As Pound neared the end of his life and of the poem, he discovered and recorded glimpses of paradise on earth.

Public opinion of the work varies dramatically. Many readers can make no sense of the poem; others find that it contains some of the most remarkable passages in English-language poetry. Critics have been similarly divided. Although the poem is solidly in the canon of American literature and is considered one of the central works of modernist literature, many scholars and academics dismiss it as a failed, obscure, and ultimately fascist poem.

A Farewell to Arms

Ernest Hemingway published *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929. He was already famous for his portrait of dissolute youth in Paris, *The Sun Also Rises*, but this novel was a great step forward in terms of sophistication and importance. It tells of Hemingway's own experiences as an ambulance driver during the last days of World War I; his wounding and convalescence and affair with a nurse. More important, though, was Hemingway's revolutionary technique. His prose was journalistic, stripped of adjectives and any construction that might call attention to itself. Such narration achieved a numbness that reflected the mental brutalization the war visited upon the hero□and the author. Hemingway eschews abstract concepts such as glory, duty, and honor because, like his hero's, his own experience during the war showed him that these were weapons used by people in power to manipulate ordinary people.

After the popular and critical success of this novel, Hemingway became an international celebrity with literary credibility. He continued to write for much of the rest of his life and produced at least two great novels (*For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*) before committing suicide in 1961.

Harmonium

The popularity of the work of poet and insurance lawyer Wallace Stevens has continued to grow even as the work of other modernists has fallen in favor. Stevens's first book of poetry was *Harmonium*, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1923. While modernist poetry written by Pound and Eliot was allusive, drenched in the fragments of previous cultures and other languages, and overwhelmed by an almost angry melancholy, Stevens's work was light and lyrical. In *Harmonium*, Stevens exhibited a verbal dandyism, delighting in the sounds of words and in Elizabethan definitions. He was a direct descendant of Keats and Marvell, whereas other modernists saw Browning, Shakespeare, and Dante as their ancestors.

But Stevens cannot be dismissed as a writer of light verse. His poems exhibit the characteristic modernist fear of nihilism while entertaining the fear that the entire world is simply a projection of his mind. In "The Snow Man," for instance, Stevens listens to "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is," and in "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" the narrator questions whether "I was the world in which I walked." In his later books, Stevens produced longer, philosophical poems that questioned art's place in human

cognition, and by the 1970s and 1980s, Stevens, not Eliot or Pound, was cited as an influence by hundreds of practicing American poets.

The Sound and the Fury

William Faulkner, a Mississippian, began his career as a writer heavily influenced by the regionalist Sherwood Anderson, with whom he worked in New Orleans (in the 1920s, the home of American Bohemianism). But Faulkner quickly outdid his teacher. He created an entire fictional world in which almost all of his fiction was set: Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. In this world the past always impinges upon the present, and Faulkner's fiction is full of narrative devices intended to outflank language's need to be based in time. His 1929 *The Sound and the Fury* contains Faulkner's most successful experiments with time.

The novel is the story of the fall of the Compson family that culminates in the suicide of son Quentin. Told by a series of narrators, the stories in the book provide different perspectives on the same events and the reader must compare all of the different versions in order to understand what "really" happened. Most difficult is the narration of Benjy, a retarded boy who has no conception of time. In his narration there is no differentiation between what happened years ago, what happened yesterday, and what is happening now. Faulkner's experiments did not gain him a large audience in the United States (in search of income, he moved to Hollywood in a failed attempt to be a screenwriter) but his influence was vast among Latin American writers, especially such "magical realists" as Gabriel García Márquez.

To the Lighthouse

Virginia Woolf perfected the stream-of-consciousness or interior monologue style in her novels of the 1920s. Her 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse* depicts the Ramsay family, who is spending the summer in a vacation house on the Isle of Skye. Assorted guests, including the painter Lily Briscoe (a character many readers feel is a stand-in for Woolf herself), also come and go. The novel moves from a focus solely on the personal level of the family to a wider focus; the impending world war appears as a dark cloud on the horizon. The novel then shifts time to ten years later as the family deals with the death of one of its members.

Woolf's novel delicately and insightfully pulls apart memory, family relationships, and the effects of death. In a movement such as Modernism, generally so focused on the big picture often to the exclusion of the personal, *To the Lighthouse* stands out as an example of how modernist technique can be applied to the examination of emotion.

Ulysses

James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, first published in 1922, is the single greatest work of modernist literature and is considered by many to be the finest novel ever written. Joyce

spent ten years writing this book, a meticulously detailed day in the life of three Dubliners. The main characters are Leopold Bloom, a Jewish advertising salesman; Molly Bloom, Leopold's wife, a singer who is planning to cheat on her husband; and Stephen Dedalus, a dissipated young intellectual. The story parallels Homer's *Odyssey* but translates that epic journey of ten years to eighteen hours and one city.

Upon its publication—and even before, when fragments were published in magazines—the book was immediately hailed as a work of genius. Joyce's endless erudition, his command of languages and literature and history, his love and intimate knowledge of one small place at one specific time, are all on display in this book. More than just an intellectual enterprise and a small gem of engineering, though, *Ulysses* is a genuinely moving story of conjugal and parental love. Because of its frank treatment of sex and its, at times, insulting portraits of religion and Irish nationalism, the book was banned in Ireland and America. In the United States, it took twelve years for the book to be allowed in the country; until then, travelers to Paris would have to hide the book in their luggage from customs inspectors (who were warned to look for its characteristic blue-green binding).

"The Waste Land"

T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," published in 1922, is the single most important modernist poem. Essentially plotless, the poem instead attempts to capture historical development to the present day by use of allusion. Characters such as Tiresias, the Smyrna merchant, and an East London housewife, wander through the poem. London, the "Unreal City" in the fog, becomes the synecdoche for the fallen world as a whole. The poem moves from Elizabethan times to the ancient world to the present and ends, finally, with a small failing voice speaking Sanskrit.

Interestingly, in its original version the poem was six times as long and titled "He Do The Police in Different Voices." When he was still a struggling poet, T. S. Eliot showed the poem to Ezra Pound, asking for his advice. Pound performed what he called a "Caesarean operation" on Eliot's manuscript, telling him to cut the links between the vignettes so that the poem appeared as a series of fragments. Eliot never called attention to Pound's central role in creating "The Waste Land" and it was not until the 1960s, when the original manuscript was found, that Pound's true role became publicly known.

Most critics have seen the poem as expressing a fundamental despair at the sense that, with the loss of all certainties, the world was nothing but "fragments" that are "shored against [our] ruin." It continues to vex students with its difficulty, but even the most basic reading evokes a sense of desperation and loss.

Critical Overview

Modernism did not exist until it was almost dead. That is, until the 1930s or later the term "Modernism" simply did not mean what it means today: a group of writers, an arsenal of literary devices, a number of characteristic themes. Interestingly, in the 1910s and 1920s□the height of Modernism as it is understood today□the word "Modernism" referred to a particular strain of thought in the Catholic Church. At that time, the modernist writers did not see themselves as a unified movement. Instead, the writers now called modernists were members of dozens of different smaller movements: the Lost Generation, the dadaists, the imagists, the vorticists, the objectivists, the surrealists, and many others. What is identified as the characteristic themes or concerns of the modernist period (a general pessimism about the state of the world, a rejection of society's certainties, a sense that only the rebel artist is telling the truth about the world) were simply "in the air" of the times; everyone was thinking and writing about the same ideas, so it did not seem necessary to name their commonalities.

Literary critics of the early twentieth century were generally hostile to the writers now called modernists. The Victorian ethos held that literature's purpose was to identify "sweetness and light" and "the best that has been thought and said" (in the words of Matthew Arnold, one of Victorian England's most important critics) in order to make better citizens. Literature and art, for the Victorians, were meant to be "edifying"□educational. Literature was read to learn how one should behave. By that same token, literature that did not put forth edifying models was simply bad literature. This attitude is shown especially well in the hostile response to Gustave Flaubert's 1857 *Madame Bovary*, a novel that depicted, without comment or condemnation, the adulterous behavior of a middle-class woman. The Arnoldian attitude toward literature persisted well into the twentieth century, and in the United States was personified by the writers and editors of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, especially Henry Seidel Canby.

For these critics, modernist literature was both incomprehensible and dangerous. Its stylistic experiments made it difficult to digest easily□readers had to work to make it through *Ulysses* or *The Sound and the Fury*, not to mention *The Cantos* or "The Waste Land"□and its pessimistic, negative attitude toward society could hardly be expected to make better citizens. In fact, modernist literature celebrated those people, artists especially, who rebelled against society. Where the late Victorian critics and their intellectual descendants wanted edifying, socially-uplifting literature, modernist literature sought to create independent, critical, alienated subjects.

As a result, Modernism had to create its own critics and to a remarkable extent it succeeded. At first, modernist writers simply started their own magazines and reviewed each other's work. Ezra Pound, through the journals *Poetry* and *The Egoist*, was especially productive in this. Later, T. S. Eliot became Modernism's leading critic. In his journal *The Criterion* and, later, from his post as managing editor of the publishing house Faber & Faber, Eliot advanced his own vision of good literature. He denigrated the neoclassicists and the romantics and praised the Elizabethans; he argued for a literature steeped in the "Tradition"; he valued tension, ambiguity, and allusion. Not

coincidentally, his own poetry seemed to be the height of "Good Literature" as he defined it.

After Eliot defined a modernist aesthetic, other critics began to agree with him. Difficulty, resistance, ambiguity, irony, and the sense of an ending to something were all qualities praised by critics ranging from the political right wing (the New Critics) to the far left (the New York Intellectuals). By the 1930s and 1940s the modernist aesthetic was taking over Anglo-American literary criticism. The old guard of critics defending the edifices of Western civilization seemed less and less relevant after a war, a depression, and another war. The pessimistic modernist view of the world began to seem correct. By the 1950s, Modernism and its aesthetic standards were almost unquestioned in American criticism and education.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Modernism remained dominant in American literature. Literary histories were rewritten to reflect Modernism's new importance; earlier, forgotten writers such as Herman Melville were rediscovered as important ancestors. And the modernist aesthetic of alienation, separation from the world, and profound pessimism became almost synonymous with literature.

This all changed in the 1970s and 1980s. Because of the political upheavals of the 1960s, relevance again became an important virtue of literature. Readers wanted literature to be politically engaged, to tell the stories of the struggles of oppressed groups (women, African Americans, Chicanos, gays and lesbians), and most importantly to take a political stand on issues. The modernist aesthetic denigrated works that sought to be politically relevant; this dated the works and made them less timeless and universal. But again, as in the 1940s and 1950s, a new generation of critics and teachers reevaluated Modernism and found it to be lacking in many virtues. It did not help that many modernist writers held political and social beliefs that ranged from extremely conservative to outright Fascist.

Over the last decade or so, a new generation of scholars has sought to again reevaluate Modernism. These scholars no longer look at Modernism according to Eliot's own opinions of what is important in literature. In a sense, these new scholars read Modernism against its own grain, trying to find buried content in the literature. And while Eliot's reactionary beliefs and Pound's anti- Semitism still exist, even the most left-wing critics often find something to admire in their works, something that often Pound or Eliot explicitly urged readers to ignore. Perhaps the most notable example of this "against-the-grain" reading of Modernism is the reconsideration of "The Waste Land" after Pound's central role in the poem's composition was discovered. Eliot's cult of the solitary, alienated artist standing apart from all of his peers and creating suddenly seemed questionable after readers discovered that Eliot's greatest poem was, in fact, the product of a collaboration that he tried to hide for decades.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Barnhisel directs the Writing Center at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. In this essay, Barnhisel describes the process by which Modernism became the dominant literary movement of the twentieth century.

In its heyday (the 1910s and 1920s), Modernism did not exist. That is to say, the word Modernism did not have the meaning that it has today. Modernism referred to technology, to an openness to the new commercially-driven society that was coming about, and to changes in Catholic theology. The literary themes and concerns and stylistic innovations that today are called modernist belonged, in their time, to dozens of different writers who lived in different places, spoke different languages, were members of different groups, and very often were hostile toward each other and their work. It was only in the 1950s and 1960s, years after the movement ended, that the term Modernism came to designate a group of writers preoccupied with alienation and the destruction of old certainties. It can be instructive to look at the ways that large trends in literature and culture are examined, classified, and codified into a movement by readers and critics. Modernism was produced long after the movement's height by critics; Modernism was not produced by the modernist artists themselves.

In a very real sense there is no one Modernism; there are many modernisms. Some critics have identified Modernism as far back as the French writer Gustave Flaubert, who wrote in the 1850s, and many critics see a number of works of the 1970s (Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance) as late examples of Modernism. The themes now understood as characteristically modernist existed in many works of the nineteenth century. By the early 1900s, an explosion of artistic subgroups whose members crossed between music, painting, sculpture, dance, photography, and literature rapidly coalesced and just as quickly disappeared. Almost all of these groups□the surrealists, the imagists, the cubists, the vorticists, the dadaists, the futurists, and many others□are considered components of Modernism.

It was only near the end of the movement that critics came to a consensus about what constituted Modernism in literature, and these critics set the rules for who should be considered a central member of the movement and who would remain only a minor figure. Perhaps more important in the long run, these critics codified a way of reading and criteria for evaluation of literature, both of which, not coincidentally, were particularly friendly to Modernism.

These critical developments of the 1950s were a direct reaction against the climate of earlier decades. In the 1930s and 1940s, art and politics were linked together very closely. Artists were expected to weigh in on the political issues of the day, and especially in the 1930s they allied themselves with left-wing causes. Dozens of artists and writers joined the Communist Party, feeling that only a worker-centered movement could save America from the depression and from vast concentrations of wealth. Other, albeit fewer, writers and artists allied themselves with the other side: of these, the most notorious were the English painter and novelist Wyndham Lewis, the Norwegian

novelist Knut Hamsun (who praised Hitler), and the American poet Ezra Pound, who admired Mussolini and held anti-Semitic beliefs. T. S. Eliot, although he never supported fascism, had extremely conservative political views as well.

Writers have never become famous only by their own efforts. It takes dozens of people to bring a work from the mind of the writer to the hands of the reader. And in an age such as the mid-twentieth century, when thousands of works of literature were published every year, the role of the critic became especially important in establishing whether a writer was important and why. In the 1930s, when the modernist writers had already produced a solid body of work to be explained and evaluated, two groups of critics with drastically different backgrounds and political inclinations set their sights upon Modernism. Together, these groups defined the sprawling movement, telling readers what it meant and, most importantly, arguing that Modernism should be read without concern to any political beliefs expressed in the works or held by the writers. Their consensus about Modernism eventually made the movement the great movement of twentiethcentury literature.

The first of these two groups came together in the American South in the 1920s. This "Fugitive" or "Agrarian" group included writers Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate (most of whom were poets or novelists as well as critics) who were inspired by the antebellum South and its Elizabethan English heritage. They yearned for a preindustrial world where cultured aristocrats cultivated the land and wrote subtle, accomplished verse. In the 1920s they read the influential critical writings of T. S. Eliot, which meshed well with their own ideas about literature and led them to appreciate Eliot's (and by extension other modernists') works.

Eventually, these writers obtained academic posts and developed a method of literary analysis called "New Criticism." The New Criticism valued such formal devices as tension, ambiguity, wordplay, and irony. It had absolutely no interest in questions of what a work can tell about history or about an author's life or what political meaning a work holds. People who read works for what they had to say about society were Philistines to the New Critics; the goal of reading literature was to refine one's sensations and to make ever-finer distinctions about the excellence of language. In such works as Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn* and Ransom's *The New Criticism*, these critics provided a model for reading literature apolitically.

This apolitical attitude was anathema to the New Critics' counterparts, the New York Intellectuals. The New York Intellectuals were urban, immigrants or the children of immigrants, largely Jewish, and adamantly left-wing (many of them were briefly Communist Party members). They came together writing for *Partisan Review*, the leading intellectual journal of postwar America. And for these critics□Philip Rahv, Delmore Schwartz, Diana Trilling, Irving Howe, and many others□Modernism's value was that it undermined the simplistic happy-ending narratives produced by capitalism and "mass culture." Modernism, with its fragmented visions of the world and its insistence that there is no such thing as an objective perspective, was a blow against the smug capitalist structure of advertising and consumption. Modernism accomplished this not by means of the content of the writing, but by means of the form. The

complicated combination of allusions, the decentralizing interior monologue, and the often jarring sense of time take away all certainties and call attention to the ways that minds create the world.

During most of the 1930s, these two groups had little to do with each other. The New Critics, from their posts at universities and colleges, taught students how to read and appreciate literature. The New York Intellectuals wrote for journals and lived as public intellectuals; few of them had any affiliation with schools and most of them mistrusted universities. But both argued to different audiences that the type of writing now called modernist was the highest form of literature in the contemporary world.

In 1949, though, these two groups were forced to directly confront Americans' refusal to ignore literature's political meanings. The great American Modernist poet Ezra Pound had lived in Italy for over two decades, during which time he had expressed his admiration for Mussolini as well as for a growing anti-Semitism. During World War II, Pound broadcast radio programs on Fascist state radio and, as a result, was indicted for treason in 1943. In 1945 Pound was arrested and brought back to Washington to face trial. Broken and unstable, he was found mentally unfit to stand trial. He was sentenced to an indefinite period in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the criminally insane.

But Pound was not finished. During his term in the army's detention center in Pisa, Italy, Pound composed a series of cantos (individual installments of his epic poem *The Cantos*). Published in 1948 as *The Pisan Cantos*, the book was Pound's most personal work in decades and perhaps his greatest single book of poems. It won the first Bollingen Prize, an award given by the Library of Congress, in 1949. Immediately, a storm of controversy arose. The American press and large numbers of American citizens were angered and insulted that a man who had supported an enemy power only a few years before, and who could have been executed for treason, was now being honored by the United States government.

The Bollingen Prize committee included members associated with the New Critics and the New York Intellectuals as well as the poets W. H. Auden, Conrad Aiken, and T. S. Eliot. Called upon to defend their decision, the committee members did so in very different ways. The Jewish poet Karl Shapiro frankly stated that he voted against Pound because he could not abide anti-Semites. Allen Tate argued that poetry must be judged without reference to the personal life of the poet. The committee as a whole released a statement to the press arguing that their decision was grounded on "that objective perception of value on which civilized society must rest."

Where the New Critics would have been expected to defend the prize, many assumed that the left-wing, anti-Fascist, Jewish New York Intellectuals would oppose any award being granted to Pound. *Partisan Review* convened a symposium in its pages to discuss the award, and although a range of points of view were expressed, the editors of the notably leftist journal (Philip Rahv and William Barrett) came out in support of the award. They feared what they termed the "Stalinoid" tendency of governments and societies to judge art only by the criteria of whether it advances that society's interests. To the New York Intellectuals, art must spur challenge of society's assumptions, not

uphold them; art must demand thinking and questioning. By no means did the New York Intellectuals endorse Pound's ideas; on the contrary, many of them made a point to condemn him even when defending his award.

If World War I was the vortex out of which Modernism was truly born, the Bollingen Prize controversy became the event that transformed Modernism from an avant-garde movement into the literary establishment. During the 1950s, literary critics of the left and the right agreed about literature, at least in broad strokes. And while they each admired different things about Modernism (the New Critics liked its formal intricacy, while the New York Intellectuals endorsed its demands on the reader), their consensus about the movement defined it and ushered it into the center of the American literary canon, where it has remained ever since.

Source: Greg Barnhisel, Critical Essay on Modernism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Sheppard explores the problems inherent in fully defining of European Modernism and its impetus.

Critical Essay #3

In one of the earliest attempts to come to terms with modernism as a total phenomenon, the Czech Formalist, Jan Mukarovsk˝, began by stating that 'the notion of "modernism" is very indefinite'. Thirty-five years later, Monroe K. Spears echoed that sentiment when he prefaced an important book on the same subject by observing that 'Modernism is, of course, an impossible subject'. Shortly after that, the editors of one of the most widely disseminated anthologies of essays on the topic wrote in their introduction:

> The name [i.e. modernism] is clear; the nature of the movement or movements . . . is much less so. And equally unclear is the status of the stylistic claim we are making. We have noted that few ages have been more multiple, more promiscuous in artistic style; to distil from the multiplicity an overall style or mannerism is a difficult, perhaps even an impossible task.

And a decade later, two other influential commentators tacitly admitted that they were still encountering the same difficulties in finding 'the core of Modernism' by opting, as they were finally forced to concede, for an unsatisfactorily reductionist definition of the concept. Indeed, the most obvious index of the difficulties involved in discussing the subject is its lack of clear chronological boundaries. Although the broad consensus agrees on 1885-1935, some critics set its startingdate as early as 1870 (so as to include Nietzsche and Rimbaud), while others, notably North American critics, set its ending in the 1950s (so as to include the early novels of Vladimir Nabokov, the late poetry of William Carlos Williams, the abstract Expressionists, and work produced under the impact of *émigré* European modernists).

As three basic bibliographies clearly indicate, a huge amount of secondary literature on modernism exists, and in adding to it, I am aware that I may have neglected a key work which either anticipates or counters my argument. However, because critical understanding of modernism has developed so much ever since academic literature on the subject began to snowball in the early 1960s, it is not totally foolhardy to attempt, on the basis of that development, to try and elaborate a more differentiated understanding of the phenomenon.

On the whole, critics have tried to comes to terms with modernism via one of three strategies. First, a large number have tried to define it by pinpointing one or more key features, concerns or 'common traits'. These have included an 'uncompromising intellectuality', a preoccupation with 'Nihilism', a 'discontinuity', an attraction to the Dionysiac, a 'formalism', an 'attitude of detachment', the use of myth 'as an arbitrary means of ordering art' and a 'reflexivism', an 'anti-democratic' cast of mind, an 'emphasis on subjectivity', a 'feeling of alienation and loneliness', the sense of 'the ever-present threat of chaos . . . in conjunction with the sense of search' and 'the experience of panic terror', a particular form of irony which derives from 'the rift between self and world', 'consciousness, observation and detachment', and a commitment to metaphor as

'the very essence of poetry itself'. In the early 1970s, when this strategy was most prevalent in critical literature, two Marxist critics aptly remarked: 'On the question of what Modernism is, no two critics agree. . .' Three years after that, Bradbury and McFarlane outlined the limitations of this approach, and as late as 1984, the reductionism of Fokkema and Ibsch (who excluded a range of classically modernist texts from the category on the basis of an excessively narrow definition) highlighted these limitations even more starkly. But it is, perhaps, Chapters 4 and 5 of *Les Avant-gardes littéraires au XX*e *siècle* (in which a large number of allegedly defining characteristics of modernist art are isolated and discussed at great length) that bring several basic weaknesses of this strategy into the clearest relief. Once torn out of the context which generated them, it becomes evident that almost none of these characteristics, whether formal or experiental, is specific to the modernist period. It also becomes clear that more than one of them, depending on which author, works or culture one selects, could arguably be privileged in any reductionist account of modernism. And from this it follows that to breathe life back into this collection of dead concepts, it is necessary to reconstruct the dynamic, not to say cataclysmic context which generated them in their specifically modernist *combinatoire*. As one of the editors of a recent collection of essays on German modernism clearly saw, it is time both to stop 'reducing modernism to this or that set of criteria' and to pose 'the question of history and politics in the [modernist] text . . . with renewed vigor'.

Given the limitations of this first approach, more than a few critics have felt the need to develop a second, more broadly-based strategy quite often as a spin-off from the first. Having identified one or more allegedly key features of modernism or the modernist avant-garde, critics then attempt to bring these into sharper focus by setting them in a one-dimensional historical, literary- historical or sociological context. Thus, modernism has been viewed as a continuation of or a contrast with Romanticism; as a reaction, in its extreme avant-garde forms, against Aestheticism; as an inversion of the conventions of Realism; as a contrast with Expressionism, Futurism and Surrealism; as a precursor of postmodernism; as a product of the megalopolitan experience and/or the Great War; and as a result of the 'serious arts' being forced to cede their 'utilitarian function' to the 'mass media of communication and entertainment'. All of these positions are more or less tenable, but none is exclusively so. Precisely because, as Alan Wilde observed, the modernists were 'heirs to a tradition they revolted against', they simultaneously used *and* reacted against aesthetic conventions which marked several earlier and contemporary artistic movements. Moreover, fused with such purely aesthetic considerations, the experience of modernity (of which the mass city is but one, major aspect) is equally important to most, if not all, important modernist texts: either visibly or as the equally significant 'repressed Other' in such works as Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* (*c.* 1903-8) (translated as *New Poems* (1964)), most of Kandinsky's pre-1914 visual work, or E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1922-4). Furthermore, as Spears so clearly saw, the Great War did not of itself generate modernism, but rather foregrounded that awareness of the darker side of reality and human nature which had already been present in the work of several major non-modernist writers of the nineteenth century. And while modernism and postmodernism overlap to such an extent that a large number of *surface* features are common to both phenomena, there are, as Wilde's and Hassan's books show, basic ontological differences between the two modes. Bathrick

and Huyssen are right to reject simple categorical contrasts, but their own work, speaking as it does of 'the modernist aesthetic of transcendence and epiphany', points to a nostalgia or desire for epiphany, transcendence and closure which has no place within the flat surfaces and eternal present of postmodernism. As with the movements which preceded modernism, its relationship with its successor is far from simple. What Fredric Jameson said of any cultural or historical period is especially true of modernism, given that modernism is more a transitional phenomenon than a period or a movement. What is designated by the label does not '"express" some unified inner truth□a worldview or a period style or a set of structural categories which marks the whole length and breadth of the "period" in question'. Modernism not only evolved from, reacted against and anticipated a multiplicity of other artistic phenomena, it also developed out of a complex of socio-historical experiences, of which the shocks caused by the modern megalopolis and the Great War were simply the most violent.

We shall, I suggest, get further with the problem by developing a third strategy which is more or less manifest in works on modernism or the modernist avant-gardes by Schwartz, LeRoy and Beitz, Bürger, Jameson, Renate Werner, Jeffrey Herf, and Huyssen and Bathrick, and if we then combine their insights with the central thesis of Horkheimer's and Adomo's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947) (translated as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972)). Basing his argument on a concept borrowed from the American scientist Thomas S. Kuhn, Schwartz argues that the modernist epoch involved a 'global shift' across a range of disciplines, and that to understand this shift, we need to develop a 'matrix approach' which 'makes it possible . . . to compare individuals who have no direct ties to one another but exhibit similar patterns of thought.' Like the much looser matrix which is used in *Les Avantgardes littéraires au XX*e *siècle*, the matrix established by Schwartz to investigate the poetry of Pound and Eliot derives primarily from the natural sciences, mathematics and philosophy. But the work of the other writers named above implies that the paradigm shift which those disciplines, like the arts, underwent during the modernist period derived from a much more fundamental seismic upheaval. In 1974, Bürger, following Adorno, connected that upheaval (which generated both Aestheticism and the avant-garde reaction against it) with imperialism. And in 1973, LeRoy and Beitz were even more precise about that generative source when they described it as 'the transition to the epoch of imperialism', which they then analysed as follows:

> Turning then to some changes brought about by the transition to imperialism, we can say first that the ideals of the French Revolution, which had held up reasonably well during two thirds of the nineteenth century (in England and the United States, at any rate), become markedly less tenable. The same thing happens to the notion associated with Adam Smith that the existing economic system has the capacity to correct its own ills and bring about an equitable distribution of the wealth. Profound doubts now arise as to whether man has the capacity to dominate the historical process. With a suddenness that would be surprising

if one knew nothing about the causes, the idea
of progress collapses. When we seek an explanation
for these changes, it is relevant to note how in the
epoch of monopoly the decision-making process becomes
invisible, the real decisions coming to be made
more and more by those in command of the monopolies;
ordinary people, even those in somewhat privileged
positions, come to feel□and justifiably□that
they lack the kind of leverage that the humanist tradition
had always made one feel entitled to command.
A further cause lies in the intensifying irrationalities
in the existing order, the vast increase in productive
capacity along with economic stagnation, technological
progress, and the neglect of human needs, breathtaking
scientific advances that seemed to promise a
solution to the age-old problem of human want, but
with no mechanism for connecting these advances
with the demand which in theory they ought to be
able to meet . . . Still another cause of the new doubts
about the existing order is a new kind of alienation
from work. This results in part from gigantism in industrial
development and corresponding efficiency in
techniques for managing the work force.

For all its perceptiveness, monocausalism never lurks far behind the surface of this avowedly Marxist account of the origins of modernism, and in 1981, Jameson offered a corrective to that tendency when he warned against viewing modernism as 'a mere reflection of the reification of late nineteenth- century social life.' More importantly still, Jameson, like Bürger seven years before, saw modernism in dialectical terms: its works are not just reflexes, transcriptions or symptoms of a profound cultural upheaval, but, *simultaneously*, responses through which the authors of those works try to pictorialize their understanding and so make sense of that upheaval. Bürger had asserted that the literary work was not just an 'Abbild, d.h.. . . Verdoppelung der gesellschaftlichen Realität' ('image, that is to say . . . replication of social reality'), but the 'Resultat einer Tätigkeit, die auf eine als unzulänglich erfahrene Wirklichkeit *antwortet*' ('product of an activity which *responds* to a reality that is experienced as inadequate'). And Jameson implied a similarly dialectical conception of modernism when he wrote:

we are first obliged to establish a continuity between
these two regional zones or sections□the practice of
language in the literary work, and the experience of
anomie,standardization, rationalizing desacralization
in the *Umwelt* or world of daily life□such that the
latter can be grasped as that determinate situation,
dilemma, contradiction, or subtext, to which the former
comes as a symbolic resolution or solution.

Indeed, towards the end of the same work, Jameson broadened out that dialectical conception by indicating that it was necessary to understand modernism not as a single, unified response, but as a range of responses to a perceived crisis. In doing this, he implied that it was possible to account coherently for the diverse phenomena which the concept involves, but without falling prey to the reductionism and over-simplification which the first two strategies described above involve. Because, Jameson suggested, modernism was the product of an age in a process of radical change, it was not simply, but multiply Janus-faced (and in the case of Dada, anus-faced into the bargain), with the result that any account of it has to look not just in two, but in several directions at once. And it is this dual awareness that modernism is both an active response to a seismic upheaval and a heterogeneous phenomenon which constitutes one of the greatest strengths of the major essays in Huyssen's and Bathrick's recent book.

Werner and Herf enable us to go further still. Herf noted that many (conservative) German modernists were born between 1885 and 1895 into a country which was modernizing rapidly (i.e. rationalizing its institutions and industrializing), and in which the humanist, liberal democratic tradition was relatively weak. And Werner pointed out that in common with most other major artists and intellectuals in nineteenth-century Germany, most German modernists had come from one class (the 'Bildungsbürgertum'□'educated middle class') and attended one educational institution (the 'Gymnasium'□' classical grammar school'). This latter was dominated by 'ein klassizistischer Normenkanon, die doktrinäre Verfestigung der klassischidealistischen Ästhetik, die Vorstellung, dem Kunstwerk als einem in sich harmonisch gegliederten Organismus komme die symbolische Repräsentanz einer göttlich geordneten Welt zu' ('a quasi-classical set of norms, the canonical institutionalization of a classical-idealist aesthetic, the notion that a work of art could stand symbolically for a divinely ordered world to the extent that it itself was a harmoniously structured organism').

Similar things could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of modernists from other European cultures. Consequently, it can be argued that at one level, the concept of modernism designates a heterogeneous range of responses to a global process of modernization by a generation which had internalized a set of assumptions in conflict with the values inherent in that process, and which, as a result, experienced modernization as a cultural cataclysm. It should, however, be stressed that the nature and intensity of the conflict varies from culture to culture, in Germany, for example, the classical ideal described by Werner was particularly remote from reality; the process of modernization was exceptionally rapid; and the liberal democratic, humanist ideal had a comparatively weak hold in the public domain. Consequently, many German modernists experienced the conflict particularly intensely. In England, however, the Arnoldian ideal was more robustly ethical than its German counterpart; the process of modernization, having begun much earlier, had been less rapid than in Germany; as Dagmar Barnouw has argued, the liberal democratic, humanist ideal continued to play a comparatively important role in the public domain throughout the modernist period; and the Great War did not produce the same social upheaval as it did on the Continent. Consequently, it was easier for intellectuals in Britain to find more common ground with their societies so that what was in essence the same conflict was, on the whole, experienced less apocalyptically. As a result, it generated much smaller, less radical and less threatening

avant-gardes (i.e., the Georgians, Imagists and Vorticists) than was the case on the Continent. So, for all the criticisms which can be levelled at Bürger's theory of the avantgarde, he was fundamentally correct in describing its work as the 'Ausdruck der Angst vor einer übermächtig gewordenen Technik und einer gesellschaftlichen Organisation, die die Handlungsmöglichkeiten des Einzelnen extrem einschränkt' ('expression of a profound anxiety in the face of a technological system which had become excessively powerful and a social system which imposes extreme limitations on the individual's freedom of action').

It is no accident that Georg Heym's first use of the neologism 'Weltstadt' ('world city'□i.e. 'city which has become the whole world') should have occurred in a poem, 'Berlin VIII', which was written in December 1910□that precise juncture when, according to Virginia Woolf, 'human nature' and 'all human relations' changed. By late 1910, a significant number of major modernist artists and intellectuals were foregrounding a powerful sense that a global process was affecting *all* areas of human life. But modernism was more than just a reflex, it also involved an active attempt to understand and pictorialize the complexities of that process. More importantly still, modernism, in its extreme forms, involved the prophetic urge to investigate the long-term implications of those complexities□ both for the individual and society in general. Consequently, Horkheimer and Adorno, writing from America in the 1940s, enable us to add a final dimension to our understanding of the context which generated modernism via their analysis of the dialectical turn which, they contend, the central project of the Enlightenment had taken by the mid-twentieth century. In their view, those very constructs of human reason whose original purpose was to free mankind from its thralldom to Nature and feudalism, had turned into an autonomous system which was running madly out of control, depriving its creators of any real autonomy, and enslaving them more effectively than ever Nature or feudalism had done:

Die Herrschaft des Menschen über sich selbst, die
sein Selbst begründet, ist virtuell allemal die Vernichtung
des Subjekts, in dessen Dienst sie geschieht,
denn die beherrschte, unterdrückte und durch Selbsterhaltung
aufgelöste Substanz ist gar nichts anderes
als das Lebendige, als dessen Funktion die Leistungen
der Selbsterhaltung einzig sich bestimmen,
eigentlich gerade das, was erhalten werden soll.

Man's self-mastery, in which his sense of selfhood
is grounded, almost always involves the destruction
of that very subject in whose name the process of
self-mastery is undertaken. For the substance which
is thereby mastered, suppressed and dissolved is that
selfsame vital force from which all that is achieved
in the name of self-preservation uniquely derives□
i.e. precisely that element which is supposed to be
preserved.

Viewed in this context, modernism ceases to be merely the artistic manifestation of a conflict between conservative, humanist sensibilities and a modernizing, non-humanist world, and becomes the manifestation of a more or less shocked realization that modernization required more than the development of a new, appropriate sensibility. Rather, a significant number of modernists saw that for all its ideology of scientific rationality, the process of modernization was, like the Golem of Paul Wegener's expressionist film *Der Golem* (1920), the monstrous product of an originally emancipatory impulse which was now running amok. Many of the modernists had, during their youth, been imbued by their liberal humanist background with the Enlightenment belief that it was possible for Man increasingly to understand, rise above, dominate and utilize the external world by means of his *logos*□understood either as a purely secular faculty or as one which was grounded in the divine *logos*. But, paradoxically, that very generation which had grown up amid the triumphant achievements of increasingly confident nineteenthcentury science, technology and economics, now felt that these systems were becoming dysfunctional and potentially totalitarian. Moreover, by virtue of the law by which the repressed always returns in a destructive form, they also felt they were in danger of turning into their opposite: the entropic chaos which the sociologist Emile Durkheim had, in *Le Suicide* (1897) (translated as *Suicide* (1952)) and *De la Division du travail social* (1902) (translated as *Division of Labour in Society* (1933)), called *anomie*. And it was this feeling of normlessness (which, according to Durkheim, was induced by modernity's destruction of traditional communities) that generated the 'panic terror' which informs so many modernist works.

Marcel Duchamp's *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (*The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*; also known as the *Large Glass* (1915-23)); the dystopic vision of Yevgeny Zamyatin's My (1920) (translated as We (1924)); Breton's claim in the first Surrealist Manifesto (1924) that we are increasingly being forced to live in a rationally constructed cage from which, 'sous couleur de civilisation, sous prétexte de progrès' ('using civilization and progress as pretexts'), everything is banished which does not conform to convention; and such paintings from the 1930s by Max Ernst as *La Ville entière* (*The City as a Whole*) (1935-6 and 1936) and *La Ville petrifiée* (*The Petrified City*) (1935) catch the first movement of the dialectic described by Horkheimer and Adorno, as does Balázs's and Bartók's image of Duke Bluebeard's Castle. In their opera the triumph of (male) rationality is shown to bring immense wealth and power, but at a terrible cost. Against Duke Bluebeard's intention and despite his desire to be redeemed from his own creation by Judith, his castle holds him more securely captive than ever Nature could do. It induces in him a sense of powerlessness; turns the female and the elemental into dead things locked behind the seventh door of his castle and so divorces him from those powers which might save him from himself.

But Franz Kafka's 'In der Strafkolonie' (1914) (translated as 'In the Penal Colony' (1914)); Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* (1915-16) (translated as *Under Fire* (1917)); Georg Kaiser's *Gas* trilogy (1916-19) (translated by various hands 1924 and 1971); the concluding pages of Italo Svevo's *La Coscienza di Zeno* (1919-22) (translated as *Confessions of Zeno* (1930)); the war paintings of Otto Dix from the 1920s and 1930s (one of which, *Flandern* (*Flanders*) (1936), was inspired by the concluding pages of *Le*

Feu); Alfred Döblin's *Berge Meere und Giganten* (*Mountains Seas and Giants* (1921-3)), especially Books One and Two; and the slaughterhouse chapters from Book Four of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1927-9) (translated 1931) transcribe both movements of Horkheimer's and Adorno's dialectic. In all six cases, a rationally constructed system□a machine for executing convicts; the military-industrial complex; mechanized warfare; the technological megalopolis; and a food production process□has turned or is in danger of turning into its opposite. In all six cases, an elemental, irrational system is running out of control, treating people as though they were animals or reducing them to dead primal matter, and threatening to destroy both its creators and itself as it does so.

Indeed, because of the very tenacity with which Western Man clung to the fiction of the rationality of the process which was enslaving him, many modernists felt that he was all the more perilously exposed to those anti-rational powers which the Enlightenment had thought it possible, in some final sense, to subdue, harness and control: psychopathological urges and demonic Nature. Kandinsky, whose seven *Compositionen* (*Compositions)* (1909-13) are marked by a violent sense of impending Apocalypse, put that sense into words when, in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1900-10) (translated as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (1914)), he wrote as follows on the state of contemporary civilization: 'Der alte vergessene Friedhof bebt. Alte vergessene Gräber öffnen sich, und vergessene Geister heben sich aus ihnen' ('The old forgotten graveyard is quaking. Old forgotten graves are opening and forgotten spirits/ghosts are rising up from them'). And Hugo Ball, one of the founders of Dada in Zurich in February 1916, echoed the diagnosis when lecturing on Kandisky in Zurich on 7 April 1917: 'Die Titanen standen auf und zerbrachen die Himmelsburgen' ('the Titans rose up and smashed the celestial castles into pieces'). Thus, it is precisely because Mann's Gustav von Aschenbach clings so stubbornly to the illusion that his attraction for Tadzio derives from high, Apollonian motives that he falls prey so destructively to Dionysiac obsession. And it is precisely because the utopian Dream Kingdom of Perle in Alfred Kubin's *Die andere Seite* (1908) (translated as *The Other Side* (1967)) has been created so artificially that its final collapse into anarchy is so violent and so total. The same sense also explains why madness and the city are so closely connected in so many modernist texts. As Spears put it, that institution which had originally been constructed as 'a society of individuals who subscribe to an ideal of rational order' was felt to be turning dialectically into the 'Weltstadt', the insane megalopolis which, in all major pre-war Expressionist poetry and painting, is associated with darkness, demonic ingression, elemental inundation and the dystopic machine. It is not simply, as Bathrick suggests, that 'quotidian modernity' is felt to *cause* madness. Rather, for all its claims to rationality, the modern city itself is perceived to have 'den charakter des offenen Wahnsinns' ('to be characterized by public insanity'). One work which graphically demonstrates this connection *in extenso* is Rilke's novel *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) (translated as *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1930)). In this text, the central character is so profoundly affected by the dislocated insanity of modern Paris that, as Huyssen has shown (see note 33), the shock uncovers the fragmentary nature and latent paranoia of his own personality: insane city and unhinged self are mirror images of one another. By the same token, Michael Fischer in Döblin's *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* (*The Murder of a Buttercup*) (*c.* 1905), a small-scale entrepreneur; the madman in Heym's story. *Der Irre* (*The Head-case*) (1911), a psychopath who is

associated with an industrial landscape; and Anton Gross in Franz Jung's *Der Fall Gross* (*The Case of Anton Gross*) (*c.* 1920), a draftsman, are metonymic. While convinced of their sanity, all are motivated by pathological drives which they cannot control, and these lead them to do violence to the natural, the innocent and the female, and, ultimately, to destroy themselves.

Because we can, with hindsight, understand modernist texts in a total context in a way which many of their creators could not, Althusser's concept of a 'problématique' is of relevance. In *Pour Marx* (1965) (translated as *For Marx* (1977)), Althusser argues that any 'problématique' as that is perceived subjectively will be more or less mismatched with the objective state of things, and so will tend to de-form, obscure or repress factors which are not compatible with the epistemological position of the perceiver. If we apply this idea to modernism, it becomes easy to see why the phenomenon is so diverse. First, because of the subjective elements involved in the dialectic encounter from which any given text is generated, two texts which derive from the same objective 'problématique' may appear to be unconnected at the surface level. Second, texts will vary greatly in the manner in which they transcribe and foreground the objective 'problématique' from which they have been generated. Where some will display an 'explicit consciousness of their own ideologies', others will distort, simplify or repress those ideologies and the objective 'problématique' which underpins them□ 'manage' them, 'forget' them, drive them underground. Thus, some modernist texts, like Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 'Vorfrühling' ('Early Spring') (1892), the early work of Gustav Klimt, or the poems of Georg Trakl (1910-14) allow the objective 'problématique' of modernism to manifest itself only as more or less dark intimations of an impending threat. Others, like Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless* (1902-3) (translated as *Young Törless* (1955)) naturalize that 'problématique' into something more manageable (an adolescent crisis in this particular case). Others, like Egon Schiele's paintings *Selbstbildnis mit Lampionfrüchten* (*Self-portrait with Chinese Lanterns*) (1912), *Mutter und Tochter* (*Mother and Daughter)* (1913) and *Liesbesakt* (*Act of Love*) (1915), show terrified human figures in contorted and defensive postures but provide no background which indicates what is causing their terror. Others, like Andrey Bely's *Petrburg* (1911-13) (translated as *Petersburg* (1959; revised and improved in 1978)), Balász's and Bartók's *A Kékszakállá herceg vára* (*Duke Bluebeard's Castle*) (1911), Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1911) (translated as *Death in Venice* (1928)), or Franz Kafka's *Der Proceß;* (1914) (translated as *The Trial* (1929)), foreground a very powerful sense of the objective 'problématique', but do so in terms which are mythological, quasi-mythological or surreal rather than overtly modern. And others, like Ludwig Meidner's *Apokalyptische Landschaften* (*Apocalyptic Landscapes*) (1913-14), or the major poetry of the German Expressionists, foreground the objective 'problématique' using images which are derived from the modern, i.e. urban/technological world.

Furthermore, modernist texts vary greatly in the degree of complexity with which they present the 'problématique' which they are confronting and trying to resolve. Some, like the poetry of the German Expressionist August Stramm, evince a sense that the 'problématique' is so tangled, so multidimensional, that it vitiates the very medium□in Stramm's case language□which is being employed. While others, like the poetry of the German Activists (1914-20), such late novels by Lawrence as *The Plumed Serpent*

(1923-5), or Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1935; second (revised) edition 1953) (translated as *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1959)), involve a subjective 'problématique' which is relatively simple, notwithstanding the portentous weight of their rhetoric. Finally, modernist works vary extensively in the nature and complexity of their response to the perceived 'problématique'. On the one hand, it is perfectly possible for important modernist works like many of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* or Kandinsky's post-1910 visual work to involve a highly complex response to a perceived 'problématique' which is so repressed, concealed or 'veiled' that we seem to be dealing with Art for Art's sake in its purest form. While on the other hand, an excessively simple perception of the 'problématique' can, and indeed tends to provoke a correspondingly simplistic response and so generate works which, although modernist, are utopian, and even totalitarian in one form or another.

These variables have been the (often unrecognized) source of critical debate along at least two axes: which works belong in the modernist canon and how important is any given modernist work or author? Although such debates are important, I wish, in this essay, to sidestep them for the sake of two more descriptive aims. First, I wish to chart the major aspects of the modernist 'problématique' within the context established above. And second, I want to chart some of the major ways in which a range of modernists responded to and attempted to resolve that 'problématique' as they perceived it. The point of drawing such a map is not to make it unnecessary to explore individual texts. Rather, the point is to bring those texts into some kind of relationship with one another and so give readers some kind of idea of the issues they may expect to find there when they throw away the map and engage with the texts themselves. . .

Critical Essay #4

By the early 1930s, it was a commonplace among artists and intellectuals, especially on the Continent, that European civilization was at a crossroads. C.G. Jung's *Seelenprobleme der Gegenwart* (*Spiritual Problems of the Present Day*) (1931), especially the chapter entitled 'Das Seelenproblem des modernen Menschen'; Karl Jaspers's *Die geistige Situation der Zeit;* Edmund Husserl's lecture of 7 and 10 May 1935 'Die Krisis des europäischen Menschtums und die Philosophie' (translated as 'Philosophy and the Crisis of Modern Man' (1965)); and, of course, Heidegger's *Einführung in die Metaphysik* all evince a more or less pronounced awareness that Western humanist and/or idealist culture was in a state of crisis. The scientist Max Planck put it thus:

> We are living in a very singular moment of history. It is a moment of crisis, in the literal sense of that word. . . Many people say that these symptoms mark the beginnings of a great renaissance, but there are others who see in them the tidings of a downfall to which our civilization is fatally destined.

But the art of modernism had anticipated and gone beyond such a straightforwardly optimistic/ pessimistic reaction to the perceived crisis, and at the risk of excessive categorization, it is possible to identify at least nine fairly well distinguished types of response to that crisis which recur throughout modernist art.

First, and most negatively, there is the nihilist response. Faced with a situation which Durkheim had, in *Le Suicide* and *De la Division du travail social*, described as one *of anomie*, more than a few modernist artists and intellectuals succumbed to the feeling that an apocalyptic end was approaching beyond which there was only the 'endless darkness . . .' with which *A Kékszakállá herceg vára* concludes, or that human relationships were irredeemably locked into that sadomasochistic double bind which marks Kafka's early writings and Georg Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (1912) (translated as *From Morn to Midnight* (1920)). Consequently, a significant number either went insane (Nietzsche, van Gogh, Jakob van Hoddis, Antonin Artaud); or took their own lives (Virginia Woolf, Jacques Vaché, Jacques Rigaut, René Crevel, Georg Trakl, Ernst Toller, Kurt Tucholsky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Sergey Yesenin); or died prematurely in a state of near total despair (Rimbaud, Alfred Lichtenstein, August Stramm).

Second, several modernists□and this response is particularly typical of the early Expressionists□ sought to relieve their sense of crisis by means of the experience of ecstatic release, sometimes aided by drugs, alcohol or violent experience. Following Rimbaud's stated aim in his letters of 13 and 15 May 1871 of arriving at the Unknown by deranging all his senses, several early Expressionists, not to mention the *alter egos* who form the mid-point of their so-called *Ich-Dramen*, would have assented to the view which Georg Heym recorded in his diary on 6 July 1910 and 15 December 1911: that one instant of intoxicated enthusiasm, even though it may lead to death, is preferable to

the suffocating banality and oppression of everyday modern life. And Ludwig Rubiner's highly influential essay of mid-1912, 'Der Dichter greift in die Politik' ('The Poet intervenes in Politics'), with its call for dynamism, intensity, ecstasy and the will to catastrophe, was almost certainly one of the immediate stimuli for such hymns to ecstasy as Bean's 'Untergrundbahn' ('Underground Train/Railway') (1913), Stadler's 'Der Aufbruch' ('The Beginning'/' The Break-Out') (*c*. 1912) and 'Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht' and Ernst Wilhelm Lotz's 'Aufbruch der Jugend' ('Youth Bursts Out') (*c.* 1913-14). In these and similar works, no attempt is made to analyse or understand. The threatened ego seeks to overcome its sense of isolation and constriction by tapping the irrational powers of the psyche and inducing what Freud called the 'oceanic feeling', regardless of where that might lead. And in several cases, it led, via the war hysteria of 1914, to the trenches and an early death (Lotz, Stadler, Hans Leybold, Franz Marc and August Macke) or to rapid disillusion with ecstatic irrationalism (Ludwig Rubiner, Oskar Kokoschka, Wilhelm Klemm, Hugo Ball and Rudolf Leonhard). As Freud was to argue in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (XIII) (translated as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (XVIII)) which he published in 1920 in the wake of the Great War: if you open up the Unconscious, you are as likely to release the destructive power of the Death Instinct (*Thanatos*) as the creative power of the Life Instinct (*Eros*).

Third, a significant number of Modernists turned to mysticism as a way of resolving their sense of crisis. This might take the form of a latter- day Platonism (like that of Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*); a panentheism (like that informing the theory and practice of Hans Arp and Paul Klee); an esoteric hermeticism (like that of Yeats); or a more or less westernized Eastern mysticism (like that embodied in the blue-eyed people who preside over and survive the concluding apocalypse of *Die andere Seite;* or that implied by the concluding (Sanskrit) words of Eliot's *The Waste Land;* or that involved in Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1919-22) (translated 1954) and *Narzibeta; und Goldmund* (1927-9) (translated as *Death and the Lover* (1932)). But the mysticism might also take more secular forms like Chandos's final openness to inexplicable epiphanic moments; Breton's alchemically inspired quest for 'le merveilleux' ('the marvellous') in *Nadja* (1927-8) (translated 1960); the importance of music in Symbolist and Symbolist-derived aesthetic theory; the use of music imagery throughout *A Passage to India* and in the concluding pages of *La Nausée, Dr Faustus* and Kafka's 'Die Verwandlung' (1912) (translated as 'The Metamorphosis' (1937)); or what has been variously termed the 'individualist mysticism' and 'the aesthetic of transcendence and epiphany' of such works as *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge, My, Das Schloß, Der Steppenwolf and Berlin Alexanderplatz*. In all cases, we are dealing with an attempt, albeit one which expresses itself in very different ways and with varying degrees of confidence, to arrive at a sense which is deeply repugnant to those critics who have accepted the (anti-)ontology of postmodernism. Beyond or within what looks like entropic chaos or unresolvable conflict, there exists a firm spiritual substratum. This substratum may be either psychological or metaphysical, but it permits what Jung termed 'integration' and the emergence of what the Existentialists were to call a sense of Being out of Nothingness: it is a melody, as Roquentin puts it in the final pages of *La Nausée*, which persists even after the record has been broken.

Fourth, and closely related to the mystical response, is the aestheticist one. As Bürger has shown, the attempt to establish art as something autonomous, a-historical and removed from the realm of rationalization and commercialization goes back to the end of the eighteenth century. But towards the end of the nineteenth century the sense intensified that the world had not only been desacralized, but was also being increasingly afflicted by the radical sense of uncertainty generated by the dialectical turn taken by the central project of the Enlightenment. Consequently, such practitioners of Art for Art's sake and aestheticism as the Symbolists, the Decadents, the George Circle and the Imagists felt the ever more urgent need to proclaim the sacral nature of art and thereby hold on to an allegedly a-temporal enclave of meaning, stability and transcendence. It is this desire which informs Mallarmé's essay 'Averses ou Critique' ('Rainshowers or Criticism') (1886-95); better known as 'Crise de vers' 'Crisis in Poetry' (1897)); Rilke's book on Rodin (1903-7) (translated 1946) and Hofmannsthal's essay 'Der Dichter und diese Zeit' ('The Poet and this Age' (1906)). In an age when, as Hofmannsthal puts it, the representative things lack spirit and the spiritual things do not stand out in relief; which has no Eleusinian Mysteries or Seven Sacraments with which people can lift themselves above everyday life, it is the artist's task to redeem the world by recapturing that lost sense of mystery.

From here, it is only a short step to the fifth response, the decision to turn one's back on the modern age. After the Great War, for instance, Rilke, Yeats and Ball expressed that decision in a 'flight out of time'□the emigration to a 'still point' or the fixed centre of a 'gyre' which was geographically as far removed as possible from the confusions of the modern age. In Rilke's case, this meant the little château at Muzot; in Yeats's case, the tower in Galway; and in Ball's case, Montagnola in the Tessin (where he became Hesse's secretary and biographer) and the certainties of ultra-orthodox Catholicism. Eliot and Pound (whose early thinking about art and poetry, especially in respect of the need for impersonality, owed much to Symbolism) expressed a very similar decision in a somewhat different way. After the Great War, both moved backwards in time to associate themselves with a pre-modern consciousness and system of beliefs which, they felt, were free from the uncertainties, instability and sense of meaninglessness which marked the modern age. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot came to the conclusion that the modern world was an arid desert full of broken images and that all he could do about it was to put his own lands in order. And he rationalized that conclusion in his essay 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921) by means of the extremely influential notion of the 'dissociation of sensibility' according to which English culture had undergone a historical fall from grace during the seventeenth century from which it had never recovered. On the basis of that conclusion, Eliot committed himself publicly, in his preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), a book dedicated to an English divine who had died in the pre-lapsarian year of 1626, to classicism in literature, royalism in politics and Anglo-Catholicism in religion□i.e. to those attitudes which Eliot believed to have been most finely developed in the last part of the sixteenth century, before the historical fall. And it was the quintessential spirit informing those attitudes which Eliot sought to celebrate in *Little Gidding* (1941-2), the last of the *Four Quartets*, which takes as its starting point a religious community near Huntingdon founded one year before Andrewes's death by Nicholas Ferrar, but looted and dissolved by the Roundheads in 1646. Pound voiced a similar disgust with contemporary European civilization in *Hugh*

Selwym Mauberly (1919-20), describing it as 'an old b____ gone in the teeth,/ . . . a botched civilization'. He then left England, and after a stay in Paris, finally settled in 1924 in Mussolini's Italy (which he saw as a modern version of the corporate medieval state and hence free from the mechanization, systematization and 'the black death of the capitalist system') in order to write his own, latter-day version of the *Divine Comedy*: the *Cantos*. These were, as Schwartz put it, 'designed to challenge the corrupted values of Western civilization and to inspire reverence for the highest values□the "eternal state of mind"□which will lay the groundwork for a new and more humane society.' Likewise, Hofmannsthal and George went down their own, not dissimilar paths leading from Aestheticism to various forms of high conservatism.

Where Pound and Eliot turned their backs on the complexities and confusions of the present in the name of an ideal, hieratic past, other modernists, especially during the immediate post-war years, turned their back on the same complexities and confusions in the name of an ideal, socialist future. Thus, the more or less short-lived left-wing utopianism of, for instance, Ernst Toller, Johannes R. Becher, RudolfLeonhard, Kurt Hiller, Ludwig Rubiner, Lyonel Feininger, Bruno Taut and the members of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* in Germany, or of Kandinsky, Mayakovsky, Alexander Blok, El Lissitzky, Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodschenko in Russia, was the obverse of the rightwing nostalgia of Eliot, Pound, Hofmannsthal and George. Both groups of modernists were marked by a deep yearning for a total, centred world in which the New Man under socialism or redeemed humanity under God could rediscover a secure identity and transcendent sense of purpose. It is wrong to say, as some critics have, that all modernist utopianism issued in a totalitarian commitment. However, Pound's extreme right-wing illusions did lead him to become the propagandist for a fascist state; and Becher's extreme leftwing illusions did lead him to become the first Minister of Culture of a Stalinist state, the GDR, and the composer of its national anthem. In both cases, a flawed sense of 'problématique' ultimately generated a frighteningly simple, totalitarian response.

The sixth response can be broadly described as a 'primitivism'. Non-European or pre-modern cultures are used not just as sources of aesthetic inspiration, but as a cultural model for emulation. Hence the importance of the Hindu philosopher Professor Godbole in *A Passage to India* and the black community of Harlem in Section II of Lorca's *Poeta in Nueva York* (1929-30) (translated as *Poet in New York* (1940)). Godbole's intuitive, nonrational cast of mind makes him the character who is best adapted to the mysteries, ambiguities and open-ended fluidity which Forster designated with the non-topographical shifter 'India'. And in Lorca's poem, it is the elemental, mythological, 'great and desperate' King of Harlem (whose beard is said to stretch down to the sea) who offers the inhabitants of New York, especially its black community, their only hope of redemption from the anguished frustration and cancered blood which derive from their enslavement by the banality and materialism of industrial civilization.

The seventh response, aptly characterized by Pär Bergman as 'modernolatry', is characteristic of Italian Futurism, early Vorticism and that group of writers, of whom Ernst Jünger is the best known, described by Herf as 'reactionary modernists'. Where the first six responses described above all, in various ways, involve a withdrawal from or

transcendence of the contemporary world, the three latter groups celebrated their unreserved commitment to it. The Futurists and the reactionary modernists did so because of the speed, energy, size and sheer modernity of industrial society, and, conversely, its ability to destroy what had been inherited from the past. The Vorticists did so because of the tension they perceived between the massively static, abstract machine forms of modernity and the violence which was stored up within them. But where the Futurists' hymn to the machine, the city and material energy led several of the major members of the movement towards 'embarrassingly reactionary' attitudes□the inhuman celebration of mechanized warfare, Man's ability to master his environment by machine brutality and, ultimately, Mussolini's fascism□most of the Vorticists moved away from their early attitudes and towards less abstract and more humane modes of art. Indeed, Jacob Epstein (who belongs stylistically to the Vorticist group even though he refused to exhibit with them in June 1915) went so far as to destroy what is arguably the major example of Vorticist sculpture, his massive *Rock Drill* (1913-15), probably because he felt that it celebrated the machine violence which had issued in the Great War. Unlike Epstein, but like several major Futurists, Jünger failed to learn more humane attitudes from his war experience. And in books like *In Stahlgewittern* (1920; second (revised) edition 1924) (translated as *The Storm of Steel* (1929)) and *Der Arbeiter* (*The Worker*) (1932), he actually seems to approve of the process by which human beings lose their autonomy and become aspects of a supra-human military or industrial machine. But like the early Vorticists, it was the staticness and stability of huge machines which attracted him; and this, together with his ingrained aristocratism, generated in the late 1930s the totalitarian (albeit anti-Nazi) 'static hierarchy of value' and 'haven of paradisaical permanence' which forms the resolution of his novel *Auf den Marmorklippen* (1939) (translated as *On the Marble Cliffs* (1947)).

The change of heart on the part of most of the Vorticists forms an obvious bridge to the eighth response. Utopian and messianic socialism was doomed to disillusion as the real nature of the German and Russian revolutions became apparent; and Futurist affirmation of the modern was unacceptable to many modernists because of its blindness to or indifference towards the reality and implications of machine violence. So, in order to avoid these pitfalls, those modernists who suffered from a sense of cultural crisis but who wished to stay with the contemporary world had to develop more modest, more ambiguous and more ironic attitudes to the complexities of modernity. It was this desire to negotiate a middle way which generated Constructivism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), with their assertion of the need for a modern classicism, their commitment to modern materials and their desire to rescue Western civilization from the barbarism to which it had succumbed over the previous decade. But above all, whether they understood it in these terms or not, the proponents of both movements were trying to reverse the dialectical turn which the central project of the Enlightenment had taken and bring it back onto its central and proper course. Hence their attempts to bring technology back to manageable human dimensions through the design and construction of aesthetically pleasing cities where imperialist capitalism was not permitted to turn into a chaotic, autonomous system, but was, instead, subject to reasonable and humane control. One might describe this general attitude as a pared-down humanism: Man was reinstated at the centre of things but not necessarily regarded as the measure of all things. And human reason, while retaining its centrality,

was not overestimated vis-à-vis the powers of unreason inside and outside human nature. Such was the spirit informing Bruno Taut's move away from utopianism and acceptance of the post of City Architect in Magdeburg; Sartre's Existentialism; Jung's central doctrine of 'integration'; Ernst Bloch's *Spuren* (Traces) (1930); Döblin's revision of his apocalyptic *Berge Meere und Giganten into Giganten* (*Giants*) (1932) (in which human autonomy and technological ability were celebrated); and, perhaps of all literary works, Thomas Mann's *Joseph* tetralogy (1926-42) (translated as *Joseph and his Brothers* (1934-45)). Here, as Ritchie Robertson has perceptively observed, Mann, instead of 'surrendering blindly to the primitive or trying to deny its power', sought to 'explore and understand it with the aid of his modern consciousness' and so developed an ironic stance as 'a means of keeping the primitive at bay while acknowledging its authority and appeal'.

And finally, one can identify a strand in modernism which points forward very clearly to McHale's definition of the postmodernist condition as an acceptance of 'an anarchic landscape of worlds in the plural' in which artists renounce the nostalgia or desire for epiphany, transcendence and closure. From the modernist point of view, this double attitude of acceptance and renunciation can be experienced either as a loss (as in Virginia Woolf's last, posthumously published *Between the Acts* (1938-41), and, less tragically, in *Ulysses* and *Watt*). Or it can be experienced as a liberation (as in *Finnegan's Wake* and *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*). Or it can be experienced as both at the same time. The best example of this latter, ambiguous response is undoubtedly provided by Dada with its anarchist roots, plurality of poetic registers (including deliberate banality), wide-ranging use of various kinds of collage components, recognition that the cinema rather than the printed word is the art form of modernity, aggressive challenging of classical humanist assumptions, metaleptic mistrust of hierarchies, disrespect for allegedly impermeable boundaries (like that between 'Art' and 'life'), hostility to final solutions and closures, parodic use of machinery, experimentation with heteroglossia via the simultaneous poem, carnival imagery, willingness to accept its own disposability/death, antiillustrations and repeated insistence that Dada involves the ability to say 'yes' and 'no' at the same time. It can be argued that Dada left too many of the tragic aspects of life out of account, and in his later years, Arp came to see this. Nevertheless, Dada involves the 'suspensive irony', the 'more comprehensive "both-and"', the 'willingness to live with uncertainty, to tolerate and, in some cases, to welcome a world seen as random and multiple, even, at times absurd' and the ability to accept 'the gaps and discontinuities' which Wilde identified as central features of postmodernism. Dada also evinces virtually all the characteristics which, in McHale's view, typify postmodernism□so that it comes as something of a surprise to discover that neither of these critics accords Dada so much as a mention!

It is an artistic landscape like that constructed by Dada in which Ulrich, Musil's 'Möglichkeitsmensch' (literally 'possibilitarian') lives and moves: 'without the fiction of the self as entelechy unfolding and growing according to some inner law'; untroubled by 'the futile and frequently selfdestructive searches for selfhood as wholeness, which neglect the potential rewards of openness toward the other'; and without the need for certainty. Indeed, Ulrich's refusal to look for any final solution outside his situation, his ability to hold an ironic balance between the conflicting, overlapping and fluctuating possibilities

which inform his situation, and his preparedness to live without any final certainty in an elastic situation where reason is of limited help all make him an example of that 'non-Euclidian humanity' which can live in a 'Lobatchevskyan' universe. Eliot glimpsed precisely this possibility when he published his essay on Ben Jonson in the *TLS* on 13 November 1919, but having achieved his own sense of centred, 'Euclidean' certainty, he repressed that awareness when he published his *Selected Essays* in 1932. Ulrich's attitudes also put him in the same category as those quintessentially modernist heroes Chaplin and Keaton□little men who, when everything is ranged against them, manage to keep their balance in an insane modern universe.

Because the modernists could see, with varying degrees of clarity, complexity and acceptance, the implications of an accelerating process which, in our own era, has turned the world into an electronic stage, or, as Wilde put it, a global shopping mall, they constituted in the literal sense an avantgarde scouting out an unknown territory. But because that process had not yet turned into a total and accepted way of life legitimized by what Horkheimer and Adorno were to call the 'culture industry', it was still possible for the modernists to respond to it in ways which are closed to the postmodernists. Hence the frequent and hotly debated charge that postmodernism is not an oppositional phenomenon. The modernists were still able, either literally or imaginatively, to seek out alternative or geographical enclaves which had not yet been colonized by the media or the leisure industry. They could call to mind a past which was in danger, but not irrevocably so, of being lost and had not been reified by the nostalgia or heritage industries. They could hope in a hieratical or socialist utopia which had not been discredited by Nazi or Stalinist atrocities. They could withdraw into arcane areas of the mind which had not been invaded by the religious or the fantasy industries. And they could use a variety of innovative artistic techniques and psychological ploys which enabled them to retain a greater or lesser sense of selfhood and autonomy, but which had not yet been assimilated by the advertising, fashion and lifestyle industries. Although modernism anticipated what McHale has called 'the pluralistic and anarchistic ontological landscape of advanced industrial cultures', most modernists disliked what they espied from their advanced position. As Barnouw and Wilde suggest, this was partly because of a nostalgia for a (probably imaginary) ideal stability, but partly, too, because of three more serious reasons. First, many modernists suspected that what McHale describes as 'pluralism' might actually be nothing more than a multicoloured surface concealing a commodified uniformity. Second, the more socially aware realized that that 'anarchistic' landscape was not a flat one, but involved large, possibly growing areas of systematically created physical and psychological misery. And third, the more psychoanalytically aware feared that the abolition of metaphors of depth□one of the central features of the postmodernist imagination□inevitably involved a blindness to or the repression of those dark, Dionysiac powers which return from the forgotten depths all the more potently and destructively for being ignored.

Given the unmistakeable consequences which are now issuing from the dialectical turn taken by the central project of the Enlightenment□ escalating environmental problems, the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots, the boredom, violence and alienation which haunt our advanced societies, the difficulties involved in making relationships within a system which is inherently hostile to *Gemeinschaften*□the anxiety

of modernism may well be a more appropriate response to that turn than postmodernism's ludic acceptance. Ever since Kierkegaard, the Existentialists, with the exception of the later Sartre, have been telling us that our capacity to experience *Angst* betokens a very deep realization that the prevailing system which constructs what Lawrence called the 'old stable *ego*' is at odds with the profoundest stratum of the personality. And the central project of German aesthetics since Kant, admirably analysed by Andrew Bowie in terms of the 'concern with those aspects of subjectivity which are incompatible with wholesale rationalisation', points to the same awareness. We may not be able to return in good faith to the security of religious orthodoxy, cling on to the centred categories and confident correspondences of classical humanism, or find refuge in any of the enclaves still available to many of the modernists. But in the face of the massive problems faced by Western or westernizing humanity, all of which can, ultimately, be understood in terms of Horkheimer's and Adorno's analysis, it has become a matter of urgency to undertake a transvaluation of values. And that means defying the massively oracular authority of the patriarchs of the 1980s like Lacan and Derrida; finding a power with which to fill the gap at the heart of postmodernist aesthetics and psychology; undoing the post-Enlightenment equations of Geist-as-spirit with Geist-as-ego and self with ego; relegitimizing metaphors of depth; and rediscovering that decentred fluidum at the heart of the human personality which many ancient cultures referred to by means of metaphors of breath. The problematics of modernism are still with us, albeit in a more drastic form. Thus, by studying the variety of ways in which modernist writers, thinkers and artists responded to them and understanding the implications and end results of those responses, we are given the means of avoiding the modernists' mistakes and making decisions about the nature of reality, our relationship with reality and our relationship with ourselves which can, in some measure at least, help us to look for a way out of the *impasse* into which our civilization seems currently to be heading.

Source: Richard Sheppard, "The Problematics of European Modernism," in *Theorizing Modernism: Essays in Critical Theory*, edited by Steve Giles, Routledge, 1993, pp. 1-51.

Adaptations

Historically, most modernist works have not translated well into film or television adaptations. Of the modernist writers, it is Hemingway whose work has been most often filmed. Hollywood produced two versions of *A Farewell to Arms*, one in 1932 (starring Gary Cooper and Helen Hayes, directed by Frank Borzage) and the other in 1957.

Other modernist writers have seen their novels turned into films. A few attempts have been made to produce Joyce's work, for instance. In 1967 the director Joseph Strick filmed a version of *Ulysses* that depicted a bare-bones version of the story. However, since most of the book takes place on a linguistic and allegorical level, most viewers have found the film unsatisfying.

Topics for Further Study

Modernism evolved as an artistic reaction to dramatic changes in politics, culture, society, and technology. Research some of the technologies that were developed in the late 1800s and early 1900s that might have literally changed the world. Some of the inventions you might want to investigate might be the technologies that captured and recorded reality (photography, sound recording, film), the technologies of communication, the technologies of transportation, and the technologies of weaponry.

The two world wars of the twentieth century had an enormous effect on the modernist movement. Many critics feel that the movement hit its height just after World War I and was effectively killed by World War II. Research the wars' effects on writers of the modernist movement. What did they do during the war years? How did the war change their lives? You might want to look at lesser-known writers such as Rupert Brooke or Wilfred Owen who actually served in the conflict.

Most of the important modernist writers were born between 1880 and 1900, and most of them died in the 1960s. The world changed dramatically in the intervening period. In 1890 what were the world's great powers? Who were its important leaders? What were the important issues in international relations? What products did people use? How did people travel from place to place? Compare the answers to these questions to what the world looked like in 1965.

In addition to being a reaction to changes in technology and politics, Modernism was a reaction to important developments in Western thought. Dozens of philosophers and scholars of the late nineteenth century rejected the accepted explanations about the world and proposed their own. Of these, the thinkers who had the greatest effect on Modernism were the economist Karl Marx, the naturalist Charles Darwin, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and the psychiatrist Sigmund Freud. Research any one of these thinkers. What were their most important insights? What previous explanations did their writings reject? How do their ideas affect the world today?

Compare and Contrast

1890s: The United States' economy expands rapidly as the nation exploits its natural resources. Large corporations in the transportation, steel, oil, meat-packing, and financial industries establish monopolies; as a result, Congress passes the Sherman Anti-Trust Act intended to break up such monopolies.

Today: Dozens of states and the federal government go to trial with the Microsoft corporation. Charged with being a monopoly, the company defends itself on the grounds that standardization is better for consumers than variety.

1914: World War I breaks out when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is assassinated in Sarajevo. The system of interlocking alliances among Europe's great powers compels these nations to go to war on each other's behalf. The war drags on until 1918; millions are killed.

Today: After a terrorist attack destroys the World Trade Center in New York, President George W. Bush calls for a war against terrorism and especially against Osama bin Laden. In the first stage of the war, American and British submarines and airplanes bombard Afghanistan, where bin Laden is said to reside.

1915: During the first years of World War I, the United States refuses to join the fighting. In 1915, though, the passenger ship *Lusitania* is sunk by the German navy, killing thousands of Americans. This incident plays an important part in swaying American public opinion toward joining the war.

Today: After terrorists pilot jetliners into American targets, killing thousands of people, President George W. Bush calls for a "war on terrorism" and begins bombing targets in Afghanistan. As the campaign to find and punish the terrorists responsible continues, American troops fight alongside the local militias to defeat Afghanistan's Taliban government.

1927: Al Jolson stars in *The Jazz Singer*, the first "talkie" motion picture. The conjunction of recorded sound and recorded image, revolutionary in its time, follows the instantaneous broadcast of sound by radio, which achieved its first transatlantic broadcast in 1901. It is followed by the instantaneous broadcast of sound and images by television in 1939.

Today: The advent of computers in the 1960s has by now changed the nature of recorded sound and images. All of the pre-Worlds War II technologies such as film, magnetic tape, vinyl records, and radio broadcasts are what is known as "analog" information. Modern technologies like compact disks, digital cameras, computer hard drives, and even cable television feeds are based on digital information□a series of instructions to a computer. Many people suspect that this change from analog to digital will change our relationship to reality just as profoundly as did the development of recorded sound and images.

1929: After many years of what is now known as the Roaring Twenties, a period in which the American economy expands rapidly and the United States begins to develop the consumer culture popular today, the stock market crashes on October 29, 1929. The crash is caused by many factors including dramatic economic troubles in Europe and Asia and the tendency, among American consumers, to buy items on credit and then default on payment. The crash leads to the terrible Great Depression of the 1930s.

Today: After many years of unprecedented economic expansion (largely driven by the hightechnology sector of the economy), these seemingly endless good times begin to dramatically slow. Paper fortunes are wiped out overnight as stock options become worthless. Hundreds of Internet companies go out of business, but the slowdown also affects "brick and mortar" industries like automobiles, construction, and travel.

What Do I Read Next?

There was almost no facet of life that was not fundamentally transformed by the technological advances of the modernist period. Stephen Kern's 1983 book *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (1983) is an excellent meditation on how technology changed human life and perception.

A movement that was not similar to Modernism in its formal features but provided many modernist writers with a model of artistic rebellion was the so-called Decadent movement of the 1890s. The best-known Decadent writers were the Anglo-Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde and the French novelist J. K. Huysmans, but dozens of other writers were loosely affiliated with this group. Reading Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) gives a good idea of the nature of Decadent literature.

World War I was the central historical event affecting Modernism. Paul Fussell's study *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) provides a detailed and often moving discussion of this war and its effects on contemporaries.

Out of the armistice that settled World War I grew the seeds that would eventually mature into World War II. The "belligerents," or the losing powers, were forced to pay vast sums to the victors and give up large amounts of territory. Even in Italy, a poor country that was dragged into World War I, the effects of the war led directly to the ascension of Benito Mussolini to power. Dennis Mack-Smith's 1983 biography *Mussolini* gives a detailed portrait of post-World War I Italy.

Further Study

Bradbury, Malcolm, and James McFarlane, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, Penguin, 1991.

This anthology provides more than two dozen essays by the most eminent critics of Modernism. Topics range from the artistic scenes in various cities to the formal characteristics of modernist poetry to discussions of some of the smaller movements within Modernism.

Charters, Jimmie, *This Must Be the Place*, Herbert Joseph, 1932.

Jimmie Charters□"Jimmie the Barman"□tended bar at the Dingo in the Paris neighborhood of Montparnasse, a notorious haunt for such modernist writers as Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce.The book provides a portrait of these writers in their leisure hours, written by a man with very little interest in their art but a great appreciation for their personalities.

Douglas, Ann, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995.

The artistic scene in New York in the 1920s was a "mongrelized" blend of black and white, urban and rural, male and female, according to Ann Douglas, who suggests that there is a need to understand the important contribution that marginalized groups made to American Modernism. In her book, she portrays the rise of New York City to cultural preeminence and balances the stories of traditional modernist heroes such as Ernest Hemingway with discussions of Harlem Renaissance figures such as Langston Hughes.

Hemingway, Ernest, *A Moveable Feast*, Touchstone, 1996.

Hemingway's casual memoir of the Lost Generation is the most famous description of Paris in the 1920s. Artists and writers from Picasso to Gertrude Stein to Man Ray appear in this amiable and fascinating book.

Kenner, Hugh, *The Pound Era*, University of California Press, 1973.

Controversial and idiosyncratic, Hugh Kenner is the most famous critic who deals with Modernism. In this book, he argues that Ezra Pound, not T. S. Eliot or James Joyce, is the central figure of Modernism and that all of Modernism's themes and formal devices can be found in Pound's writings.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literary Movements for Students (LMfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LMfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LMfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literary Movements for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literary Movements for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LMfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LMfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literary Movements for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literary Movements for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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