MODERNISM

Peter Childs

3rd edition

ROUTLEDGE

the NEW CRITICAL IDIOM

MODERNISM

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Peter Childs is Professor and Pro Vice chancellor at Newman University, UK. He has edited and written over twenty books on diverse subjects ranging from contemporary British culture to post-colonial theory.

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Peter Childs

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Series editor's preface

The New Critical Idiom is a series of introductory books which seeks to extend the lexicon of literary terms, in order to address the radical changes which have taken place in the study of literature during the last decades of the twentieth century. The aim is to provide clear, well-illustrated accounts of the full range of terminology currently in use, and to evolve histories of its changing usage.

The current state of the discipline of literary studies is one where there is considerable debate concerning basic questions of terminology. This involves, among other things, the boundaries which distinguish the literary from the non-literary; the position of literature within the larger sphere of culture; the relationship between literatures of different cultures; and questions concerning the relation of literary to other cultural forms within the context of interdisciplinary studies.

It is clear that the field of literary criticism and theory is a dynamic and heterogeneous one. The present need is for individual volumes on terms which combine clarity of exposition with an adventurousness of perspective and a breadth of application. Each volume will contain as part of its apparatus some indication of the direction in which the definition of particular terms is likely to move, as well as expanding the disciplinary boundaries within which some of these terms have been traditionally contained. This will involve some re-situation of terms within the larger field of cultural representation, and will introduce examples from the area of film and the modern media in addition to examples from a variety of literary texts.

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INTRODUCTION

ANSWERING THE QUESTION: WHAT IS MODERNISM?

Romance – 'In medieval literature, a verse narrative [recounts] the marvellous adventures of a chivalric hero. ... In modern literature, i.e., from the latter part of the 18th through the 19th centuries, a romance is a work of prose fiction in which the scenes and incidents are more or less removed from common life and are surrounded by a halo of mystery, an atmosphere of strangeness and adventure.' (*The Reader's Encyclopedia*, William Rose Benét)

Realism – 'A mode of writing that gives the impression of recording or "reflecting" faithfully an actual way of life. The term refers, sometimes confusingly, both to a literary method based on detailed accuracy of description (i.e. verisimilitude) and to a more general attitude

that rejects idealization, escapism, and other extravagant qualities of romance in favour of recognizing soberly the actual problems of life.' (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Chris Baldick)

Modernism – 'Modernist art is, in most critical usage, reckoned to be the art of what Harold Rosenburg calls "the tradition of the new". It is experimental, formally complex, elliptical, contains elements of decreation as well as creation, and tends to associate notions of the artist's freedom from realism, materialism, traditional genre and form, with notions of cultural apocalypse and disaster. … We can dispute about when it starts (French symbolism; decadence; the break-up of naturalism) and whether it has ended (Kermode distinguishes "paleo-modernism" and "neo-modernism" and hence a degree of continuity through to post-war art). We can regard it as a time-bound concept (say 1890 to 1930) or a timeless one (including Sterne, Donne, Villon, Ronsard). The best focus remains a body of major writers (James, Conrad, Proust, Mann, Gide, Kafka, Svevo, Joyce, Musil, Faulkner in fiction; Strindberg, Pirandello, Wedekind, Brecht in drama; Mallarmé, Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Rilke, Apollinaire, Stevens in poetry) whose works are aesthetically radical, contain striking technical innovation, emphasize spatial or "fugal" as opposed to chronological form, tend towards ironic modes, and involve a certain "dehumanization of art."' (Malcolm Bradbury in *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, Second Edition, ed. Peter Childs and Roger Fowler)

Postmodernism – 'The new avant-garde literature (neo-modernist or postmodernist) partly carried modernism further, partly reacted against it – for example against its ideology and its historical orientation. What it consistently pretended to be (and sometimes actually was) was *new*. Determinedly self-destructive, it attempted to cut off its branch of the past, by proposing entirely new methods, a fresh "syllabus" or canon of authors (Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure, Proust) and a new register of allusions.' (*A History of English Literature*, Alastair Fowler)

If the idea that identity exists through difference is taken as a starting point, then Modernism can begin to be understood in terms of possible distinctions from other literary forms. Modernism is, for

example, frequently distinguished from realism, the dominant mode of the novel from its inception in Britain in the eighteenth century with the rise of bourgeois capitalism to the present day. According to many critics, realism is characterised by its attempt to offer up a mirror to the world, thus disavowing its own culturally conditioned processes and ideological stylistic assumptions. Modelled on prose forms such as historiography and journalism, realist writing thus often presents itself as transparently representative of the author's society and so features characters, language, and a spatial-temporal setting familiar to its contemporary readers. Most importantly for a debate of literary history, it is apparent that the hegemony of realism as the dominant form of the novel was challenged by writers throughout the twentieth century as alternative ways of representing reality and the world were presented by Modernists and then postmodernists. Realism itself was once a new, innovative form of writing, with authors such as Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) and Samuel Richardson (1690–1761) providing a different template for fiction from the previously dominant mode of prose writing, the Romance, which was parodied in one of the very first novels, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605–15), and survives in Gothic and fantasy fiction. To the present day, realism remains the primary favoured style for most novelists, but many avant-garde, innovative, and radical writers have sought to undermine its dominance. Very broadly speaking, the vast majority of attempts to offer alternative modes of representation from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century have at one time or another been termed Modernist, and this applies to literature, music, painting, film, and architecture (and to some works before and after this period). In poetry, Modernism is associated with moves to break from the iambic pentameter as the basic unit of verse, to introduce *vers libre*, symbolism, and other new forms of writing. In prose, it is associated with attempts to render human subjectivity in ways more real than realism: to represent consciousness, perception, emotion, meaning and the individual's relation to society through interior monologue, stream of consciousness, tunnelling, defamiliarisation, rhythm, irresolution and other terms that will be encountered later in the book. Modernist writers therefore struggled, in Ezra Pound's brief phrase, to 'make it new', to modify if not overturn existing modes and subjects of representation, partly by pushing them towards the abstract or the

introspective, and to express the new sensibilities of their time: in a compressed, condensed, complex literature of the city, of industry and technology, war, machinery and speed, mass markets and communication, of internationalism, the New Woman, the aesthete, the nihilist, and the flâneur.

The dominant post-war conception of Modernism has accentuated these aspects to its key texts; however, emphases in recent studies have moved towards alternative conceptualisations. Instead of the progressive model whereby literary modes eclipse or supersede older ones in a teleological line of development, like Virginia Woolf's gig-lamps symmetrically arranged, there is acknowledgement of, first, styles existing alongside one another in the text, and second, of Modernism's involvement in the broader social structures of the period and with the mass movements and popular cultures of modernity. Here, the literary complexion starts to change once the dominant view of a break from previous, or indeed contemporary forms and cultural practices, is questioned, and marginalised voices from the *fin de siècle* and the empire, as well as voices of those excluded for reasons of gender or sexuality, are placed closer to the centre of Modernism's narrative. Also, a critic such as Lawrence Rainey explores the role played by various individuals, such as patrons and collectors, and institutions, such as the academy and the law courts, in initially promoting the avant-garde to a wider reading public, beyond which point literary Modernism, whose engagement with popular culture is evident in the works of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot for example, would require the influence of the mass media as well as both 'critical approbation and some degree of commercial viability to ratify its status as a significant idiom' (Rainey 1998: 170). Starting with the little discussed pre-war visits to England of the Italian Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Rainey's sociologically oriented *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* reconstructs formative moments in the making of Modernism, focusing on the decade after 1912 up to the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* in 1922, and then Ezra Pound's *Draft of XVI Cantos* in 1925. Rainey pitches Modernism between the age of journalism and the coming of the Universities, seeing it as situated between a passing elite bourgeois culture and the coming middlebrow world of media aesthetics. Most importantly it was ambiguously caught between its inclinations away

from and towards contemporaneous common cultural practices in the wider civil society. In the conception of Modernism, Rainey sees a greater importance for all kinds of cultural institutions than has previously been acknowledged: the idea of the deluxe edition and *Ulysses*, the rise of the little review and *The Waste Land* (both forms of publication indebted to massive patronage), politics for Pound and 'a coterie politics' for H.D. Thus, the significance of popular and even demotic culture on 'high Modernism' can be re-acknowledged, from such seeming extremes as Joyce's interest in pornography to Eliot's 1923 essay on the extremely successful comedian and singer Marie Lloyd. But, the wider influence of jazz, art, music, romance, machinery and the sheer frenzy of economic, cultural, and social change, from market forces to machines, is increasingly felt in the depictions of Modernism.

PLUNGING IN

With regard to literature, Modernism is most readily understood through the work of the avant-garde authors who wrote in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century. It is a contentious term and should not be discussed without a sense of the literary, historical and political debates which have accompanied its usage. The problems of definition are such that many critics avoid providing one, even though they freely use the term. David Ayers avoids the issue of definition by stating a starkly contrasting problem with regard to *Ulysses*: Joyce's novel is such a touchstone for uses of the term in literature that it has become almost impossible to read it in any terms other than 'Modernist', which means reference will be made to its symbolism, its variety of textual forms, and range of methods (see Ayers 2004: 66), and no matter how much contemporary critics try to analyse the novel's content, in terms of gender, nationalism, colonialism, and so on, rather than its form, content and form remain inseparable, and so do, it seems, *Ulysses* and Modernism.

One of the first aspects of much Modernist writing to strike contemporary readers was the way in which such novels, stories, plays and poems immerse them in an unfamiliar world with little of the orienting preambles and descriptions provided by most nineteenth-century realist writers, such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot.

In other words, Modernist writing 'plunges' the reader into a confusing and difficult mental landscape which cannot be immediately understood but which must be moved through and mapped in order to understand its limits and meanings (see Mahaffey 2007). In this Introduction I will briefly sketch features of this landscape so that some of the contours of Modernism can be visible but I recommend that the reader returns to the Introduction having read the entire book, at which time its broad brushstrokes will be better appreciated with the knowledge accrued from the later chapters.

But before plunging into the terms and the definitions employed by critics, I would like to plunge into a fictional narrative, and discuss what is going on at the start of a Modernist text which is in some ways exemplary but which would actually be sidelined by some definitions of Modernism and by some overviews of Modernist writers. Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* was published in 1938, supposedly eight years after Modernism started to wane and be replaced by the neo-realism of writers such as Graham Greene, George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway, Rosamond Lehmann and Evelyn Waugh. It is also by a writer who is often cited as the first *post*modernist. However, the elements of religious scepticism, deep introspection, technical and formal experimentation, cerebral game-playing, linguistic innovation, self-referentiality, misanthropic despair overlaid with humour, philosophical speculation, loss of faith and cultural exhaustion all exemplify the preoccupations of Modernism. I shall quote the opening page of the novel, to give a strong flavour of the writing, and then offer a commentary on it.

> The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton. Here for what might have been six months he had eaten, drunk, slept, and put his clothes on and off, in a medium-sized cage of north-western aspect commanding an unbroken view of medium-sized cages of south-eastern aspect. Soon he would have to make other arrangements, for the mew had been condemned. Soon he would have to buckle to and start eating, drinking, sleeping and putting his clothes on and off, in quite alien surroundings.
>
> He sat naked in his rocking-chair of undressed teak, guaranteed not to crack, warp, shrink, corrode, or creak at night. It was his own, it never left him. The corner in which he sat was curtained off

from the sun, the poor old sun in the Virgin again for the billionth time. Seven scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible. Sweat poured off him, tightened the thongs. The breath was not perceptible. The eyes, cold and unwavering as a gull's, stared up at an iridescence splashed over the cornice moulding, shrinking and fading. Somewhere a cuckoo-clock, having struck between twenty and thirty, became the echo of a street-cry, which now entering the mew gave *Quid pro quo! Quid pro quo!* directly.

These were sights and sounds that he did not like. They detained him in the world to which they belonged, but not he, as he fondly hoped. He wondered dimly what was breaking up his sunlight, what wares were being cried. Dimly, very dimly.

He sat in his chair in this way because it gave him pleasure! First it gave his body pleasure, it appeased his body. Then it set him free in his mind. For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind, as description in section six. And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word.

Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (1938)
(London: Picador, 1973, lines 1–33)

When beginning to interpret or decode these lines, we should remember that Modernist prose is enormously compressed, which means that it ought to be read with the attention normally reserved for poetry or philosophy. Brief lines allude to complex ideas, comic set pieces enact philosophical theories, and there is little attempt to relate the extreme situations and mental conditions in the novel to anything the reader might consider to be representing 'normality'. This opening contains many of the features associated with Modernist stylistics and preoccupations: a solipsistic mental landscape, an unreliable narrator, psychological and linguistic repetition, an obsession with language, a quest(ioning) towards 'reality', uncertainty in a Godless universe, the constraints of convention against the drives of passion, and black humour.

A Dubliner in London, Murphy is a quite typical Beckett (anti) hero. This is at least in the sense that he follows Beckett's idea of the human condition and so has a supple mind shackled to an imperfect,

cumbersome body: the one a sanctuary to which he wishes to retreat, the other a chaos which he wishes to control. This is one reason why he is literally tied up at the opening of the novel, as he attempts to negate the body and escape into his mind by achieving some kind of nirvana through meditative contemplation. For our purposes, this immediately signals a greater interest, typical of Modernism, in the workings of the mind than of the body. As discussed below, it is also a starting point for consideration of how the mind works, and, in particular, how a mind in extremity works.

As would be common in a Modernist narrative, the novel has been read as a search to climb inside the mind, away from the body's needs and wants: to be free from desire. On the superficial level Murphy is a young man with a gull's eyes and a yellow complexion who suffers from violent heart-attacks. His girlfriend Celia is a prostitute who is described via a perfunctory list of measurements and passport details at the start of Chapter 2 and yet is the most sympathetically portrayed of all the characters – Beckett calls them puppets – in his novels. It is Murphy's predicament that he is to be sought by each of the other characters in the novel while he only wishes to escape from himself. Murphy wants to flee the physical world and seek refuge in the indivisible, unextended, pain-free mental world, which is one reason why he later takes a job in a mental asylum. Beckett's interest is in the Cartesian problem of dualism: how do the mind and the body interact? They co-exist together like the yolk and albumen sealed within an egg, but no one knows now they are connected. In an attempt to represent this dilemma, Beckett toys with several theories such as Descartes' belief that there is a connection through the pineal gland and also the theological explanation, related to the issue of free will, that whenever the individual wills their body to move, God causes the action to be performed. Such concerns, though flavoured by Beckett's peculiar preoccupations, exemplify Modernism's fascination with the way the mind processes or projects a reality which surrounds the individual but which is often alienating and oppressing.

The novel is also deeply concerned with religious explanations of the universe and with questions of what it means to be human with or without God. The opening line of this, Beckett's first novel, reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun (cf. Ecclesiastes 1:9) and also hints at the belief that there is no free will in the universe. The sun has no alternative

but to shine, and in the second sentence we find Murphy sitting out of the sun 'as though he were free', suggesting that he, like the sun, is actually determined by his nature, driven by biological and psychological impulses of which he knows very little. This comment on restriction has a more literal embodied relevance in the next paragraph when we learn that Murphy is tied to a chair, a predicament that is quite possibly a parody of the philosopher Wittgenstein who famously used to sit on a deckchair beneath a fan in his otherwise bare room at Cambridge. The third sentence tells us as much about Beckett's narrator as it does about Murphy. This is because the narrator, who at most later times will appear omniscient, is undecided about the length of time Murphy has been at West Brompton: 'what might have been six months' (l. 3). It is one of the first hints that the narrator, who we have already realised is playful, is not going to follow the usual conventions of storytelling, but will mock them instead. So he has little time for the normal realist descriptions of homes and is content to describe Murphy's condemned mew as 'a medium-sized cage of north-western aspect'. The final sentence of the paragraph introduces another of Beckett's favourite techniques: repetition. Lines 8 and 9 repeat the round of eating, drinking, sleeping and dressing mentioned in lines 3 and 4. In this case, the echoing underlines the point that, though Murphy will soon have to move, there will indeed be nothing new for the sun to shine on. This is a Modernist preoccupation with repetitive, cyclical rather than chronological, teleological time which will be discussed later.

The second paragraph immediately matches Murphy's undressed body with the undressed teak of his rocking-chair, the perfect vehicle in which to be constantly moving and yet going nowhere. The difference between the two is that Murphy's body is not guaranteed not to 'crack, warp, shrink, corrode, or creak at night' (l. 11). The reader is then once more reminded of nature's unremitting cycles at the level of the cosmos and of animal sexuality, with 'the poor old sun [son] in the virgin again for the billionth time' (l. 13). The extra significance of this is that Beckett substitutes astrology for God as a system of faith for Murphy. The following sentences concerning Murphy's bondage are a typical Beckett set-piece in that they contain the detailed but flawed over-explanation of a situation containing permutations. Murphy is tied up with seven scarves: two on his shins, one round his thighs, two at his torso, and one round his wrists. The inadequate or

delinquent rather than unreliable narrator leaves the reader with two questions: where is the seventh scarf, and how did Murphy on his own achieve this Houdini-like position, in which his hands are tied and he is restricted to 'the most local movements'? (ll. 16–17) Beckett's points here are that first, mathematics, the purest science, does not adequately represent the world (for example, try to work out, to as many decimal places as your mind can tolerate, the exact number of weeks in a year by dividing the number of days in a year [365] by the number of days in a week [7]); and, second, that Murphy's mind is always ensnared in and unable to escape from his body, and hence is always 'tied up'. Bringing these two points together provides a clue to why Murphy later calls another character 'Thou surd' (p. 47). A surd is an irrational number, such as the square root of minus one. The mathematical way of recording these imagined figures which exist in theory but not in practice is with the symbol *i*, which, curiously, is also when capitalised the pronoun used to represent the individual, who is always an irrational and *ab*surd figure in Beckett's imagined fiction, where the perverse, neurotic, thought-tormented characters of Modernism find their fullest expression.

Murphy sits, sweats and watches the sunlight's play on the ceiling. A cuckoo-clock strikes the improbable time of between twenty and thirty and echoes the barterer's shout *Quid Pro Quo*! [one thing in exchange for another]. This business cry, signalling the difference between the commercial preoccupations of the capitalist world against which the Modernists pitted artistic freedom, is a precursor of one of the novel's major speculative philosophical themes: that the amount of suffering in the world is always constant, though it may change in form. The argument is that life is a closed system, that 'For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. … Humanity is a well with two buckets … one going down to be filled, the other coming up to be emptied' (pp. 36–37). The supposed comfort of this theory is that though things cannot overall get better they cannot get worse either. Things 'will always be the same as they always were' (p. 36); or, to return us to the start of the book, there is 'nothing new' under the sun, there is only redistribution: quid pro quo. Beckett suggests that this also operates on the divine level by reference to the fact that in one of the gospels it is stated that one of the thieves on the cross beside Jesus was saved and the other one damned, the moral being

that the individual should neither despair or presume. This suggests a balanced if inexplicable and unfair universe, to which Beckett often wants to draw our attention in a phrase which occurs in several of his works, as on p. 121 of *Murphy*: 'Remember also one thief was saved' (from St. Augustine).

The third paragraph tells us that Murphy does not like such distractions breaking into his consciousness because they detract from his pleasure, which is to 'set him free in his mind', which again raises the question of free will. Murphy believes that the freedom of the mind depends upon the appeasement of the body, a fact that the narrator, again breaking the frame of the narrative, tells us we will have to wait until section six to have described. Such metafictional comments are anticipatory of many postmodernist techniques. The last sentence tells us that 'pleasure was not the word' for the pleasure in Murphy's mind and this is a repeated trope in the book (cf. 'hardly the word' on p. 21, 'not quite the right word' on p. 39, and 'pleasant was not the word' on p. 66). This is partly a questioning of language's ability to represent the world adequately, and is also a questioning of boundaries: can pleasure be pushed so far that it becomes something else, such as pain, which leaves aside the other question as to whether pleasure is felt by the body rather than the mind?

The chapter ends by returning to its beginning: the narrator contemplates 'most things under the moon' while Murphy rests back in his rocking chair: 'Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free'. Murphy is eventually freed from his desires, when, while he is seated in his rocking chair, a gas leak is ignited and Murphy at last achieves the oblivion he has sought in a final 'big bang'. It is an ending that is inevitable in a world in which, reminding us of the novel's fatalistic opening sentence, 'all things hobble/limp together for the only possible' (pp. 127 and 131). *Murphy* is a very funny but deeply pessimistic novel and it is entirely appropriate that Murphy's will asks for his burnt remains to be flushed down the toilet in the Abbey theatre, Dublin, 'where their happiest hours have been spent'. It is appropriate to Beckett's sense of life's irony and futility that they will actually be scattered across the floor of a London pub in a brawl.

Having plunged into an in some ways representative Modernist piece of writing, and thus offered a microcosmic bottom-up perspective of a segment of Modernism through one literary example,

I want now to move to the other end of the spectrum of approaches and offer a top-down macrocosmic overview of the terms and critical stances associated with Modernism. It is only through the negotiation of these two understandings of Modernism, as specific textual examples and as a number of gross cultural movements, that the word itself can become meaningful.

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS: MODERN, MODERNISM, MODERNITY

Modernism is variously argued to be a period, style, genre or combination of the above; but it is first of all a word, one which exists alongside cognate words. Its stem, 'Modern', is a term that, from the Latin *modo*, means 'current', and so has a far wider currency and range of meanings than 'Modernism'. In the late fifth century, for example, the Latin *modernus* referred to the Christian present in opposition to the Roman past, modern English is distinguished from Middle English, and the modern period in literature is considered to be from the sixteenth century on, although it is sometimes used to describe twentieth-century writing. More generally, 'modern' has been frequently used to refer to the avant-garde, though since World War II this sense has been embraced by the term 'contemporary' while 'modern' has shifted from meaning 'now' to 'just now' (Williams, 1989). It is this sense of the avant-garde, radical, progressive or even revolutionary side to the modern that was the catalyst for the coinage 'Modernism', and it is to this meaning that Rimbaud appealed when insisting '*Il faut être absolument moderne*'.

It is now, however, perhaps both impossible and undesirable to speak of a single 'Modernism', and the practice of referring to 'Modernisms' dates back to the 1960s. Some critics argue that the term is simply an imposition, applied after the fact on a small group of unrelated authors and a series of genuine movements such as Imagism, and Vorticism. Undoubtedly there has developed in literary studies a recognisable but not immutable canon of Modernist authors and texts just as there has more recently arisen an ever-growing body of critics since the 1980s foregrounding alternative and other writers, female authors in particular, but also for example the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, and more recently novelists and poets from outside

Euro-America, whose work contests the ground that has been staked by the assertions, claims and practices of the familiar names and their critics. It is consequently invidious to have to say what Modernism was precisely because any history or definition insinuates many implicit exclusions. Modernism has predominantly been represented in white, male, heterosexist, Euro-American middle class terms, and any of the recent challenges to each of these aspects either reorients the term itself and dilutes the elitism of a pantheon of Modernist writers, or introduces another one of a plurality of Modernisms. This reveals that there is sufficient currency and investment in the term itself that writers and critics seek to contest its parameters and scope, its application(s) and meaning(s). Even the assertion that Modernism was internationalist (in the sense of European and transatlantic) raises a question mark over the extent to which critics can speak of a 'British' literary Modernism, just as in fine art the assumed precedence of continental painters has been questioned in the light of re-examinations of neglected and previously unfashionable British artists from the turn of the century. While the works of Picasso and Matisse have had more impact, there is an alternative history of modern(ist) art to be deduced from paintings such as those of the Camden Town Group and the London Group.

Despite those critics who argue that it is a specious label, the term 'Modernism' appears to be here to stay, though most of the points that would have been asserted of it in the 1970s are challengeable. For example, that it is fundamentally Euro-American is open to immediate querying when it can as persuasively be argued that Modernism marked the regeneration of a tired Western artistic tradition by other cultures: African, Afro'American, Asian, Chinese, and, more generally, the products of diaspora. Similarly, the view that Modernist writers simply rejected or broke away from Victorian literature, for example, has been more and more challenged as critics point out connections with rather than departures from the writings of such figures as Robert Browning, Walter Pater, Walter Swinburne, and even Rudyard Kipling.

'Modernist' is a comparatively old word which, in the late sixteenth century named a modern person and came by the eighteenth century to denote a follower of modern ways and also a supporter of modern over ancient literature. By contrast, 'Modernism' was first used in the early

eighteenth century simply to denote trends characteristic of modern times, while in the nineteenth century its meaning encompassed a sympathy with modern opinions, styles or expressions. In the later part of the nineteenth century, 'Modernism' referred to progressive trends in the Catholic Church. In literature it surfaced in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), to denote what he called a general and unwelcomed creeping industrial 'ache of Modernism'. The term also gained wider and earlier use in relation to other arts, but in literary criticism, the context with which this book is concerned, the expression emerged most notably – but failed to gain currency – with Robert Graves's and Laura Riding's 1927 study *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. However, it is also true that a conviction that there was a 'modern movement' came into broad circulation before the Second World War and the spirit of Ezra Pound's 'make it new' was consciously embraced by many and disparate writers such that, while it is commonplace to maintain that 'Modernism' is a partial version of literary history constructed and mythologised long after the fact, it is nonetheless true that many writers and especially their harshest critics recognised in the early decades of the twentieth century multiple trends toward radical, innovative, challenging and experimental writing that would remain even if the retrospective label itself were removed.

It was only in the 1960s that the term Modernist became widely used as a description of a generation of writers and of a literary phase that was both identifiable and in some sense over. Its literary roots have been said to be in the work of the French poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire and the novelist Gustave Flaubert, in the Romantics, or in the 1890s *fin de siècle* writers, while its culmination or apogee arguably occurred before World War I, by which point radical experimentation had impacted on all the arts, or in 1922, the *annus mirabilis* of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Katherine Mansfield's *The Garden Party*, May Sinclair's *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean*, and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (see North 1999). Post-war dates for Modernism's high point make sense in terms of British and also US literature but perhaps not in terms of any other in Europe. Its end is variously defined, in terms of time, as 1930, 1940, 1950, or even yet to happen, and, in terms of literary reaction, as neo-realism or postmodernism. As an international art term it covers the many avant-garde styles and movements that

proliferated under the names of Expressionism, Imagism, Surrealism, Futurism, Dadaism, Vorticism, formalism and, in writing if not painting, Impressionism. Modernist writing is most particularly noted for its experimentation, its complexity, its formalism, and for its attempt to create a 'tradition of the new'. Its historical and social background includes the emergence of the New Woman, the peak and downturn of the British Empire, unprecedented technological change, the rise of the Labour party, the appearance of factory-line mass production, and war in Africa, Europe and elsewhere. Modernism has therefore almost universally been considered a literature of not just change but crisis.

'Modernity' is a word first used by Baudelaire in the mid-nineteenth century. In his essay 'The painter of modern life' Baudelaire describes modernity as the fashionable, fleeting and contingent in art, in opposition to the eternal and immutable. In relation to Modernism, modernity is considered to describe a way of living and of experiencing life which has arisen with the changes wrought by industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation; its characteristics are disintegration and reformation, fragmentation and rapid change, ephemerality and insecurity. It involves certain new understandings of time and space: speed, mobility, communication, travel, dynamism, chaos and cultural revolution. This societal shift was differently theorised at the turn of the century by, for example, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber and Ferdinand Tonnies. Durkheim focused on the increased division of labour inherent in modern production, Weber on the disenchantment of a rationalised world, and Tonnies on the gradual move from the interrelations of the close-knit rural community, the *Gemeinschaft*, to the heterodoxy and anonymity of urban society, which he termed the *Gesellschaft* (See the Introduction to Bradbury and McFarlane 1976). The foundations of sociology lie in these attempts to come to terms with changes that were also being processed by the Modernists.

The most notable writers on modernity in the first half of the twentieth century were the Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists, such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's ninth thesis in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' provides a famous image of 'the nightmare of history' as the Modernists saw it. He describes an 'Angel of History': 'His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage