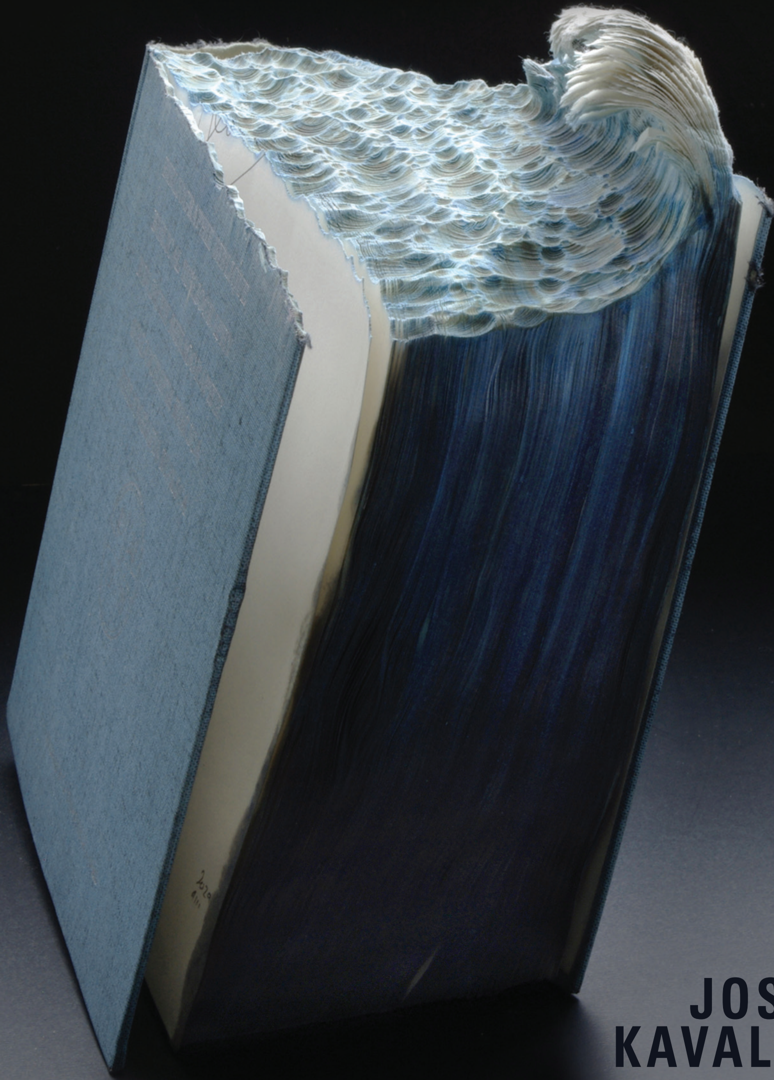
HIGH MODERNISM

Aestheticism and Performativity in Literature of the 1920s



JOSHUA KAVALOSKI

High Modernism

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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Aesthetics and Performativity in Literature of the 1920s

Joshua Kavaloski

CAMDEN HOUSE
Rochester, New York

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J. K.
April, 2014

Introduction: The Problematics of High Modernism

In a poem composed in 1919, William Butler Yeats prominently writes that "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."[1] With these words, he mourns the perceived collapse of the order that had previously provided structure and meaning to human life. The embattled center in this verse is not fated for complete dissolution, however, since the poem, entitled "Second Coming" and written in the wake of the First World War's destructiveness, anticipates the arrival of a new messianic force that has the ability to restore humankind to a state of spiritual and ontological harmony. The longing for a new center in this poem can be read as a reaction to the war and to the corrosive changes in social and cultural life initiated by the processes of modernity—scientific rationality, secularization, industrialization, and urbanization. But the poem can also be interpreted as a recondite response to the unmanageable heterogeneity of modern and modernist art. After all, modernism is frequently characterized as a disparate collection of aesthetic approaches which sought a radical break from the cultural, social, and political status quo of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[2] According to this interpretation, "Second Coming" also articulates the desire to reestablish order out of the shocks, crises, and violations of modernism's early phase. The poem's vision of redemption through a new center for art was arguably realized in the decade after the First World War. After all, the 1920s was the period when modern literature entered a central or mainstream phase that largely renounced the caustic and destructive spirit of the avant-garde, according to the narrative of many literary historians. One scholar writes that "by 1918 both the neo-Romantic pastoralism of the Georgians and the protestations of the avant-garde were giving way to a new cultural and literary mood."[3] This view, that literature of the early interwar period is distinctive, has effectively come to dominate the scholarly discourse about early twentieth-century aesthetics, notwithstanding Daniel Bell's claim that "there is no center" to modernism.[4]

In literary studies, texts of the 1920s are often ascribed to what is called "high modernism," but the very notion of a high phase is problematic, and it evokes two primary associations. For some scholars, "high" represents a value judgment emphasizing the elevated nature of serious art in contradistinction to the banality and inconsequentiality of "low"

or popular culture. According to this view, high modernism involves pure and autonomous art. Maria DiBattista writes, for instance, that "the high modernists in particular [were] devoted to the pursuit of literature as a work of art and not as a casual entertainment or veiled political tract."[5] A second association is due to scholars who use high modernism as a periodizing tool to distinguish a core middle phase from early and late phases.[6] Invoking this sort of historical understanding, Pericles Lewis states that "when literary critics write of 'high' modernism, they are usually attempting to distinguish what they see as the relatively mainstream works of the 1920s from the more radical experiments of the prewar avant-garde or of such later avant-gardes as dada and surrealism."[7] For Lewis and other like-minded scholars, the prewar avant-garde is an early stage of modernist literature that began in the late nineteenth century and continued until the end of the First World War. It encompasses diverse historical schisms such as symbolism, aestheticism, and decadence as well as futurism, vorticism, and expressionism. For its part, late modernist literature emerges in the 1930s in response to the Great Depression and rise of fascism in Europe. It is often characterized as satirical and overtly political. Although the term "high modernism" clearly contains semantic slippage, many literary scholars seem to presume some combination of both primary associations—aesthetically refined literary works which were published during the early interwar period. There is therefore an implicit yet widespread understanding that high modernism involves the artistic culmination of modern literature during the 1920s. Writing about modernism, Maurice Beebe states that "it makes sense to say that the movement reached its crest in the 1920s, then slowly diminished in strength."[8] There are some scholars who prioritize other phases of the early twentieth century,[9] but they generally represent a minority view and Astradur Eysteinsson writes that "the critical consensus seems to be that modernism was clearly not a dominant norm before World War I."[10]

Even when the decade of the 1920s is not identified explicitly as the center of modernism, it is often implicitly privileged. In theory, most scholars acknowledge that the modernist movement spanned a relatively broad period of time, starting roughly around 1890 and ending by 1940. But in practice, many of these same scholars emphasize and discuss literary works published in the 1920s. Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch associate modernism with "important authors such as Marcel Proust and Andre Gide, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann and Robert Musil."[11] It is more than mere coincidence that the main works of these authors were largely published in the decade after the end of the First World War. Numerous other literary scholars employ a similar model that implicitly spotlights the early postwar era. Ursula Heise sees modernism epitomized in the "novels of Proust, Mann, Joyce, Svevo, Woolf, Faulkner, Stein."[12] For Tyrus Miller, the early twentieth century

culminates in "the 'mainstream' of European high modernist fiction—Proust, Gide, Mann, Hesse, Svevo, Broch, Musil, Joyce, Woolf."[13] With regard to modern American literature, Frederick Hoffman writes, "the 1920s seem to have been from the start designated as something distinguished and special."[14] For his part, Michael North's book *Reading 1922* is devoted to the single year when Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses* were published. North claims that "the literary modernism of 1922 is distinguished from the larger culture of the time."[15] Lionel Trilling, in reminiscing about the time when students at Columbia University in the 1950s first asked him to offer a course on modern literature, writes with heavy irony that he would "let them have their gay and easy time with Yeats and Eliot, with Joyce and Proust and Kafka, with Lawrence, Mann, and Gide."[16] These scholars, as well as many others, tacitly associate modernism with authors whose major texts were published during the 1920s.

What explains this relatively dominant presumption that modernism culminates in the years after the First World War? Prior scholarly accounts have been unconvincing. For Amy Koritz, "the 1920s usefully foregrounds for examination a specific set of cultural strategies and the conditions motivating them."[17] Yet Koritz provides no detail about these so-called cultural strategies. For David Ayers, it is no accident that modernism matured after the First World War, since "the 1920s is the decade which heralded the arrival of late capitalism, with its armoury of mass media, its attempted consolidation of global hegemony . . . and its dialectic of promise and refusal in which a great many social alternatives are systemically closed down while new human possibilities are tantalizingly glimpsed."[18] Although historical accounts of this type help clarify the unique sociopolitical circumstances then, they do not provide any useful elucidation about what distinguishes the literary works themselves.

The notion that the expansive movement of modernism culminates in a center or mainstream phase known as high modernism in the interwar period is an artifice deeply fraught with aporia. Yet this notion has grown to dominate the scholarly understanding of early twentieth-century literature, and it continues to have a powerful hold on the imagination of literary theory today. High modernism, when invoked by literary critics and theorists, is most often associated with Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time, 1913–27), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), Ezra Pound's *Cantos* (1922+), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain, 1924), André Gide's *Les faux-monnayeurs* (The Counterfeiters, 1925), Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). There is no unanimity about this ostensible canon, however, and other frequently mentioned texts include Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* (Duino Elegies, 1922) and *Sonette an Orpheus* (Sonnets to Orpheus, 1922), Franz Kafka's *Das Schloss* (The Castle, 1922), Katherine Mansfield's

Garden Party (1922), Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno* (Zeno's Conscience, 1923), Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924–29), Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *Farewell to Arms* (1929), Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* (1927), D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), Hermann Broch's *Die Schlafwandler* (The Sleepwalkers, 1928–32), Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930), and Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man without Qualities, 1930).

High modernism is frequently associated with individual literary works since authors often evince differing aesthetic stances at different parts of their lives. This observation can be illustrated through two examples. Joyce's *Ulysses* is consistently identified as a foundational text of modernism in general and high modernism in particular. But *Dubliners*, his collection of stories published in 1914, is frequently ascribed to naturalism because of its "fidelity to the 'realities' of petty-bourgeois Dublin," according to Terry Eagleton.[19] For its part, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) clearly has some modernist features, but it also arguably participates in the established tradition of the so-called *Künstlerroman* or novel of the artist, a literary genre with roots as far back as the late eighteenth century. For many critics, Joyce's late work *Finnegans Wake* (1939) displays modernist features, but it also ushers in postmodernism with its self-referentiality and playful approach to language. The works of Thomas Mann are often viewed in a similarly differentiated manner. While Mann's *Der Zauberberg* is frequently cited as a text of high modernism, it would make less sense to apply the term to his other major works. *Buddenbrooks* (1901) uses modernist techniques such as leitmotif and irony in its depiction of the decline of a merchant family, but it also arguably continues the nineteenth-century tradition of realism. Mann's later novel *Doktor Faustus* (1947) explores the irrationality and nihilism of German intellectual life during the rise of fascism, but its historical setting and explicit political stance seem to disqualify it as a work of high modernism for many scholars.

There has been intense scholarly dispute surrounding this presumed mainstream phase of twentieth-century literature. High-modernist texts first acquired artistic legitimacy through the writings of contemporaneous critics who conceived and perpetuated an ideal image for art. According to this model, literature from the 1920s is preeminent precisely because it evades any didactic or moral function and epitomizes artistic autonomy or *l'art pour l'art*. Critics endowed it with a number of positive associations during the first half of the twentieth century. For high modernism's supporters, its privileging of form over function suggested its sacral aura; its commitment to aesthetic innovation demonstrated its creative genius; and its complexity and seriousness proved its intellectual superiority. Not long

after mainstream literary works of the interwar period were enshrined and canonized, they soon came into question, and Gail McDonald remarks that there was a "post-war metamorphosis of the modern poet from savior to tryant."[20] By the middle of the twentieth century, there was an increasingly contentious reception of high modernism, which often came under withering attack from a variety of theoretical positions. The litany of indictments is extensive. According to its detractors, high modernism is elitist, inaccessible, and overly aestheticized. It evades history and ignores the pressing social and economic concerns of its time. It upholds the white male patriarchy and participates in the domination and marginalization of women and minorities. It implicitly serves a reactionary political agenda and is aligned with fascism, totalitarianism, and imperialism. Despite a wide range of evaluative judgments, supporters as well as detractors largely take for granted that high-modernist literature embodies the apotheosis of pure art. Mainstream interwar literature is viewed, in a word, as aestheticist. These shared presumptions about high modernism coalesce into a critical construct that advances a particular scholarly narrative about the development of twentieth-century literature. This book explores and revises that construct.

The disputes surrounding the notion of high modernism mark a fault line in the practice of literary studies during the twentieth century. As early as the 1920s, the Anglo-American literary scholars, later known as the New Critics, valorized literature's formal qualities.[21] While these scholars initially concentrated on British authors of previous centuries such as William Shakespeare, John Donne, John Dryden, and others, they increasingly turned to contemporaneous works of modern literature, too. The New Critics were responsible for establishing the aestheticist model which elevated 1920s works by Eliot, Pound, and Joyce, but this model inevitably marginalized other phases and dimensions of modern literature. By the 1960s and 1970s, it became clear that a paradigm shift of sorts was taking place in literary studies. The interpretation of literature began to be dominated by intellectual approaches that were explicitly concerned with ideology and power. "Theory" is the umbrella term often used to describe these new approaches, and practitioners of it frequently sought to break with and overturn the formalist model of criticism. As a result, the modernist texts which helped legitimize formalism were also targeted. By the late twentieth century, the formalist method of the New Criticism had largely been eclipsed by literary theories with an explicit sociopolitical concern such as Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism, and cultural studies. Many literary theorists sought to displace high modernism in order to make room for alternative constellations of literary works, but they arguably ended up reinforcing its central position within the larger modernist movement. The more they attacked it, the deeper it became ensconced at the core of modern literature. Despite their many differences, formalist

critics and ideological-oriented theorists tended to share the implicit presumption that early twentieth-century culture pivots on the literature of high modernism.

Although the reception of early twentieth-century literature has often been partisan, some recent scholars have provided a more balanced perspective. One welcome development is the growing consensus that the wide diversity of works associated with modernism can scarcely be captured by the semantic singularity of the term itself. Peter Nicholls, for example, notes that modernism is too often treated as a "monolithic ideological formation" instead of what it really is, "a highly complex set of cultural developments at the beginning of the twentieth century."[22] This recognition of multiple aesthetic manifestations of modernism has set into motion a larger reassessment of early twentieth-century culture. Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz use the word "expansion" to describe three recent major developments in what they call "new modernist studies."[23] The first major development for Mao and Walkowitz is the expansion of modernism beyond the traditionally privileged space of the West to include Asia, Africa, and other geographical regions, which can then be considered as potential new sites for modernist aesthetics. The second development is a broader historical focus so that modernism now roughly encompasses the years 1850 to 1950 as opposed to earlier models that often assumed a narrower span of time. The third major development for Mao and Walkowitz involves a reconfiguration of the long-dominant antagonism between high art and low art, with the consequence that popular culture is increasingly being treated as a full participant in the early twentieth century. These three trends in the new modernist studies can be conceptualized as epistemological waves that expand outward and envelop what was earlier excluded and marginalized. These waves, however, continue to be anchored by an imaginary center. Geographically, high modernism is still the "self" that delineates the "other" identity of non-Western literary traditions. Historically, the 1920s still represent the center of the modernist period for many literary scholars, regardless of the degree to which it distends backward or forward historically. And aesthetically, presumptions about high modernism's elitism still justify and shape many scholarly studies of popular culture. Despite the laudable revisionary praxis of the new modernist studies, certain central questions continue to be overlooked. Stephen Ross writes:

> Given the recent revival of modernist studies and the emphasis in it on recovering a fuller, more inclusive and thus authentic understanding of modernism, we might well expect to discover a whole subgenre of modernist critiques of theory aimed at redeeming modernism from the more egregious misrepresentations it has suffered. But while some work has been done to recuperate modernism from

> challenges of regressiveness, it has been largely defensive rather than critical. . . . Modernist studies have continued theory's project of tearing down the fantasy of high modernism.[24]

Although the value of recent scholarship in modernist studies cannot be overestimated, this revisionary practice nonetheless continues to replicate certain assumptions about high modernism. Since it largely remains firmly ensconced at the core of the scholarly discourse about early twentieth-century culture, then the assumptions surrounding it need to be revisited and critically reexamined. This book is inspired by and builds on the work of recent scholars such as Jed Esty, who writes that "we can work against the idea of an old high modernism of the center and some new alternative modernisms at the periphery."[25] Only by remapping the center can the entire modernist enterprise be reconceptualized.

Modernism and Time

In the later examination of individual texts, *High Modernism: Aestheticism and Performativity in Literature of the 1920s* accentuates a major concern of interwar literature: time. After all, time entails not just the passage of seconds, minutes, hours, and so forth, but also the more philosophical concept of temporality. High-modernist literature engages temporal issues in multiple ways. On a basic level, it is often explicitly articulated in character dialogue, narrative description, plot, and theme. These sorts of literary phenomena are certainly worthy of further critical assessment and will help provide focus and thematic consistency. This book's concentration on time also allows for a scholarly examination of temporal tropes, including the development of characters, the subjective perception of events, the transition of generations, the arrangement of narrative, the progress of nation, and the discourse of evolutionary historicism. These tropes will prove significant in remapping high modernism.

Although time is not limited to works of the early interwar period, it does seem to reach a point of great intensity then, and literary scholars have long been aware of modernism's intense engagement with it. Fredric Jameson writes that literature of the early twentieth century foregrounds "the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality, the elegiac mysteries of durée and memory."[26] For Ursula Heise, there is an "interlacing of memory and expectation in the individual's experience of time, Jamesian flow, Bergsonian durée, or the cyclical returns of history as one finds them in the works of high-modernist artists and writers."[27] And Michael Levenson states that "in the first postwar decade, at a moment of vaulting ambition in the High Modernist novel, time became such a dominant concern that it can be taken as a cultural signature."[28] As evident from these three scholars, time is not just associated with the

larger movement of modernism but explicitly with high modernism. High modernism's concern with time is even attested to by earlier and less theoretically-informed critics. In Margaret Church's 1963 book *Time and Reality: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, the term modernism does not occur once. But her selection of authors reads like a who's who of the early interwar phrase of modern literature: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Mann, Kafka, and Faulkner. For Church, what these writers have in common is that they all explore alternative manifestations of temporality. What explains the high profile of temporal issues in the literature of the early twentieth century in general and high modernism in particular? Peter Osborne offers a preliminary answer when he identifies "Modern*ism* as the affirmative cultural self-consciousness of the temporality of the new."[29] Modernist artists were particularly aware of time due to their devotion to renewal and innovation, which they achieved in part through their use of nonconventional temporal modes in contradistinction to the normative and linear model of time that had largely dominated Western culture until then.

A few cursory examples will help introduce the way that literature of the 1920s explores and reworks temporality. Although T. S. Eliot's modernist work of poetry, *The Waste Land*, is endowed with dissonance, it demonstrates an identifiable preoccupation with time, for instance by conveying a sense of timelessness, a notion central to Eliot's all-important concept of tradition.[30] Present and past are repeatedly juxtaposed to one another and create a tension between historical and narrative progression on the one hand and the indefinite temporality of the lyrical image on the other. The character Tiresias offers an instance of this.

> I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives
> Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
> At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
> Homeward . . .[31]

Tiresias is fraught with contradictions—blind but seeing, male but with female attributes—and this character perspective overcomes the lineament of singular time by relating multiple unrelated events concurrently. This simultaneity is not the only temporal figure here, however. When temporality manifests itself as clock time, Eliot depicts it as numbing and harmful, as for example with the "dead sound on the final stroke of nine."[32] Here we see, in the words of one scholar, "time as trap, time as prison, time as punishment or exile."[33]

Time is also prominent in Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, which famously unfolds on June 16, 1904. By constructing a massive and dense literary work around a single day, Joyce is able to uncouple the lived experience of subjective time in the narrative from the linear time of the story world. This bifurcation is underscored by the stream of consciousness in Leopold

Bloom's mind: "Then about six o'clock I can. Six, six. Time will be gone then. She . . ."[34] The ellipsis after the female pronoun in this passage enacts the prior sentence's implication that time will no longer exist at a certain time. The paradox visible here is indicative of a larger time-based theme that has been addressed by several scholars. John Henry Raleigh, for instance, writes that the novel is "quintessentially concerned with the temporal and the myriad of ways in which time manifests itself in human consciousness."[35] As such, Joyce's novel figures time as indeterminate in order to explore the vagaries of human subjectivity. What is remarkable about *Ulysses* is its temporal heterogeneity—it presents multiple incongruous models of time, reflecting the radically different ways that it is experienced in the human mind.

Similar to *Ulysses*, Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* also explores inner temporal modes. The seven volumes of this colossal literary work distend human consciousness and destabilize the mind-body balance maintained by Cartesian dualism. Proust's work also explores the relationship of past and present. As a result, the moment of "now" is attenuated and becomes an ephemeral experience, as illustrated by the phrase "This notion of time embodied, of years past but not separated from us."[36] Here, the unnamed character narrator relates an experience. He continues by describing the anticipation that his mother would soon arrive: "Mamma would presently come upstairs, these sounds rang again in my ears, yes, unmistakably I heard these very sounds, situated though they were in a remote past."[37] The past intrudes into the moment of the present until time no longer appears to pass in a linear manner. In a prominent study of Proust's work, Julia Kristeva writes that "time in fact persists as the only surviving imaginative value which can be used by the novel to appeal to the whole community of readers."[38] For Kristeva, Proust's work explores the way that what she calls the "psychic time" of consciousness interacts with the extratextual world. Time here serves as an intermediary between imagination and action, mind and body. As such, *À la recherche du temps perdu* offers readers a refuge from modernity's vicissitudes.

Modernist literature's concern with time did not arise sui generis, and it should be understood, in large part, as a response to certain identifiable circumstances of the period. One of these involves the ways that thinking was shaped by national-historical issues in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In *Unseasonable Youth*, Jed Esty maintains that modernist texts "explore the contradictions inherent in mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire."[39] For Esty, nonprogressive national narratives utilize a temporal paradigm that carries imprints of evolutionary historicism and eschatology. During the age of imperialism, the self-understanding of the West involved unquestioned notions of progress, yet these notions are unsettled in literature of the period. After

all, the ideological construct of the nation and its relationship to the rest of the world are encoded as a problem in modernism, which proposes the countermodel of antidevelopmental temporality. Imperialism is just one historical discourse among the many that were prevalent while the modernist movement was unfolding. Esty writes:

> With the semicollapse of the universalist and evolutionist discourses of the Western Enlightenment, with the faltering of historical positivism, with increased political recognition of anticolonial struggle, with the obviously strained resources of European hegemony in the tropics, and with the rise of anthropological concepts of difference, it becomes difficult to imagine, at the turn of the twentieth century, a realism that could in any straightforward way conform to evolutionary or teleological models of world history. But it is not impossible to imagine a critical realism—call it modernism—that registers a heterochronic model of world-historical temporality, one that combines underdevelopment, uneven development, and hyperdevelopment across the global system.[40]

The normative narratives about progress mentioned here operate according to the monolithic contours of historicist time, which as a temporal model presumes unending advancement on multiple levels, ranging from the individual to the nation. These presumptions are exposed and disrupted, however, in mainstream modernist works by Joyce, Woolf, Mann, and others.

The intellectual discourse of the fin de siècle also helped remap inherited notions of time, and modernist literature was influenced strongly by Henri Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Time and Free Will, 1889), Sigmund Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* (The Interpretation of Dreams, 1899) and Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity (1905), among others. These and other thinkers are significant for modernism because they contributed to a revision of previously unquestioned assumptions about temporality. The preoccupation with time in the culture of the early twentieth century was also shaped by the numerous social changes and new technologies, as has been documented by Stephen Kern in his book *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918*. Yet while Kern usefully traces the etiology of modernism's temporal alterity, he subjugates art and literature to the disciplinary discourse of history. One instance of this tendency is when he writes that "the issue of sequence versus simultaneity was expressed by numerous artists, poets, and novelists and was concretely manifested in some new technology in addition to the wireless—the telephone, the high-speed rotary press, and the cinema."[41] For Kern, art reacts to scientific developments, and literary works by Joyce, Woolf, Mann, and others merely illustrate the social changes taking place in the early twentieth century. This type of historiographic method, while valuable in many ways, is unable to account for literature's unique aesthetic features and active

cultural role. One example is when Kern presumes that Mann's novel *Der Zauberberg* merely treats time as a subject in the dialogue between characters.[42] This reading effectively reduces the novel to a mere prose fiction document that attests to the period's historical context. Literary scholars have long been aware of the temporal dilation in Mann's narrative, for instance, but it is completely overlooked here. Kern's treatment of literature is ultimately of limited use because high-modernist texts do not simply use realistic techniques to depict technological and scientific developments of the early twentieth century.

Just as modernist temporality should not be reduced to a reflection of historical circumstances, it also should not be equated with other forms of art at the time. Modernist literature has distinct features that distinguish its engagement with time. The visual arts, for example, have a fundamentally different technique, as recognized by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who in the eighteenth century asserted that literature unfolds in time as painting unfolds in space. With regard to this difference, Lessing writes:

> One is a visible progressive action, the various parts of which follow one another in time; the other is a visible stationary action, the developments of whose various parts take place in space. Since painting, because its signs or means of imitation can be combined only in space, must relinquish all representations of time, therefore progressive actions, as such, cannot come within its range. It must content itself with actions in space; in other words, with mere bodies, whose attitude lets us infer their action. Poetry, on the contrary.[43]

Lessing's observation can be illustrated by Salvador Dali's 1931 surrealist painting *La persistencia de la memoria* (The Persistence of Memory). In this iconic work, watches droop over the physical edges of branches and tables. For one scholar, the items in this painting "represent Dali's exploration of hard versus soft in the physical world, and of the nature of time itself."[44] According to this and other similar interpretations, Dali seems to indicate that time does not have fixed, tangible qualities that can be measured or subjected to scientific discourse. This painting's approach to time differs qualitatively from the narrative mode that drives the genre of the novel. Unlike narrative, which unfolds in a temporal dimension, a painting is a frozen moment that is arguably incapable of actively participating in time. In Dali's painting, time appears as an evocative image for contemplation and discussion, but it is not experienced in the same manner as narrative is.

Philosophy is another cultural activity that can signify and contemplate time without being able to engage it directly. Heidegger's 1927 *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time), for example, investigates the role of time in ontology. Yet Heidegger is limited to enunciations about time and cannot actively participate in a temporal mode. A similar observation applies

to Edmund Husserl's 1928 work *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* (On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time). Here, Husserl is concerned with so-called primal impressions or *Urimpressionen*, each of which creates a new present in the human mind. But while Husserl reflects intellectually on the creation of experience, he cannot actually provide temporal experience itself. In disciplines such as philosophy, physics, and psychology, time is a frequently occurring trope in the early twentieth century, but it is an object of analysis at a distance from the perceiving subject. What distinguishes high-modernist literature is that it has the potential to enact time in its structure, form, and narrative. In short, high-modernist texts seek to engage the unmediated experience of time, and acknowledging this potentiality helps conceptualize the uniquely different cultural role played by literature in the modernist movement.

Although the textual analyses of this book highlight the temporal configuration of early twentieth-century literature, it would be reasonable to raise the objection that modernist texts are not alone in their concern with time. After all, temporal experimentation is also discernible in the literature of other periods. It plays a prominent role in Laurence Sterne's 1759 *Tristram Shandy*, where the eponymous character's life is retold in a nonchronological and fragmentary manner. Jeffrey Williams points out that "*Tristam Shandy* is unusual in its radical asymmetry, in its frequent shifts in time and level, moving backwards and forwards, without sustaining a temporal ground."[45] Sterne's novel is not alone in anticipating modernist techniques, and similar features can intermittently be witnessed in the literature of the nineteenth century, too. Referring to how some literary works manipulate temporality to create the impression of idiosyncratic subjectivity, Georg Lukács writes that "such an experience of time is the basis of Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale*."[46] For Lukács, Flaubert's 1869 work qualifies as a "novel of disillusionment" because it deemphasizes the depiction of objective reality and therefore presumably foregoes any engagement with actual social problems.[47]

Just as temporal concerns can be identified prior to the 1920s, they can be found afterward as well. With its use of self-reflexivity and technique of montage, the 1936 novel *Nightwood* by Djuna Barnes undeniably evokes comparisons with the literary works of Eliot, Joyce, and Proust. Tyrus Miller, for instance, views Barnes as a late modernist whose work also happens to share a few features of high modernism. He writes, "Barnes's characters mock the modernist appeal to disinterested awareness as a means of rescuing the 'profounder significance' of their doings."[48] Hermann Broch's 1945 novel *Der Tod des Virgil* (The Death of Virgil) depicts stream of consciousness in a manner reminiscent of Joyce. The skewed chronology and capricious narrative of Samuel Beckett's 1953 novel *Watt* also suggest techniques typically ascribed to mainstream or

high modernism. And William S. Burroughs's 1959 novel *Naked Lunch* involves frequent jumps in time and space.

None of these novels by Stern, Flaubert, Barnes, Broch, Beckett, or Burroughs were written in the 1920s, yet they all appear to share some programmatic similarities with the works of high modernism. It would thus be difficult to argue that the narrative manipulation of temporality in the literary works of the early interwar period is utterly unique. What, then, distinguishes high modernism? Unlike other literary periods, where temporal tropes can occasionally be noticed, works of high modernism share a common and indefatigable concern with time. Partially as a result of this phenomenon, scholars have come to agree that high modernism is detached from social issues. It is no coincidence that literary works of the 1920s by Proust, Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Mann, Gide, Woolf, and others are overwhelmingly described as artifacts of aestheticism.

Assumptions about the detached subjectivism and chaste stylistics of high modernism first emerged with the formalist literary criticism of T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, and others. These so-called New Critics supposedly sought a sacred vision for literature that would offer refuge from what they perceived to be modernity's quotidian and soulless character. They were soon challenged, however, in the latter third of the twentieth century by literary theorists such as Peter Bürger, Andreas Huyssen, and others. Despite the fact that theorists denounced the method of the New Criticism, their discourse often reiterates and reinforces the notion that mainstream works of the 1920s consist primarily of superficial arrangement, subjective interiority, and artistic ephemerality. A binary arrangement thus underlies this literary-historical shift, whereby the attention to aesthetic form by the New Critics was gradually superseded by a concern with sociopolitical content by theorists. In order to solve this intractable opposition, *High Modernism: Aestheticism and Performativity in Literature of the 1920s* adopts a synthetic approach described by Fredric Jameson as "the content of the form." He writes that this approach "constitutes the only productive coordination of the opposition between form and content that does not seek to reduce one term to the other."[49] Although form and content each have their own irreducible discourse, an examination of the tensions between them will enable new critical insights.

The claims about high modernism's aestheticist features have served various rhetorical purposes, but it is time to dispense with them since art is never merely artifice. A tenable starting point for an alternative perspective is offered by Theodor Adorno whose understanding of modernism has often been overlooked in Anglo-American scholarly discourse about early twentieth-century literature.[50] Adorno states that "the more thoroughly formed [art works] are, the more resilient they become to artificial illusion."[51] Even when art is not conventionally mimetic in content, its

form can still engage society in profound and penetrating ways. Adorno is somewhat evasive about this potentiality but provides elaboration when he writes, "Thoroughly formed works are falsely accused of being formalistic. Actually they are realistic in the sense that they represent realizations of, among other things, truth content: they actualize or realize their spiritual essence instead of just denoting it."[52] By addressing the process of actualization, Adorno suggests here that art is capable of enacting or performing critique in its very form. *High Modernism: Aestheticism and Performativity in Literature of the 1920s* builds on this model and asserts that "thoroughly formed works" of high modernism transform the extratextual world.

Modernism, Formalism, and Aestheticism

The modernist project, broadly speaking, entails a vision of art that diverges radically from the mimetic mode of realism. Instead relying on content to authentically depict the empirical world, modernism engages in linguistic play and explores new, nonconventional forms of expression. "Modernism has always been defined by reference to its formal properties," writes Michael North.[53] Because of a commitment to aesthetic innovation, modernist art forsakes the representational function of art and instead turns to artifice. Although the term "aestheticism" is imperfect in this context, it nonetheless serves a practical purpose by expressing a major feature in the broad trajectory of modernism. In a narrow historical sense, aestheticism refers to a cultural movement which emphasized the aesthetic value of art and literature and turned away from political, social, and ethical issues. Inspired by philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, and influenced by poets such as Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier, it unfolded in the second half of the nineteenth century and extended into the first decade of the twentieth. Writers of aestheticist literature include Oscar Wilde, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, and others. What distinguishes them is that they generally subscribe to "the position that the appreciation of art and beauty is a worthier affair than an engagement with life's quotidian affairs."[54] From a historical perspective, this exaltation of beauty can be understood as an attempt to resist the increasing commodification of art and to escape what was perceived as the banal cultural tastes of the rising middle classes. Aestheticism, however, cannot be limited to a historical phase of culture before the First World War with an overstated devotion to embellishment and artificiality, and distinct traces of it can be identified in the practices of impressionism, symbolism, and decadence. Indeed, the argument can be made that it pervades much of modernism as a whole since the literary turn to subjectivity, which was prominent throughout the early twentieth century, is itself a legacy of the

aestheticism of Walter Pater, the English writer and critic who was active in the second half of the nineteenth century. Pater is also significant because he anticipated modernism's later concern with time and influenced forerunners of modernism such as Henri Bergson: "Bergson's emphasis on the *durée*, the persistence of the moment from the past into the present, and bridging the present into the future, is in part a revisiting and revision of Walter Pater's famous, rhapsodic celebration of the moment."[55]

In the following pages, the term "aestheticism" is employed to describe the general tendency during modernism to ennoble the aesthetic domain and discount any social or didactic role of art. "Historical aestheticism," by contrast, will be used here to designate the narrower cultural movement involving the works of Baudelaire, Gautier, Huysmans, Pater, Wilde, George, and Rilke. This terminological distinction has two advantages. First, it helps differentiate the general emphasis on form in early twentieth-century literature from that in early twentieth-century literary scholarship, since many contemporary literary historians confusingly use the term "formalism" for both. The former will here be called aestheticism or aestheticist literature while the latter will be referred to as formalism or formalist criticism. Second and more importantly, the distinction between aestheticism and historical aestheticism helps elucidate a general presumption by contemporary scholars that 1920s literature principally involves a commitment to art's supremacy, if not always to a conventional notion of beauty: "Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, along with many other modernists, inherited from Victorian aesthetes and decadents such as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde the idea of 'art for art's sake.'"[56] High-modernist authors appropriated the late nineteenth-century idea of *l'art pour l'art* from historical aestheticism, albeit without the latter's emphasis on artifice and ornament. This appropriation manifested itself most noticeably in the interwar concern with style and form: "The word 'form,' then, makes the transition from aestheticism to modernism without any sign of embarrassment or apology. Although the sexual connotations of the word disappear, the emphasis on art's non-representational bent becomes even more pronounced."[57] Literature of the 1920s was less likely to be erotically indulgent because the moral code then was no longer as repressive as it had been during historical aestheticism. High-modernist authors thus had fewer moral restrictions to resist and subvert. What interwar literature shared with historical aestheticism was the conviction that art offered access to a sacred realm. Indeed, scholars have suggested that art was treated as a revered object during high modernism, replacing religion which had been increasingly discredited with the onset of modernity's rationalism and secularism. Mark Anderson points out that "the very notion of writing as a religious quest stems from the various aestheticizing movements of the European *fin de siècle* such as decadence, Symbolism, 'l'art pour l'art' or the *Jugendstil*."[58]

Because high-modernist texts presumably espouse the sovereignty of art, it is not surprising that many scholars view them as detached from life and society. When Fredric Jameson invokes the "high-modernist imperative of stylistic innovation," he stresses mainstream modernism's devotion to aesthetic issues above everything else.[59] Andreas Huyssen expresses a similar sentiment when he writes that for high modernism "the work of art is autonomous and totally separate from the realms of mass culture and everyday life."[60] This understanding of high modernism as detached from society can be traced to the Marxist theorist Georg Lukács, who criticized the aestheticist tendencies of modern art as a dangerous retreat to irrational subjectivism and even solipsism. In his book *The Theory of the Novel* (1920), he sharply differentiated between realist art which depicts the solidly "authentic" world and modern art which wallows in the vacillating imagination of the human mind. The modern mode was viewed as pernicious by Lukács, who writes, "Here the tendency is rather toward passivity, a tendency to avoid outside conflicts and struggles rather than to engage in them, a tendency to deal inside the soul with everything that concerns the soul."[61] This critique is further developed by Lukács in his later work *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1958/1963), where he writes that "the rejection of narrative objectivity, the surrender to subjectivity, may take the form of Joyce's stream of consciousness, or of Musil's 'active passivity,' his 'existence without quality,' or of Gide's '*action gratuite*,' where abstract potentiality achieves pseudo-realization."[62] For him, Joyce, Musil, and Gide, along with Kafka, Döblin, Proust, Dos Passos, and Faulkner all represent a distinct estrangement from any consensus about reality. These authors, who were later ascribed to high modernism, erode the human connection to the objective world through their practice of nonrepresentational art, according to Lukács. The literary depiction of consciousness effectively makes it impossible for art to be socially engaged, since it involves subjectivity. And Lukács clearly disapproves, as is evident in his statement that "modernism means not the enrichment, but the negation of art."[63] Literature's fundamental mission for Lukács is to articulate the tensions and underlying problems of society at a given historical moment. Only a mimetic literary style is presumably capable of changing the world through a depiction of social injustice and political depravity. In other words, art should imitate life in order to identify the areas where it can be improved. Lukács's indictment of modernism and his endorsement of realism frequently come across today as heavy-handed and overly ideological. But his main thesis has been influential among certain later literary theorists such as Fredric Jameson.[64]

There are echoes of Lukács in *Mimesis* (1946) by Erich Auerbach, who uses a historical approach to examine the changing way that literature represents "reality." His final chapter is devoted to questions of perspective in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, and he writes, "There actually