MODERNISM – A MOVEMENT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Anca Mihaela DOBRINESCU
University of Ploiesti, Romania

Abstract

The paper focuses on modernism as a movement of radical innovation in all artistic fields, the sweep of modernism being felt all over Europe and the United States in the first decades of the 20th century. Emphasis will be laid on the artistic achievement of several modernist English novelists and the way in which, by successfully assimilating tradition, they got integrated into the general movement of renewal.

The twentieth century was, from its very beginning, confronted with a state of crisis in all fields of life, social, political or artistic. More than any of the centuries preceding it, the twentieth was essentially an international one, characterised by a new spirit, under the form of a reaction against the established system of values and break with tradition. The key concept, shared by the whole Western world was that of 'the modern'. It would be then difficult to speak about distinct achievements restricted to Britain alone. As the two world wars demonstrated it, Britain could no longer play its role on the international stage independently, but as an integral part of a system whose functioning depended on the individual countries' ability to interrelate, while acknowledging one another's identity. Britain was just one of the components of the Western world and the rapid economic, social, political and cultural changes occurring in this world proved unlikely to leave Britain unaffected.

An unprecedented development of science and technology led to a complete questioning of the pre-established values of the previous centuries and forced the human mind to adapt itself to a seemingly dismembering system and try to cast order upon it. New values struggled to emerge and become operational throughout the twentieth century. The concept of 'the modern' is probably the most difficult to define in the context of this century, but what is certain is that modernisation occurred almost simultaneously in all fields and in all countries of Western Europe.

In 1899, the Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which he formulated the fundamental concepts to underlie the psychoanalytic method, based on dream analysis and free association. His work was to exercise one of the most notable influences on

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

the twentieth-century modernist literature, in that a new interest in the mind and the mechanisms underlying the mental processes started to be taken. Most significant developments in narrative technique that characterised the twentieth-century literary productions came to be associated with Freud's theories.

In 1900, the German physicist Max Planck developed his quantum theory, postulating that energy is radiated in small, discrete units, called quanta. In 1905, the German American physicist Albert Einstein developed the theory of relativity, which would become the basis of the later demonstration of the unity of matter and energy, of space and time and of the forces of gravity and acceleration. Not only did both theories usher physics into the modern era, but they also substantially influenced the new artistic perspective, making creators reconsider the relationships between art and reality.

Based on this development of science and technology, arts begin to claim their right to represent in a new way, even if this meant deforming them, the data of sense perception and experience. Modern artists started from the assumption that "whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide."(Woolf: 198) Since 1908, the year of Braque Exhibition, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Constantin Brâncuşi have forced audiences to rethink and reorganise their perception of life or reality.

The same tendencies of refashioning older art were present in music and dance. Igor Stravinsky's music broke the conventions of harmony and was characterised by asymmetrical rhythms. In 1908, he started composing music for Sergey Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, music of surprising dissonance becoming a perfect match for an unconventional choreography.

Gaudí's highly personal style, a mixture of neo-Gothic and art nouveau, also including surrealist and cubist elements, is at its best in the lofty cubist towers of the Templo Expiatorio de la Sagrada Família in Barcelona. The forms, colours and textures of the building still impress visitors, forcing them to reorganise their knowledge of what the art of architecture is or is expected to be. From the art nouveau style, architecture evolved towards an international style characterised by a new emphasis on volume, regularity and proportions, on technical perfection given by the use of materials such as steel and glass.

Given the extent of the modernist renewal, the very concept of modernism in the context of the different '-isms' emerging at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century has come under the critics' and analysts' scrutinising lens. Efforts have been made to identify those features that could function as the lowest common denominator for the distinct individual performances of writers whose works seemed to reflect the changes characterising the turn-of-the-century period and the first decades of the twentieth century. We might say that no previous cultural

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

and literary phenomenon has aroused similar intense interest among the public. Surprisingly, however, the elucidating efforts have been accompanied by further reluctance on the part of the audience to come to grips with the modernist phenomenon proper. The novelty of the artistic reflection forced audiences to contemplate the relativity of a value system that was replacing the apparent stability of the nineteenth century.

In literature, modernism has challenged the readers' expectations to such an extent that little consensus has been reached to the very terminology one should use in relation to it. In the 1970s, Malcolm Bradbury voiced his dissatisfaction with the lack of terminology that one could comfortably and unambiguously associate with the literary works produced in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. "Every so often, there occur in the arts certain severe upheavals which seem to affect all their products and radically change their temper. For some reason these are often closely associated with centuries: we can sense one such change that belongs to the eighteenth century, which we call 'Neo-Classicism'; another associated with the nineteenth, 'Romanticism'; and another associated with our own century for which we have no clear name but which we often regard as the most radical of all. There are, then, certain phases, often taking place over a relatively short period of time, when 'style' shifts and the structure of perception among artists significantly alters, and when the environment and prevailing assumptions of art are so radically recreated that it seems no longer to be witnessing to the same kind of world, or employing structure, material or language in the same way as before." (Bradbury, xxviii) The critic's worrying about the lack of an appropriate terminology, which indicates uncertainty about the content the terms are used to designate, seems to have been put an end to at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The literary history has finally come up with a name for an artistic phenomenon perceived as radically novel when it first started to take the stage. Besides, this term has managed to impose itself as indispensable to the understanding of the twentieth century if for nothing else, at least for the fact that, for lack of imagination probably, it got incorporated into the concept of 'postmodernism' as well. If we could have, by any chance, done without 'modernism', as the case was in various Western European cultural spaces, it is hardly imaginable that we could dispense with that of 'postmodernism', which has been almost unanimously assimilated in all Western cultures. The term 'modernism' derived from the 'modern' has been found satisfactory to subsume the various literary manifestations represented by the individual works of writers throughout Europe and the United States. Yet producing a suitable and widely accepted name for a contradictory phenomenon is more than a Christian baptism. It essentially means that a community of readers, be they 'common' readers or critics, have finally managed to identify a set of features shared by a set of sometimes disconcertingly heterogeneous works and thus produce a publicly acceptable definition of a new literary trend. Therefore, we would say that it is not so much the lack

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

of terminology that Bradbury deplores, but the lack of consensus regarding the specifics and particulars of literature in the first decades of the twentieth-century. Any form of consensus, no matter how fragile it might have been, would have led to modernism being perceived as a unitary and stable whole and, consequently, definable in relation with the artistic currents characteristic of the previous centuries. Yet, although we feel more comfortable nowadays with the modernist heterogeneity, which has been, paradoxically, tamed into the canon of modernism, we cannot ignore the fact that the individual literary contributions of modernist writers still resist categorisation and labelling. What we have learned to do, in time, is to identify pathways to the essentials of modernism, beyond the apparent differences among individual contributions.

It may not have been quite clear in the age that the twentieth-century art will depart so severely and abruptly from the inherited conventions. There existed little doubt, however, that the turn of the century was marked by a new spirit. Scientists and artists alike sensed that there had been a serious upheaval of the existing value system. This axiological upheaval generated a manifest reaction against whatever was old, which inevitably led to a desire to break with anything that represented tradition. The whole Western world shared the spirit of the modern. Various, and yet similar in intention, cultural movements emerged almost simultaneously in all countries of Western Europe and involved practically all arts. Derived from the term 'modern', 'modernism' has come thus to dominate, terminologically, the Western stage to such an extent that few will think nowadays about seriously contesting the fact that Joyce, or Woolf, or Proust, or Mann are 'modernist' writers. The term is used to designate the most recent forms of artistic innovation, an exacerbation of modernity in the attempt to break with any existing conventions.

It is generally agreed that modernism is a term used to signify "a paradigmatic shift, a major revolt, beginning in the mid- and late nineteenth century, against the prevalent literary and aesthetic traditions of the Western world."(Eysteinsson: 1-2) Although different theories and opinions are formulated as to the nature and depth of the revolt, there are not too many divergent views regarding the strength and indispensability of the concept of modernism. This convergence of views may be explained starting from the scope and intensity of individual artistic achievements at the beginning of the twentieth century. The spirit of negation and the necessity of renewal shared by the Western world underlie the whole modernist enterprise. The consolidation of the concept is largely due to the contribution of individual writers and artists who can scarcely be brought otherwise under one common denominator. Individual works contributed to the shaping of what was to become later the canon of modernism.

The artistic modernity of the twentieth century defines itself against the conventions of the nineteenth century realism. It is to be interpreted in the sense of a new perception of reality and of new relationships established between the work of art and reality. As Bernard Bergonzi pertinently

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

stated in *The Situation of the Novel*, "[t]he tradition of the nineteenth-century realism […] depended on a degree of relative stability in three separate areas: the idea of reality; the nature of the fictional form; and the kind of relationship that might predictably exist between them … It goes without saying that for many of the twentieth-century novelists and critics this assumption is no longer credible…"(16) Consequently, if there is an aspect shared by practically all modernist productions, no matter how different in appearance they may be, this is placed in the realm of the relations established between the perceiving subject and the perceived object. Therefore, the modern revolt against tradition does not mean complete rejection of the realist conventions, as we are sometimes wrongly inclined to believe, but a far subtler incorporation of this tradition, translated into the questioning of the relationship between the self and the outer world.

To be able to correctly interpret the modernist effort of renewal, the most reassuring assumption to use profitably as a starting point is that, in spite of their obvious experimental character, the modernist works are based on an assimilation and revaluation of tradition. This is a reasonable premise from which any analysis of modernism may proceed if the validity and indispensability of modernist literature is to be asserted in the broader context of literary tradition. On a closer reading of modernist novels, what one may have the chance to discover is that, through innovation, the modernist writers challenged their readers' expectations, by artfully exploiting the conventions inherited as part of the novelistic tradition. Thus they satisfied their readers' sense of literary comfort, while playing with their horizon of expectations, in an effort to refresh the audience's perceptions of what a novel was expected or intended to be.

Much of the shock caused by modernism is associated with the way in which the modernist writers' treatment of the taboo subjects of the Victorian period was perceived in the age. Although some of the Victorian writers had undoubtedly expressed, in different ways, their dissatisfaction with the Victorian value system, "the nineteenth-century novel was anchored in a world of public value agreed on by reader and writer."(Daiches: 25) The public value system was essentially centred on the idea of God and faith in God, reason for which it was interpreted in terms of a rather rigid moral code. The modernists developed an explicit interest in the relevance of the ordinary and the trivial as part of life in the new acceptation that they associated with the concept. They were also particularly sensitive to the complexity and depth of the inner motions of the self, which they considered to be more truthful than anything that the self could represent within a network of external relationships. Both their interest and this new sensitivity made the modernist novelists foreground particulars of life that had been attentively avoided or hidden by the nineteenth-century writers who had attempted thus to preserve the cohesive image of a publicly shared value system. The moment such taboo subjects became the subject matter of literature, the audience trained in the

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

conventions of the realist novel reacted vehemently discarding such experiments as frivolous, immoral, obscene, unsuited to the public moral sense.

The vehement reaction of some of the readers of Lawrence's, or Joyce's work may be partly understandable given the mentality still existing in the period, which was, at best, reminiscent of the Victorian one. One could say that the mentality that generated such reactions was not just a shadow of the mentality of the past, but rather the result of a clear projection of the Victorian value system in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, this reaction also raises significant problems related less to mentality than to some relevant issues pertaining to the field of literature. When a work like Joyce's *Ulysses* is qualified as licentious and scatological, the question that immediately comes to our mind is by what standards the work has been judged. If a writer like Lawrence is accused of immorality, it is certain that the standards applied to the reading of his work have not been of an artistic nature. Or, if the novel is an art form, it is by artistic standards only that it should be judged, not by moral, philosophical, political or any other standards that the handling of subject matter may encourage. A novel is good not because its characters observe the moral precepts and live morally pure lives. A novel is good if it displays a perfect match between form and content, between the method adopted and the material to be represented according to the novelist's intention.

In time, as the mentality changed and the readers' horizon of knowledge was broadened, the original shock has been attenuated. What has certainly outlived the period of cultural renewal when modernism asserted itself as an alternative to the realist tradition is the idea of experiment and radical break with the nineteenth-century tradition. This has remained the favourite starting point in the analysis of an undoubtedly challenging phenomenon. Yet, what we are too little aware of is how detrimental the insistence on experiment is to the overall image of modernism, as far as its integration in the system of literary tradition is concerned. Besides, the constant references to the experimental side of modernism tend to blur the anchoring of modernist writings in the solid ground of realism, which the modernists never rejected, but repeatedly admitted to have originally assimilated.

Faced with a fragmentary, shaking and far from shared value system, the modernist novelists devised a form capable of grasping the fragmentariness and relativity of the age, while constituting itself into the only instrument able to cast coherence upon an externally dismembered system. By focusing on the self, on the one hand, and on their art, on the other, the modernists meant to produce a stable and stabilising mental and artistic force to be placed at the centre of a tormented and disorderly universe. The modernist experiment should not be approached as a phenomenon interesting in itself, but as a solution offered by literature to the unity problems of an age.

James Joyce is almost unanimously considered to be the most radical experimenter in technique of all modernists. Yet, he constructed his novels in such a way as to ensure a correct ratio

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

between what the readers knew about and expected from a novel and what the writer intended to do as far as the redefinition of reality and of the novelistic conventions was concerned. Paradoxically, it was not Joyce's insistence on technique and investigation of the potentialities of literary language, which he shaped totally anew, but the inclusion of the minute realist detail in his work that shocked the audience. In Joyce's case, what readers found more difficult to come to terms with was not the technical intricacy of the narrative but what the adopted method managed to bring to the surface. Joyce was mainly interested in the inner life of the characters, more than in their coming into relevant relationships at the exterior level. Yet the reader's direct access to the character's mind and self, by the use of methods meant to render the inner life transparent, is always prepared and facilitated by a realistically achieved presentation of time, place and character.

Virginia Woolf adopts a similar strategy in her purely modernist novels. Her plunge into the character's consciousness, however, is more abrupt, even if less apparent at first sight. Although the concepts of space and time or the category of character seem to be used in ways that make them function as stable reference points for the reader, Woolf demonstrates that everything that has a certain degree of relevance in reality is only a matter of individual perception. By her extensive use of the narrated monologue, out of all the consciousness investigating techniques, Woolf effected a subtle and sophisticated narrative compromise between the realist conventions and the modernist's intention, letting the reader oscillate between what he expected and what he received from a narrative point of view. In Woolf's case, the generally disturbing, sometimes annoying, multiple points of view are expertly hidden under one narrative voice, that of an impersonal narrator, who loses, however, that position of supremacy that had been unquestionably relied on before. Woolf created thus a multiple-voice narrative able to render the fragmentariness and complexity of life, while maintaining the illusion of stability conveyed by the presence of a truth possessing, though not controlling voice.

In Lawrence's case, typical Victorian institutions, with all the underlying value system, such as family, marriage, religion, the individual's position in society, or education are foregrounded under the form of a novel apparently written in the pure realist fashion. Yet, from the very first lines, expectations are challenged, the reader being then confronted with the deepest zones of the human unconscious. The reader feels so at ease with the novel's formal conventionality that he may forget about the fact that the taboo subjects that Lawrence openly discussed in his work had been, in most cases, avoided by the Victorian novelists. Lawrence's innovation in form was less explicit than that of Joyce or Woolf. Yet the 'moral' shock that he caused in the age certainly exceeded the one produced by his fellow novelists. We could say that the radicalness of his experiment, more than in any other case, resided in the obvious discrepancy between the conventionality of form and

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

the boldness with which he dared discuss issues difficult to accept even for twentieth-century inhabitants.

What an unprejudiced reading of the modernist narrative literature may prove is that, although they were generally seen as radical experimenters effecting a total break with the previous centuries' novelistic conventions, the modernist writers directed their creative efforts towards an assimilation and revaluation of the literary tradition. Far from ignoring the 'common' reader, leaving it only to the 'elite' to decode the meaning of their work, the modernists incorporated the very conventions that they questioned into the texture of their novels, attracting thus their readers into the process of meaning creation. Convention and innovation are subtly balanced so as to ensure the readers' feeling of comfort, while refreshing, at the same time, their perceptions and knowledge. For readers to understand and respond appropriately to the challenges of literature, the difference should not be interpreted as a break, but as conformity between the new and the old. While placing their experiment against a background of already mastered conventions for contrast and comparison, the modernist novelists taught their readers to look with different eyes at the literary achievements of the past. Far from being an isolated remarkable phenomenon, they won themselves a place within the system of the literary tradition. According to T. S. Eliot, it is exactly this mutual refraction between past and present that is essential to the proper understanding of all valuable literature. "No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. […] The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities." (215).

Modernism is not, however, the only term used to express a significant revolt at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. There were also various other '-isms' emerging almost simultaneously in different European cultural spaces that presupposed a redefinition and a renewed perception of reality. The productions of the modernist English novelists prove that there is a shared core of modernism, consisting in the foregrounding of the self, doubled by an apparent

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

unawareness of the objective outer world, as a sign of a self-conscious break with the tradition of realism. Yet, they bring equally strong evidence that, while being rooted in realism, they divert from the realist conventions in an effort to assert their novelty and uniqueness as various facets of one and the same highly controversial trend. Emerging out of an explicit state of revolt, against a background of crisis, the representative productions of the various modernisms in literature, as well as in all the other arts, represent an attempt to assert the autonomy of the work of art, by intently, sometimes excessively, focusing on form and artistic language.

The break with the nineteenth-century realism was initiated in France by a group of young artists who were denied the right to exhibit their paintings in the annual exhibition of the excessively traditional French Royal Academy. They were derisively called 'Impressionists' on account of their technique that presupposed an individual impression of the object, and not the imitation of the object itself. The Impressionist painters offered a different view of nature, of great interest to them being the reflection of light on water. They tried to reflect nature in its movements and the natural pulse, rejecting the idea that nature was static. Laying great emphasis on the aesthetic value, the Impressionists insisted on the importance of painting as painting, starting thus a modernist 'tradition' of art as autonomous and reformulating the relationship between the work of art and reality.

In the interludes preceding each chapter of *The Waves,* Woolf manifests an explicit interest in the representation of light and its reflection in the water. As a matter of fact, *The Waves* as a whole largely depends upon the effects created by light reflected in water. By extension, the novel is centred on the various individual reflections of the real. The technique Virginia Woolf uses for the description of nature is quite similar to that of the Impressionists, this probably explaining why Woolf purposely avoids darkness, though it may have served as an element of contrast for light.

In line with the Impressionists' views, Woolf considers that what is perceived is more important to the mind than what is actually real. Reality is a matter of individual creation. The individual perceptions of one thing are seen as more truthful than a detailed imitation of the real, and thus more likely to contribute to the making of a comprehensive image of reality. This can be demonstrated by the presentation of the natural landscape through the different perceptions of the six children in the opening pages of *The Waves*, at various sensorial levels.

Impressionist in its rendering of individual perceptions or impressions, the Woolfian text displays incontestable features of Symbolism, in its exploration of the relationships between sounds, smells, and colours. The characters' soliloquies in *The Waves*, also suggest, in a Symbolist manner, that there must be a mysterious relation between the visible and the invisible. Thus, if the Impressionists' endeavour moved in the direction of subjectivising the objective, the Symbolist artists' task was rather to objectivise the subjective.

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

A poetics of fragments and discontinuity, Symbolism definitely set up the principles of the European modernism. The reconsideration of the relationship between art and society brought about a reshaping of "the psychological (or interior) landscape" as "a zone of the mind where objects pulse with the same inner vibration."(Nicholls, 26). The Symbolist rejection of any convention or authority represented a form of asserting the idea of modernity. The rational discourse is replaced by the poetic language of multiplicity and indeterminacy, which "originates not from a stable centre but from the point at which the boundaries of self begin to fray, where subject and object flow together."(Nicholls, 30) To be modern, from the Symbolists' point of view is to be able to go over imposed aesthetic or moral limits. The Symbolists consider that modern sensibility distinguishes itself by multiplicity and mobility, and their art centres on the potentialities of a multiplied self. Rooted in the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition, Symbolism constituted itself into a reaction against an objective recording of nature, life or reality by extension. The artists attempted to gain insight into a reality beyond the limits of the visual. The mere sight was infused with spiritual elements, allusions and ambiguities.

The concluding paragraph of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, with its specific reference to painting, invites the reader to focus on its Symbolist dimension. Insight is gained into the invisible through the visual and, in a more extended sense, through art as a means of objectivising the subjective.

The turn of the century does not confront the public only with ethereal and evanescent artistic representations of the real. Artists will also bring to the fore a more active and dynamic self confident that, facing a world of radical change, he has the freedom to oppose to it meanings of his own creation. Italian Futurism gave a more conspicuous social dimension to the interpretation of the modern and of the twentieth-century modernity. Modernity resulted from the impact the technological innovation had on the cultural tradition. The Futurists took an increased aesthetic interest in technology. Dynamic in simultaneity, Futurist art rejects the static, identifying itself as a process. Product of an urban, technologised society, the Futurist art is oriented towards the future, expressing its love of the dynamism and force given by technology. Literary Futurism invented a totally new language, reserving itself the right to combine words in an original way. The depth, verticality, and eventually meaning, presupposed by the symbol is replaced by horizontal juxtaposition of disparate images meant to unify apparently unrelated zones of experience. The ambition of the Futurists, which may be seen as a feature of literary modernism, is to create an art of totality, which can simultaneously appeal, in a manner initiated by the Symbolists, to all senses.

D. H. Lawrence is the English modernist most fascinated with the Futurist ideas, and especially with the Futurists' belief that physical objects had their own vitality and personality. He was in search for the Futurist inhuman will underlying all existence. His work is the one that best

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

embodies the Futurist love of movement and dynamism. Besides, he can be noted for the elaborate analysis of the feverish life of the metropolis, as opposed to the life in the provincial area. All Lawrence's characters are highly sensitive to the social, and even the technological, differently from the characters of all the other English modernists. When analysed in the depths of their subconscious or unconscious, Lawrence's characters emanate an almost inhuman energy that can be associated with the vitalistic energies that make flowers bloom and animals mate. This Futurist dimension is obvious in *Women in Love*, rightly considered a novel of, or about, the modern age.

The twentieth-century Western modernity was equally marked by the Surrealist experiment which, following Sigmund Freud's example, attempted to surface zones that had not been explored before. It is a reproduction of the mind in absence of any control of reason, outside any aesthetic or moral preoccupations. Art opens towards the unconscious and the dream in an attempt to free life in the recognition of the self. The probing of the mind constitutes the substance of literary modernism, inevitably paralleled by the invention and adoption of new literary techniques meant to identify and bring to the surface mental spaces that had been considered inaccessible before.

A ceaseless innovator in technique, each new technique always giving him further access to the deepest zones of the human psyche, James Joyce was probably the modernist most open towards the surrealist experiment. His interest in the human mind was insatiable, which prompted his literary investigation of practically all the imaginable aspects of the human mind. The varied techniques of rendering the mind transparent are encountered in Joyce's work, with all the linguistic alterations that the representation of the mind required. The processes of the unconscious are foregrounded, with a particular stress laid on the significance of dreams, in an attempt to give meaning to apparently disconnected and incoherent thought-associations and free associative ideas.

Expressionism represented a form of artistic renewal in the German cultural space. An art of scepticism, of disillusionment in front of a technologised society which alienates the individual, instead of freeing him, expressionism foregrounds a creative self that, no longer passive and subordinated to the object, struggles to give things a new expression infused with subjectivity. In front of a dehumanised, traumatising urban civilisation, the expressionist art subjectively relates itself to the absolute, tragically transcending reality in hallucination and phantasm.

From all the English modernists, Lawrence is the one in whose work the attraction to the ideas and principles of Expressionism are most explicit. His novels, especially *Women in Love*, attempt to offer a new vision of time and history, underlain by vitalism and evolution. With his intent focus on the social as much as on the individual, or on the individual's relation to the social, Lawrence managed to capture a climate of social unrest that deepened the individual's state of anxiety. For this reason, Lawrence's investigation of the self moves further than the mental, into the hidden zones of the subconscious and the unconscious.

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)

In the English cultural space, the dissimilarities between the varied performances of the modernist novelists may be accounted for by their manifesting a certain preference for the principles of one or several of the '- isms' emerging at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.

Although, originally, it was a strategy of negation, modernism synthesised the elements of innovation into what was to become "the *humanity* of the modernist enterprise. At the heart of that enterprise one discerns the intense need to shape a disordered world – not, in the first instance, either to reform or escape it but, instead, to establish, if only negatively, a relationship with it."(Wilde, 19).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bergonzi, Bernard, (1970) *The Situation of the Novel*. London: Macmillan

Bradbury, Malcolm (1972) *The Social Context of Modern Literature*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Daiches, David (1970 *)The Novel and the Modern World*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press

Eliot, Thomas Stearns (1979) "Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *The Idea of Literature. The Foundations of English Criticism*. Moscow: Progress Publishers

Eysteinsson, Astradur (1990) *The Concept of Modernism*. Cornell: Cornell University Press

Nicholls, Peter (1995) *Modernisms. A Literary Guide*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Wilde, Alan (1992) "Modernism and the Aesthetics of Crisis" in *Postmodernism. A Reader*, ed. Patricia Waugh. London, New York, Melbourne, Auckland: Edward Arnold

Woolf, Virginia (1979) "Modern Fiction" in *The Idea of Literature. The Foundations of Criticism*. Moscow: Progress Publishers

BDD-A23824 © 2005 Editura Universităţii „Petru Maior"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:52:59 UTC)