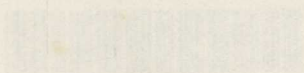


DOUWEN, K. E. M. A.

MODERNIST CONJECTURES

Modernist
Conjectures

A Mainstream in
European Literature
1910-1940



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C. HURST & COMPANY, LONDON

DOUWE FOKKEMA

ELRUD IBSCH

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Foreword

This book reflects the results of long-term research into literary history, particularly of the first half of the twentieth century in which Modernism was a major current.

Although we wish to share the responsibility for the book equally, the reader may like to know that the chapters on Proust, Musil and Mann were written by the second of the undersigned, and the other chapters by the first. Dutch readers will notice a difference from the earlier Dutch edition, *Het Modernisme in de Europese Letterkunde* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1984); the chapter on Carry van Bruggen has been deleted, and that on T.S. Eliot as well as the Epilogue are new. These, however, are only the most striking differences between the earlier Dutch version and the present one. In preparing the English edition, the authors often saw the necessity to rewrite and not simply to translate; moreover, the bibliographical references were brought up to date, and errors corrected.

Some translation was done, however, and we wish to thank Maarten van Delden for having assisted us in preparing the English version of three different chapters. Most of the translations of quotations from foreign literature derive from existing English editions; these have been enumerated in our list of acknowledgements.

We have set ourselves the following rules regarding the indication of sources and quotations. Titles of literary works are given in the original languages. When mentioned for the first time, titles in languages other than English are followed by an English translation between brackets. Quotations from French and German literary works are in the original language, followed by an English translation between brackets. Quotations from other literary sources – mainly Italian and Dutch – are given in English; the original text is provided in a footnote. If no source is given for the English translation, it is ours.

The spelling of familiar Russian names, such as Dostoevsky, Gorky and Tolstoy, departs from the internationally accepted system of transliteration of the Russian script which we use elsewhere.

In view of the highly divergent sources referred to, we decided not to include a bibliography. As a rule references are given in full only at their first occurrence, which can easily be located by consulting the index.

Last but not least, thanks are due to Margreet Davidse for her sustained efforts in typing various parts of the manuscript.

September 1986

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1. What is Modernism?

By distinguishing periods, currents and movements, the literary historian hopes to create some order in the overwhelming abundance of literary texts. With European literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth century the term 'period' has been preferred, and a certain consensus exists as to the description of the successive periods of Classicism, Romanticism, Realism and Symbolism.¹ With twentieth-century literature we tend rather to speak of currents or movements, such as Futurism, Expressionism and Surrealism, perhaps because we are still too close to the literature of the first half of the century to be able to discern periods. However, it is also possible that the quick succession and simultaneous development of different literary currents characteristic of modern literary history will forbid future attempts towards periodisation – unless the coexistence of many different currents is considered a distinctive feature of a period.

Much early twentieth-century literature falls within Futurism, Expressionism and Surrealism, but by no means all of it, and many of the texts which do *not* partake of the historical avant-garde have been considered of great value. Since the early or middle 1970s the awareness has grown that important authors such as Marcel Proust and André Gide, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann and Robert Musil, Menno ter Braak and E. du Perron should be studied in a coherent way. The examination of the common features of these and other authors has long been restrained by the fact that they never manifested themselves as an international movement.² They lacked the

1. See, for instance, the various articles by René Wellek on the concept of Classicism, Romanticism, Realism and Symbolism in his *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), and *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

2. The term 'movement' pertains to a sociological process. If a group of writers can be clearly distinguished, with manifestos and other collective publications, one can speak of a movement, e.g. the Futurist movement. If the texts produced by a movement are considered as literature rather than as the result of an intentional function, they can be said to constitute a literary current. Expanding a suggestion by Claudio Guillén, we consider the term 'literary current' as a complement, not only of 'literary period', but also of 'literary movement'. The literary current manifests itself primarily in texts, the movement in action. Cf. Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 421.

spontaneity and onesidedness that would have enabled them to sign programmatic statements, as the Futurists and the Surrealists did. They were too much intellectuals to be capable of writing manifestos and convening press conferences. They could not easily be brought together under one denominator, and for a long time were not recognised as one group.

The recognition that they had made a considerable contribution to European literature between the two World Wars, as writers of fiction and criticism rather than as poets, came at a moment when their part had been played out. They received their name posthumously. In his essay 'What Was Modernism?' (1960) Harry Levin characterised a historical phenomenon: Modernism belonged to the past and had given way to Documentary Realism, to the Existentialist novel, and – after the Second World War – to the writings of the Angry Young Men in England and the Beat Generation in America.³ The contrast between the

3. Harry Levin, 'What Was Modernism', reprinted in *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 271–95. Levin's conception of Modernism is shared by Peter Faulkner in his *Modernism* (London: Methuen, 1977). In their *Modernism 1890–1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane suggested that Modernism begins in the 1890s and gave the term a much wider meaning. Theo Hermans, too, gave the term a rather wide interpretation in his *The Structure of Modernist Poetry* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982). Matei Calinescu traced the origins of the term 'modernism' in *Faces of Modernity: Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). Michael Levenson emphasised the philosophical and critical background of Modernism in *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Nietzsche's legacy to Modernism was examined by John Burt Foster in his *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981). Ricardo J. Quinones focused on the development of Modernism, notably on a later mythical stage in Modernist writing, in *Mapping Literary Modernism: Time and Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985). W. Bronzwaer emphasises the position of T.S. Eliot and sees 'the new Classicism' as one aspect of Modernism in 'Igor Stravinsky and T.S. Eliot: A Comparison of Their Modernist Poetics', *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook*, 4 (1982), pp. 169–91. Lukács subjects Modernists such as Joyce, Gide and Musil to severe criticism in his *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus* (Hamburg: Claassen, 1958), which was published under the original title, 'Die Gegenwartsbedeutung des kritischen Realismus' [1957], in Georg Lukács, *Werke*, 17 vols (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1963–75), 4, pp. 457–603; a fragment of this essay was inaccurately translated under the misleading title 'The Ideology of Modernism' and published in David Lodge, ed., *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 474–87. For other publications on

Modernists and their postmodern critics marked the end of Modernism. Stephen Spender, too, emphasised that Modernism belonged to the past. He distinguished between 'the contemporary' and 'the modern'. The 'contemporary' fully participates in the modern world and accepts the historical forces which confront him with reality. The 'contemporary' takes sides. Like Spender himself, who saw the imminent danger of fascism and went to Spain to join the Republicans,⁴ the 'contemporary' seeks political commitment. The 'modern' (we would say 'Modernist') writer may be 'acutely conscious of the contemporary scene, but he does not accept its values'.⁵ Here Spender points to an attitude which Du Perron admired so much in Gide, who in 1937 had written: 'En désaccord avec son temps – c'est là ce qui donne à l'artiste sa raison d'être'⁶ ('In disagreement with one's time – that is what justifies being an artist'). Earlier, in his poem 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (1920), Ezra Pound had hinted at the artistic distance from contemporaneous events:

For three years, out of key with his time,
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry. . . .
. . . seeing he had been born
In a half-savage country, out of date.⁷

The Modernist does not commit himself. He considers, and is critical – also with regard to his own criticism. If there are traces of a commitment, it is primarily of a cultural, not of a social or political nature: 'With his sensibility he is committed to the present; with his intellect he is committed to criticizing that present by applying to it his realization of the past.'⁸

Modernism, see the review article by Reinhold Schiffer, 'Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975', *Poetica*, 9 (1977), pp. 130–9, and, last but not least, Alistair Davies, *An Annotated Critical Bibliography of Modernism* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, and Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1982).

4. Valentine Cunningham, *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 30.
5. Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), p. 78.
6. E. du Perron, *Verzameld Werk*, 7 vols (Amsterdam: Van Oorschot, 1955–9), 6, p. 477. Du Perron quotes from the entry of 6 July 1937, in Gide's *Journal 1889–1939*; cf. the Pléiade edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 1266.
7. Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 173. First published 1928.
8. Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern*, p. 78.

Different from the Expressionists, the Futurists and the Surrealists, the Modernists have a preference for narrative prose, but it is a kind of narrative that differs from the Realist novel. The Modernist interpretation of the world is provisional, fragmentary. The Modernists do not believe in definite explanations; they are sceptics rather than enthusiasts. They are interested in the various ways in which knowledge of the world can be worded and transmitted, but consider the actual transfer of knowledge as something of secondary importance. They detest every form of dogmatism, and instead propound their careful hypotheses.

In short, they do not trust the attempts at a comprehensive description and explanation of the world which characterises the great Realist novels of the nineteenth century. They also lack the belief in a higher, absolute truth that underpins Symbolist poetry. The Modernists present their intellectual hypotheses in arguments which some moments later they may be eager to qualify or even revoke. They emphasise the value of the intellectual consideration and reconsideration; here, we think of the extensive dialogues on intellectual issues in Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain), Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (The Counterfeiters), and Du Perron's *Het Land van Herkomst* (Country of Origin). Since they are well-suited to express intellectual reflection, it is letters, the diary and the essay which occupy a position of special prominence among the writings of the Modernists. This should indicate in a very general way what our concept of Modernism is. Before continuing with our characterisation of Modernist texts, some methodological observations are necessary. At the end of this chapter we shall present a more elaborate description of Modernism.

The Object of Examination

If the common features of a number of literary texts are to be traced, the student of literature cannot be restricted to studying the text as a unique phenomenon. The text remains a crucial element of literary history, but the question arises which texts and which aspects of those texts are to be examined.

In the first place we shall respect the well-known difference between the text as material object and the interpreted or concretised text, or, in the terminology of Jan Mukarovsky, between the text as 'artifact' and

as 'aesthetic object'.⁹ In their material aspect, all texts are in principle alike; only after they have been read can their different shape and quality be distinguished. The decision whether a particular text should be called literary is being taken by readers while reading the text. As we wish to examine literary texts, we shall focus on texts which at some time have been accepted by particular groups of readers as being 'literary'.¹⁰ The period of literary history we wish to deal with has its basis in the judgement of particular readers.

Here we should point out the following problems: (1) the term 'literary' in the last sentence but one needs further explanation; (2) the question of who the readers are in whose judgement we are interested must be answered; and (3) the basis of the dynamics of literary history must be examined. We have observed that in twentieth-century literature there are different currents and movements, some clearly successive, but others coexisting. What are the factors behind the succession of these literary systems or the rise of rival systems?

(1) The decision whether a particular text is to be called literary depends on individual readers or a community of readers. However, readers even if they are critics, will not always make an explicit judgement about whether a text is literary or not. In such a case we assume – and this assumption is certainly applicable to modern, if not to earlier times – that readers consider a text to be literary if in some way or another it has produced an aesthetic effect upon them. The effect of the text is aesthetic if readers read the text not primarily as a source of general knowledge or as an exhortation to action, but as conveying a *new vision* which has no immediate pragmatic value. Apart from the aesthetic effect, some knowledge can certainly be transmitted, and readers can also be persuaded in general terms to make a commitment to action, but the aesthetic function of the text leads primarily to a perceptual stage which

9. Jan Mukarovsky, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, trans. Mark E. Suino, Michigan Slavic Contributions (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970), p. 90. This distinction has been widely accepted, although sometimes another terminology is preferred. Wolfgang Iser, for instance, does not speak of 'artifact', but of 'Appellstruktur' in *Die Appellstruktur der Texte: Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1970), and Götz Wienold uses the term 'Ausgangstext' in *Semiotik der Literatur* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972), p. 27.

10. Cf. Felix Vodicka, *Die Struktur der literarischen Entwicklung*, with an introduction by Jurij Striedter (Munich: Fink, 1976), p. 30.

focuses on *models* of knowledge and action rather than on particular knowledge and action.¹¹

The cognitive and persuasive functions of texts are certainly not completely suppressed by the aesthetic function.¹² On the contrary, although the aesthetic function may dominate the cognitive and persuasive functions, the latter can under certain conditions be particularly effective. Because of the non-committal aesthetic context in which they occur, the cognitive and persuasive elements of the message may find readers off-guard concerning areas which they prefer to ignore, or which are taboo.

Although, in agreement with Mukarovský, we assume that any text can have an aesthetic function,¹³ it cannot be denied that certain texts have a greater chance than other texts to produce an aesthetic effect among a particular group of readers. Apparently there is a correlation between the quality of certain texts and the aesthetic effect they produce among a particular reading public in a particular situation. We might almost posit that, if we know both the text and the disposition of readers, it is possible to predict with a considerable degree of accuracy whether they will consider a text to be aesthetic.

This position derives from the hypothesis that the aesthetic effect of a text results from a particular relation between the world described in the text and the real world as experienced by readers. The aesthetic effect can materialise only if there is both similarity and difference between these worlds. With modern literature the necessity of a difference has been emphasised – e.g. by Broder Christiansen who introduced the concept of *Differenzempfindung* (differential experience), by Hans Robert Jauss who elaborated on the violation of the reader's expectations, and by Jurij Lotman who distinguished the 'aesthetics of opposition'.¹⁴ What has

11. For the conception of the text as a model of the world, and literature as a modelling system, see Jurij M. Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Ronald Vroon, Michigan Slavic Contributions (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1977).
12. Cf. Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', in Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language* (New York: Technology Press of the M.I.T., 1960), pp. 350–78.
13. Mukarovský, *Aesthetic Function*, p. 28.
14. Broder Christiansen, *Philosophie der Kunst* (Hanau: Clauss and Feddersen, 1909), p. 118; Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), or the English translation: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, Introduction by Paul de Man (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, and Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982); Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, chapter 9.

often been neglected, however, is that the elements which readers see as deviant belong to things they consider relevant; otherwise, the deviation would not even have caught their attention. In order to be effective, the innovation of textual devices must relate to themes which are crucial to the readers' lives. This explains the persistence of traditional topics in modern literature: love and death, the relation between parents and children, the individual and the community, and other anthropological constants. Although there are also literary themes which have no 'eternal' value, important formal innovations in literature usually relate to issues highly relevant to large groups of readers.

(2) Since readers' lives are determined by historical and social conditions as well as by personal circumstances, we cannot ignore the situation readers are in at the time when they are reading. Literary communication is initiated by the writer, whose biography and creative intentions we know quite well, particularly in modern literature. The material text or artifact also provides a firm basis for us to examine the communication situation. Readers, however, are heterogeneous: there are the early ones, who read Modernist texts immediately after publication or even in manuscript, and there are later ones who are still reading the texts and in doing so make direct or indirect use of the many critical comments which have appeared in the mean time. The first group is restricted, but the second is very numerous. The wide circulation and corresponding appreciation of Joyce's *Dubliners* since the 1960s are in sharp contrast with the hesitant judgement of those early readers who, in their capacity as publishers or advisers to publishers, delayed the printing of the book.¹⁵ Readers can be differentiated according to the time in which they live, their country of residence, the language they read (do they read the text in the original or in translation?), and their social group.

In determining readers' social status, we are primarily interested in their position in relation to literary life, i.e. the production, reception and distribution of literature. It is their relation to literature rather than their financial or general social position, which is to be examined. Are they professional or 'general' readers? Does their reception of a text lead towards a new text, literary criticism or another type of reception document, which is to play a role in literary life?¹⁶ The main variants of

15. James Joyce, *Selected Letters*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 81-90 (letters of May and June 1906), pp. 197-9 (17 August 1911), and pp. 208-9 (30 November 1913).

16. Elrud Ibsch, 'Receptietheorie: Een positiebepaling ten aanzien van