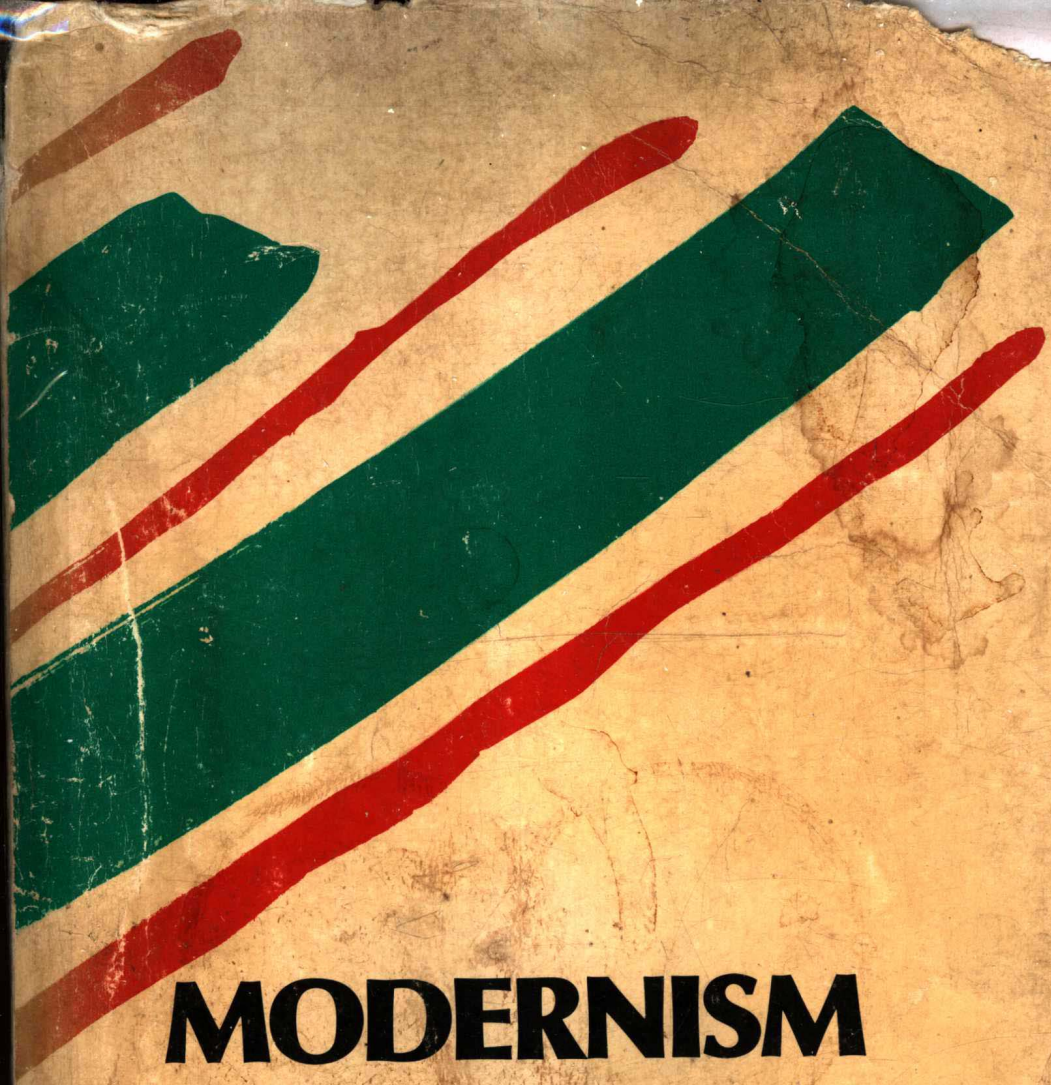

MODERNISM IN LITERATURE

BENDER
ARMSTRONG
BRIGGUM
KNOBLOCH

MODERNISM IN LITERATURE

TODD K. BENDER University of Wisconsin, Madison

NANCY ARMSTRONG Instituo de Estudos Norte-Americanos
Universities of Coimbro and Oporto, Portugal

SUE M. BRIGGUM University of Wisconsin, Madison

FRANK A. KNOBLOCH University of Wisconsin, Madison

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON
New York Chicago San Francisco Atlanta
Dallas Montreal Toronto

7 8 9 0 059 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Modernism in literature.

1. Literature, Modern—20th century. 2. Modernism (Literature) I. Bender, Todd K.
PN6014.M325 808.8'01 76-43371
ISBN 0-03-015186-4

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Associated Press for the story on page 13.

THOMAS HARDY: "Channel Firing" and "Convergence of the Twain" from *Collected Poems* by Thomas Hardy. Copyright 1925 by Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. and the Trustees of the Hardy Estate and Macmillan London and Basingstoke.

ROBERT FROST: "A Hillside Thaw," "Acquainted with the Night," "Two Tramps in Mud Time," "Desert Places," "Design," and "Directive" from *The Poetry of Robert Frost* edited by Edward Connery Lathem. Copyright 1923, 1928, 1930, 1939, 1947, © 1969 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Copyright 1936, 1951, © 1956, 1958 bv Robert Frost. Copyright © 1964, 1967, 1975 by Lesley Frost Ballantine. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers.

WILFRED OWEN: "Greater Love" and "Strange Meeting" from *Collected Poems* by Wilfred Owen. Copyright Chatto & Windus, Ltd. 1946, © 1963. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation, The Owen Estate, and Chatto & Windus.

SHERWOOD ANDERSON: "The Book of the Grotesque," "Hands," and "Godliness" from *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson. Copyright 1919 by B. W. Huebach, Inc. Copyright renewed 1947 by Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of The Viking Press, Inc.

D. H. LAWRENCE: "The Odour of Chrysanthemums" from *The Complete Short Stories of D. H. Lawrence,* Volume II. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of The Viking Press, Inc. "The Woman Who Rode Away." Copyright 1928 by D. H. Lawrence and renewed 1956 by Frieda Lawrence Ravagli. Reprinted from *The Later D. H. Lawrence* by D. H. Lawrence, edited by William York Tindall, by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

JEAN TOOMER: "Blood-Burning Moon" from *Cane* by Jean Toomer. Copyright 1923 by Boni & Liveright. Copyright renewed 1951 by Jean Toomer. Reprinted by permission of Liveright Publishing Corporation.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD: "Winter Dreams" (copyright 1922 by Frances Scott Fitzgerald Lanahan) is reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons from *All the Sad Young Men.*

WILLIAM FAULKNER: "Barn Burning." Copyright 1939 and renewed 1967 by Estelle Faulkner and Jill Faulkner Summers. Reprinted from *Collected Stories of William Faulkner,* by William Faukner, by permission of Random House, Inc.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY: "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (copyright 1936 by Ernest Hemingway) is reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons from *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* by Ernest Hemingway.

JAMES T. FARRELL: "A Front-page Story" and "The Scoop." Reprinted from *The Short Stories of James T. Farrell* by permission of the publisher, Vanguard Press, Inc. Copyright 1935, 1937 by Vanguard Press, Inc. Copyright renewed 1963, 1965 by James T. Farrell.

RICHARD WRIGHT: "The Man Who Lived Underground" copyright © 1944 by L. B. Fischer Publishing Co. from *Eight Men* copyright © 1961, 1940 by Richard Wright, published originally by The World Publishing Company, with the permission of Thomas Y. Crowell Co., Inc.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR: "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." Copyright, 1953, by Flannery O'Connor. Reprinted from her volume, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories,* by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

ALAN SILLITOE: "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner." From *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* by Alan Sillitoe. Copyright © 1959 by Alan Sillitoe. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

TERRY SOUTHERN: "Twirling at Ole Miss" from *Red Dirt Marijuana and Other Tastes.* Copyright © 1963 by Terry Southern. Reprinted by permission of The Sterling Lord Agency.

JOAN DIDION: "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream" Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. from *Slouching towards Bethlehem* by Joan Didion. Copyright © 1966, 1968 by Joan Didion.

PREFACE

Modernism in Literature is designed for use in courses introducing the fundamentals of reading and writing about literature as well as in surveys of the modern age. We realize, of course, that no two instructors would put together the same anthology of modern literature, and we do not pretend to offer a "standard" reading list. We have tried to make a text flexible enough to accommodate both a variety of pedagogical approaches and a wide range of student abilities. Because there is more than enough material for two semesters' reading, each instructor can tailor the reading list to the needs of particular students, those new to college-level English or the experienced upper-class students who have chosen to focus on the twentieth century.

Our Contents includes selections from nearly all the major figures of the modern period and from the more interesting contemporary writers as well. Along with a broad selection of short stories, there are six works of novel or novella length, and in addition to poems of the length usually considered tolerable for undergraduates, we have included *The Waste Land,* complete with the author's notes, and an entire book from Williams' *Paterson.* Whenever possible we have chosen major works. Rather than one of Woolf's short stories, for example, you will find a chapter from the major document, *A Room of One's Own;* for the same reason, the first chapter of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* accompanies one of the stories from *The Dubliners.* Our selection of classics is complemented by several experimental works rarely found in anthologies of this kind and by other pieces collected here for the first time. We consider some of the New Journalism, stories by South American fabulists, Rhys's long-overlooked novel, and Ondaatje's experimental narrative more interesting and teachable than the usual anthology selections. Although we have represented all the basic literary genres, the selection is obviously balanced in favor of fiction. The addition of one supplementary text, perhaps a collection of drama or contemporary poetry, will easily shift the balance in favor of the instructor's personal preference.

The three categories that organize these readings—Realism, Expressionism, and Impressionism—reflect our critical inclinations as well as the response of our students. We have found these conceptual categories superior to a straight historical arrangement in encouraging individual critical awareness. The categories are based on general literary principles that can be defined in terms of one author and applied to another, incrementally leading the student toward independent reading. Our organization remains flexible, however. In fact, some of our best class discussions developed when students disputed the placement of works in one category or another or when they challenged the distinctions between the categories themselves. We feel that this arrangement provokes fundamental considerations about the nature of art and leads students to original insights into the nature of modern culture, but if you find our orientation too technical, you can easily shift the focus from aesthetic movements to theme. The works under Realism explore possible relationships between man and a social or natural environment; in Expressionism, the artist represents the unique world of self; and Impressionism explores the act of perception as the individual mind and the objective world are conjoined.

Alternatively, if you wish to emphasize the nature of literature in general rather than the nature of modernism, the critical guide at the back of this book provides a ready-made program of study. A class can progress step-by-step

through the nine aspects of literary language we have described and apply these concepts to an appropriate reading list. Modern literature is especially interesting for the very reason that it has not been irrevocably packaged and pigeonholed like the literary productions of earlier epochs, and while our organization seems logically coherent, pedagogically sound, and refreshingly new to us, it is primarily intended to encourage debate and critical activity on the part of students rather than to do the thinking for them.

We have designed our critical aids so as to incorporate within this single text the advantages of such supplements as the MLA style format, a glossary of literary terms, an introduction to critical approaches to literature, and a "how to write" handbook. More importantly, our critical aids are designed to bring students to a level of competence as quickly and easily as possible, first, by absolutely avoiding techniques and concepts we ourselves consider useless, and, secondly, by removing some of the mystery from the processes of literary study. Our "critical guide" is composed of nine conventions basic to the critical activity that can be mastered by the average student in a semester. This method enables the increasing number of students who have little prior training in English to progress rapidly toward proficient writing. Our Index of Useful Literary Terms is composed of terms that are less basic but still important in widening the scope of critical awareness with historical information or brief summaries of more specialized approaches to literature. These terms always include at least one application to a work in this text, and we've found that they provide convenient discussion or paper topics for the teacher to assign or for the ambitious student to discover on his own.

In presenting these aids, we have tried to remove the guesswork, the uncertain process of trial and error, which so often distresses the student of literature. To achieve this end, we have relied on examples to clarify our ideas. Exemplary work produced by real students in real introductory-level classrooms is worth more to other students than a thousand *dos* and *don'ts*, and accordingly we have devoted most of the space concerned with writing essays to essays written by our students. In the instructor's manual accompanying this text, we have also used the student as our guide and have repeated the questions and projects which have produced the best classroom results. Our critical aids are presented as useful suggestions, not iron-clad prescriptions. We feel that modern art raises more questions than it answers, and for us to pretend otherwise would be to falsify the nature of our material, denying the student the challenge and possibility for originality it affords.

We urge you to help us collect a more diverse selection of exemplary essays for use in future editions. Our editor at Holt, Rinehart and Winston is maintaining a file for those original undergraduate essays which you feel deserve recognition and provide sound models for other students to follow. Please send them to Harriett Prentiss, Senior Editor-English, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 383 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Finally, we must take this opportunity to thank our students in English 208 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for helping us select the readings and for giving us many good essays from which to choose examples, Professor Dennis Martin for his constructive criticism, and Harriett Prentiss, Susan Katz, and Ruth Chapman for their editorial assistance.

CONTENTS

Introduction to Modernism

The value of a traditional literary education is being rigorously questioned today. In "Real Students in Real Classrooms," Louis Kampf writes, "I can think of no decent justification for teaching composition or literature in terms of the profession's traditional objectives." Kampf argues that a literary education does not change the quality of an individual's life, nor does it promote social equality. "This is not to say," he adds, "that literacy is not a good thing. Obviously in an industrial society it's a necessity. However, literacy may be defined in various ways. Those who have power tend to do the defining." A working-class high school student views the study of literature as the totally arbitrary imposition of a middle-class liberal arts curriculum in this irreverent statement:

> School would be alright if you didn't have to take English. Social Studies I wouldn't mind being required, cause that's kinda interesting. But English, what real interest can you have about that? There might be some way you can make English interesting, but I can't see it. Cause I don't like reading a book and you're supposed to tell how good it is. And I don't think it's good. And I don't think it's right. Like, I

> read *The Godfather* and I really like that book, but I can't do a book report on it cause it's not required for my Regents [test]. I don't care what anybody says, why should they tell me I should read a book and think it's good? I'll read what I want to read. It really pisses me off, this school. That's the only thing I can say. They're trying to teach me shit that I don't even want to know. The only reason I got to learn that shit is so I can take one exam and pass it. And one test doesn't mean shit.[1]

But to one college freshman, literature is not practical even in terms of middle-class goals:

> I really don't think that lit. courses should be required. For someone who is pursuing a career in the field of science it is a waste of time and effort and distracts the student from his more important class. I think it is important to be able to write well and to be able to understand what is written, but there should be a course where you don't have to understand the deep thoughts of the works studied in this lit. class.

Until the 1960s, there was no serious challenge to teaching methods, selection of materials, or assumed motives for learning. Perhaps the teachers, the artists whose writings they taught, and the students who processed this information had similar social goals. Even more likely, few of them realized that any social goal at all was furthered by the study of literature. In recent years, however, the smooth transmission of knowledge, conventions, and values from one generation to the next has been disrupted by violent debate among teachers over teaching methods, grading procedures, and changes in the classic curriculum to incorporate black studies, women's studies, and maybe even *The Godfather*. These changes in the teachers' attitudes have been matched by the students' growing political awareness and vocal irritation with old standards. These obvious shifts in the social framework within which the teaching of English takes place force us to question our old assumptions about the ultimate purpose of literary study.

Take, for example, this typical preface to a currently popular textbook which concludes with a sentimental appeal to the traditional humanitarian goal:

> Most important of all, however, is that the book is aimed at the appreciation of good literature. Literature is the property of all; its appeal is to all. But literature, as an art, employs techniques and offers problems that can be understood only through analysis, and analysis means work. The immediate aim is to help the student in this work, but the primary object of the book is to promote the pleasurable study and, finally, the love of literature.

All the "buts" and "howevers" standing between the student and "the love of literature" invite a response to literary instruction resembling Huckleberry Finn's rejection of Miss Watson's impractical goals: "*She* was going to live so as to go to the good place. Well, I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it." Huck was asked to restrain his natural impulses in exchange for a lofty and mysterious goal, "the good place." The textbook author promises an equally mysterious, equally deferred gratification, "the love of literature." The path to the good place is difficult for all ("analysis means work"), and the author in fact assumes from the beginning that only a few will become competent readers and writers, as he confidentially admits in the privacy of his *Teacher's Manual*:

> Indeed, if students were allowed to go through composition and literature classes without guidance, it is fair to

[1] Martha Hamilton, "Youth in Working-Class Suburbia," quoted in "Real Students in Real Classrooms" by Louis Kampf. *New Literary History*, Vol V, no 3 (Spring 1974).

> say that perhaps ninety percent of all their writing would be synopsis or precis. . . . It is a fond hope that students will continue working on these problems after they leave our courses, but once they have received our grades they are on their own, out of reach of our voices.

Here he offers the more reasonable assumption that literature is *not* the property of all, nor is its appeal to all. In recent years, the fundamental dishonesty of these contradictory claims about the universal appeal of often difficult and specialized writing has inspired a cynicism in students and teachers alike, which can only obscure the genuine social advantages that do come with literacy and a literary education. Therefore, before we tell you what we think about literature, we want to explain the sometimes contradictory goals which we all, willingly or not, pursue as teachers and readers.

We ourselves belong to a group often called the literary establishment that includes critics, textbook writers, and teachers as well as the authors whose works we teach. Members of our group have certain ways of reading and talking about literature which we believe are better than those advocated by, say, popular book clubs. Even though there is disagreement within the literary establishment concerning the best way to read a particular work of literature, this group is differentiated from that of people who simply consume literature or respond to its art subjectively, reading for plot or for other "wrong" reasons. English professors communicate to students more or less forcibly, more or less intelligently, the ways in which highly literate people read and talk about literature. Even a teacher like Kampf who rejects the establishment, believing it fosters intellectual elitism and thus does not perform a valuable service for the community, will have been educated in the values and terminology of that select group. To one degree or another, we all equate the educated voice with the voice of authority. The public wants its children to acquire it, and it pays teachers to perform this service.

You have recently decided to join a specific social group by coming to college or a university. Your group is divided between honors and "C" students, but society makes other, perhaps more telling distinctions on the basis of the kind of institution you are attending —the degree of its public prestige. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 15, 1976) published results of a *Fortune* magazine poll: A tally of top corporate executives "showed that 35 percent graduated from Ivy League schools and another 45 percent from other private colleges and universities. Yet it is that kind of school, now costing upwards of $4,000 or $5,000 a year, that the average family can no longer afford." If you put this together with the fact that "the top 1 percent of our population own 28 percent of all personal wealth, and the top 10 percent just over 50 percent of it," you must conclude that the relationship between an individual's social class and type of education is frighteningly significant.

To see how the study of literature participates in this social stratification, we devised a rather unscientific survey to determine whether people are marked socially by the books they think are important. Of course we found it easy to distinguish the typical college student from the nonstudent and both from the literary specialist on the basis of their answers to the old question, "If you were stranded on a desert island, what five books would you wish you had with you?"

X	*Y*	*Z*
Bible	*Moby Dick*	*Remembrance of Things Past*
The Call of the Wild	*How to Survive on an Island*	*The Faerie Queene*
Love Story	*The Scarlet Letter*	*Ulysses*
Sears Catalogue	*Slaughterhouse Five*	*The Anatomy of Melancholy*
Run to Daylight: The Vince Lombardi Story	*The Story of 0* (in case it is lonely)	*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

Assuming that these people replied to our question with the titles of books they considered valuable, we drew several conclusions: First, some people value literature more highly than others, and second, groups within our society define good literature in radically different ways. Finally, the study of literature separates some from the vast majority (*X*), placing them in a much smaller group (*Y*), while a student whose wit, stamina, and money hold out may become one of the relatively few members of the literary establishment (*Z*).

Some obvious contradictions are emerging. The vast majority (*X*) sends its children to college in order that they appreciate *Moby Dick* and enter the economic progression that *The Chronicle of Higher Education* describes, yet the *Chronicle* article suggests that only a particular college education will be financially profitable. We, Parsons and Harvard teachers alike, serve that vast majority in its intention, but look at the amazing impracticality of our literary values as reflected in *Z*'s reading list. Not one book on desert survival. The literary establishment somehow helps to create the social establishment but remains distinctly outside of it. One reason for this contradiction and its more than economic significance becomes clearer when we look at the history of the literature we choose to teach.

Each historical period has produced many more works of art than the few that were passed on to later generations. Why certain writing survived and became designated as "good literature" is a complex subject, one whose major theme seems to be the shifting relationship between "good literature" and that which reflects the values of the social establishment. For example, statistics show an absolute correlation between the values of the dominant social class and the kinds of literature taught in United States public schools between 1836 and 1920: The American Book Company estimates that between those years 122,000,000 copies of the McGuffey *Reader* were sold in this country. According to *Historical Statistics of the United States*, approximately 7,500,000 people were enrolled in public school grades one through eight in any given year after 1870 (statistics for public school enrollment before that date were not compiled). The McGuffey *Reader* was comprised solely of literary and expository writings and excerpts such as Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*, Dickens' "The Death of Little Nell" from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and fiction produced expressly for the *Reader* such as "Where There Is a Will There Is a Way" and "Lazy Ned." The statistics indicate that these literary selections were a primary part of the education of a substantial percentage of several generations of the population of the United States. The purpose served by the selection of subject matter and its commanding distribution is best expressed by Henry Vail, a partner in the firm which purchased publication rights

to the *Reader* in the 1870s. In a letter, Vail explains the policies determining the book's major revisions in 1878:

> There was in the books [previous editions] much direct teaching of moral principle, with "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." In the later revisions this gradually disappeared. The moral teaching was less direct but more effective. The pupil was left to make his own deductions. . . . The author and publishers were fully justified in their firm belief that the American people are a moral people and that they have a strong desire that their children be taught to become brave, patriotic, honest, self-reliant, temperate, and virtuous citizens.

The irony is, of course, that the *Reader* itself played a major role in determining those values shared by the great majority of the citizenry, which in turn determined the kind of literature that this public would desire to have its children read. The success of McGuffey's *Reader* in perpetuating the same values from generation to generation clearly demonstrates the political importance of its definition of good literature, and it shows why teachers may be considered useful tools for social mobility.

This kind of situation seems very distant to us today. Not only do we question the way conventional values are perpetuated in teaching, but we recognize that a standard reading list for twentieth century literature is impossible. Paradoxically, just as we have come to question the possibility of defining "good literature," we have also become aware of how absolutely necessary that definition can become. Periodically when governments have used control of literary production to establish totalitarian power, we have been forced into awareness of literature's influence over public values and thus over political circumstances. The Nazi book burnings and persecution of artists antagonistic to the Nazi state are common knowledge. Because uncontested, the Führer's standard of beauty, the Aryan type, prevailed, playing no small part in creating the tolerance of the German public for mass annihilation of "inferior" types. Similarly, Stalin executed nearly a thousand artists and writers, nearly everybody of any reputation or talent, in order to solidify his political power in the U.S.S.R. Literature obviously has a broad political capacity to combat illegitimate power as well as to perpetuate power the public considers to be legitimate. Writers for McGuffey's *Reader* were valued to the degree they supported majority rule. In direct contrast, the twentieth century writers praised by the literary establishment uniformly attack the values of the majority.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* offers a classic example of minority attack in moral and legal rather than overtly political terms. The case reminds us that forms of literary censorship have existed in America and Britain as well. The fact that it took a major court decision to allow us to read Joyce's novel indicates that the difference in values between artist and community is no mere quibble over words but an extremely serious controversy. The decision of the United States district court delivered in 1933 by the Hon. John M. Woolsey which lifted the ban on *Ulysses* as a pornographic work concluded that events and words usually excluded from polite conversation may be essential to an honest depiction of human thoughts and emotions. The United States government had argued that *Ulysses* was obscene. Woolsey's decision in favor of the claimant determined that "unusual frankness" by itself does not constitute obscenity. Joyce's legal victory indicates that the minority can change majority values or at least its level of tolerance for moral questioning.

The variety of selections in this textbook indicates how far we have come since the Woolsey decision. But some of these stories would probably offend

your parents, which reveals another contradiction. We have been hired by the public to teach its children how to survive in current society, yet we choose to accomplish this by offering writers who attack that society's standards. Why does the public want us to teach books it will never read and could never approve of? Our one tentative answer lies in the necessity of criticism for its own sake as social corrective and as intellectual exercise. This is the position of the innovative and "good" twentieth century artist, which we as teachers reflect.

This idea of the writer as minority critic has its roots in events of the previous century, and as nineteenth century specialists we find these historical roots particularly interesting. While the McGuffey *Reader* reigned, minority reactions were forming that began in England with the Romantic movement and in the United States with the Transcendentalists. The end of the eighteenth century in England saw a transformation of the role of the artist in society. Poets such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson had assumed, like the McGuffey editors, that art had a moral purpose. It was the poet's function to coax or scold readers into living up to the ideals of their culture by maintaining and perfecting social and religious institutions. William Wordsworth in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 disputed this definition of the poet's role. Although he was a Cambridge-educated poet writing for the literate elite of his society, he reacted against his education when he praised a social ideal we call "cultural primitivism." Wordsworth's preface describes a fictional society, divorced from the traditional institutions of his readers, in which people live in a state of natural simplicity. He chooses a world of "humble and rustic life . . . because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language." Later in America, Henry David Thoreau made a personal as well as literary endorsement of cultural primitivism in his autobiography, *Walden*. Thoreau had abandoned the deadening materialism of the town to live in the woods, adopting the simple rustic life of a hermit. "I went to the woods," he says, "because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." Wordsworth and Thoreau, alienated from their materialistic middle-class society, yearned for one in which freedom, morality, and wisdom predominated. In this way, the English Romantics and American Transcendentalists established moral authority by opposing the established religious, political, and social values of their cultures. Literature as they defined it was truly a minority expression.

They felt, contrary to majority opinion, that human beings do not develop true identity through a process of education and socialization. The natural impulses and emotions which Wordsworth calls "the primary laws of our nature" are only obscured and repressed among the complexities of urban society. Rustics, savages, children, or hermits are more proper subjects for art, more worthy models of humanity, than educated gentlemen because the simple character yields a more realistic description of human nature. In his essay, "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau makes an even more direct assault on the values and institutions of his materialistic society by expressing a similar desire for realism. He says that people, in conforming to social institutions, have abandoned their real natures for a reduced, artificial one: "The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies." Moral art must recover a primary nature that society has repressed, and it must do so by repudiating approved

forms of writing. Since old conventions, social and literary, obscure the primary truth, innovative art forms are necessary in order to convey the new realism.

The old urbane and polished verse forms were clearly inadequate to convey the values of the natural society. Wordsworth therefore argued for a kind of natural language in which the poet expressed primary truths "as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men." Thoreau's fellow Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, saw a genuine moral necessity for honest language. In an essay in *Nature*, Emerson noted that language, like all social institutions, always expresses the values of the men who use it. Language in a materialistic society tends to be an instrument for repressing or corrupting natural virtue: "The corruption of man is followed by a corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires—the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, of praise—and duplicity and falsehood take place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will is in a degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not." In order to prevent this falsification of truth, Emerson held, poets must overturn poetic conventions and repudiate the corrupt values of their audience.

The Romantics proposed a new concept of realism and a new literary language to convey it, but their realism was soon considered to be no more than an idealistic retreat into some "golden age" of the past. The assumptions of cultural primitivism that were central to the Romantic position were attacked on two fronts. Science radically altered the view that nature, especially human nature, was benign, and the facts of nineteenth century history seemed to verify science's conclusion. To begin with, Darwin's discoveries made it difficult for authors and readers to see nature as an innocent and harmonious garden. In *The Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin argued that all natural species, including *Homo sapiens*, originate "from a struggle for survival" where "new and improved varieties will inevitably supplant and exterminate the older, less improved, and intermediate varieties." The natural world is composed, then, not of morally superior creatures, but of those tough or cunning enough to compete successfully for food and to reproduce their kind. Darwin redefined nature as a ruthless system of domination: "As more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life." This radical conflict between science and artistic and religious definitions of reality marks one of the major changes in cultural history that has produced contemporary attitudes and values. Most writers and readers today accept the authority of science over any other, just as science was enthusiastically accepted by the vast majority of the English and American public during the second half of the nineteenth century.

When Darwin redefined natural law as an amoral and materialistic process beyond human control, he not only discredited the idealism of the Romantics and Transcendentalists, but he also lent scientific validity to the optimistic materialism of the middle class. Herbert Spencer put Darwin's principles of evolution through natural selection together with the premises of the new sociology developed by Auguste Comte, transforming an unpleasantly deterministic idea of evolution into the ideal of progress. Darwin's theory showed that natural life developed toward more individuated, more specialized, so-called "higher" forms. As this happens, Spencer argued, larger and larger groups are formed, for the similarities within