

RICARDO QUINONES
CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

THE DRAMA OF THE TWO AMERICAS: MODERNISM,
POSTMODERNISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

The period of the past twenty-five years in American letters--roughly from the early 1960s to the present--witnessed a remarkable succession of highly visible movements that were obliged to confront in one way or another the nature, the scope and the validity of Modernism. This is all the more remarkable when we observe that the former date serves as well as any to mark a general recognition that as a creative movement Modernism had expired--one could responsibly speak of it as dead. But the afterlife of this major upheaval in twentieth-century art and thought was far from over. Numerous studies began to appear, particularly in the last ten years, all showing the extended matrices, the broader contours and affiliations of Modernism ¹.

Consistently invoked in these studies are such phrases as "underlying assumptions," "fundamental similarities," "convergences of thought," "genealogies and family resemblances." Such historical expositions seem to have extended Modernist boundaries in two directions. Attention to the conceptual foundations of Modernism has established greater connections between philosophers and literary modernists, with the salutary effect of bringing into closer relationship continental and Anglo-American literary Modernism. Secondly, as these studies were considered the larger dimensions of Modernism, to mark out an epoch, they necessarily involved Modernism with other crucial periods of our culture, with the Renaissance, with Romanticism, and with successive episodes that derived from the primary actions of Modernism itself. These episodes--the politically-active counter-culture of the 60s, postmodernism and American deconstruction-

-have each provoked fundamental confrontations with the meaning of Modernism as well as reassessments of its broader social and cultural roles. That is, going beyond scholarly exposition, the very experience of these later movements have prompted either a rejection of Modernism, with the accusation that its true motivations and inclinations are revealed in the later manifestations, or a return to the aesthetic and philosophical values of Modernism, in regard to which the later movements are seen as partial versions or else distortions. But the debate carries even more matter: the later movements have revived the fundamental issue of Modernism's relationship to the values and assumptions of the modern West; that is, the issue of the antinomianism of Modernism and its ambiguous relationship with modernity. This is why the American location of the debate is all the more charged with significance.

Dramatically unconventional, Modernism continues to require adjustments in normally valid scholarly preoccupations. This is particularly the case when the country under review is America. Modernism is inseparable from the true internationalization of literature as well as the emergence of America as an exporting partner in the culture trade of the twentieth century. In all areas, countries on the periphery have tended toward the center. As World War I brought America into activity as a world political power, so the years immediately before and after what was once quaintly called The Great War witnessed the full-fledged participation of American writers in the creation of twentieth-century culture. It would be practically impossible to conceive a Modernist poetics without the efforts of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound and all of their confreres and compatriots who clustered so visibly in Paris and London in the earlier part of this century, and who gathered not only to learn and to follow but to teach and to lead.

Far from being meant to convey a chauvinist message, this statement registers the fact that the confluence of expatriates served to create a transatlantic culture. One of the reasons for the remarkable long-lasting ascendancy of Modernism, making it for the twentieth century what Romanticism was for the nineteenth--and that is the generator of cultural development--is that the conditions to which the Modernists responded and made for their own, the cultural matrix in which they flourished, would become the dominant one of the developing century. Today when we write about the reception of Modernism into America, for example, we are unable to make any valid distinctions between what is "native American" (which phrase is now only used by government bureaucracies to describe American Indians) and the world at large. This was first due to political conditions before and after World War II that prompted many to claim America as their new home, but has now become simply a feature of the extraordinarily powerful means of contemporary communication. Under the first, we can think of Renato Poggioli's Theory of the Avant-garde, first published in Italian in 1962 and then brought out in 1968 by Harvard University, where Poggioli had together with Harry Levin made that University one of the major American centers of comparative literature. Such an instance of welcomed repatriation, however multiplied country-wide, is not the whole story. Nowadays, like business itself the business of culture is multinational. The question as to the respective nationalities of Eliot and W. H. Auden has been brought up to date when we are led to speculate if the "New York Review of Books" is English and the "London Review of Books" American. Summary for our purposes might be the work of Jose Guilherme Merquior, the Brazilian ambassador to Mexico, whose From Prague to Paris (1986) might hold the last word in this study--and that is meant in more than the chronological sense. Published in England by Verso, distributed in America by Shocken, this work enters

into the questions raised by the topic of Modernism and America as significantly as does any native-born work.

An essay by Harry Levin, "What Was Modernism" (1960), can serve as a point of departure for this essay ². Its acknowledgment and that from one of the most precocious early defenders of Modernism, that Modernism was then to be discussed in the past tense, was shared by two other leading American intellectuals, Leslie Fiedler and Irving Howe. ³ The time of these recognitions is important for two reasons. First it shows the longevity of the Modernist reign. Modernists clearly outlived the ten-, fifteen-, or twenty-year hegemony allotted to a literary generation. In short, they were able to enjoy their literary afterlife in their own lifetime--without any sense of having been superseded. While it may be argued that their creative momentum came to a close sometime in the early years of World War II, they were not replaced by another literary generation. In the politically conscious and active 30s, they continued to be honored. Despite different political concerns on the part of a younger generation of writers, "they were still our heroes," wrote Stephens Spender ⁴. The continuity between the 1930s and the 1950s, with all their evident differences, is guaranteed on this front when we observe that the latter generation still called the Modernists masters.

The early 1960s is a valid point of departure for a second reason. That period saw a new (and yet not young) generation of American writers assert themselves, and by that I mean reclaim their own voices. Robert Lowell, John Berryman, John Updike, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow and many others came upon their creative veins and voices that they were able to exploit and sustain well into the decade and beyond. Moreover, in their own personae they became cultural artifacts.

There is a broader social as well as cultural

significance to this "break-through." Their related works seemed to be based upon a new intensity of personal experience, a new validation of themselves and more importantly of the significance of their own experiences. It was as if they had lost the need to refer their experiences to the approval of a commanding presence, a presence that was no longer there. It does not matter if these works be labeled "confessional" or "neo-Romantic." What does matter is the collateral recognition they received as announcing a new moment, in fact, the much larger social and intellectual change that we associate with the 1960s. Just as a new personal fire came to expression in literature, so a new moral fire came to the front in political and social life. The 1960s was a true watershed in America's reaction to Modernism. The new needs for community and commitment, the new moral directness and political conviction smashed through the prevailing sense of ambivalence and studied complexity, the acceptance of the political status quo, and the moral schizophrenia that had been so typical of the generation of the 1950s, and that may be traced back to the complex consciousness and the aesthetic and moral distancings of Modernism itself. While directed against the more quiescent, uncommitted and in some ways tragic generation of the 1950s, this rebelliousness could not help but take its toll from the legendary figures looming behind, and these were the great Modernists themselves. For the first time, Modernism was dethroned, "de-mythologized."

Paradoxically, this new cultural situation helped clear the way for a period of extraordinarily active attention to Modernism, an outpouring of major critical works, works that had as their main intent the clarification of the larger purposes of Modernism. It was as if the intervening period made possible an adjustment of focus, and scholars and cultural historians were now better able to bring Modernism as a whole into their sights. More and more those drawn to write

about Modernism felt so attracted because a moment had arrived when they were able to treat Modernism with the same breadth that one might use in discussing Romanticism. Others felt compelled to take the measure of Modernism, to weigh its accomplishments, and even assess its deficiencies.

This new order of the day would hardly have been possible fifteen years earlier. It was in part made possible by the large number of discrete and detailed works which contained the specific chronological and biographical materials that enabled literary historians to make connections and mark convergences between the varied and yet related Modernists. Secondly, the new order was permitted by the psychic distance in part promoted by the new attitudes of the intervening 60s. If one only looks at the contributions in the important volume, Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives (1986), which grew out of a centenary conference in 1982, one sees that writer after writer, including Clement Greenberg, Robert Morgan, Martin Esslin--that is, noteworthy and prominent defenders of Modernism-- found occasion to question and criticize the validity of Modernist techniques, and more importantly, the lengths to which they were being taken. It is as if one had entered a new and to my mind necessary period of critical reappraisal, where one could evaluate the paintings of Picasso, the poems of Eliot and even more pointedly of Pound, free of any need to enlist oneself as obligatory defender of the avantgarde. Lastly, this period of enlarged critical perspective and reassessment was actually required by new artistic and critical movements. Willingly and consciously in the case of postmodernism, the issues of the nature, the scope and the value of Modernism have been debated; unwillingly and hence necessarily more by its critics than its adherents, the same questions have been raised by the advent of deconstruction, forcing us to grapple with the very meaning of Modernism, its core of values.

In the larger picture, one of the major and understandably continuing engagements of Modernism has been with Romanticism. From the very first, Modernism was demoted as a pretentious designation for something that could be nothing more than a post-romanticism. Paradoxically, Modernism was delegitimized historically by the very establishment of its parentage, a dominant and superior ancestor from which it supposedly derived its qualities, and to whose resources it owed its own livelihood. The problem is of course vexing, particularly when we acknowledge with Hugh Honour that the impact of Romanticism as a cultural and a literary movement cannot be discounted ⁵. The issue is complicated by the obvious cultural potency of Romanticism as well as by the difficulty in making distinctions of discontinuity in any diachronic perspective. There are always harbingers, heralds and predecessors in the vast continuum of being. Nothing starts from the unimaginable point zero. Yet, in any discourse of cultural history, it seems ahistorical to deny Modernism an equal validity with Romanticism. That would be a procedure more or less like declaring that there was no Renaissance but Luther was medieval. Particularly is this the case when we see that Modernists repeatedly and convincingly defined themselves by a position that Meyer Abrams, America's foremost Romanticist, has termed "counter-Romantic." ⁶

Such strong argument is always in need of specific demonstration. After all, despite his reverence for the metaphysicals and his abhorrence of the Romantics, T. S. Eliot was closer in his sensibility to the Romantics. Yet there is a profound difference as well as a discontinuity. When we follow the line of development established by the Romantics, the works of Tennyson or Hardy hold no surprise for us. We can indeed make note of genealogical resemblance, even of a shared resources. But it takes no great imagination to perceive that following the Romantic line there is absolutely no way we could anticipate The Waste

Land or Ulysses. They have all the unpredictability of cultural innovation. Not only were Modernists themselves conscious of a cultural break (and that must count for something) but an analysis of their works seems to corroborate their intentions. Moreover, that they did mount a decisive alteration in the idiom or art is confirmed by their own sustained development, and the clear and indisputable fact of their long cultural ascendancy. These principles of cultural determination will be invoked when we investigate the claims of Postmodernism.

This account of the Romantic-Modernist saga is obviously an unfinished one; early primitive struggles are rarely abandoned but persist and live on to fight it out another day. Of more recent date, the arguments of those wishing to assert Romantic primacy have been refined by George Bornstein and Harold Bloom ⁷. Earlier arguments relied upon a Romanticism deeply allied with Nature; this connection was dissolved by Modernists who sought, as Ortega has reminded us, to bring metaphoric injury to Nature, to wound it and effect a severance. Both Bornstein and Bloom attempt a rereading of Romanticism and in the light of this new understanding come to see Modernism as "merely" a transformation of Romanticism. Rather than characterizing Romanticism as effecting a displacement from a supernatural to a natural matrix, each would see the Romantic poets as substituting imagination of Nature. Romantic poetry is poetry of mind in dialogue with itself--"the poem of the act of the mind" (the title of Bornstein's introductory chapter that contains a highly useful summary of the various stages of the Romantic-Modernist debate). In these reconsiderations the major Modernist poet becomes Wallace Stevens.

It should come as no surprise that the latest installment should be offered by deconstructionist critics. According to Jonathan Culler, "one of the

principal efforts of deconstructive criticism has been to disrupt the historical scheme that contrasts romantic with post-romantic literature." ⁸ With some point he refers to Paul de Man's observation that following the deconstructive mode would undermine all historiography. As we shall see, there are other reasons for the deconstructive tendency to disallow Modernism and to favor Romanticism.

More positively and more usefully, we can observe that this moment of Modernist reassessment has permitted the reclamation of many eclipsed reputations, Romantics among them, which had fallen under the Modernist shadow. In general we can refer to works of extraordinary imaginative force (if not stylistic complexity), such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Time Machine, and other such popular classics. This notable and necessary expansion of the canon also meant that not only the Romantics themselves but Tennyson, Meredith, and the Georgian poets can have their fuller virtues appreciated in this time of Modernist reassessment. ⁹

Whereas the Romantic-Modernist saga could by its very nature make scant contribution to an understanding of Modernism, the Modernist-postmodernist debate is directly centered on the meaning of Modernism; in fact, what is at issue seems to be a proper understanding of Modernism. It is for this reason that Postmodernism figures mightily in the question of the reception of Modernism.

There are several dangers in approaching postmodernism. By emphasizing its filial relationship to Modernism, one runs the risk of delegitimizing Postmodernism; that is, denying it historical validity, and thus possibly repeating the error of Romanticists who refused to consider Modernism as anything but a post-Romanticism. While acknowledging this to be a danger, at the same time one must recognize that history is not

symmetrical, and that while Modernism was able to assert an independent historical identity, Postmodernism might not possess the same resources. It is a case for which there are no rational, a priori settlements. The second error, extending beyond matters of historical affiliation to those of evaluation, is that one might be using the past in order to abuse the present. This is a notorious error of historicism, one that was exposed by Nietzsche more than a hundred years ago (and by Petrarch centuries before that). Clement Greenberg and Hilton Kramer come under attack as sclerotic Modernists who somehow betray a kind of aesthetic conservatism (inescapably, the charge seems to proceed, allied with a general atmosphere of political neo-conservatism).¹⁰ Here again, however, the abhorrence of such an argumentative position should not prevent us from making large historical and aesthetic judgements. Obviously the validation of post-modernism must not only rest upon the question of historical identity but also upon aesthetic accomplishment, and this is ultimately a question of judgment. As it turns out, both of these aspects of the problem--that of the degree of historical innovation and that of ultimate aesthetic and cultural evaluation--are the essential questions in regard to postmodernism. Happily, Alan Wilde in his Horizon of Assent builds an intriguing argument of historical development-- he denies a "sharp break" from "heroic Modernism" (E.M. Forster) through "late Modernism" (Auden and Isherwood) to Postmodernism, identifiable with the flat, collapsed, minimalist style.¹¹

His book has the value of a tightly-reasoned, historically-developed argument that is strong on close analysis of specific literary texts. Moreover, he does not accept postmodernist assertions at face value, but is refreshingly willing to submit their texts to judgment and evaluation.

Two of the more significant defenders of Postmodernism, Ihab Hassan and Matei Calinescu, are important for other reasons.¹² They should be brought together because each of their works appearing in 1987 contains the fullest bibliographies to date; each is marked by second thoughts on the subjects--revisions, as it turns out, that tend in opposite directions; and each reveals a significantly different personal approach to the subject.

Ihab Hassan has been a longtime and stout defender of postmodernism. His discourse is serious, passionate and, at times, perfervidly vatic. He draws up detailed lists of contrasting qualities to distinguish between Modernism and postmodernism.¹³ Unfortunately his schedule is not based upon a full understanding of Modernism; he consistently attributes to Modernists qualities that are of nineteenth-century Romantic derivation and to postmodernists qualities that are the very ones by which Modernists chose to define themselves. It is a rare student of Modernism who would describe the Moderns as being given to hypotactical as opposed to paratactical construction, either in syntax or in form. The Waste Land is disjunctive in structure, in language, even in allusion--as if the great classical phrases cannot be repeated in their entirety. Aborted speech, finally bordering on nothingness, is the painful testimony elicited by this poem of modern times. If it is fairly impossible to think of great Modernist works as ones to snuggle up to in front of a fire, in another contrasting pair of terms--lisible (readerly) versus scriptible (writerly)--it is clear that Modernist would be placed under the second category and not under the first, as Hassan would have it. It is hard to conceive Modernists as falling under the genital-phallic, when that category is opposed to polymorphous/androgynous. Under this classification what are we to make of the "Nighttown" episode in Ulysses, or of Tiresias

in The Waste Land? The "old man with wrinkled dugs" indeed shares in the qualities of both sexes and presides over an Inferno that is far from phallic. And in the concluding series of terms, whereby Modernism could be associated with Origin/Cause, God the Father, Metaphysics (as opposed to Irony!), Determinacy and Transcendence, in almost every instance one could take significant, self-defining statements and episodes by major Modernists that would be the exact contrary of these categories.

Matei Calinescu's most recent contribution revokes a previously held position, one in which the "post-" prefix was determining, indicative of a derivative and subordinate status for postmodernism in regard to Modernism. In many ways his new description of Postmodernism fits very nicely with the critical moment we have been describing: a period of freedom and reassessment in regard to the major epoch of Modernism. A broad eclecticism of taste and artistic choice has served to inspire a new sense of elated freedom. In this perspective, there is a certain connection between the aesthetics of postmodernist architecture and Postmodernism in other areas--although the full validity of the formulation depends upon the equivalence of modernist architecture with Modernism in other arts and literature. Postmodernism thus would convey a built-in revisionist playfulness, a ready hypotheticalness of all resolutions. As a description of both the situation of criticism and of creation it is immensely attractive, helping to define where we are. Postmodernism is a "possible frame," "a convenient frame for discovering or inventing more or less interesting affinities among a great number of contemporary writers." (301) Less categorical than Hassan's, Calinescu's position does seem adequately descriptive of a genuine and far-reaching historical entity.

While understanding the full difficulty of the problem, we can nevertheless question whether

Calinescu squarely addresses the issue of the relationship of Postmodernism to Modernism. To be sure, Postmodernism is called a "departure from" Modernism, a "renovation and not a radical innovation." These phrases do not contradict the sense of "different, perhaps, but continuous with." Change does not mean discontinuity. However skillful, talented, dedicated and enjoyable postmodernist writers are, they cannot escape their historical situation, which is one of living within a scheme still controlled by Modernism. Here we might bring back the criteria of surprise and unpredictability. Having the Modernists behind us, does it come as any surprise that the Postmodernists should indulge in an aesthetic of "impossibility," that they should move from epistemology to hermeneutics, as it were? ¹⁴ The issue of extraordinary Modernist self-reflexivity has already been introduced, and the step from one to the other is not exactly difficult. If we can return to the so-called Modernist "purists," such as Greenberg and Kramer--the designation is of course a misleading one--one can see that their aesthetic reactions do not emanate from a situation of stylistic disorientation. Having the Modernist experience behind them they are in full possession of the capacities to render judgment. They have not fallen suddenly into the ranks of the uncomprehending. Their "aesthetic failure"--if that is what it is--comes from understanding all too well the premises upon which postmodernist creation is built. They are not reacting to something new, or to something that they have not seen before, but rather to something that is all-too-familiar.

This seems to account for the revisionist arguments of Ihab Hassan's own contributions to the situation of Postmodernism. Oddly enough, it is the experience of deconstruction that had led him to call for a new moment (xi, 214): "The field of humanistic sense is now left open to a perpetual agony of interpretations, or else to silent dismissals." (204) In recoil from such constant and

cosmic aporias, Hassan feels a need to return to sense ("Making Sense: The Trials of Postmodernist Discourse" is the title of his major revisionist piece). He does this by returning to "native ground" and that is American pragmatism. He reaches the general conclusion that many arrived at much earlier, namely that happy results in literature and criticism may be achieved without finding it necessary to solve the unsolvable, to bring certainty where there will always be a residue of doubt. The inability to achieve an absolute certainty had converted itself into absolute doubt. This is an argument made by Richard Rorty, when he urges American critics to dispense with metaphysics, and continue to write about what they know. Hassan of course means making sense in a fuller way. Consequently, he leaps over the somewhat blithe counsel of Rorty, to the more celebratory pragmatism of William James, one that engages notions of "belief, desire and power." (206) Given the opening comments of this report, one may be intrigued by his approving reference to the Inaugural Address of Yves Bonnefoy at the College de France (1981), which contained a call for a redirection of critical attention to positive entities, to forces and presences, beings and happenings in time. Such concern would not only portray history as containing events of importance, it would also regard literature as bodying forth qualities of genuine affective force and significance. By carrying to the farthest extremes some of the qualities of Postmodernism and Modernism, deconstruction has actually and inadvertently effected a substantial return and revision--one could say, although Hassan does not acknowledge it, a return to the more complex and modulated vision of classical Modernism. 15

If Postmodernists like Hassan and Calinescu are constantly engaging themselves with Modernism, deconstruction seems strangely incurious as to its origins. Modernism is the avoided subject in deconstructive discourse. There are several reasons

for this. First, if one is interested in critical power, one does not effect such a takeover by proclaiming in an evolutionary way that one is carrying on the work begun by predecessors. One invokes some models, as it were, but one does not place actions in anything like an historical perspective. In regard to deconstruction this is a tactical but also theoretical position: if any text is a means of gaining access to the vast storehouse of language, then it is very difficult to perceive or even construct any history at all. Further, an unwillingness to confront the Modernist background to deconstruction might be explained by the evident difficulty of de-centering a text that is already "de-centered." No rebelliousness wishes to convey the impression that it is directing kicks against an open door. Not only does one not acknowledge real fathers but one chooses to dethrone imaginary fathers. I have used the image of "straw figures," as have others.¹⁶ Finally, there is yet another fascinating and quite plausible explanation of the deconstructive avoidance of their own genealogy. As J.G. Merquior argues, there exists a Kulturkritik at the heart of deconstruction. It represents a fundamentally antinomian, anti-rationalist attack on the intellectual and humanistic bases of the modern West. Its denial of history is tantamount to a denial of reality, that things do happen which are of extraordinary consequence.¹⁷ Unfortunately, and with tragic effect, even deconstructive critics are being brought to learn that texts have consequences, and external realities to intrude upon consciousness--fatally so. This inherent ideology is downplayed by American deconstructionists who are better able to do so when their own broader intellectual affiliations are ignored.¹⁸

If the question of the reception of Modernism into America has been mooted by the very character of Modernism and the role of Americans in its creation, the question of the American reception of

deconstruction is a living one and quite revealing. Here again there are many reasons to explain this extraordinary phenomenon--one that has had large consequences, as we have already seen, in the Modernist relationship with Romanticism and in the cited instance of recoil from Postmodernism.

First, we must acknowledge that not only American cultural life but the overall situation of twentieth-century thought presented fertile ground for theories of literature that promoted destabilization. In flight from two totalitarian regimes of extraordinary oppressiveness, the rhetoric of the time naturally inclined toward indeterminacy over determinacy, to unsteady outlines rather than sharp definitions. Fluidity, complexity, irony, ambiguity--anything that resisted unity and stasis--seemed to be preferred. There is, one could say, a historical disposition in the rhetorical dominance of the age to literary theories and movements that promote doubt and skepticism.

Special American conditions were propitious to the invasion of critical theory. The old New Criticism, while capable of yielding rhetorical studies of complex poetic textures, soon reached a point of diminishing return. In the search for something new, which seemed to promise larger perspectives and even a sense of liberation, active university minds turned at first to structuralism and then came to rest in deconstruction. But this could not have happened had there not occurred a related and even more damaging event: the decline of the man of letters. Correlative to this absence is also the loss of the common reader. The two rise and fall together. This means that there were no clear and commanding voices significant enough to bring deconstruction to the test of broad public scrutiny. Deconstruction came to the front at a moment of dislocation between the university-bound intellectual and the public at large.

Of perhaps even greater importance in explaining the ready acquiescence of a significant part of the American university is one of the reasons for its greatness: the open-minded liberality with which it entertains new ideas. It would appear that the reception of deconstruction into America was prepared by the broader need for constant innovation that is endemic to the American experiment itself, (negatively, this might be expressed as a fear of accepting identity and as a refusal to enter into history). We must also realize that American pragmatism is itself congenial to theories that promote decentering. When to the entire mixture we add the ingredients of Modernism, that is, America's leading role in the dominant literary and cultural movements of the twentieth century, with its emphasis on complex consciousness, on self-reflexivity, on proliferation of multiple points of view, and with its overall challenge to stand-points and staying-points, then we can see that not only postmodernism (which is in its origins home-grown) but more significantly deconstruction could only come to existence in a common climate made possible by Modernism.

As we come to the end of deconstruction (its career was remarkably short lived, and current critical effort is devoted to assessing whatever valid contributions it may have made), we now see more clearly that, like Postmodernism, it represented nothing so much as the end of an era¹⁹. In their mutually-reinforcing and consummate expressions of disaggregation they are the last manifestations of the age of heroic Modernism. This recognition has been advanced recently by two critics, Graham Hough and Irving Howe. I quote Hough's reaction since it represents a revision of an earlier position in which he denied Modernism any substantial--as opposed to stylistic--validity:

No creative upheaval like the Modernist movement of the earlier part of this century

has come about, to make us re-draw the map of literary history. So one has the sad spectacle of many trim and high-powered intellectual machines with their wheels spinning vainly in the air. 20

One can see here another reason why deconstructive critics would wish to avoid the question of Modernist affiliation. But this same establishment of relationship has brought with it a renewed and constantly renewable debate about responsibility. As it turns out, the great confrontation of Modernism is not with Romanticism, not with Postmodernism or Deconstruction, but rather with the Enlightenment, and with its legacies and inheritors, with simple rationality, social amelioration and technological advance. If this is the case, are not Modernism, Postmodernism and deconstruction all part of one family--this is what the argument of shared familial qualities promotes--that is, part of one large antinomian current that, flowing from Nietzsche, threatens the very bases of modernity itself? When, under the influence of Nietzsche's early and persistent attacks on the culture as well as philosophical underpinnings of the Enlightenment, Modernism developed its pessimistic, anti-rationalist tendencies, did this not grow and spread from root to contemporary branch?

This is the argument announced again and again, in various disguises and under various formats, but one that remains; it is abiding and recurrent, because it derives from the origins and the very core of the Modernist experience. It is the crucial argument, particularly in America, because an antinomian Modernism strikes at the very foundation of America itself, at the practical wisdom, at the cautious optimism and hopefulness in regard to the earthly city that reached its full expression in America of the Enlightenment, in figures like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Deconstruction has inadvertently had a

salutary effect: it has revived the drama of the two Americas, wherein the one America of calm good sense and practical intelligence has been allowed to reshape itself and call back to itself the America of constant innovation. The question then that remains is what accommodation America can make between its foundations in the Enlightenment and its new, major participatory role in the twentieth century culture of Modernism. Can it survive a self-critique that seems so fundamental?

The question might be posed another way, with accommodation coming from the other direction: is Modernism as antinomian, as counter-Enlightenment as would appear? This returns us to the question whether postmodernists and deconstructive critics are representative of Modernism in its full articulation and development, or whether they do not give extreme expression--extreme because taken out of the full balance of Modernist perspective--to only one aspect of the Modernist charge, and that is its complex consciousness and skeptical disposition. 21

The response of James Joyce to charges leveled by Wyndham Lewis against the "time-mind" of the twentieth century may be instructive here. ²² By emphasizing so ephemeral a concept as time, Lewis railed, the Modernists contributed to the development of a "phalanstery of selves" and as a consequence demoted any sense of external reality. Grant Lewis all of his point, Joyce responded to Frank Burgeon (his greater response forms one of the creative centers of Finnegans Wake,) does it cover more than ten per cent?

His meaning is clear and accurate: Joyce's view of things is much larger than Lewis's partial vision could allow. The Modernists could well entertain the world of consciousness (which Lewis associates with time), but they did not ignore the world of space, or external reality. In fact, one could say that the dynamics of their discourse

precisely calls for the interacting tension between a reflective consciousness and the approach of some imminent--and perhaps terrible--reality. Modernists regarded their attacks on the machine-like, categorical behaviour or rational, professional and industrial Western man as temporary and tactical. Their negative critiques were regarded as necessary efforts before the larger work of reintegration could be undertaken. Developmental, their earlier vision enlisted the necessary later stage of return. ²³ Put another way, we can say that The Heart of Darkness is transcended by The Secret Sharer, where the young captain's experience of doubleness, actually serves to revivify the structure of authority. The evidence is much too large and abundant to be presented here, but we can say that their works offered gestures of remediation. They were indeed psychologists of culture, but this does not mean that they tended to aestheticize experience. Not being industrialists they could only minister to their time through their words, but it is difficult to imagine any reader whose sensibilities would not be modified--and for the better--by a reading of Buddenbrooks or The Secret Sharer. If we are to take Mann's enormous Joseph series as an indication, the emphasis on tolerance, consciousness and even practical intelligence--as Joseph the provider manifests--illustrates not only his, but others' attempts to strengthen sanity and humanity. Prompted by motivations of balance, the fuller Modernist development offers the hope for a reintegration of forces that had been harmfully divided.

In regard to history, reason and external reality, we can see that the Modernists were far from their later followers. Like Nietzsche, and unlike deconstructive critics, Modernists did not seek to void history. Eliot, Mann, Virginia Woolf, and D.H. Lawrence were the most important essayists of their times. Their essays constantly addressed their present and changing needs in the light of the great moments and figures of the past.

They constantly sought to reshape the past, to create new pantheons. They could in no way be linked with manifestations of counterculture, since their sense of themselves in relation to their history was continuous. ²⁴ Nor could they be considered anti-rational. Their debates with the nineteenth century, with the developing time-world since the Renaissance, and with Romanticism were highly reasoned arguments, supported by significant developments in other disciplines and by other thinkers, by Einstein's relativity, by Freud's psychoanalysis, by Whitehead and Ortega's perspectivism, by Worringer and Wolfflin's contributions to art history. By virtue of such searching and reasoned critiques, Modernism became more than a literary movement--it came to characterize an entire and long-lasting epoch.

In closing, one is hesitant to repeat the old refrain "Only in America"--primarily because it is not so. Nevertheless, one has to recognize that the extraordinary "boom" in Modernist scholarship is not due merely to revivals that regularly recur some twenty years after an author's death; rather it indicates a continuing engagement not only with Modernism as a scholarly object but with its social and intellectual importance. It appears that in America the need to come to terms with Modernism is a crucial one, affecting its major intellectual movements since the 60's (even when, as is the case with ^ddeconstruction, that confrontation is performed by others). The reason for this is now clear. In confronting Modernism, America is facing its own coming of age, its own encounter with limits, with history and with identity. Modernism has helped America reach maturity, by presenting it with complexity, doubleness, infinite reflexivity and finally blankness, and yet by permitting it to return to itself. In some ways this later return was provoked by the experience of postmodernism and deconstruction. These extreme and distorted derivations of Modernism have prompted major studies, whose truer motivation may have been to

reclaim the fuller purposes of the major Modernists, but who now appear by a just appraisal of their performances to have been valuable guides to America's maturation.

Notes

1 For fuller bibliographies see Modernism (Pelican, 1978), co-edited by Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane and Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives (University of Illinois, 1986), co-edited by Monique Chefdor, Ricardo Quifones and Albert Wachtel. For roughly the last ten years these are some of the books that I have consulted: Gabriel Josipovici, The Lessons of Modernism and Other Essays (Rowman and Littlefield, 1977); Stanley Sultan, "Ulysses," "The Waste Land" and Modernism (Kennikat, 1977); Alan Wilde, Horizon of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination (Johns Hopkins, 1981); John B. Foster, Jr., Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism (Princeton, 1981); Modernism Reconsidered Harvard English Studies No. 11 (Cambridge, 1983); Stephen Kern, The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918 (Harvard, 1983); Michael Levenson, A Genealogy of Modernism: English Literary Doctrine, 1908-1922 (Cambridge University, 1984); Carlos Baker, The Echoing Green: Romanticism, Modernism and Phenomena of Transference in Poetry (Princeton, 1984); Jeffry M. Perl, The Tradition of Return: The Implicit History of Modern Literature (Princeton, 1984); Timothy Reiss, The Discourse of Modernism (Cornell, 1985); Sanford Schwartz, The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot and Early Twentieth-Century Thought (Princeton, 1985); Frederick Karl, Modern and Modernism: The Sovereignty of the Artist, 1885-1925 (Atheneum, 1985); Ricardo J. Quifones, Mapping Literary Modernism (Princeton, 1985); Allan Megill, Prophets of Extremity (University of California, 1985); Charles Russell, Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-garde from Rimbaud through Postmodernism (Oxford, 1985); Bernard Bergonzi, The Myth of Modernism and Twentieth Century Literature (St. Martin, 1986); J. G. Merquior, From Prague to Paris (Verso, 1986); James Longenback, Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot and the Sense of the Past (Princeton, 1987); Matei Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity:

Postmodernism 2nd ed. enlarged (Dike, 1987); Ihab Hassan, The Postmodern Turn (Ohio State, 1987); Perry Meisel, The Myth of the Modern: A study in British Literature and Criticism after 1850 (Yale, 1987). One notices the extraordinary spate of volumes in the last four years. In fact, as I was writing two additional works appeared: Julian Symons, Makers of the New: The Revolution in Literature, 1912-1939 (Random House, 1988); and Hugh Kenner, A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers (Knopf, 1988). This report pretends to no scientific objectivity, nor even to be a fully encompassing survey. It is rather concerned to highlight those arguments of the past twenty-five years that seem to be the most enduring.

2 First published in The Massachusetts Review (August, 1960) and reprinted in Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature (Oxford, 1966). In the same volume see "Reflections on the Final Volume of The Oxford History to English Literature" and also the more recent, Memories of the Moderns (New Directions, 1980).

3 For Howe, see "Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction," "Partisan Review, Summer, 1959, reprinted in his Decline of the New (New York, 1970); and also The Idea of the Modern (Horizon, 1967); see Fiedler's Collected Essays of the Modern (Horizon, 1967); see Fiedler's Collected Essays 2 vol. (New York, 1970), "The New Mutants," II. 379; "Introduction," II. 403; and "Cross the Border-Close the Gap," II. 461.

4 The Struggles of the Modern (University of California, 1963).

5 Romanticism (Harper and Row Icon, 1979). "The influence of Romanticism has been so profound and so pervasive that no account can encompass it" p.319.

6 Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution

in Romantic Literature (Norton, 1971) p. 417. An earlier prominent use of the phrase occurs in T. S. Eliot's "Baudelaire," Selected Essays (Harcourt, Brace, 1950), "Baudelaire was inevitably the offspring of Romanticism, and by his nature the first counter-romantic in poetry ..." p. 376.

7 For Bornstein see Transformation of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot and Stevens (University of Chicago, 1976); for Bloom see The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition (University of Chicago, 1971) and Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (Cornell, 1976).

8 On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Cornell, 1982), pp. 248-249.

9 For a vindication of some of Tennyson's qualities, see the very reliable John Bayley, "The All-Star Victorian," The New York Review of Books, Dec. 18, 1980, p. 42. Myron Simons's The Georgian Poetic (University of California, 1975) is exemplary.

10 See Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism, 2nd ed. enlarged (Duke, 1987), pp. 289-292 and Hassan, The Postmodern Turn, (Ohio State, 1987) pp. 218-219.

11 Johns Hopkins, 1981, p. 87 but passim.

12 See number 1 above.

13 "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism," The Postmodernism Turn, pp. 91-92; also in Chefdor et al., Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives, (University of Illinois, 1986), p.312.

14 Five Faces, pp. 302-305.

15 See Schwartz, The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot and Early Twentieth-Century Thought

(Princeton, 1985), p. 214 for the link of James with Modernism.

16 See Quiñones, "Reading Dante Transliterally," Dante Studies, 1981, pp. 169-172; Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (University of Minnesota, 1983), pp. 144-145. Most recently Richard Rorty has pointed out that the so-called "universal agreement" Derridean deconstruction is determined to undermine has no reality, but is rather a "neat textbook dilemma." "Not only is there no universal agreement on the conditions of intelligibility of the criteria of rationality, but nobody ever tries to pretend that there is, except as an occasional and rather ineffective rhetorical device. The discourse of high culture has, particularly in the past two hundred years, been considerably more fluid and chatty and playful than one would guess from reading Heidegger or Derrida." "Deconstruction and Circumvention," Critical Inquiry, September, 1984, pp. 14-15.

17 In Prophets of Extremity (University of California, 1985), Megill traces the "aestheticization" of experience, which results in a failure to distinguish between the necessary reactions required from an interpretation of the experience of being run over by a truck and the experience itself--"a distinction which every language, if it is to function on something more than a purely fantastic level must somehow accommodate." (p.42).

18 Frederick Karl adds to this notion when he writes a propos of the obfuscating prose of deconstructive critics, "We could argue, in fact, that part of the need for such quirky prose is to disguise, in part or whole, the critic's indebtedness; to disguise, indeed, that the ideas, while freshly stated, are not particularly fresh." Modern and Modernism: The Sovereignty of the Artist, 1885-1925 (Atheneum, 1985), pp. 412-413.

19 See Megill, p. 337 and Schwartz, p. 214.

20 London Review of Books, October, 1985, p. 15; see Howe, The New York Review of Books, April, 1987, p. 32: "We live in a moment of lowered cultural and emotional expectations, after the fall of Modernism, but without anything very strong to replace it..."

21 Karl himself regards postmodernism as an "intense stress on certain aspects" of Modernism. p.408.

22 For an account of Joyce's response to Lewis's Time and Western Man, see Quiñones, Mapping Literary Modernism (Princeton, 1985), pp. 216-222.

23 For a larger discussion of the notion of "return" in Modernist Literature, see Perl. Not without problems in its overall schema as well as some of its terminology, this study is still valuable in its essential impulse.

24 See Daniel Bell, "Beyond Modernism, Beyond Self," in Arts Politics, and Will: Essays in Honor of Lionel Trilling (Basic Books, 1977), ed. Quentin Anderson et al., p. 214. Just as the radicalism of the Sixties prompted some critics (such as Bell and other New York intellectuals) to regard Modernism as the blameworthy devoiemment, so deconstruction has moved some to lay yet another offense at the door of Modernism. See Eugene Goodheart, The Failure of Criticism (Harvard, 1978), pp. 4-5.