The modernist period, or ‘era’ as it has been called, straddles in its ‘high’ phase at least two decades of radical change (1910–30) during which many of the social values and aesthetic practices of the ‘long’ nineteenth century are left behind. Historically it includes the years of the Great War (1914–18) and, in Britain, post-war changes in the laws relating to education, women and public life, employment and housing, as well as the effects of economic recession. A period of extensive social and political change, it is marked also by diverse attempts in art and literature to understand, analyse and re-present the modern; as poet and critic Ezra Pound said, the task of the artist was to ‘make it new’.

Lawrence is central to our understanding of modernism although many view him in practice and temperament as a figure at a distinct remove from intellectuals and practitioners like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf, who themselves embodied radically different approaches to their historical moment. Hence the term ‘modernism’ is deceptive in its suggestion of a coherent, monolithic artistic movement. Literary modernism in fact describes, or contains, a range of dissimilar and contradictory approaches to new subjects, so that we can think of it as characterized by diversity and plurality rather than consensus. Many radical positions within modernism are derived from revolutionary thinkers, chief among them Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, iconoclasts and innovators whose work encouraged a revaluation of social, political and personal ‘certainties’. Other influences, however, helped along the development of modernist aesthetics. French Symbolisme, for example, with which the poet Mallarmé was associated, had a significant impact on the work of, among others, W.B. Yeats, Pound, Eliot and Lawrence. Wilhelm Worringer’s Abstraction and Empathy (1908) appealed to Lawrence because of the claims it made for abstraction and new forms of consciousness expressed in ‘primitive’ art. There was also a great deal of interest in myth as a mode of consciousness which preceded historical understanding (which was then viewed by the ‘modernist’ intellectuals with scepticism), and a fascination with social anthropology, particularly the genealogy of belief systems described in Sir James Frazer’s extensive study called The Golden Bough (1890–1915). T.S. Eliot drew on Frazer in The Waste Land (1922) in references to fertility rites, the dying god and spiritual mythologies. Lawrence too knew Frazer’s work. Eliot was also impressed by T.E. Hulme’s ‘Romanticism and Classicism’ (1911), a key document which was invoked to define
‘modernist’ aesthetics and which similarly influenced Pound in his ‘imagist’ phase. With Richard Aldington, Hilda Doolitle (who published under the initials H.D.) and F.S. Flint, Pound established imagism, an anti-Romantic discrete form of modernist poetry, and he edited an imagist anthology, Des Imagistes in 1914.

Diverse avant-garde movements at this time produced statements, pamphlets and periodicals proclaiming the radical vision of each group. These included Filippo Marinetti’s manifestos, among them ‘The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism’ (1909) – Lawrence was familiar with Marinetti’s work, and the free verse of another Italian futurist, Paolo Buzzi (Letters II: 180) – as well as statements on visual arts and culture from cubists, expressionists, constructivists, vorticists and the surrealists. Key statements about literature and culture were produced by T.S. Eliot (‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ [1919]), Virginia Woolf (‘Modern Fiction’ [1919], A Room of One’s Own [1929]), E.M. Forster, Ford Madox Ford (Hueffer), James Joyce, H.D., Richard Aldington and many others. At the heart of literary modernism is the reformation of poetry and the novel, in particular. This resulted in an increased interest in the writer’s medium alongside a preoccupation with the modern human subject.

From the time he was first published, Lawrence enjoyed the support of a number of influential figures in the literary world. Writing after his death, his friend the critic and reviewer Catherine Carswell recalls his first novel, The White Peacock, as a succès d’estime and acknowledges Ford Madox Hueffer’s influence with Heinemann in getting it into print (Carswell 1932: 6). Hueffer’s support of Lawrence has already been described. The youthful Lawrence, in his letters, shows his pleasure at being published in Hueffer’s English Review, and shows too that he is not reluctant to be aligned with ‘the new young school of realism’ and, with a sense of his contemporary moment, the ‘new spirit’ in literature (Letters I: 139). The mature Lawrence would become, in his discursive writing (such as the late essays on the novel) and in the formal treatment of complex subjects in his most achieved fiction, one of the ablest commentators on the successes and failures of modern literature (for a detailed discussion of Lawrence’s modernist contexts and his critical contribution see Bell in Fernihough 2001: 179–96).

Lawrence’s novel The Trespasser, in draft form, found a champion in Edward Garnett, an intellectual and critic who was a reader for the London publisher Duckworth, and who became, at a crucial time in Lawrence’s life, his friend and mentor. Lawrence took Garnett’s advice on where to revise the text, and The Trespasser was published by Duckworth in 1912. Garnett remained central to Lawrence’s early
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career, his influence persisting throughout the period associated particularly with the publication of *Sons and Lovers*. Lawrence also made the acquaintance of Ezra Pound when he was teaching in Croydon, through Ford Madox Hueffer. Although they were not natural friends, Lawrence was willing to benefit from Pound’s influence which was considerable and, indeed, Pound helped his poetry into print in a number of significant periodicals, including *The Egoist* which promoted imagism. The fact that Pound tired of Lawrence’s writing fairly quickly is not too surprising given, ultimately, the divergent aims of each: Pound theorized about poetry in ways which were, and would become, increasingly alien to Lawrence. However, Pound knew Lawrence’s poetry because of Hueffer and from *Georgian Poetry* (5 vols. 1912–22) edited by Edward Marsh, and he reviewed *Love Poems and Others* calling it, with reservations, ‘the most important book of poems of the season’ (Draper 1970: 53). After Pound, the American poet Amy Lowell supported Lawrence’s work in her annual anthology of imagist poets. Richard Aldington and H.D. cemented their friendship with the Lawrences at this time. H.D.’s novel, *Bid Me to Live* (1960) is in part a fictionalized account of her relationship with Lawrence. Aldington, like H.D., had an editorial role on *The Egoist* – he was succeeded in that capacity by T.S. Eliot whose ambivalent views about Lawrence’s literary value became central to the question of his reception [*119; 124–5*]. Aldington edited *Last Poems* (1932), and his work included a biography of Lawrence, *Portrait of a Genius But …* (1950).

In 1913, Lawrence also began the well-documented, often stormy, friendship with the critic and editor John Middleton Murry, and the New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield. Murry had published Lawrence in a quarterly which he edited, called *Rhythm*. Mutual respect and liking followed their first meeting although during the war years the Murrys (he and Mansfield were married in 1918) and the Lawrences grew apart – the relationship between Murry and Mansfield, and the Lawrences, is explored in *Women in Love* [*56–65*]. An important critic and influential figure in modernist literary history particularly through his association with key modernist magazines, Murry edited the *Athenaeum* between 1919 and 1921, and launched *The Adelphi* in 1923 (the year Mansfield died of tuberculosis), publishing an impressive range of writers which included Virginia Woolf as well as Eliot. In Murry, Lawrence hoped to have found a disciple. Their eventual estrangement was perhaps the most bitter of many he experienced (see Kinkead-Weekes 1996: 559–62).

At this time Lawrence also got to know people who could offer him real practical support, such as Lady Ottoline Morrell, a wealthy literary
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patron, who could always accommodate him at her Oxfordshire home, Garsington Manor. He was on friendly terms most of the time with other writers including E.M. Forster and others associated with the Bloomsbury Group – a clique of artists and intellectuals who gathered around the sisters Vanessa Bell, the artist, and Virginia Woolf, and their closest associates who included the economist John Maynard Keynes and critic and painter Roger Fry – although Lawrence was the first to admit that he was not really at home in this company. He also met poet and novelist Aldous Huxley, who remained a friend and who saw a great deal of Lawrence towards the end of his life in France. Intellectual relationships, like his brief friendship with the Cambridge philosopher and pacifist Bertrand Russell (in 1915), were significant. Although they eventually had a bitter falling-out, Russell helped Lawrence to develop his highly idiosyncratic ‘philosophy’ which he had rehearsed in a work-in-progress (1914) called ‘Le Gai Savaire’ – a title that reflected Lawrence’s reading of the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche – a work which became ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’ (1914; published, unrevised, in 1936). ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’ (which is more about Lawrence than Hardy, although his analyses of Hardy’s works are interesting), was drafted and redrafted at the same time as The Rainbow, and the relationship between the two texts is evident and important [55–6; 99–101].

If 1912–14 had been marked by new friendships – some, but not all, literary – the period 1914–18 was a depressing time for Lawrence who viewed the war as the last throes of a degenerate ‘mechanistic’ Western culture. The popular view was that the war with Germany, which was declared in August 1914 (and when Britain went to war so did its dominions and colonies), would be over quickly, and Lawrence settled down steadily to write until the time came when the end of the conflict would allow him to leave England. Some of his friends enlisted. Others – like Lawrence, eventually – were rejected for military service because they were found to be physically unfit in medical examinations. Weak lungs would not have prevented Lawrence from participating in non-military ‘war work’, as many men and women did, but he refused because he viewed such activity as in some way colluding with the idea of war. However, he was not a pacifist, a ‘conscientious objector’, someone who opposed the war on moral or other personal, principled, grounds. According to Catherine Carswell, Lawrence’s preferred option was ‘inaction’ – he would neither participate nor protest (Carswell 1932: 23). Regarding his own projects, he and Bertrand Russell (who was a pacifist) planned to work together – a series of lectures was discussed – but disagreements quickly resulted and the scheme faltered.

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Lawrence expressed the new animosity he felt towards Russell to his friend Lady Cynthia Asquith in August 1915 (*Letters* II: 378–81), a few months after a trip to see Russell, Maynard Keynes and their friends at Cambridge, which Lawrence had hated. The concerns which surfaced during this visit are often cited to reinforce views about Lawrence’s homophobia, stimulated by his revulsion at the Cambridge ‘men loving men’: essentially Keynes and his friends Francis Birrell and Duncan Grant (*Letters* II: 320). Lawrence would work on ideas about male friendship (which had for him a philosophical as well as a personal dimension) in later writing like the abandoned ‘Prologue’ to *Women in Love* [63–4]. However, much of the correspondence of this period shows Lawrence to be highly critical of his new acquaintances and becoming insistent, even strident, about the ‘dead’ and ‘false’ culture they inhabit, as well as, paradoxically, recording in his fiction his hopes for a new germination.

1914–15 was also a tense period in Lawrence’s marriage. Middleton Murry notes that:

> two things were preying on him together: one was the War, the other his struggle with his wife; the two strains seemed to be making a sick man of one who, on his return to England [after the first trip abroad with Frieda], had looked radiantly well.

(*Nehls 1957: 255*)

The issues which arose in his new marriage were examined in Lawrence’s writing. Apart from the relationship with Frieda, the personal trauma that the war presented to Lawrence (in particular the indignity of the army medicals to which he was subjected) is described in the retrospective and highly autobiographical chapter of his novel, *Kangaroo* (1923), called simply ‘The Nightmare’, and is documented in many of the letters of this period. In *Kangaroo* [69–72], it seems that the war is obscene because of its betrayal of ‘manly integrity’ rather than for the loss of any broadly understood political or moral values. In part as a response to the madness of the war, Lawrence began developing his idea of a small island community – a ‘colony’ (*Letters* II: 259) – of like-minded people determined on ‘new life’. Later he called this imagined community ‘Rananim’, and invented as its emblem the phoenix, common symbol of renewal. It came to nothing, but the idea shows the extent to which he was thinking about an alternative lifestyle, and working on a symbolic language with which to express it.

Also in 1915, Lawrence, Murry and Mansfield collaborated on a periodical called *Signature* for which Lawrence intended to write a series
of philosophical pieces. It was not a successful venture commercially, folding after three of six projected issues, but it enabled Lawrence to publish parts of his long essay ‘The Crown’ which builds on ideas first tried in ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’ and which, crucially, informs much of the doctrinal content of *Women in Love* [62–3; 101–2]. The major event of his year, however, was the publication of *The Rainbow*, and the ensuing controversy. Almost immediately the courts ordered its destruction under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. The sexual content of the book certainly offended conventional morality, but the war-time authorities may also have had suspicions about Lawrence’s German connections through Frieda (and, if one looked closely, at ‘unpatriotic’ sentiments expressed in the book through the character of Ursula Brangwen) [49–56]. The event was unusual enough for Phillip Morrell (Ottoline’s husband, and a Member of Parliament), to ask questions in the House of Commons, but Lawrence seemed not to have the energy for significant resistance (Kinkead-Weekes 1996: 285–96). Many of his comments in the letters of this troubling period are valedictory – he spoke of fleeing to America which he perceived as more liberal, and where an expurgated version of *The Rainbow* was published, but was prevented by the war from sailing – and he persists in his version of a collapsing civilization, of a decaying England and a world ending. London, the heart of empire, is ‘in a black rain … and a tube full of spectral, decayed people’ (*Letters* II: 434). It was symptomatic of this culture of ghostly automata that it should reject his book of life. Although he had accepted editors’ revisions and straightforward cuts of his work, he could not be optimistic for his second ‘Brangwen’ novel – still in progress – after the treatment of *The Rainbow*, and perhaps the thought that he had nothing more to lose gives that novel, *Women in Love*, its biting critical edge. Unable to go to America, the Lawrences moved, at the end of December 1915, to Cornwall. Settling for a time at Zennor, Lawrence, impoverished, worked on *Women in Love* – which he knew would not find a publisher in Britain – as well as a number of other pieces including poetry and short stories.

So this was a difficult period professionally and personally for Lawrence. His marriage contained tensions and had become characterized by struggle and resistance, often witnessed and discussed by their friends. In his reminiscences, Murry describes how he and Mansfield moved to Cornwall as the Lawrences’ neighbours, at Lawrence’s urging, although both had serious reservations, where they had previously enthused, about living so close. This was largely because of Lawrence’s erratic moods and judgements on the motives and behaviour of his friends (Nehls 1957: 370–81; 385–7), but also reflected
an unease at the open rows which periodically occurred in the Lawrences’ marriage. Their friendship was strained, and Murry and Mansfield eventually retreated from the South-West.

Despite the evident tensions, Lawrence’s letters record a genuine enthusiasm for the rural life available to him in Cornwall (he befriended and assisted a local farmer, William Henry Hocking, and there is speculation whether he, so different from the over-conscious Cambridge sophisticated, and Lawrence, were briefly lovers [Mark Kinkead-Weekes 1996: 377–80]). However, the Lawrences’ period of residency was brought to an abrupt end in October 1917 by a formal notice to leave issued by the military authorities. In fact, they had been under surveillance, with differing degrees of intensity, for some time. Lawrence’s letters were sometimes intercepted and opened, his house was searched, but he still declared himself shocked at the expulsion and ignorant of its causes. The Lawrences returned to London, renewing some old contacts, and then to a number of addresses which included a brief return to the Midlands before the end of the war made possible the first stage in a long, self-imposed, exile. In 1919 he left for Italy, a country he had first visited in 1912 and to which he would consistently return. The result of his first visit, *Twilight in Italy*, and his poems *Amores* (which were very early pieces), were published in 1916. *Sea and Sardinia* would be published in 1921, and *Sketches of Etruscan Places* [*Etruscan Places*], posthumously in 1932 [111–14].

Significant shifts had occurred in Lawrence’s personal philosophy between the publication of *Sons and Lovers* in 1913 and this move to Italy with *Women in Love* on the horizon – it would be published in America in 1920. *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1917) and *New Poems* (1918) constituted a major poetic achievement [82] and *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories* (1914) was a significant collection [91]. He had also worked on exploratory essays like ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’, ‘The Crown’, related meditations like ‘The Reality of Peace’ (1917), and he was reading, and writing about, American literature in preparation for what became *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) [104–8]. He had used his writing to explore his own sexuality and had begun to develop a personal philosophy based on ‘male’ and ‘female’ oppositions and dualities. By the time he came to write *Aaron’s Rod* (1922), he was thinking about masculinity and individuality which would absorb him in his later work, not least, in the novels *Kangaroo* (1923), *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928). Crucially, he had also started to examine the radical possibilities of the novel form, with views that would find expression in the essays of the 1920s on genre [108–10].