Introduction

Edwardian Britain, despite a century's distance with which to judge it, remains an enigmatic period for the historian. As early as 1935 George Dangerfield challenged the simplistic myth of "the Edwardian garden party," the "golden afternoon" before the deluge remembered through the tarnished lenses of those who had experienced the First World War. Dangerfield found the story of Britain between 1910 and 1914 to be "a far more curious drama" than that of a country "dancing its way into war, to a sound of lawn-mowers and ragtime, to the hum of bees and the popping of champagne corks."[1] Rather, the period as he described it was one of confrontation and conflict, tension and transition.

For Dangerfield above all the drama revolved around the fact that "true pre-war Liberalism" "was killed, or killed itself, in 1913."[2] A similar murder was committed in the intellectual history of the period. Among one group of thinkers in particular a "strange death" occurred in their concept of history. On or about the year 1913 the idea of progress died.

Fortunately, death is not the only story in Edwardian Britain. And it is possible to view the age not simply as the sunset of the preceding century, but also as the dawn of much that we consider modern. As Dangerfield himself acknowledged, the "extravagant behavior of the post-war decade, which most of us thought to be the effect of war had really begun before the War. The War hastened everything – in politics, in economics, in behavior – but it started nothing."[3] The emergence of the Labour Party, the foundation of the Welfare State, even the origins of fascism have been the emphasis of historical studies of the pre-war period as much as has been the demise of the Victorian era.

Birth was evident in the literary history of the age as well. Modernism, the characteristic literary movement of the first half of the twentieth century, had its origin in the years immediately preceding the First World War. Those features of literature that are associated with the "high" Modernism of British writers in the 1920s and 1930s, such

as non-representationalism, "abstraction and highly conscious artifice," "abrupt juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated particulars," "stream-of-consciousness narrative in the novel" and unrhymed verse, originated in the "drama" of Edwardian Britain.[4]

It was in this movement, British literary Modernism, that can be found one group of Edwardians among whom the idea of progress died and a different concept of history was born. In opposition to progressive notions, the Modernists found much more reality in cyclic views of the past. As one literary critic has succinctly pointed out, "modernism . . . abandons the idea of a linear historical development, falls back upon notions of a universal *condition humaine* or a rhythm of eternal recurrence."[5] Moreover, it is commonplace to be informed that such characteristic Modernist practices as the "mythical method," the "method of ideogram and anachronism," and the "time shift technique," in addition to the explicitly circular structures of many novels and long poems, reflect a non-progressive concept of time and the past.[6]

It is important to note that the Modernists were not merely innovative creative writers devising a new and unusual literary technique. They thought and wrote a great deal about politics, society, religion, and philosophy. And their abandonment of progress and adoption of a cyclic sense of the past went well beyond technique alone. The Modernists formulated their views of the universal structure of history as a result of a complex emotional and intellectual response both to the tradition in which they had been brought up, and to the important conflicts and changes of the Edwardian age. In observing the disturbing and often confusing challenges of this period, the first British Modernists found progress to be an historical structure unsuited to their needs and perception of reality. Cycles were far more satisfying.

This is a work of intellectual history, which examines the origins of this new historical view among the Modernists in an attempt to illuminate one aspect of the "curious drama" of Edwardian Britain. Thus, it is an intellectual history of intellectuals and history. While the Modernists' attitudes towards history have been the subject of studies in the past, most commonly the concern has been to shed light on the writers' mature creative work. As a result, chronology and historical background are often ignored.[7] This work, however, considers the Modernists as thinkers, as well as artists. Moreover, it applies the techniques of intellectual history, which have provided much insight into the writings of philosophers and political theorists, to the work of creative writers. It is hoped that what has resulted is a new understanding not only of this group of very important

literary figures, but also of the nature of the period in which they were living.

This, therefore, is a work of history, not literary criticism. Moreover, it takes the form of a collective intellectual biography. By examining all the writings of a representative group of thinkers over a short span of time it attempts to point out how and why their thought collectively changed direction. In the end this study illustrates Dangerfield's thesis of the Edwardian age as a period of disturbing transition. The Modernists themselves viewed the time in which they lived as one of chaos and confusion. Ultimately, they used history, and in particular the idea of cycles, as a means not only to discover order in the face of disorder, but also to innovate in their own creative writing, to ensure themselves, and artists in general, a more important place in the world, and, finally, to provide a sense of hope for the future.

While some observers may judge the Modernists' critical writings and their uses of history as superficial and naive, they are important for a number of reasons. First, the development of their views of history illuminates some of the problems of the period as they were felt by informed observers who were not necessarily professional politicians or philosophers. Moreover, the Modernists' writings also can illustrate some of the subtle ways in which history has been and can be used – to solve perceived problems and meet a variety of, often unconscious, needs. Finally, Modernist views of history were crucial in the development of one of the most important innovations in artistic practice of the twentieth century. All of this warrants a full study of the genesis of their historical thinking.

Five authors have been selected as a representative group of Modernists to form the focus of this study: W.B. Yeats, Ford Madox Ford (né Hueffer),[8] Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme, and D.H. Lawrence. They have been chosen for a number of reasons. First, they are all acknowledged by literary critics as having made important contributions to Modernist theory and practice. In addition, because this is a study of the origins of Modernist views of history, the representative group must have lived and published works in Britain well before the beginning of the First World War. This is true only of the group selected. Other acknowledged Modernists such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf either were not in Britain before 1914 or had not published anything substantial by that date.[9] Moreover, the five Modernists selected were part of the same generation.[10] They were all born within twenty years of one another (Yeats and Ford in 1865 and 1873 respectively, Hulme in 1884, and Pound and Lawrence both in 1885). And although they originally came

from different areas of Britain or America, they all lived and worked in London for much of the time between 1909 and 1914.

Finally, these five authors have been chosen collectively to represent early Modernism because they were, in fact, part of a loose intellectual group. Although they were not a self-conscious coterie agreeing on a name or a strict program to describe their work, Yeats, Ford, Pound, Lawrence, and Hulme had close personal and professional connections with one another. They all knew each other or knew of one another. They were all well aware of one another's work and ideas. They wrote for the same set of journals, went to many of the same places professionally and for entertainment, and they had many of the same friends in common. Moreover, they felt an affinity between their work and ideas. Among those authors actively publishing literature in London in those years, the five Modernists acknowledged one another, and were acknowledged at the time by others, as having many ideas in common, as being different from other writers, and as representing an important new trend in literature and thought.

These five authors, therefore, had the opportunity and desire to share their views and theories with one another. Although their ideas originally may have developed from their own individual interests and backgrounds, they all were brought closely together immediately before the war. It is not surprising, therefore, that a common set of assumptions about history resulted. It is these common ideas, emotions, or attitudes that are the focus of this work. What has been sacrificed, therefore, is a comprehensive analysis of the very real differences between the authors and those features of their thinking that make each unique. This has been intentional, both in the interest of space, and because this is the study of a group; the emphasis, thus, is on the commonality of their opinions. Much critical writing has been done on each individual author and this body of work should be consulted for an understanding of the differences between them.

Because it is the origins of the Modernist view of history that is under consideration, this study focuses on the years 1909 to 1914, although it has been necessary to discuss some ideas well before 1909 and some after 1914. Nineteen hundred and nine has been chosen as a starting date because it was then that the five Modernists first met, or became aware of, one another; 1914 is the ending date, naturally, because it is the start of the First World War.

Moreover, because the Modernists have been treated as intellectuals as well as literary figures, all of the works of the five Modernists have

been considered in these years to point out their changing ideas of history. This includes journal articles, letters, private papers, memoirs, and non-fiction, as well as their poetry, drama, stories, and novels. It is important to note, however, that the genesis of their historical views was a complex process involving emotional and intellectual responses to contemporary developments in a wide variety of areas including politics, society, religion, and aesthetics. Thus the discussion of their ideas of history necessitates a consideration of their attitudes towards all of these topics as well.

As a work of contextual intellectual history, moreover, it has been necessary to examine the social, political, and intellectual context to which the authors responded, in order to discover what might have prompted the changes in their ideas. The construction of this context has been carefully limited by the five Modernists' own writings. Only those subjects and events that they commented upon explicitly or that they took an interest in have been considered part of the context. Unlike a literary critic such as Sanford Schwartz who studies a wide "matrix" of ideas which were "in the air" at the time and that he has selected because of a perceived similarity to the thought of the Modernists, I have only discussed those ideas and occurrences either that the authors wrote about or of which there is strong indication that they were aware.[11] Therefore, not all of the features of Edwardian England have been included as part of the context considered. For example, some of the five Modernists wrote explicitly about the Boer War, the 1911 Parliament crisis, the ideas of Henri Bergson, or the Theosophical Society. All of this has been examined. Articles in journals they were known to have read and on subjects in which they were interested at the time also have been considered. But if Einstein's theory of relativity has not been mentioned, or if Nietzsche or the Suffragette movement are considered only briefly, it is because the five Modernists either did not discuss these ideas or events or mentioned them infrequently.

The study follows a roughly chronological organization, although it does not do so strictly. This is because it is a collective, rather than an individual, biography. In order for the common thought of all five authors to emerge, the chapters are organized around topics, rather than around writers. Because the five Modernists did not comment on all topics, or did so at different times, it has not been possible to proceed in a strictly chronological manner or to include every author in every discussion. What this means is that some Modernists feature more in some discussions than others. For example, D.H. Lawrence seems remarkably absent

in the beginning of the work, but, like Athena from the head of Zeus, emerges suddenly almost fully grown at the end. Ford Madox Ford, on the other hand, fades from view somewhat as the study progresses.

In the end, the presentation of the origins of the historical thinking of the five Modernists in this work may resemble Ford Madox Ford's "Impressionistic" rendering of the past more than anything else. It aims at giving the reader an impression or general feeling of the chronological development and of the common ideas and emotions of the authors. However, unlike Ford's histories, the impressions and conclusions of this work are based on careful research done for each author in a strictly chronological fashion.

The genesis of the five Modernists' views of history occurred slowly and often was quite subtle. It is important at the outset, therefore, to be aware of what are the general components of different views of history in order that the often minor changes in their thinking can be properly weighed. That the five Modernists theorized about the nature of history was hardly innovative. In fact, they were joining the ranks of numerous artists, as well as philosophers, theologians, and historians who constructed speculative philosophies of history. In this the Modernists were doing more than just reflecting poetically on "the mutability and transience of all things."[12] Rather, they were attempting to answer fundamental questions "about patterns and purpose and meaning" in the past, in order "to render the whole historical process meaningful in the sense of 'intelligible'."[13]

Moreover, the Modernists' conclusion that history moves in cycles also was not particularly new. In fact, it has been argued that "there are three possible patterns" of history; "either history has proceeded in a certain direction, or it has repeated itself in succeeding peoples and periods, or it has been formless and chaotic."[14] The latter view does not lend itself to speculative philosophies of history, the fundamental aim of which is to reduce "the whole of the past to an order" and to predict "things to come."[15] As a result, speculative histories are almost exclusively either progressive or cyclic. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the British literary Modernists of the early twentieth century were not the first to speculate that cycles were the fundamental feature of the past.

Nevertheless, while the five Modernists were not unique in holding cyclic philosophies of history, they were the first to do so in quite a long time. Since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment the most common pattern of history was that of progress. There have been, however, a number of different progressive views. Inspired by the discovery of laws

of nature for the physical world during the Scientific Revolution and encouraged by the belief that similar laws could be found for all areas of human existence, European thinkers such as Turgot, Lessing, Smith, Condorcet, Herder, and Comte developed theories of linear progressive improvement. In other words, they speculated that if the scientific method was applied properly and existing conditions were changed according to the laws uncovered by that method, the world would rapidly improve. Such views of progress culminated in the nineteenth-century Darwinian and social Darwinian theories of positive evolution, and in the progressive assumptions of British Whig historians such as Buckle, Macaulay, Freeman, and Maitland who carefully plotted the development of the British political system from its primitive origins to its perfection in the present day.[16]

The "optimistic belief in progress which laid its mark on so much nineteenth-century historical thinking" was reflected occasionally in literature.[17] For example, Tennyson wrote in his 1842 poem "Locksley Hall" of the "glorious gains" that British civilization had achieved through the growth of wisdom and science, and he expressed confidence that if he could look "into the future, far as human eye could see" he would witness "all the wonder that would be."[18] George Eliot, writing in 1851, was optimistic that "every phase of human development is part of the education of the race in which we are sharing; every mistake, every absurdity into which poor human nature has fallen, may be looked on as an experiment of which we may reap the benefit."[19]

However, few nineteenth-century thinkers or artists were entirely unequivocal about positive progress, and a number had become so disillusioned that they even speculated about the linear decline of civilization. One historian even argues that a "European-wide . . . anxiety about degeneration" existed, which "reached something of a crescendo in the 1890s."[20] The fact that an entire school of artists were named "Decadents" says much about theories of history at the end of the century. These writers did not, however, abandon underlying assumptions of progress. The only difference was a change in direction; the world was growing progressively worse, rather than better.[21]

While linear progress was very popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries especially among the general public, it was not the most common pattern of history among artists and thinkers. In fact, the philosophy of history that gained most adherents in the nineteenth century combined linear advance with cyclic regression or repetition to create a spiral pattern. The first widespread group to develop spiral theories were

the Romantics. M.H. Abrams, in his extensive study of Romantic theories of history, *Natural Supernaturalism*, argues that the most characteristic pattern of history of authors such as Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Schelling, Schiller, and Fichte was progress in the shape of a spiral. In this view of history, improvement occurs after a decline or fall from a golden age. When humanity returns to the principles of the former age, a new golden age results, superior to the first one because of the knowledge gained by the fall. No further falls will occur and progress will continue indefinitely. The fall, therefore, is "fortunate" because without it the future could not be permanently better.[22]

The early nineteenth-century Romantic writers were not alone in speculating about the spiral pattern of history. In fact, most later Victorian thinkers and artists developed their own varieties of this theory. For example, according to one literary critic, the "paradox of the fortunate fall underlies Ruskin's whole concept of the Gothic," because he believed that it was possible to reverse the decline following the Middle Ages and restore the world "to a glory far greater than that possible had there been no prior transgression."[23] Other Victorians held similar views, but proposed that, not one, but many "fortunate falls" had occurred. Perhaps influenced by Hegel's dialectic pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, many nineteenth-century authors believed that throughout history two principles, one positive and one negative, alternated with one another. Arnold's Hebraism and Hellenism, Carlyle's systole and diastole of faith and unfaith, Pater's centrifugal and centripetal, Ionic and Doric, Asiatic and European, and Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian impulses all fit this pattern. Each of these thinkers continued to propose that the tradition they found preferable had increased and been perfected over time because of the lessons learned during each negative "fall".[24] And they were hopeful that the struggle of opposites would be resolved or, to use the Hegelian concept of 'aufheben', annulled, preserved, and transcended, and progress would result.[25]

Thus, most Romantics and Victorians could not avoid the nineteenth-century optimism in the likelihood, as Matthew Arnold put it, of "the growth towards perfection."[26] In fact, Arnold like so many others made it clear that his aim, which was "the aim of great culture," was progress – "to ascertain what perfection is and to make it prevail."[27] And despite much pessimism about the present, most Victorian writers were confident, like Thomas Carlyle, that "the happiness and greatness of mankind at large have been continually progressive" and that "a new and brighter spiritual era is slowly evolving itself for all men."[28]

The historical theories of the early twentieth-century British literary Modernists were indebted to many earlier authors and appear similar to them at first glance. However, there are some very significant differences. Despite being called 'modernist', their philosophies of history had a greater affinity to pre-modern thinkers than to any eighteenth- or nineteenth-century figure. Many literary critics point out the debt that Modernists such as Yeats and Joyce acknowledged to the early eighteenth-century philosopher, Giambattista Vico, who it is claimed developed one of the only modern cyclic theories of the past. However, the Modernists' theories were quite different from his. A close reading of Vico reveals that within his "*corsi e ricorsi*," or repetition of the divine, heroic, and human ages, are common assumptions of progress. Because Vico believed that with greater historical knowledge it was possible to make fundamental changes, improve upon the past, and thus avoid the final degenerative age of a future cycle, his views cannot be considered strictly cyclic, as were those of the Modernists. Some historians even have argued that Vico's importance is not as a cyclic thinker, but as a precursor of later progressive theories; his "books were the vehicle by which the concept of historical development at last entered the thought of Western Europe."[29] Similarly, a recent study concludes that his "cycles were not cyclical but spiral-like."[30] Vico's theories, thus, resembled Romantic and Victorian views of history more than anything pre-modern or Modernist.

It was only in the pre-modern period that thinkers were willing to accept the strictly cyclic nature of the past. This was certainly the case in traditional and non-Western societies, such as those of Persia, India, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.[31] It also has been argued that "the eternal return is a universal ingredient of mythic thought" and was the most popular theory in the Greco-Roman world. Most pre-Socratic philosophers wrote of a universal pattern of a cyclic coming together into unity alternating with a decay into separation. Plato's theory of the great year and recurring destruction of worlds, Aristotle's cycle of political revolutions, Polybius' rise and fall of states and empires, and the Stoics' theories of the periodic return to an original state of innocence were all cyclic as well.[32] That some twentieth-century Modernists were aware of the pre-modern origins of their views of history is made clear by Yeats's 1937 exposition of his theory of history, *A Vision*, which includes an overview of all of these ancient ideas and more.[33]

As with progressive views, there are a variety of cyclic theories of history. Two patterns are most common – the "cycloid" and "sinusoidal" types.[34] A cycloid pattern of history is one in which "history goes

through . . . [a] sequence of beginning, middle, and end only to start over with a repetition."[35] In other words, these theories posit the growth, maturity, and decay of one civilization or tradition and the repetition of that pattern within that civilization or another. These theories were most common in the later Greco-Roman period and the Renaissance. They also can be easily transformed into spiral pattern with the addition of some form of progress over time as occurred in much Romantic and Victorian thought.

In the late nineteenth, and especially the early twentieth century this cycloidal thinking re-emerged. For example, Nietzsche's idea of the Eternal Recurrence suggested that throughout time all events are repeated infinitely. However, Nietzsche did not elaborate on this idea fully enough for it to be considered a speculative philosophy of history, and there is debate about whether he even meant it to be taken literally. Moreover, his theory of the Overman implies an acceptance of progress; a consciously willed evolutionary process that overcomes and transcends the present may result in a better future. Thus, Nietzsche's thought is not unequivocally cyclic.[36] It is only with Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* in 1918 that a fully developed cycloidal philosophy of history appeared. Spengler found in nine separate cultures a cyclic "pattern analogous to the life cycle of a plant or animal;" all grew, matured, and decayed.[37] Arnold Toynbee in the 1930s and 1940s found a similar organic "pattern of growth, breakdown, and eventual decay and dissolution," but expanded upon Spengler by examining twenty-one civilizations of the past.[38]

The historical theories of the early British literary Modernists, however, were different even from those of other cyclic thinkers in their own era. This is because, rather than claiming that history followed a cycloid pattern, the Modernists, like thinkers of a much earlier period, developed sinusoidal views of history. They accepted an "alternation (or fluctuation) view" of the past in which "there is a movement in history wherein one set of general conditions is regularly succeeded by another, which then in turn gives way to the first."[39] In other words, rather than theorize about one eternally repeated life cycle, an alternation view postulates the existence of two sets of phenomena, principles, or traditions that cyclically alternate throughout time. One tradition is predominant for a number of centuries or years and then it is replaced by the other tradition. The first tradition will return, the second one will then follow it, and this alternation will continue for ever. The Modernists' views of history, therefore, were quite unique for the period in which they were written,