Introduction

Shakespeare and modernism – the one, an early modern playwright, and the other, separated by about three hundred years, a cultural situation of late modernity – are arguably antithetical. We think of Shakespeare as the affirmation of what heights creative genius can achieve in the exploration of human themes, writing in the renaissance, an allegorical concept suggestive of the rebirth of classical antiquity at the beginning of a new historical epoch, modernity. Shakespeare's dramatic characters, in their mimetic capacity, would seem to demonstrate the potential for the intellectual and emotional life of the individual in post-feudal civilization. They communicate to us, in slightly antiquated language, their essential modernity, the stage an always self-conscious metaphor for our lived experience. By comparison, we think of modernism as a broadly defined literary paradigm, linked to the 'early modern' within the framework of modernity, but characterized by fragmentation and dissociation, the de-centring of the humanist tradition. Modernist artworks would seem to communicate an altogether different ethos, a disconnectedness to modernity, an inability to relate to or make sense of the modern experience. A waste land, an end game, modernism occupies the opposite ontological category.

Yet modernists, like their Victorian predecessors, read Shakespeare. They wrote copious volumes of literary criticism. They discussed and debated his biographical details and personal character. They produced his plays in the theatre and introduced them to the cinema. They studied his texts and applied current scientific methodologies to help explicate and understand them. They appropriated his life and works in their literature. They also protested against Shakespeare. They disparaged the style of nineteenth-century essay writing characteristic of popular literary appreciation and established academic institutions for literary criticism. They denounced the stagnant traditions associated with Shakespeare's performance in the theatre and heralded the arrival of a new drama and

avant-garde aesthetic movements. They rebelled against the central position of Shakespeare in the English literary canon and even denounced his plays as artistic failures, antiquated relics, and bastions of bourgeois commercialism. In late nineteenth and early twentieth-century English culture, the numerous appropriations, allusions, denunciations and discussions – this engagement with Shakespeare across a range of cultural practices – served to define, mediate and relate the modernist experience.

The purpose of this book is to explore the modernist engagement with Shakespeare, the ways in which artists and writers read and interpreted, re-imagined and re-configured Shakespeare as a canon, an author, a literary archetype; and in so doing, the ways in which they read and interpreted, theorized and canonized their own work and that of their contemporaries. The suggestion of both Shakespeare's mutability and modernism's narrativity here suggests a familiar problematization of these two literary categories; indeed, who were modernists, and what was this cultural monolith which arguably dominated their cultural imagination? On the surface, both Shakespeare and modernism would seem distinct and relatively obvious literary categories – an author and a broadly defined literary period. Shakespeare is Shakespeare and modernism, albeit complicated, is a knowable aesthetic event. My premise here, however, is that neither represents an absolute historical reality, either about authorship or literary period – the man Shakespeare, the moment of modernism – and where we find these two fields intersecting in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century England is precisely in the narratives of their cultural construction. If Shakespeare was central to the modernist project, he was so because, as a cultural formation in conflict with its own self-constituting systems, he was demonstrative of modernity and the subsequent crisis of modernism.

The remarkable history of Shakespeare from the seventeenth century to our own has been mostly predicated upon the assumption that Shakespeare represents a single imaginative consciousness, an assumption complicated by the well-known absence of Shakespeare's holograph manuscripts. What we have instead are, to begin, numerous extant printed texts of the plays in Quarto and Folio versions, ascribed to Shakespeare, but each with varying and still highly debated claims to single authorship. In addition to these are the extant printed narrative poems and sonnets whose authority is generally better, but which are constrained by the conventions of courtly poetry and, as the creative expressions of their author, are mostly undervalued in relation to the plays. Finally, a series of holograph signatures and a final will not in his own hand, as well as some

genealogical and financial records, represent in total remarkably little to connect us directly and unproblematically to the man Shakespeare. Perhaps as a result of this relative absence, the majority of Shakespeare commentary through history has been, to greater and lesser extents, concerned with issues of literary, dramatic and textual authority, even up to but not always or unconditionally in our own contemporary critical paradigm. The ever-present heretical theories regarding the authorship of the plays, from the Baconians to the Oxfordians, among numerous others, may seem like pedantic attempts throughout history to exploit this absence, but what they are at least evidence to is the vulnerability to which the unification of these texts as the authentic expressions of Shakespeare has always been subject. Despite the obviousness of Shakespeare's genius, maintaining the apparent unity of his authorship has required significant intellectual energy and discursive output.

These observations are now commonplace as much contemporary criticism has exposed the problematic bias of an authorship which the various disciplines of editing, criticism, biography and performance have imposed on the texts. We might read the whole history of Shakespeare's reception as an operation of an author function, the immaterial author an implicit objective in the pursuit of the authoritative text, the ideal performance, the historical truth or the organizing theme. This is a totalizing account which necessitates much qualification, but the point has been commonly noted that the search for or representation of an elusive textual meaning is always discreetly related, even when intentional fallacies are denounced, to the always-absent author in any given literary field.[1] This is not unique to Shakespeare. The history of Shakespeare's reception, however, is exceptional: the concept of a single, powerful, unifying imagination otherwise obviating the heterogeneity of numerous texts and cultural situations has become a major dialectical framework, the increasingly formidable reputation of Shakespeare as the foremost representative of a literary canon contrasting with a growing diversity of interpretive and performative possibilities. This is no less apparent in the modernist paradigm when various new adumbrations of Shakespeare study – biographical criticism, scientific bibliography, Elizabethan antiquarianism, historicism, and a burgeoning academicism – sought to delimit Shakespeare's authorship by allegorizing the concept of a unified canon, projecting various structural systems – psychological, sexual, thematic, historical – upon the texts. Modern textual strategies, developments concomitant with the progressive expansion and diversification of modern industrial society, simultaneously generated and contained the

various canonically disintegrating impulses against which they sought to defend the unity of Shakespeare.

Moving through history from the early modern to the post-modern, we learn that successive generations have reinvented Shakespeare in the image of their own cultures, a process which suggests the universal adaptability and dynamism of the canon through modernity, but which actually functions to reify the unity of modernity itself in the face of an inexorably forward-moving, diversifying modernization.[2] Shakespeare, not of an age but for all time, becomes representative of unique and diverse cultural situations because his canon serves as corollary to the teleology of modernity upon whose trajectory these cultures are seen, or see themselves, to develop. Given the relatively unstable unity of the canon, is it merely ironic or self-fulfilling that Shakespeare should occupy a central position in this allegory, an exemplary author who embodies the development of humanist ideology within modernity while always containing the possibility for his own de-centring and diversification? If modernism represents a crisis of modernity, a moment containing the distinct possibilities offered by a similar dialectical negotiation between a unifying, collective modernity and its potentially frightening, potentially emancipating, alternative, then Shakespeare, we are surprised to discover, was also a modernist.

Of course, like Shakespeare, the concept of an authentic or knowable modernism, based as it is upon the assumption of modernity as a historical situation, is hydra-headed. Modernism has witnessed innumerable differing formalist accounts of its chronological and geographic boundaries, defining characteristics and principal representatives. The constant redefinition and re-conceptualization of modernism is indicative of the *telos* of modernity itself: the constant revolutionizing, the always-impending newness implicit in the temporality of the word 'modern' producing ever-new divisions, definitions and theorizations for its own conceptual framework.[3] In its essence, though, like the concept of 'renais-renaissance', 'modernity' suggests a chronological periodicity based on a dialectical structure of rupture and continuity, both discontinuous (modern, new) and continuous (developed from, improving upon). The modern generates, on the one hand, a sense of breaking with the past, from a prior order to a modern one. For modern*ism*, that break emerges out of a triangulated relationship with its 'modern' correlates: where modern*ity* is the historical situation, its own break occurring somewhere in the sixteenth century (though possibly earlier, possibly later), modern*ization* refers to the forward-moving process of modernity, and modernity's *-ism*,

an aesthetic field expressive of the reaction to that process in its later, more fully developed stage. Modernism is thus conceived as a reaction-formation, a rupture in late modernity, a collective expression of angst and futility precipitated by the disenfranchising, dehumanizing forward-movement of modernization. On the other hand, modernism retains the positive ethos of the modern, the sense of continuity with the past combined with the libidinal charge of the new, the utopian possibilities implied by innovation and progress, by the teleology of modernity.

The modernist narrative shares a chronological and ideological framework with the Marxist narrative which has become, not surprisingly, one of the most powerful interpretive models for modernism (as, by the same token, 'modernist' has become a characteristic label for many early Marxist writers). Whereas modernity marks the transition from feudal to capitalist society in the Marxist narrative, modernization designates the process of economic development in industrial capitalism. The precedent here is Karl Marx himself who, with Friedrich Engels in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, described the constant revolutionizing of the means of production inherent in bourgeois society, and the concomitant uncertainty and agitation which it produces, the uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations.[4] Modernism becomes a condition of capitalism, an expression of the uncertainty and dissociation produced within, and a movement of resistance to, bourgeois society. As an aesthetic reaction-formation, modernism resists the social forces which would degrade the artwork to a market commodity.[5] In its anti-bourgeois orientation, modernism insists upon art's aesthetic autonomy, resorting to the humanistic valuation of art as fetish, a *l'art pour l'art*, for its own sake, separated from the economic conditions of its production.[6] Marxism thus articulates an engagement with modernity which is expressive of the modernist experience and which, increasingly through the twentieth century, has become its enabling discourse.

Though modernity as an epistemological category predates Marx, the central revelation that modernity, reduced to its determining economic factors, equals capitalism makes modernism a form of capitalist critique, a philosophical/aesthetic resistance to bourgeois society. At the same time, modernism expresses the same inner dynamic of modernization, the perpetual innovation – in the famous dictum of Ezra Pound, the need to 'make it new'. At times, therefore, modernism shares the emancipatory potential of Marxism, embracing the liberating spirit of a popular consciousness. Whereas capitalism, we might argue, represents a fairly objective condition of history, the Marxist narrative interprets that condition as

the struggle between an enslaving economic system and the utopian future of the proletariat. The modernist narrative produces a similar dialectic of oppression and emancipation through its aestheticization of life. Not simply a reaction-formation, modernism also offers an aesthetic alternative, an emancipatory art which embraces the possibilities of modernity, the future technologies and machineries, and the liberating spirit of revolution echoed in real political movements and revolutions. This alternative would resonate in avant-garde movements such as expressionism and futurism. As a rupture within modernism, the avant-garde would turn against the idea of aesthetic autonomy, insisting upon art's social praxis, an insistence which would lead to the avant-garde's identification with real political and social movements such as fascism.[7] With its emphasis on the artist and the artwork as autonomous – an insistence which simultaneously reasserts the very categories of bourgeois thinking, the valuation of the self descended from the Enlightenment – to which it also revolts, modernist artworks would also express a contradictory self-denial, a regression from modernity. Writers roughly contemporary with Marx such as Nietzsche and Freud would harness a shared resistance to 'false consciousness', valorising the primitive and pre-rational experience by positing a division between the rational conscious and pre-rational subconscious. Both of their writings would reverberate through narratives of literary modernity in the twentieth century.

Within the framework of these narratives – *l'art pour l'art*, the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, romantic anti-capitalism, the will to power, modern psychopathology – modernism becomes an expression of both the positive and negative possibilities of modernity, as well as a crisis within the very categories of modernity itself. If the works of writers from Marx, Benjamin and Lukács to Nietzsche and Freud help to characterize modernism in the context of roughly contemporaneous social and aesthetic theory, we also find their vocabularies echoed in the narratives of Shakespeare's cultural construction throughout this same period. The resistance to bourgeois commercialism, the fear of a mass culture hastened by class dissolution and industrial mechanization, the prescriptive demands for revolutionary forms of theatre and writing, the anticipation and wonder engendered by scientific discoveries, medical technologies and psychological theories, the emancipatory potential of art – these are the issues that were central to the artists, writers, theatre practitioners, literary commentators, biographers, academics and enthusiasts for whom Shakespeare was a subject. Or rather, what we might say is that Shakespeare proved a central and largely inevitable subject for those

modernists who, in constructing their cultural narratives, were trying to understand and relate their own contemporary experience. Shakespeare as a cultural category becomes one of the focal points for modernism because he contains all the positive and negative, conflicting possibilities of modernity.

Shakespeare and Modernism is a study of Shakespeare as a narrative system read and written within the meta-narrative of modernism.[8] My purpose here is neither to define modernism according to its engagement with Shakespeare nor to demonstrate how close modernists came to the historical truth about Shakespeare. Rather, my purpose is to explore how artists and writers in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century England engaged with the cultural traditions of Shakespeare as a means of defining and relating what they understood to be their own distinct historical experience. The methodological focus employed here builds upon a critical perspective which has been developed through recent works by Terence Hawkes, Hugh Grady and Richard Halpern in their seminal studies of this field.[9] The highlighting of narrative systems, however, marks an important, if only subtle, distinction between this and previous studies. Modernism is viewed here as a highly plastic narrative trope, an explanatory system rather than an actual historical phenomenon with distinct chronological boundaries, a beginning and end, a formal aesthetic or representative and non-representative figures.[10] This is not to deny the use of the term – modernist artists, modernist artworks, modernism as literary period – but to recognize that the construction of modernism is contingent upon, as noted earlier, the assumption of modernity as our own historical situation.

This de-emphasis on modernism's formal aesthetic boundaries would seem to suggest an evasion of the project implied by the title of the book, the defining of a single modernism and its reception of Shakespeare. The methodology arguably courts a relativism that comes from viewing modernism as, rather than a series of recoverable truths, a complex system of 'stories' determined by and always read within the present. The first purpose for my emphasizing narrative, however, is to recognize and make explicit the embeddedness of Marxist cultural critique within modernism as a critical formation, articulated within its anti-bourgeois and utopian dimensions, but also within modernism constructed as a cultural category post modernism. Indeed, the often insurmountable complexities of modernist discussion would seem to result in part from a dialectic, unresolved in Marx, initiated by the central division between base, or mode of production, and superstructure, encompassing, among other

things, cultural production. Simply put, culture might be seen either as determined by the base, prescribed by the economic conditions of production, or as an autonomous or semi-autonomous critical sphere capable of fomenting the class revolution which reorders the relations of economic production. The Marxist revelation that all forms of production in society depend upon and are predetermined by the organization of class systems (carefully modified by Althusser to answer the charge of a 'vulgar' Marxist determinism with ideology critique) provides the central tenet of materialist criticism. In my view, the materialist perspective radically undermines reductive formalist accounts of modernism which underplay or ignore the ideologies of class and gender which are everywhere manifest in modernism. The methodology used here therefore employs a materialist emphasis on class and gender systems and the economic or material dimension of cultural activity, with specific consideration given to the social and political transformations of the period: in particular, the increasing industrialization, mechanization and urbanization of society; the growth of a middle-class and forms of mass cultural production; the increased advocacy of the Suffrage movement and transforming gender relationships; and the emergent totalitarian ideologies of Europe.

The limitations of a closed 'stucturalist' approach to cultural production, however, are now widely recognized, the main objection arising from the totalizing emphasis on economic or ideological determinism at the expense of art's autonomy status, a status upon which modernism would seem to insist. To echo the Marxist maxim, we make our own destinies, though not in the conditions of our choosing, and the ambiguity about the role of culture in the utopian future of the proletariat, again unresolved in Marx, is precisely what has given rise to diverse Marxist-influenced aesthetic theories in the twentieth century. Whereas discourse analysis enables the historicist reading of modernity from renaissance self-fashioning to contemporary gender studies, Marxist aesthetics engage more explicitly with a critique of industrial capitalism which privileges an aesthetic or critical sphere as the binary opposite of an increasingly commercial, uncritical mass culture, particularly in the later phases of industrial capitalism. This idea has provided the framework for cultural theorists from Walter Benjamin to Theodor Adorno and Jürgen Habermas – that increasingly commercial and mass-produced forms of cultural production in late nineteenth and twentieth-century capitalist society, and the simultaneous growth of a mass-audience dominated by the values of a bourgeois middle-class seeking ever-new products

to consume, have produced and will continue to produce a necessary cultural deterioration.[11] Marxist aesthetic theory continues to provide the basis for much contemporary discussion of modernism.

Hugh Grady, for example, when attempting to characterize an aesthetic which is singular and autonomous – the modernist Shakespeare – privileges modernism as 'a carrier of anti-instrumental values and practices' by, rather deftly, combining Thomas Kuhn's scientific concept 'paradigm' with the aesthetic theory of the Frankfurt school, most notably that of Horkheimer and Adorno.[12] As he suggests, an historically aware aestheticism is a 'desirable approach to art in an era of colonizing and levelling ideologies and practices which threaten to absorb everything resistant to a life of pure commodity-exchange'.[13] To a degree, his study relies upon Horkheimer and Adorno's emphasis on cultural dialectics, the Enlightenment insistence upon rational order and instrumental reason turned into an autonomous system of discourse, increasingly secular and rationalized, and increasingly at odds with its originally emancipatory impulse. The result is a professionalized literary criticism developing in the early twentieth century which Grady describes in terms of a dialectical negotiation between social inscription and individual psychic fantasy in criticism's engagement with art. *The Modernist Shakespeare* is largely restricted to the discussion of institutionalized academic criticism's engagement with literary high art, a discussion which goes far to demonstrating modernism as a formal aesthetic paradigm functioning in the triangulated relationship of modernity/ization/ism. Both Terence Hawkes and Richard Halpern adopt a broader materialist emphasis on diverse heterogeneous cultural practices, an emphasis which arguably comes at the expense of not crediting modernism's utopian dimension.[14] Halpern, perhaps, achieves a more dialectic approach by adopting a double focus on 'allegory and on the economic'.[15] His use of the term 'historical allegory', which he defines as the relation between history and allegorical processes, applied to each of his five 'allegorical mappings' arguably coincides with my own use of 'narrative' here, though the terms serve different ends. But adopting the economic focus of the Marxist framework produces, as he notes, a 'recognizably "modernist" approach to modernism, with both the strengths and weaknesses that this focus entails'.[16]

One of those weaknesses is the negative valuation of bourgeois culture and the necessary elitism it produces, especially as entrenched within the literary academy, and particularly entrenched in its distinction of high modernism. Moving from discussions of modernism to post-modernism,

the question of an aesthetic sphere functioning in a reified capitalism becomes more dialectic, the post-modern embracing its own commodity status in a process of complex, self-reflexive commentary which would seem otherwise antithetical to modernism. Still, attempts to define modernism largely cling to one of modernism's primary discourses, incorporating, anticipating, dramatizing or effacing its insistence upon the autonomy status of art in bourgeois society. This insistence inevitably privileges modernism as the antithesis to an increasingly degraded bourgeois culture. My purpose here, then, is to adopt a kind of critical distance, however paradoxical, which will allow us to read Marxist debate as, rather than providing an unresolved narrative which explains modernism, a set of narrative strategies endemic within modernism. The paradox comes from adopting an economic or materialist focus which credits the utopian possibilities and energies harnessed within modernism – that is to say, taking a 'modernist' approach to modernism – but which is undermined by the endless deferral of narrative to a stable, identifiable history. Narrative, however, allows us to think in terms of the historicity of the concepts and categories themselves which have made our conceptualization and understanding of modernism possible.[17]

A second purpose for de-emphasizing the formal boundaries of modernism in this study is to give a greater emphasis to the nineteenth-century proto-modernist cultures which shape the diverse, heterogeneous encounters with Shakespeare in the modernist period. Working somewhat against the grain of received chronologies of the period, modernism is thus viewed here as a kind of socio-cultural matrix, with important connections to and continuities with pre-modernist figures such as Nietzsche, Freud, Wilde and Shaw. The idea of a modernist matrix with more fluid chronological, geographic and epistemological boundaries has been proposed and used to great effect by Sanford Schwartz who, like Grady after him, develops his argument from a reading of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Principles*.[18] Kuhn's concept of the 'paradigm' serves to conceptualize the notion of a break or rupture which is central to the ideation of modernism, a modernism which is both socially determined, but which, as an aesthetic–critical paradigm, is also a locus of anti-institutional values and utopian vision. For much the same purpose as mine here, Grady explains his use of Kuhn's paradigm as a 'model for the dynamics of shared cultural activities' which combine to produce modernism, a modernism which, importantly, might be seen to be coextensive with prior and subsequent paradigms and which is articulated in a series of major and minor breaks in an intersubjective sphere.[19] As this work