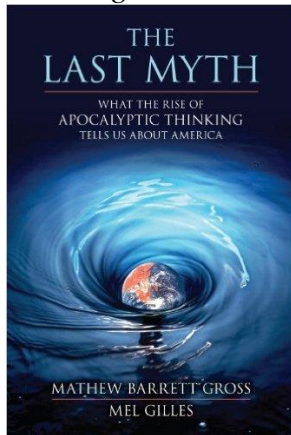


INGL 3300-066--“Post-Apocalyptic Literature and Film” ---Ingl3300-066
UPRM, Fall 2015, Dr. Gregory Stephens (Lecture 5, Sept. 15, 2015)

Roots of Post-Apocalyptic Genre: Industrialism, Modernism, and Disillusion with Progress

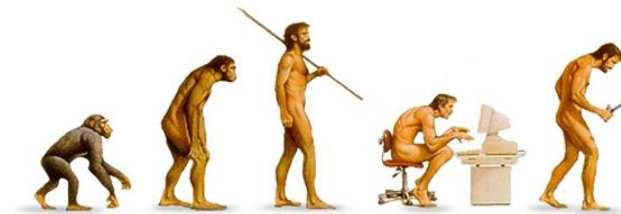
Mathew Barrett Gross and Mel Gilles, *The Last Myth: What the Rise of Apocalyptic Thinking Tells Us about America* (Prometheus Books, 2012),



from the section, “The Bomb Will Bring Us Together” (pp. 116-121)

“This nuclear fear is what has distinguished the apocalyptic imagination in the modern era from all of history, pushing the apocalypse from the realm of religion into the secular mainstream—a visceral shadow that has lingered at the edges of the modern imagination.” (116)

Read passage about *The Road*. (116)

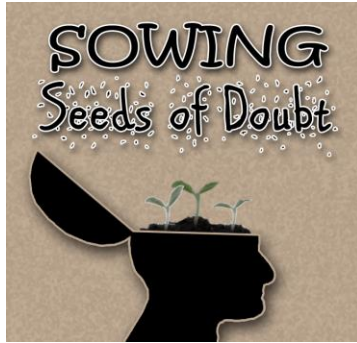


Contrast to belief in progress. **Darwin**: by placing our faith in evolutionary progress, humans could “look with some confidence to a secure future of great length.”

But the “evil fruits” of science as well as the shadow side of human nature destroyed that faith. The final blow may have been the detonation of the first atomic bomb....which “brought existential angst to the masses” (118)

“Now, progress itself had led directly to an apocalypse on a scale that was previously unimaginable.”

But the Seeds of Doubt were deep.

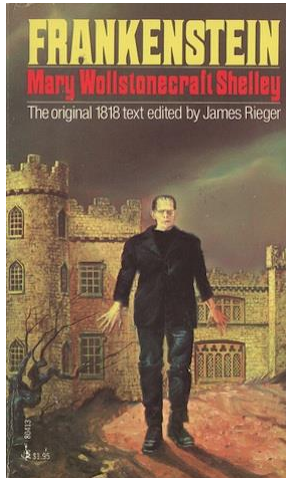


“Science, which at the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment had promised to dispel the ghosts and demons of the medieval world, has instead become a **propellant of the apocalyptic imagination**” (Gross & Gilles, 118).

From this perspective, “progress” was a “great detour” away from the apocalyptic view of history (i.e., the religious imagination).

The idea of Science *propelling the apocalyptic imagination* can be illustrated by looking at sub-types in the post-apocalyptic genre. Most disasters emerge out of science (utopia) gone awry into dystopia, & its aftermath. [*Pandemic; post-peak oil; global warming; environmental catastrophe; nuclear.* **Zombies don't occur in nature!**]

Early prototype of misgivings about science, and its potentially dystopian outcomes, is *Frankenstein* (1818) by [Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley](#) --a critique of the hubris of science. It is considered to be one of the earliest examples of science fiction.

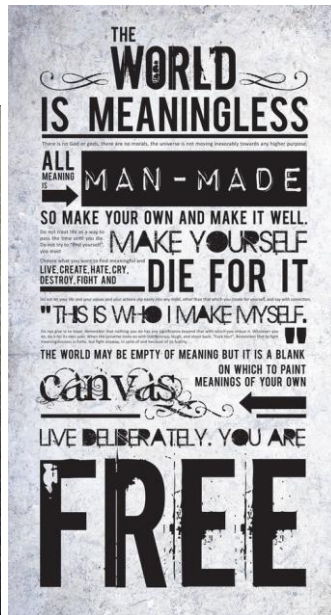


Officially, “that’s progress” was the dominant political and cultural ideology. Prior to WWI, “the belief in material and technological progress served as a substitute for religious belief in the *secular mind*” (117).

But there had been a wavering faith in progress during 19th century, as with anarchists. As inequalities widened, and imperialism reached its heyday, a growing minority questioned the “bigger is better” expansionist mindset, with the accompanying faith that science had the answer to all our problems.

Death knell World War I. Science in the service of slaughter.

Afterwards, existentialists. “Life and history meant nothing.” This was one of the characteristics of **modernism**.



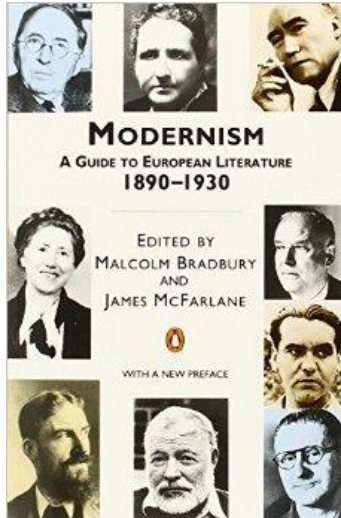
SOME CULTURAL FORCES DRIVING MODERNISM

John Lye, <http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/2F55/forces.html>

Some of the major issues to which 20th century literature responded in ways generally known as "Modernism" are:

1) Loss of faith that there is a reliable, knowable ground of value and identity.
Contributing factors include:

- challenges to 19th century science and its confidence in its ability to explain the universe;
- industrialization; the consequent displacement of persons from their previous physical and psychic groundings;
- the association of Christianity with capitalism, & an oppressive often hypocritical moralism;
- critical historical study of biblical texts & the consequent challenge to revelation;
- the popularization of evolutionary theory;
- growing awareness of a variety of cultures which had differing but cogent world-views;
- changes in philosophical thought which suggested that 'reality' was an internal and changeable, not an externally validated, concept.



First of all, what is modernism?

- Modernism definition: the development of modern industrial societies and the rapid growth of cities, followed then by the horror of World War I.
- This basically takes the modern idea of how society works and how humans behave inside to create something different.
- It's a new way of thinking moving away from the restricted way of how society works and transforming into a new way of thinking through artistic ways such as: poems, art, buildings etc.
- Its changing things from the idealised type into something unique and out of the norm. Modernism is a social progress. It also means society finding its own independence.
- It began in the era of the first World War 1 times.
- It's also a rejection of tradition.

2) A sense that our culture has lost its bearings; there is no center; there is a collapse of /a bankruptcy of values. As Yeats wrote in "[The Second Coming](#)"

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity. (1920)

3) **loss of faith in a moral center**; recognition that traditional values have led only to a horrid war, industrial squalor, the breakdown of traditional rural society, exploitation of other cultures and races, and a society built on power.

4) a **shift in paradigms** from the closed, finite, measurable, cause-and-effect universe of 19th century science to an open, relativistic, changing universe. Einstein a *modernist* thinker.

5) **authority moves** from traditional sites -- consensus, social authority and textual authority -- to individual judgment and ... validation [inlived experience], hence to locating of meaning (and 'truth') in individual experience.

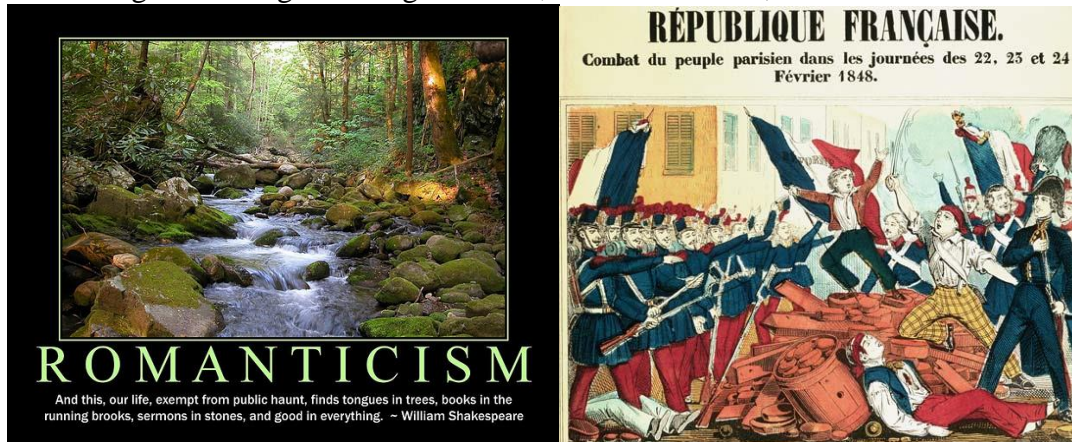
6) Development of focused on the *nature and functioning of the individual*: the discipline of psychology; democratization in politics; aesthetic movements such as impressionism and cubism which focus on the process of perception.

7) a discovery that the **forces governing behaviour...are hidden**: this in the realms of psychology, economics, politics -- Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, etc.

8) a move to the mystical & symbolic as ways of recovering a sense of the holy in experience and of recreating a sustainable ontological ground -- Jung and universal archetypes; Lawrence on creative mystery & blood knowledge, etc.

9) The search for a ground of meaning in a world without God; the critique of the traditional values of the culture; **the loss of meaning and hope in the modern world and an exploration of how this loss may be faced.**

Disillusion with science and progress begins much earlier—in fact, in **Romanticism's** reaction against the age of Enlightenment; industrialization; etc.



The Afterlife of “romantic heroism” in anarchism and other movements

What happened to the “romantic hero” after romanticism ended; sketch the link between Romanticism and the heroes of the post-apocalyptic genre



1789-1848

Romanticism = “the age of revolution” – Revolutions /Europe /Americas



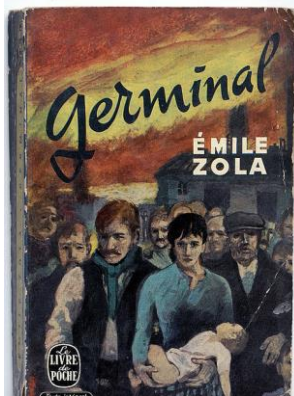
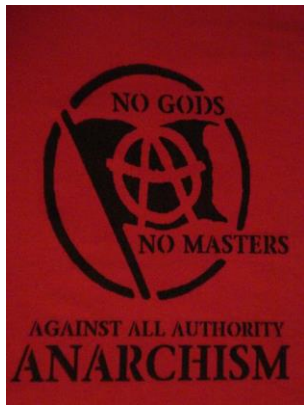
Romantic movement fades



But as romanticism fades as an artistic movement, *the urge for romantic heroes who defy tyrants and convention* (the romantic attitude) *migrates into the social world* (Douglass, socialism, Marxism, anarchism, women's rights [suffrage] etc.)

Anarchism

- Many of the post-1848 generations were recruited by anarchists, who had more realistic goals: they were not trying to initiate change on the state level.
- *Definition: Anarchism is a philosophy of self-rule.*
 - built on distrust of central authority.
 - Their critique of tyranny also extended to organized religion, or any other centralized authority. Hence their slogan, “No God No Masters”
- *Representations in literature:*
“Underground anarchism” as romantic heroism can be found in Emile Zola’s masterpiece, *Germinal* (1885). [adapted to film starring Depardieu 1993]



This novel demonstrates how the longing for “revolt against tyrants and conventions” (the Romantic attitude) re-appeared in late 19th century works. *The idea of freedom itself had become deeply romanticized. The idea had taken force that freedom can only be achieved through violent revolution.*

- Zola gives voice to yet another incarnation of the romantic hero, bent on revolt against tyrants, and oppressive tradition.

Germinal is set in France of the 1860s, during a mining strike (living conditions of the miners are abysmal). A character named Souvarine shows up and argues for his extreme version of anarchism:

“What nonsense, Souvarine said. Your Karl Marx wants to leave everything to natural forces. No politics, no conspiracy, aren't I right? All to the great day, and all to raise wages. Don't bother me, with your evolution. Light the fire at each end of the town, raze the people, clear everything away, and when there is nothing left of the old world, perhaps something better will be able to force its way through.”

[transition—a binary opposition between an oppressive ruling order, and dissidents / rebels who wanted to burn the whole thing down. After catastrophes such as World Wars, and atomic bombs, many people came to prefer order, however secured]

The Giver [dramatizes] the human and political costs of relinquishing historical memory ... Lowry critiques the **anesthetizing** effects of cultural amnesia—“the ability to forget” which is the “mental faculty which sustains submissiveness and renunciation” (Marcuse 163, in Hanson 58). [Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization*. London: Sphere Books, 1972]

“Ability to forget” is in the design structure of the “society of spectacle.”

A history of “critical utopian” / dystopian works that puts spectacle, and drugs, and media events, at the center of why people submit to repressive authority:

- 1). “Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932)
Peter Gallagher film adaptation (1998): Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVhIsUs8_RU
<https://vimeo.com/45675847> [full length]
- 2). Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*. (1974).
- 3). Suzanne Collins, *Hunger Games*, and *Mockingjay*. (Scholastic: 2008; 2010).

In these fictions, science has created a society of abundance—at least for the privileged. Elites experience great pleasures, although these are in contrast to the “savages” of Huxley, the anarchists of Le Guin, and the subjugated people in Panem’s “Districts” (Collins). In all three works, members of the subjugated classes become part of the spectacle in the center of power.

These worlds are initially attractive—a “flawed utopia” (Sargent). I.E. a work that presents what appears to be a good society [or at least, enjoyable, entertaining, hedonistic] until readers [/viewers] learn of some flaw that raises questions about the basis for its claim to be a good society, or even turns it into a dystopia. [“The Capitol” in *Hunger Games* is more a parody of the decadence and self-absorption of the U.S. reality TV/celebrity worship world--but how many would not choose to move from District 12 to the Capitol in order to live the “good life”?] Though this 'title' does not necessarily constitute a sub-genre, it does seem that such works are appearing with more and more frequency, especially in film. For example, *The Village*, *Minority Report*, *The Truman Show* and even *Logan's Run*.*

SOURCES

[Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Problem of the "Flawed Utopia": A Note on the Costs of Eutopia', in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, (eds.), *Dark Horizons*, pp. 225-231.]

*. *Logan's Run*, Dir. Michael Anderson, 1976; *Minority Report*, Dir. Steven Spielberg, 2002; *The Truman Show*, Dir. Peter Weir, 1998; *The Village*, Dir. M. Night, Shyamalan, 2004.

Varsamopoulou, Maria. *Before Utopia--The Function of Sacrifice in Dystopian Narratives*. PhD Dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2010.