

MODERNISM: A LITERATURE IN CRISIS. By Terry Eagleton. London: Yale University Press, 2025. 208 pp.

In his latest volume, *Modernism: A Literature in Crisis* (2025), Terry Eagleton returns to one of the theoretical issues that has run through his entire work: the relationship between aesthetic form and historical crisis. Modernism is treated neither as a style nor as a simple literary period, but as a temporal rift that calls into question the very categories of modernity, representation and subject. The subtitle, “A Literature in Crisis”, refers not only to the historical context of the early 20th century, but also to the structurally critical (and self-critical) nature of the constellation of artistic practices considered; according to the author, modernism is in fact an era at war with periodicity itself. In this sense, Postmodernism appears instead as an empty heir: it takes up its techniques and irony but abandons its metaphysical tension and resistance to the commodity form; while Modernism appears to be the last attempt to oppose the logic of capital, postmodernism reconciles itself with it.

From the very first chapter, Eagleton problematises the temporality of Modernism. The term, established only in the ‘60s, in a typical temporal twist: modernists did not in fact think of themselves as such. The distinction between modernity (the historical process of urbanisation, industrial capitalism, colonialism and so on) and Modernism is decisive here, since the latter emerged as a response to a systemic crisis. Taking up Perry Anderson’s thesis, the volume proceeds to identify three prerequisites for the birth and flourish of Modernism: a tradition of high culture that is still usable, the overlap of different modes of production, and the proximity of political revolution (Eagleton 2025, 5).

One of the most compelling insights is the adoption of Wittgenstein’s model of “family resemblances” (Eagleton 2025, 7): through which the volume supports the idea that Modernism does not possess a unified essence, but rather a constellation of recurring traits, such as fragmentation, dissonance, montage, impersonality and shock. Eagleton thus avoids both essentialism and nominalistic dissolution: ‘Modernism’ emerges as a polysemic term, instead of an ontologically closed category. This approach also makes it possible to explain the internal tensions between the different forms of avant-gardes (futurists, surrealists, Dadaists, etc.), without running the risk of dissolving the historical coherence of the phenomenon.

The second chapter highlights how Modernism, marking the split between the sign and the referent, conceives language no longer as a window on reality, but as an opaque surface. Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Letter of Lord Chandos* is here considered as an *exemplum*: Chandos’ aphasia may be read as a paradigm of the dissociation between existence, experience and meaning (Eagleton 2025, 77–80). In this diagnosis, Eagleton captures a dialectical tension: while the language of mass modernity presents itself as transparent and functional, modernist language becomes nebulous and resistant to immediate consumption. Here, one of the most fruitful concepts of the book emerges: the “absent centre” (Eagleton 2025, 11). Eagleton points out how, in the works of Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett, the narrative revolves around a void that distorts the entire structure (the invisible explosion, the unreachable lighthouse, the interminable wait). It is not reality that shatters, but its metaphysical foundation.

The third chapter addresses the relationship between high Modernism and historical avant-gardes. Eagleton makes a clear distinction between the search for autonomy in art (the last refuge of the aura) and the project of reintegrating art into vital *praxis*. In Soviet constructivism, the artist becomes an engineer, Dadaism transforms art into sabotage, while Surrealism attempts to fuse Marx and Freud; but the tension between technological euphoria and horror towards mechanisation runs through the entire period. Here Eagleton calls on Theodor Adorno to support the thesis of the autonomy of art not as escapism, but as a form of resistance capable of embodying social contradictions without the vanity of resolving them (Eagleton 2025, 116–118).

In *Conservative Revolutionaries*, Eagleton advances a sharper thesis: Modernism formal radicalism often coexists structurally with political reaction. Nietzsche's announcement of God's death authorizes a new spiritual elite, which finds some echoes in Yeats', Eliot's and Pound's aesthetic innovation, often subscribed to hierarchical or anti-liberal views. Formal renovation thus appears as a compensatory strategy in front of a disenchanted world. On the contrary, James Joyce's work would undermine this configuration: his formal intransigence does not consolidate elitist distance but rather reorients aesthetic complexity towards the plots of everyday life. In this perspective, Ireland's uneven development becomes a critical testing ground in which archaic myth and technological modernity intersect, exposing the constitutive tensions at the heart of Modernism.

The work is striking in its ability to combine formal analysis, critical theory and social history. Eagleton does not succumb to nostalgia or demonisation, showing how Modernism was at once elitist and subversive, metaphysical and materialist, revolutionary and reactionary. Its strength lies in its ability to hold these poles together without neutralising them. If a limitation can be identified, it is perhaps a certain centrality of the Anglo-European axis, which leaves other peripheral modernities in the background, but this is a methodological choice consistent with the structure of the volume. On the other hand, the final reflection on the institutionalisation of Modernism – which has survived above all in academia – offers a penetrating diagnosis of our contemporary culture.

*Modernism: A Literature in Crisis* stands out as one of the most ambitious recent studies in the field. Not a compendium, but rather an attempt to restate the essence of Modernism as a phenomenon that records the contradictions of a crisis without pacifying them. In an era marked by an inflation of labels – post-postmodernism, metamodernism, Anthropocene, hypermodernity – Eagleton's study resists terminological renewal in favour of historical diagnosis. It is precisely in this unresolved tension that the volume finds its theoretical strength: compelling us to critically reopen the inquiry of Modernism to question not only our own periodising categories, but the ways in which we continue to read the category of 'crisis' as a specific event and not as a persistent structure.

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INSURGENT VISIONS: FEMINISM, JUSTICE, SOLIDARITY. By Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Durham: Duke University Press, 2025. 272 pp.

In *Insurgent Visions*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty revisits key questions: How can feminism construct solidarity across borders without resorting to essentialist, homogenizing, or imperialist "sisterhood"? What does it mean to have an insurgent praxis to battle capitalist, racist, and imperialist regimes in contemporary world? Insurgent feminism, for Mohanty, is not just an attitude but a practice that challenges oppressive structures and imagines alternative ways of living and knowing.

Extending the decolonial and transnational commitments of *Feminism Without Borders* (2003), Mohanty offers a remarkably comprehensive and generative possibility of a decolonial abolitionist feminist praxis that "provides the most capacious analytical and strategic framework" (Mohanty 10). In the Introduction "Insurgent Feminisms: Genealogies, Struggles, Futures", Mohanty employs an anecdotal approach, including an intergenerational interaction with two Canadian middle schoolers to implore on neoliberal oppression, altruistic white feminism, and militarized borders, which serve as central points of intervention. To address these concerns, Mohanty comparatively analyzes three contemporary geopolitical urgencies—Palestine, the US Carceral State, and Hindutva—to theorize an anticapitalist feminist antiracist feminist praxis.