place, and so I wished all the more to know how each of these provocative chapters might have ended, or been connected to each other, if their own scoring were made part of Picker's soundscapes.

In the end, John Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes* is not, thankfully, a textual reamplification of Victorian sounds, captured and textually replayed, but rather an elegant orchestration of some of those sounds that teaches our scholarly ears how to listen better. No one who reads it will fail to appreciate, as the Victorians did themselves, their acoustic culture.

Jonathan H. Grossman
University of California, Los Angeles

Modernism and the Ideology of History: Literature, Politics, and the Past. *Louise Blakeney Williams*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. x+265.

Modernism, Narrative and Humanism. *Paul Sheehan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. xiv+234.

The ever-expanding critical interest in the many varieties of modernism makes it difficult to hold onto any singular definition of the term. Debates about the high and low, about the inclusion of Latin American or African modernisms, and about the place of the avant-garde or the relationship between modernism and contemporary writing all make the field of modernist studies an exciting but also often confusing place to be. Peter Nichols's 1995 book *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press) seemed to mark the moment when the notion of modernism became inescapably plural. It is, then, significant that two books now appear from Cambridge that hold fast to the importance of "modernism" as a meaningful descriptive term for a distinct set of narratives. How might they help us renew our understanding of early twentieth-century modernism? In what way might we examine classic works of modernist fiction without avoiding the challenges posed by recent expansions of modernist studies?

Louise Blakeney Williams's book *Modernism and the Ideology of History* sidesteps these issues almost entirely. Williams begins her work by choosing to focus on a generation, born between 1865 and 1885, who lived and worked in London between 1909 and 1914. Williams describes hers as a "study of the origin of modernist views of history" and so examines influential early modernists who were well at work

before World War I (3). Thus W. B. Yeats, Ford Madox Ford, Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme, and D. H. Lawrence are included while James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf are not.

The modernists Williams examines are inarguably significant. In fact, her interest in earlier texts and contexts is welcome and joins a growing body of scholarship looking at the development of a diversity of modernisms around the turn of the twentieth century. Williams, however, is a bit too quick to claim that her writers "represent early modernism" and form a "loose intellectual group" with "a common set of assumptions about history" (4). Though she acknowledges that this framework has forced her to elide "very real differences between the authors" (4), she does little to mitigate its effects. Thus, time after time throughout this well-researched study, we meet the phrase "the modernists thought" (154) or read such statements as "the middle classes, according to the Modernists, contributed to many modern ills" (84). Her habit of referring to this group of writers as "the Modernists" and treating them as both unified in attitude and representative of modernism in general is jarring and distracts the reader's attention from Williams's often interesting and well-informed analyses.

Williams is at her strongest when she is looking at the specific engagement of each of her writers with the idea of history. Her main point is that this particular group of modernist writers sought to replace nineteenth-century progressivist notions of history with a cyclic view, making clear "the extent of the break between Modernist and Enlightenment thinking" (14) and modernism's tendency to look at the past for solutions. So, Yeats's twentieth-century retreat from the contemporary world and Pound's insistence on a poetry "remote from the everyday" (27) become part of a collective insistence on cyclical history. This model becomes interesting as Williams examines Yeats's and Ford's mining of the Middle Ages for its "aesthetic, cultural and moral qualities" (43). We are also surprised to see the resemblance between Ford's medievalism in the poem "Enough" and Pound's "Marvoil" (47). Subsequent chapters are "Contemporary Political Problems," "Radical Conservative Solutions," "Cyclic Views Emerge," "The Example of Asian and Non-Western Cultures," and "The Proof of Post-Impressionist Art." All of them flesh out the development of "modernist" ideas of politics and history with reference to specific authors and their writings. While only rarely particularly innovative (we know that many of these writers were "radical conservatives"), these chapters are solidly researched. Unfortunately, we too often return to overgeneralized statements.

Williams's study is also limited by her insistence on traditional methods of intellectual history, seemingly unmodified by the theo-

retical claims of the past thirty years. Hers is what she describes as a "collective intellectual biography" (5), which incorporates uncomplicated notions of history, textuality, and personal agency. Would that she had looked a little more closely at the texts in hand and not simply assumed their direct reflection of their authors' ideologies. More attention to the fabric of political and cultural life at the turn of the century would also have been welcome and might have helped produce more complex ways of understanding the similarities and differences among Yeats, Ford, Pound, Hulme, and Lawrence. For example, in the chapter on responses to World War I we might have learned much from contextualizing Lawrence's opposition to the war with other burgeoning war resistance, or from placing Yeats's response within a deeper contextual examination of Ireland at the time. Instead we read: "Yeats was the modernist who was least affected by the war. . . . Rather Yeats was more concerned with strictly Irish problems. He was particularly upset by the Easter Rebellion of 1916" (190). While useful, Williams's study ultimately must be seen as only the beginning of the difficult task of examining modernists' engagement with history.

More complex in both its methodology and its argument is *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism* by Paul Sheehan. Sheehan's book examines the recurring concern with the question of the human that permeates modernist narrative in the middle years of the twentieth century and particularly the writing of Joseph Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf, and Samuel Beckett. Sheehan seeks to show that post–World War II "critical engagement with the concept of the human is not an exclusively postwar skirmish, but a century-long project . . . and . . . that [it] was crucial, not incidental to establishing the conditions of possibility for the postwar antihumanism dominating continental theory" (x). Sheehan examines the prose of these writers with an eye to their philosophical engagement with the human, as well as looking carefully at the narrative implications of key philosophical texts. Thus, this study becomes a detailed examination of the interconnections of narrative and philosophy (indeed, at one point he tells us that "Hegel is the most narrativistic of philosophers, and Schopenhauer the most novelistic" [102]). Short of pointing out that Lawrence got his Arthur Schopenhauer from Thomas Hardy rather than directly from the source (93), Sheehan rarely claims direct lines of influence among his authors, nor does he assume either the internal or external coherence of their collective thought. Rather, he makes clear that Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf, and Beckett do not adhere to any particular view of the nature of the human and its position in narrative: "Although they all address what is human, the modalities of that address are for the most part diverse, and the differences cannot be ignored" (xii).

Sheehan's primary claim is that there was an important shift of thought after about the middle of the nineteenth century when the idea of what is human was separated from the philosophical system known as humanism. Philosophers, and ultimately writers of all sorts, began to "turn away from the human as a *given* and towards the human as a *problem*" (181). Sheehan designates as "anthropometric" this "taking the measure of the 'human' . . . the human no longer possesses an *a priori* connection to humanism" (x). If humanism is for Sheehan primarily the post-Cartesian belief in an autonomous, reasoning human being having inherent value, anthropometric writings challenge those terms without becoming antihuman (6–7). His chapter "The Anthropometric Turn" is a lucid engagement with the shift to such thought within the philosophy and narrative of the early twentieth century.

Central to Sheehan's claim is the role of narrative, and especially the tradition of the European novel, in both the development of and the challenge to humanism. As he points out, "the novel has ties not only with individualism and innovation, but with the quintessentially human attribute of logic," which are all central to the humanist tradition (2). But, Sheehan continues, "the clearest link between the humanist tradition and the novel is the *Bildungsroman*" (2). Thus he will tie the critique of humanism, which he traces in subsequent chapters, to the novel form and the modernist challenges to it, and to the ultimate demise of the bildungsroman in its classic form.

Modernism then comes to the fore as the death knell of the bildungsroman and its attendant humanist belief in the unified subject and its progress. "The genre of the *Bildungsroman* . . . is essential to an emplotment of the transactions between the human (humanism, *humanitas*) and the novel. Its antagonist is the experimental, formally diverse modernist novel" (5). One might argue that there certainly are modernist versions of bildungsromane, yet Sheehan's point is that they lack the key (Cartesian) certainties of the classic novel of that genre. To the point here is Sheehan's reading of Beckett's trilogy *Malloy, Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* as the limit of narration and of the bildungsroman more particularly: "Beckett produces not so much antinarratives as anti-*Bildungsromans*. . . . Beckett even more than Woolf ushers in its dissolution" (161). Sheehan's Beckett is a bleaker one than we often encounter; he sees no moment of transcendence or potentially positive outcome. Beckett's narrators seem almost compelled to narrate and do so in a mechanical manner rather than for purposes of personal growth or self-consolidation (172). Surely, given this reading, we cannot argue for the persistence of *Bildung*.

Chapters in this book move regularly from philosophy to literary texts, insightfully demonstrating specific connections between the two.

The excellent chapter on Conrad is actually first and foremost a chapter on Schopenhauer (a figure who looms large in this study); his notion of the "mechanistic will" (71); its place within the intellectual landscape of Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche (already well prepared in the book's first chapter); and finally its importance for Conrad. Conrad thus is contextualized within the broader philosophy of the human at the turn of the century. His famous letter about an unstoppable knitting machine that keeps going despite "time space, pain, death, corruption, despair, and all the illusions" (quoted on 73) and his description of "human-technological interactivity" (83) in the mine in *Nostromo* emerge as places where humanity takes on "a mechanical relation to the world" (86) and thus where traditional humanism is confronted.

Sheehan discusses Lawrence in the light of Heideggerian notions of the decline of the West, noting that both see the human as a fallen being. "They take the human not as the overcoming animal, the transcending species, etc., but as the entity that precisely *needs* transcendence" (94). Further, the relationship to the nonhuman, which for Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers* and *Women in Love* becomes the natural (also, often, the women as unfathomable Other), also helps explain the particular route of transcendence in his novels. While one might have hoped for a more complete discussion of the problem of linking women with naturalness and nonhumanness in Lawrence, Sheehan's focus on the question of man's fallen status seems dead on.

The chapter on Woolf is not quite so innovative in its philosophical juxtapositions—indeed, if its footnotes are any indication, it also seems much less cognizant of current literary criticism on Woolf. Sheehan begins here with only a very brief reference to the philosopher most often connected to Woolf, Henri Bergson, and to Wyndham Lewis's infamous comments about her. From there he argues that in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf's "concern is less to humanise time than to show human performance in negotiating time's vicissitudes"—not a very novel thesis (127). His discussion of what he calls the liberal policing of the boundaries between the human and the natural (127) has much more promise but is not fully developed in the chapter. The final section on darkness in *To the Lighthouse* leads to a smart but too short discussion of the way that Woolf in that novel "dematerializes the soul" and creates a "metamorphic ahumanism" (149). It is a shame that this discussion is not more fleshed out and linked, as in the other chapters, to a complete discussion of philosophical contexts.

There are other minor difficulties here as well—most notably the author's often annoying habit of overpreparing and summarizing his own argument. Too, despite the book's restraint in using its subjects

as representative of all modernism, we miss any discussion of their place in real-world contexts, or in an intellectual landscape broader than Europe. Sheehan's work is very interesting and persuasive in the links it draws between philosophical traditions and literature. But ultimately neither Williams's *Modernism and the Ideology of History* nor Sheehan's *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism* fully responds to the theoretical challenges of contemporary modernist studies.

Jessica Berman
University of Maryland Baltimore County

Serious Poetry: Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill. *Peter McDonald.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. 226.

Poetry, Poets, Readers: Making Things Happen. *Peter Robinson*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. viii+208.

British and Irish poetry critics, no less than American critics, have lately moved from asking what poems mean (and how we can know) toward asking what (social) difference poems can make. This new focus has produced its own set of touchstones, chief among them W. H. Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (1939), with its provocative declaration that "poetry makes nothing happen."[1] Both Peter McDonald (born in Belfast, now teaching at Oxford) and Peter Robinson (an Englishman based in Japan) attempt to refute Auden's claims. On the one hand, both these good books attack readers who deem poetic language inconsequential or merely fictive speech: "poems only survive if they are read, and are only read if they do something for their readers" (Robinson, 184). On the other hand, both poet-critics remind us that poems work in, and through, their forms.

McDonald's book will likely draw more attention, in part because he already gained notice (and controversy) with *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). McDonald offers convincing opposition to certain now-common beliefs, among them the belief that a poem is (or is as good as) the "personality" it projects, "the widespread suspicion of form . . . in Irish" (and not only Irish) "literary theory," and the belief that a poem means what its prose paraphrase means (12, 151). McDonald attacks a specifically British climate, dominated by the hip, accessible "New

1. W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1991), 248.