

epiphanies typically associated with modernism, but modernistic voices and visions left their mark too.

### Continuities, influences and innovations

Late-Victorian literature had already begun to question Victorianism in no uncertain fashion. Even as early as 1872, Samuel Butler, influenced like many of his contemporaries by Darwinian and related thought, had comprehensively satirised the values of his age in his anti-Utopian novel *Erewhon* (an anagram for ‘nowhere’). Butler’s attack on Victorian hypocrisies continued into the twentieth century with *Erewhon Revisited* (1901) and, perhaps most memorably, with his autobiographical novel, *The Way of All Flesh* (published posthumously in 1903, though begun much earlier); and the attack was consolidated and diversified in roughly that same scope of years by the works of several other notable writers such as George Meredith, George Gissing, Oscar Wilde, Olive Schreiner, Thomas Hardy, George Moore, Sarah Grand and George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne). These writers provide one important immediate background to early twentieth-century literature, as well as a literal line of continuity, given that some of them survived into the new century and influenced other, younger writers. Their importance is principally related to their criticism of society and their advanced views on religion, morality, sexuality and gender, rather than to any major innovations of form or technique, although, for example, the strikingly proto-modernistic form of Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) should be noted, along with the channelling of elements of French naturalism into the English novel by Gissing and Moore.

More important for long-term literary innovation were the key transitional figures of the period, Henry James (1843–1916), W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) and G. B. Shaw (1856–1950). None of these writers was English by birth (James was American, Yeats and Shaw Irish), but each of them, within their own generic

#### Naturalism

Informed by evolutionary theory and ideas of biological determinism, and primarily associated with the works of the French novelist Emile Zola (1840–1902), literary naturalism was a development of realism which sought to follow principles of scientific objectivity in the treatment of character and environment and which tended to involve a meticulous detailing of the hereditary, environmental and social factors that might be seen to determine human character and behaviour. It was especially this emphasis on determinism, and the viewing of humans as creatures subject to the same laws of nature as animals of any other species, which distinguished naturalism from realism (although the two labels were, and are, often used interchangeably). Aspects of naturalism, and particularly the close attention to documentary detail in depicting scene and character, can be detected in much of the fiction and drama of the early twentieth century, both modernist and realist. However, although the novels of Arnold Bennett (1867–1931) are sometimes described as naturalist in form and outlook, and the earlier novels of Gissing, Moore and Hardy clearly exhibit naturalist elements, few British writers adhered to Zola’s theories or practice in a wholehearted way.