

Modern Prose – Fourth Year – 2022 / 2023

Modernism is a school of thought that is related to the inner feelings of human beings. It is an attempt to understand the personal feelings of individuals. It is characterized by the search for new forms of expression.

- The period of Modernism is probably from the late 19th to the mid-20th century.
- Modernism is divided into prewar, interwar, and postwar eras.

Modernism as a literary movement is typically associated with the period after World War I. The evilness of the war undermined humankind's faith in the foundations of Western society and culture, and postwar Modernist literature reflected a sense of disillusionment and fragmentation.

Note: Modernist literature is not necessarily Modern. For example, *Tristram Shandy* (1759 - 1767) by Laurence Sterne (1713 - 1768) is considered a forerunner of many narrative techniques and styles used by Modernist novelists.

Characteristics of Modernism:

Formal (Stylistic) Characteristics:

1. Free indirect speech:

Free indirect speech is a way of narrating characters' thoughts or utterances that combines some of the features of a third-person report with some features of first-person direct speech. There is, generally, no reporting clause in free indirect speech.

2. Stream of consciousness and interior monologue:

Stream of consciousness is a literary style in which a character's thoughts, feelings, and reactions are depicted in a continuous flow uninterrupted by objective description or conventional dialogue.

Interior monologue is a literary technique that is used to express a character's inner speech that passes through his / her mind.

3. Discontinuous narrative:

A discontinuous narrative is a narrative that does not follow a chronological order as it moves in time between past and present. It presents a turn from linear plots with climactic turning points and clear resolutions to open unresolved endings.

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The beginning, middle, and ending of traditional plots are often deleted or obscured in Modernist literary works.

4. Multiple points of view:

Many Modernist novels switch between the perspectives of various characters in order to get different viewpoints. This serves as a commentary on the subjective nature of perspective and reality.

5. Quotations:

An author quotes another author in his / her literary work which leads to intertextuality.

Intertextuality can be simply defined as the relationship between texts that are related using quotations and allusion.

Thematic Characteristics:

1. Fragmentation:

Fragmentation in Modernist literature is both thematic and formal. Plots, characters, themes, images, and narratives are broken.

A fragmented literary work consists of broken pieces that do not seem to fit together, reflecting the fragmentation and disillusionment of modern society after the devastating experiences of World War I.

Modernist literature embraces fragmentation as a literary form since it reinforces the fragmentation of reality and contradicts the notions of totality and wholeness because life is viewed as incoherent.

Note: Although Modernist authors tended to perceive the world as fragmented, many tried to inject order by creating patterns of allusion, symbol, and myth.

2. Alienation and spiritual loneliness:

Alienation responds to the impact of World War I. Modernist writers describe the effects of war in terms of disconnection. Alienation is also reflected by the types of narration that Modernist authors favored. They use multiple perspectives or viewpoints to suggest that reality is broken and fragmented.

Characters are alienated from each other because each lives in a world of his / her own making as reality is seen as a matter of perception.

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3. Objection to traditional thoughts:

Modernism is marked by a strong and intentional break with tradition. This break includes a strong reaction against established religious, political, and social views. There is no such thing as absolute truth because all things are relative.

4. The despair of the individual:

The individual's experience is that of alienation, loss, and despair due to the destruction caused by the war. Modernists felt betrayed by the war, believing the institutions in which they were taught to believe had led the civilized world into a bloody conflict.

Modernism elevates the individual and the inward over the social and the outward.

5. Social evils:

Social evils as man-made disasters were a matter of significant concern. Modernist novels reflect how cruel humans can be, especially concerning racial and class differences. Modernists believed that humans are not only aware of social evils but they are also capable of getting rid of them.

Famous novelists include Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Marcel Proust, and William Faulkner among many others.

• Some Branches of Modernism:

Expressionism is a Modernist literary movement when an author uses symbols and exaggeration to represent emotions, rather than representing physical reality. S/he seeks to achieve a psychological or spiritual reality rather than record external events in a logical sequence.

Impressionism is a Modernist literary movement when an author centers his / her story and attention on the character's mental life such as the character's impressions, feelings, sensations, and emotions, rather than trying to interpret them.

Authors such as Virginia Woolf and Joseph Conrad are among the foremost creators of impressionism.