

# Modernist literature: Influences & characteristics

Sources: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/courses/253/modernism-etc> and source: <http://www2.mpherson.edu/~clayb/ENC253/handouts/modernism.pdf>

## Influences

- Industrial revolution & growth of cities
- Increased consumerism
- New technologies and inventions (auto, airplane, telephone, camera)
- WWI
- Developments in science (Einstein), psychology (Freud), philosophy (Nietzsche), linguistics (Saussure), and anthropology (Frazer's study of comparative religions).

## Characteristics: Themes

- Modern life alienates the individual. It numbs us to our truest selves.
- Conviction that older forms of authority are decayed or useless, and that the authority of the individual must be strengthened...
- A faith in the power of the art to save humanity from the deadening features of everyday life....
- The belief that the artist is...sensitive and even heroic.
- The experience of time and space are subjective, depend on one's context and perspective.
- Language is not "fixed": It's complex and nuanced.

## Characteristics: Style

- Emphasis on innovation. Disrupt traditional syntax and form. Break old patterns in order to see things in a fresh, new way.
- Artistic self-consciousness: The style of the text makes it clear that an author consciously crafted it.
- Perspectivism: Switching narrators, use of many voices
- Emphasis on presenting life as experienced: Capturing the impression of a moment, for instance, or representing the inner experience of time.
- Focus on psychological reality.
- Mixing of forms and blurring of boundaries. (A nursery rhyme embedded into an adult poem, for example.)

## Characteristics: Techniques & Devices

- Stream-of-consciousness
- Multiple narrators or voices
- Non-sequential narration
- Use of fragmentation and juxtaposition
- Use of symbols and allusions
- Imagery that captures the essence of a thing or experience
- Open or ambiguous endings (more "realistic" because that's what life is like.)
- Use of metaphor and substitution.