

# Modernism

(A Literary Movement)

## Introduction:

Modernism is a broad and complex literary movement that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It represents a significant shift from the conventions of previous literary eras, particularly Victorianism and Romanticism. Modernist writers explored new narrative structures, such as stream of consciousness and fragmented narratives, to capture the fragmented nature of human experience.

## Definition:

Modernism is a literary movement that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It emphasizes experimentation techniques and forms. Modernist literature explores different themes. It seeks to capture the fragmented nature of human experience and the subjective nature of reality, influenced by contemporary developments in psychology, philosophy, and



the visual arts =

## History of Modernism:

The origin of modernism can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it gained momentum in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly during the period between World War I and World War II. This era was marked by rapid technological advancements, urbanization, and significant social changes. The trauma and disillusionment caused by World War I, in particular, had a profound impact on the psyche of writers and artists, leading them to question traditional values & beliefs.

## Features of Modernism:

Key features of modernism include:

### i) Experimentation:

Modernist literature employed a number of different experimental writing techniques that broke the conventional rules of storytelling. Some techniques are - blended imagery and Themes, absurdism, stream of consciousness etc.



## ii) Individualism:

Modernist literature focuses on the individual, rather than society as a whole. Stories follow characters as they adapt to a changing world, often dealing with difficult circumstances and challenges.

## iii) Free Verse:

Modernist literature rejected the traditional structure of poetry and adopted free verse, which lacks a consistent rhyme scheme, metrical pattern, or musical form.

## iv) Literary Devices:

Many modernist writers rely on literary devices like symbolism, allusion, and imagery to help the reader understand the writing and to create a strong connection b/w the text and the reader.

## v) Intellectualism:

Modernist writers regarded previous writings as stereotypical and inadequate. Many philosophers and intellectuals



flourished modernist literature but "intellectual snobbery" is common in them. T.S. Eliot is known for infusing poetry with high intellectualism.

### **vi) Subjectivity & Interiority:**

Modernist literature delved into the inner thoughts and feelings of characters. It focused on the subjective experiences of individual, often depicting the fractured and fragmented nature of human consciousness.

### **vii) Alienation & Disillusionment:**

Many modernist works portrayed a sense of alienation and disillusionment, reflecting the social and cultural upheaval of the time. The aftermath of World War I, rapid industrialization, and social changes left the feeling disconnected and uncertain.

### **viii) Rejection of Realism:**

Modernism rejected the notion of realism, (depicting life as it is), instead modernist writers often tried to explore the inner workings of the human mind, emotions,



and consciousness.

### ix) Cultural and Historical Context:

Modernist literature was deeply influenced by the cultural and historical context of the time, including the two world wars, rapid urbanization and the rise of mass media. It reflected a number of the anxieties and uncertainties of the modern age.

### x) Stream of Consciousness:

Stream of consciousness was a key technique in Modernist literature, aiming to replicate the natural flow of thoughts, feelings, and observations without rational reflection or censorship. This technique sought to capture the immediacy and fragmentation of human experience.

### xi) Fragmented Narratives:

Fragmented narratives are a hallmark of Modernist literature, where the traditional linear narrative structure is disrupted or abandoned. This technique reflects the chaos and



disjointedness of modern life.

## Major Writers:

### (i) T.S. Eliot:

T.S. Eliot was a leader of the Modernist movement in poetry, and his influence on Anglo-American culture lasted from the 1920s until late in the century. Some of the key characteristics of his work that align with Modernist principles are:

- \* Experiments in diction, style & versification.
- \* Use of imagery and illusions.
- \* Emphasis on the universal human predicament.
- \* Emphasis on tradition & the individual talent.
- \* Use of several languages.
- \* Interest in theology and sociology works.

#### Major Work:

His Work: "The Waste Land" (1922) -

Fragmented structure and illusions.

### (ii) Virginia Woolf:

Virginia Woolf was a central figure in the Modernist movement in literature, known for her experimental and



innovative writing style. Some key aspects of her work that align with Modernist principles include:

- \* Stream of Consciousness narrative

Work: (Mrs. Dalloway)

- \* Experimentation with form and structure.

Work: (The Waves) and (The Years).

- \* Focus on the inner lives of characters.

- \* Play with language and imagery.

Work: (Kew Gardens) and (The Mark on Wall)

- \* Interest in human condition.

### Other Modernists:

1. James Joyce.

1. Ulysses 2. Araby 3. A portrait of the Artist as a Young man.

2. Ezra Pound.

The Cantos.

3. Franz Kafka.

① The trial ② The Metamorphosis

### Conclusion:

Modernism represents a revolutionary

period in history, characterized by a

break from tradition and a quest to

Capture the complexities of modern life.