

## FACT SHEET

### Invictus and Time and the Machine (20<sup>th</sup> Century: Modernism and Postmodernism)

#### A Background to Modernism

Modernism in literature is characterized by its strong opposition to the formulaic structures and techniques of 19<sup>th</sup>-century works of various genres. It considers itself as rebellious and innovative for breaking the rules and norms of artistic language. For example, what could have been considered rambling and senseless writing is regarded as a technique showing a character's conscious and spontaneous reaction to an event called "stream-of-consciousness." Here is a paragraph from *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf where the character Clarissa Dalloway is seen watching cars drive by but is not simply described as "she watched the cars and thought about life."

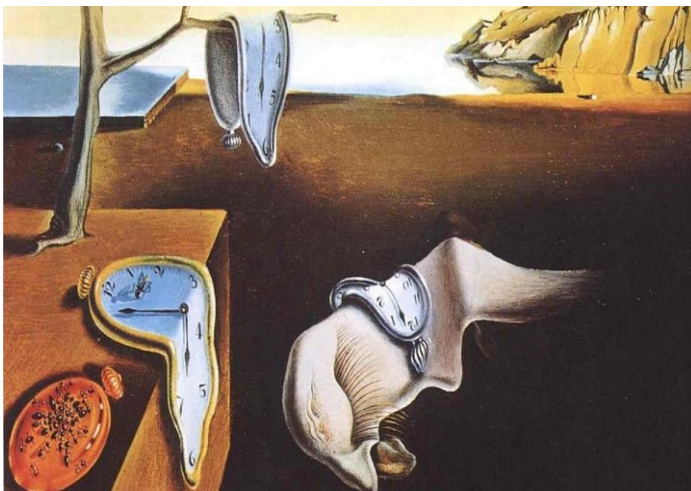
*She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fraulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.*

Because of the pressure of rapid invention, many intellectuals in the age of Modernism could not commit to a single burgeoning movement. Thus, they found themselves enveloped in many -isms. Some of these are described shortly below.

- Imagism is concerned with creating clear imagery using sharp, concrete language. The guiding principle is not to use a word that does not contribute to the presentation of an image. An example is Ezra Pound's *In the Station of the Metro*.

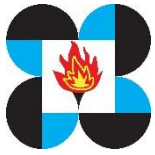
*In the Station of the Metro*  
*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;*  
*Petals on a wet black bough.*

- Surrealism is concerned with creating something bizarre and disjointed, but still somehow recognizable. It is also a movement in visual arts dominated by big names like Salvador Dali. Below is an image of his work *The Persistence of Memory*.



*Historic Evening* by Arthur Rimbaud

*In whatever evening, for instance,  
the simple tourist retiring from our  
economic horrors finds himself,  
the hand of a master wakes the  
harpsichord of meadows; cards  
are played in the depths of the  
pond, mirror, evoker of queens  
and favourites; there are saints,  
sails, and threads of harmony,  
and legendary chromaticism in  
the sunset.*



- Expressionism is focused on the intensification of emotion featuring distorted interpretations of psychological subjects and spiritual reality. It is known to be anti-realism. T.S. Elliot was known to be part of the Expressionist movement. Below is an extract from his poem, *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*.

*Half-past three,  
The lamp sputtered,  
The lamp muttered in the dark.*

### The Post- in Postmodernism

Like any other movement, postmodernism identifies itself as a reaction to modernist ways. It disassociated itself further from reason by valuing subjectivism. Some postmodernist thinkers thought that reason and logic, science and technology led to massive destruction during the two Great World Wars, particularly World War II. Thus, instead of looking at one objective truth, postmodernism influenced literature by looking at several texts and interpretations. Postmodernist literature is known for the characteristics below.

- Intertextual is acknowledging previous literary works within another literary work.
- Metafictional is writing about writing or making readers aware of the fictional nature of what they're reading.
- Minimalist is using characters and events which are common and non-exceptional.
- Maximalist is disorganized, lengthy, and highly detailed writing.
- Faction is mixing of actual historical events with fictional events
- Magic Realism is introducing impossible or unrealistic events into an otherwise realistic narrative.

### Invictus by William Ernest Henley



**William Ernest Henley**, a poet and editor, was diagnosed with tubercular arthritis. This medical condition resulted in the amputation of one of his legs at the age of 12.

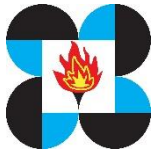
While recuperating, he began to write poems. This includes his popular work, *Invictus*, which was written in 1875.

#### Structure and Themes of *Invictus*

- Four rhyming quatrains
- Iambic tetrameter
- ABAB CDCD EFEF GHGH
- Themes: Suffering and resilience, Free will versus fate, and Agnosticism
- Figures of Speech: Alliteration, Assonance, Enjambment, Metaphor, and Anaphora

### Unlocking Vocabulary from Litcharts.com

- **Invictus.** The Latin translation of "unconquerable." Originally, this poem was an untitled section in a longer poem. The title was added later when the poem was reproduced on its own. In this way, the title can be thought of as a "translation" of the poem as a whole.
- **Pit.** Hell—specifically, Hell is a place of darkness and suffering that lies beneath the Earth as a physical pit, an immense cavern.
- **Pole.** The imaginary ends of an axis. Here, this word evokes the global expanse of Hell and night.
- **Fell.** Dangerous, evil, ferocious. "Fell" is also etymologically related to the word "felon." The "clutch" here thus becomes deadly, unstoppable. By extension, we can associate these qualities with circumstance as well, which becomes like a villainous god.



- **Circumstance.** We can think of "circumstance" as the material conditions of one's life. Its Latin root means "that which stands around"—the surroundings that have an effect on what happens to you. It's not quite as big as fate and not quite as random as chance.
- **Wrath.** "Wrath" means anger, with a slightly archaic slant to it. It's meant to be more poetic than simply saying "anger." It also has religious connotations, as in "the wrath of God," which connect it to the poem's religious concerns.
- **Shade.** "Shade" has its usual meaning of darkness, while summoning the poem's previous association of darkness with Hell. Here it's meant to represent a literal Hell or at least some kind of horrible darkness that lies on the other side of death.
- **Menace.** A threat. Here, future years become a threat because their only certainties are suffering and death.
- **Menace.** This is from a biblical allusion to Matthew 7:14: "*Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*" Strait here means narrow, evoking a gate that is difficult to pass through. Strait also can refer to narrow passages of water. This secondary, nautical meaning has echoes of the soul-as-ship metaphor that the later word "captain" implies.
- **Gate.** The gate evokes a narrow passageway that is difficult to pass through, just like the requirements of leading a virtuous life. In a broader Christian context, it also references St. Peter's Gate, the entrance to Heaven, through which only the good may pass.
- **Scroll.** The use of "scroll" evokes many different instances of the more general idea of a "book of fate." In Christianity, God has a Book of Life that contains the names of all the virtuous souls, and a contrasting Book of Death with all sinners.



### Aldous Huxley

As a writer, Aldous Huxley is best known for his novel *Brave New World* which circled around Huxley's distrust of 20<sup>th</sup>-century trends and technologies. The same sentiments are echoed in the short essay titled *Time and the Machine*.

### TRIVIA

Did you know that Henley and *Treasure Island* author Robert Louis Stevenson were friends? Stevenson found Henley a source of inspiration for his courage to face sickness and death that he made him his muse in the character Long John Silver from the same novel.

Henley's poem *Invictus* would find its way in contemporary life as it was revived in the film of the same name *Invictus* (2009), a biographical film of Nelson Mandela and South Africa's rugby team Captain Francois Pienaar.

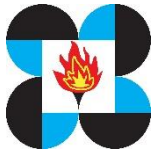
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*Sources not cited here are found in the SLGs.*