



## THE MAIN FEATURES OF MODERNISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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**Abstract:** *Modernism in English letters was one of the most influential movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was a response to rapid social, technological, and cultural changes, including industrialization, urbanization, and the aftermath of World War I. Modernist writers renounced traditional forms of writing and sought to work with new narrative methods, such as stream-of-consciousness, fragmented structures, and multiple viewpoints. Key features of modernism include a focus on alienation and disillusionment, rich symbolism and imagery, psychological depth, and, lastly, disruption of conventional forms of narration and poetry. This article describes these features, pointing out the ways in which modernist literature is devoted to the labyrinthine nature of human experiences and also to the malaise of the contemporary world.*

**Keywords:** *Modernism, English literature, stream-of-consciousness, alienation, symbolism, fragmentation, experimental narrative, psychological depth.*

Modernism in English literature was one of the most important literary movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It emerged as a reaction to the dramatic social, political, and technological changes of the time, including industrialization, urbanization, World War I, and the rapid growth of modern cities. Modernist writers felt that traditional literary forms and styles were no longer adequate to describe the complexity of contemporary life. They experimented with new techniques to explore human consciousness, emotions, and the fragmented reality of the modern world.



One of the central features of modernism is **experimentation with narrative techniques**. Modernist writers often abandoned the traditional chronological plot and linear storytelling. They explored new methods such as **stream-of-consciousness**, **interior monologue**, and **fragmented narrative structures**. Stream-of-consciousness, for example, allows readers to follow the thoughts and feelings of a character as they occur, often in a nonlinear and chaotic way. James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* are famous examples of this technique, where time, memory, and perception blend together to create a vivid portrayal of the human mind. For instance, phrases like "Yes because he never did a thing like that before..." in book James Joyce's *Ulysses* illustrate how thoughts flow directly from the mind without conventional punctuation, creating an intimate view of the character's psyche. Another example, "History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake," reflects the modernist theme of alienation and disillusionment, showing a character struggling with personal and historical reality

Another important feature of modernism is **the theme of alienation, disillusionment, and uncertainty**. Modernist literature often presents characters who feel isolated from society, confused about their purpose, or disconnected from traditional moral values. This reflects the social and psychological effects of modernity, as people struggled to find meaning in a rapidly changing world. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) is a key example, depicting a world of spiritual emptiness and cultural disintegration after the horrors of World War I.. Lines such as "April is the cruellest month" convey the paradoxical nature of life and renewal, while the poem's collage of literary, cultural, and historical references creates a sense of chaos and spiritual emptiness. Eliot's use of shifting voices, fragmented structure, and dense symbolism exemplifies the modernist emphasis on complexity.

**Symbolism and rich imagery** are also central to modernist writing. Modernist authors frequently used symbols, mythological references, and indirect language to convey complex ideas. Rather than presenting a straightforward narrative or clear moral lessons, modernist texts often require active interpretation by the



reader. For example, in T.S. Eliot's poems, images of decay, water, and urban landscapes symbolize deeper themes of loss, renewal, and spiritual crisis.

**Psychological depth and subjectivity** are also characteristic of modernist literature. Modernist writers explored the inner life of their characters, often emphasizing individual perception over objective reality. They were influenced by the ideas of Sigmund Freud and other early psychologists, who emphasized the unconscious mind and the complexity of human thought. In Woolf's novels, for instance, characters' memories and perceptions often intertwine with present events, creating a layered and subjective experience of reality. Finally, modernism is characterized by **fragmentation and the disruption of traditional structures**. This can be seen in narrative, language, and poetic form. Modernist works often mix different literary styles, voices, and time periods, reflecting the fragmented nature of modern existence. Life is portrayed as chaotic, unpredictable, and sometimes meaningless, challenging readers to confront ambiguity and complexity.

In conclusion, modernism in English literature represents a significant shift in the way writers approached storytelling, style, and human experience. Its main features—experimentation with narrative techniques, focus on alienation and disillusionment, symbolism and imagery, rejection of realism, psychological depth, and structural fragmentation—allowed writers to capture the essence of a rapidly changing world. Modernist literature continues to influence writers and readers today, offering profound insights into the human condition and the challenges of modern life.

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