

## Modernism in English Novel

Modernist novel is a term which refers to those novels or the principles behind their creation produced since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which decisively reject the artistic conventions of the novels of the previous age. Among such rejected conventions are those associated with realism in its straightforward sense.

- (1) Modernist novels tend to be self-conscious as they deliberately remind the reader that they are art-works, rather than seeking to serve as 'windows on reality'. They reject the 'tyranny of plot' as in the case of novelists like Joyce, Woolf, and others. They question the dogmas of realism in fiction in search for alternatives to the well-made plot, the rounded and life-like character, the knowable world wholly accessible to reasoned and rational enquiry.
- (2) The modernist novel typically focuses far greater attention on to the states and process inside the consciousness of the main character(s) than on public events in the outside world. This is the result of the impact of Freud on modernist novelists. The self is no longer the authority for the definition of individual identity.
- (3) This focusing upon the problems of the self and of the inner life has encouraged the development of new methods of fictional expression. The modernist novelists are remarkable for development of techniques such as stream of consciousness and internal monologue, its challenging of traditional conceptions of story and plot, its markedly greater emphasis on what James Joyce calls 'epiphanies' and Virginia Woolf 'moments'-that is, points in time when reality seems to stand revealed and to speak itself- and its revolutionary use of various forms of what we can call 'poetic expression' in the novel.
- (4) Modernist novels are pessimistic in tone, unsure about the sense or logic of the world, and look on human beings as isolated and alienated. The traditional omniscient view of a knowable world obeying certain laws in fiction is replaced by a view of reality as lacking any unifying logic.

Modernism is a formally recognized literary movement but not all the English novels written in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are typically modernist. Edwardian and Georgian novels carry, at varying degrees, the manifestations of the urge to experiment with the novelistic form but they are not decisively modernist. These novels are better categorized as 'modern', as in the case of D. H. Lawrence's early novels. Their explorations of characters tend increasingly inward and show a noticeable degree of permissiveness. The view of reality they depict is not at ease with that of the traditional conception of formal realism that dominated English novel since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.