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Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages · Department of Foreign Languages

COURSE PACKAGE

Studies of Literary Texts

Modernist Literature: Contexts, Criticism, and Texts

COURSE TITLE	Études de textes littéraires (ETL)
LEVEL	Third Year (Licence) – English
HOURLY VOLUME	3 hours per week
TEACHER	Dr. Soumaya Bouacida

Academic Year 2023–2024

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Course Overview

1. Course Description

This course explores the rich tapestry of modernist literature and its historical, philosophical, and scientific underpinnings. Students will trace the intellectual currents that shaped modernism, examining its roots in philosophy, psychology, science, and the avant-garde art movements. The clash between modernism and realism, together with the Marxist critique of modernism, will be explored. Critical readings by prominent thinkers such as Virginia Woolf, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Georg Lukács will be analyzed, providing a comprehensive understanding of the movement's theoretical foundations. The course also examines modernism's intersections with feminist thought, colonial discourse, and postcolonial perspectives. By exploring specific works by Joseph Conrad, T. S. Eliot, and William Faulkner, it aims to give students a nuanced understanding of modernism and the analytical tools to engage critically with the complexities of modernist expression and its enduring influence on literature and culture.

2. Course Objectives

This course aims to:

- Explore the impact of philosophy, psychology, science, and art movements on the rise of modernism.
- Examine the ideological confrontation between Marxism and modernism, as well as the ongoing debate between modernism and realism.
- Critically evaluate seminal texts by Virginia Woolf, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Georg Lukács, gaining insight into their contributions to modernist thought.
- Investigate the role of the New Woman and the feminist movement through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Virginia Woolf's works.
- Analyze modernism's engagement with colonialism, exploring Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the historical context of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Chinua Achebe's critique.
- Explore the historical context, major themes, and poetic techniques of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.
- Investigate the historical context and the key elements of modernism in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.
- Connect the themes and techniques discussed across the course, fostering a holistic understanding of modernist literature.
- Encourage students to engage critically with primary texts and scholarly interpretations, cultivating their ability to analyze and evaluate complex ideas.

- Enhance students' communication skills through class discussions, presentations, and written assignments.

3. Syllabus

SEMESTER ONE	
UNIT 1 **The Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Context of Modernism**	■ The Rise of Modernism ■ The Influence of Philosophy ■ The Influence of Psychology ■ The Influence of Science ■ The Influence of Art Movements ■ The Marxist Clash with the Modernists ■ Modernism vs. Realism
UNIT 2 **Critical Readings on Modernism**	■ Virginia Woolf's "Modern Fiction" ■ Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" ■ Mikhail Bakhtin's "Polyphony" ■ Georg Lukács's "The Ideology of Modernism" ■ Glossary of Modernist Concepts
UNIT 3 **The New Woman and the Feminist Movement**	■ Judith Butler's "Performativity" ■ Contexts, Themes, and Modernist Techniques in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* ■ Woolf's "Professions for Women"
UNIT 4 **Modernism and Colonialism**	■ Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Colonial Travel Writing ■ Major Themes of *Heart of Darkness* ■ The Historical Context of *Heart of Darkness* and the Legacy of King Leopold ■ Modernist Techniques in *Heart of Darkness* ■ Critical Views on *Heart of Darkness*
SEMESTER TWO	
UNIT 5 **Modernism in Poetry: T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land***	■ The Historical Context of *The Waste Land* ■ The Transformation of Poetry in the Modern Era ■ The Major Themes of *The Waste Land* ■ "Tradition and the Individual Talent" ■ The Poetic Techniques of *The Waste Land*
UNIT 6 **William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury***	■ Historical Context and Major Themes ■ Elements of Modernism

Introduction

Modernism remains one of the most decisive transformations in the history of literature. Emerging from the shocks of industrialization, urbanization, scientific revolution, and, above all, the First World War, modernist writers broke with the conventions of nineteenth-century realism in order to find forms adequate to a world that seemed fragmented, uncertain, and newly conscious of the depths of the human mind.

This course package guides third-year students through that transformation. Unit One situates modernism in its historical, philosophical, and scientific context and sets it against the realist tradition and the Marxist critique. Unit Two introduces key critical texts—by Woolf, Barthes, Bakhtin, and Lukács—together with a glossary of the concepts that recur throughout the course. Unit Three turns to the New Woman and the feminist movement, reading Judith Butler's theory of performativity alongside Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and "Professions for Women." Unit Four examines modernism and colonialism through Said's *Orientalism* and a sustained study of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and its critical reception. In the second semester, Unit Five is devoted to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*—its context, themes, and techniques—and Unit Six to William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Throughout, students are encouraged to read closely, to test critical claims against the texts, and to connect form with history.

SEMESTER ONE

Modernist Contexts, Criticism, and Fiction

SEMESTER ONE

Unit One: The Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Context of Modernism

IN THIS UNIT

- Lesson 01: The Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Context of Modernism (Part One)
- Lesson 02: The Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Context of Modernism (Part Two)
- Lesson 03: Realism vs. Modernism

Lesson 01: The Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Context of Modernism (Part One)

1. The Rise of Modernism

Modernism is regarded as a response to industrialization, urban society, war, technological change, and new philosophical ideas. The First World War, and the years immediately before and after it, caused the demise of many beliefs. As Peter Childs explains:

> The class system was rocked by the rise of trade unions and the Labour Party; beliefs in King and Country, patriotism and duty were betrayed by the carnage of the war; the strength of patriarchy was challenged as women went to work outside the home and the suffrage movement gained hold. In terms of the trauma of the war itself, the effect on modern consciousness cannot be overstated. It resulted in the invention of new weapons, such as submarines and aeroplanes, and produced more than 33 million military casualties, and an additional 5 million civilian deaths. (Childs 20)

The war produced a loss of faith, disillusionment, an experience of fragmentation and disintegration, shell shock, and the shattering of cultural norms. The modernists who came after the First World War attempted to escape from the pessimism of their fragmented society into their art, where sense, shape, and order could be achieved. In their article "The Marxist Approach to Modernism," Gaylord LeRoy and Ursula Beitz describe modernism as "a major trend in literature and art from the last third of the nineteenth century. It is marked by pessimism; with foreshadowing of the modern existential angst. . . . Art becomes a substitute for life or a refuge from it" (2). While seeking new, revolutionary, and experimental methods, modernist writers strove to be true to the new skepticisms and hesitations of their age. Novelists in particular captured the ethos of the postwar world: the 1920s produced many of the most highly regarded English-language novels of the twentieth century, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928). These writers rejected most of the fundamentals of classic realism, "such as a dependable narrator; the depiction of a fixed stable self; history as a progressive linear process; and the tying up of all narrative strands, or 'closure'" (Childs 45). In brief, Ezra Pound's injunction to "make it new" became the overarching slogan of modernism.

2. The Influence of Philosophy

The previously dominant modes had been a poetics of mimesis, verisimilitude, and realism. In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E. M. Forster argues that the realist novel "attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience" (6), adding that characterization and the presentation of the background are its two main aspects. From Forster's perspective, the realist novel rests on the principle of verisimilitude and the objective representation of life, with a confident tone and a detailed, pragmatic approach to narrating events. In *The Red and the Black* (1830), Stendhal expresses the idea of imitating life as it is through the voice of his narrator: "Yes, monsieur, a

novel is a mirror which goes out on a highway. Sometimes it reflects the azure of the heavens, sometimes the mire of the pools of mud on the way, and the man who carries this mirror in his knapsack is forsooth to be accused by you of being immoral!" (232). By contrast, modernism marked a movement towards increased sophistication, studied mannerism, profound introversion, technical display, self-skepticism, and anti-representationalism. At the turn of the century, many philosophers claimed that reality lies in the immediate flux of sensory appearances, announcing an inversion of Platonism (Schwartz 12). Artistic movements such as post-impressionism, expressionism, cubism, symbolism, imagism, vorticism, Dadaism, futurism, and surrealism progressively undermined realism, each presenting a different way of viewing reality.

Philosophers posited a sharp opposition between conceptual abstraction and the flux of concrete sensations. Bergson's "real duration," James's "stream of consciousness," Bradley's "immediate experience," and Nietzsche's "chaos of sensations" all express the conviction that reality lies in the sensory flux; each thinker set the stream of sensations against the abstract systems that organize reality. As Sanford Schwartz puts it, the opposition "between abstraction and sensation is one of the most prominent features of turn-of-the-century thought" (20). Bergson and James, like the Romantics before them, "employ organic metaphors to rescue human nature from the spectre of scientific determinism" (Schwartz 21). Bergson believed that, because we are usually interested in the physical object rather than in its changing appearances, we ignore the "personal element of experience in real duration" (Schwartz 21).

Bergson argued that psychological time is measured by duration, defined as the varying speed at which the mind apprehends the length of experiences according to their different intensities, contents, and meanings for each individual. His work changed the way many modernists represented time in fiction. Bergson distinguished between chronological time and what he called "duration": chronological time is the time of history (hours, minutes, and seconds), while duration encompasses those times in a life which are significant to an individual and which are necessarily different for each individual. Peter Childs illustrates the point: "if you are asked to talk about your own life, the time that matters to you is to do with events in your growing up or subsequent achievements and crises – in short, experiences which have turned you into the person you are. You may have several significant moments in your life which matter to you, and the backdrop of clock time is irrelevant" (58).

What Bergson did for ideas about the mind's understanding of time, Freud did for ideas about the mind's functioning. Freud began publishing on psychoanalysis in the mid-1890s, and *The Interpretation of Dreams* appeared in 1900. With the spread of Freud's work, the unitary, normative self of realism gave way to an evolving and fragmented self, as in the characters of Lawrence, Woolf, Joyce, and others. Instead of focusing on the outward surfaces of personality, Freud's mapping of the unconscious suggested that life is full of hidden meanings and desires (Childs 51).

Lesson 02: The Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Context of Modernism (Part Two)

3. The Influence of Psychology

More pointedly, there is an analogy between Freud's "free association" and the associative technique of the modernist novelists known as "stream of consciousness," a phrase coined by the philosopher William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890): "[Consciousness] is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life" (qtd. in Childs 52). Freud's therapeutic method, in which the patient's mind is allowed to uncover ideas freely, is echoed in the modernist novel—as in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), in which Dowell speaks his mind and embarks upon a painful but cathartic "talking cure." By contrast, realist authors focus on social rather than individual consciousness. In *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65), for instance, Charles Dickens emphasizes social consciousness and the invisibility of the individual; John Harmon tells Mr. Boffin that he is "nobody" and "not likely to be known" (Dickens 75). Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) is another example of the realist concern with collective rather than individual consciousness: Hardy focuses on the community, showing that Henchard's actions affect the whole town and not just himself. In other words, Henchard's private life stands for the public one.

4. The Influence of Science

The modernist novel embraced the transformations brought about by changes in physics, optics, chemistry, and engineering. Physics and astronomy were revolutionized by Max Planck's work on quantum theory (from 1900), Einstein's theories of relativity (1905–15), and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (1927). These theories overturned belief in the absolute character of the material universe. The idea that physical laws are relative to the observer was widely and excitedly debated in artistic circles, as writers adopted a tendency towards narrative relativity, "which becomes the most striking aspect to modernist fiction, from Conrad and James to Proust and Woolf, in its use of perspective, unreliability, anti-absolutism, skepticism, instability, individuality and subjective perceptions" (Childs 73). Whereas realist authors depict the world as rational, knowable, and objective, modernists portray it as complex, fragmented, and subjective, its appearance depending on the relative position of the viewer in space and time. The uncertainty principle thus seemed to describe the stance taken by several modernist authors, who view the world from multiple overlapping perspectives, while realist authors use a reliable narrator whose single perspective is governed by Newtonian laws. Narrative temporality is also a key feature: realist writers present the narrative in a linear, chronological sequence within a homogeneous space. Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), for instance, follows the psychological and social development of the orphan nicknamed Pip from childhood to adulthood in chronological order. By contrast, modernism represents time through flashbacks, flash-

forwards, and repetitions. Just as Einstein's theory freed the physical universe from Newton's laws, modernist writers attempted to free their characters from the absolutism and homogeneity of the realist novel.

5. The Influence of Art Movements

The art movements that emerged in the early twentieth century helped modernism to flourish. All the following "isms"—expressionism, impressionism, cubism, Dadaism, surrealism, and futurism—belong to the avant-garde and share Ezra Pound's slogan "make it new." They revolted against the traditional realist way of thinking and stressed that modern art should reflect the fragmented atmosphere of the age, and that emotions, consciousness, and impressions are unavoidable when representing reality. See the definition of each movement in the **Glossary of Modernist Concepts** (Unit Two, Lesson 05).

6. The Marxist Clash with the Modernists

Realist writers place the changes of the present in the context of the historical past. They refer to historical incidents in order to comment on the present, with the aim of educating people and exposing the vices of Victorian society. In his essay "On History" (1830), Thomas Carlyle argues that history is an instructor because it encompasses ordinary people rather than only the biographies of leaders. He adds that history is a source of moral lessons for the future: "Let us search more and more into the Past; let all men explore it, as the true fountain of knowledge" (11). Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) is an example of a novel centered on history. It deals with the misfortunes of Charles Darnay, who faces two trials—one in London in 1780 and another in Paris during the Revolution. Here Dickens uses history to move the plot, involving events such as the storming of the Bastille, the September Massacres, and the Reign of Terror. Reacting against the historical tendency of realism, modernist writers such as Joyce turned away from forms of historical understanding, seeing greater meaning in the individual than in society. In *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus declares: "History . . . is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (Joyce 40). This position was hotly disputed by Marxist writers, and the debate is frequently framed in terms of the opposed stances of the Hungarian critic Georg Lukács and the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht.

Lukács's position is best outlined in his late essay "The Ideology of Modernism" (1957), in which he argues that modernism is profoundly anti-realist and, from a Marxist point of view, ideologically suspect: modernist writers are interested in the personal, spiritual, or mystical transcendence of their surroundings, so that the social environment in their texts is little more than a backdrop. For Lukács, the literary work should reflect social reality. His ideas on the function of literature as a reflection of society are developed in *The Historical Novel* (1937) and *Studies in European Realism* (1950). In *The Historical Novel*, Lukács sets out the attributes of realism and of the historical novel and enlists realist authors such as Sir Walter Scott to champion

his cause, arguing that Scott's novels revolve around historical consciousness: Scott employs typical protagonists whose destinies represent the destiny of the whole nation.

Lukács rejected modernism for several reasons. He attacked expressionism and its tenets of abstraction and stylization, and in "Reportage or Portrayal?" (1932) he condemned the modernist mode of writing in general and its experimental forms—reportage, documentary, and montage—which, in his view, undermined realism's objectivity. He also criticized the formalism he saw in Brecht's theatrical "alienation effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*). Lukács emphasized the interaction between the individual and society, a principle that underlies his censure of James Joyce's static view of history. Brecht, for his part, embraced the modernist project, objecting that Lukács's conception of realism was too narrow because it was derived almost entirely from the nineteenth-century novel. He stressed the importance of experimentation in art: in his view, the dramatist may mix genres within a single work in order to reveal social reality (qtd. in Jha 3). Brecht also argued that art and literature must change, both to register the changes happening in the world and to express the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Lesson 03: Realism vs. Modernism

One salient characteristic of the realist novel is its factual veracity, which was challenged by the modernist novel, which sought to undermine mimesis by turning the discourse of the novel towards subjective rather than external reality. The focus on "the action of individuals" is another salient feature of the plot-driven narrative of realism against which modernist writers revolted. In contrast to the realist insistence on plot, Tony E. Jackson observes that a modernist novel such as Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* can "open up a number of subplots through incidental characters, but never close them" (124), which marks it off by a lack of resolution on the level of content.

The balance of inner and outer worlds, achieved after some kind of conflict, is one of the defining features of realist fiction. The great novels of realism most commonly present a protagonist seeking self-verification in relation to others (Jackson 20). For David Lodge, the relation between individual and society in the realist Victorian novel is resolved, in the final analysis, in favor of society. The Victorian novelist's aim is to present the individual in relation to society and social change, and to show how society shapes individual consciousness. This epistemological certainty stands in stark contrast to the modernist exploration of truth in terms of the individual and his or her relation to society. Modernism focuses on the microcosm rather than the macrocosm, and hence on the individual more than on the social. Modernist thinkers stressed the importance of the individual as the one who shapes society, which remains a backdrop to events. Marxist thinkers attacked this ideology because, for them, it is society that shapes individual consciousness, and society should not be sidelined.

The fundamental difference between traditional (that is, premodernist) narrative and modernist narrative lies in the difference between the plot of resolution and the plot of revelation. In the traditional mode, problems are solved and situations are worked out. The modern mode, conversely, abjures the question "what will happen?" and refuses even to acknowledge it. Events are not resolved; instead, a state of affairs is revealed. Thus plot development in traditional narrative is an "unraveling," and in modern narrative a "displaying." The plot of resolution can be discussed in Roland Barthes's terms as a "readerly" text: a text that can be read but not written—a finished product that does not stimulate the reader's productive abilities because everything is solved and closed. The plot of revelation, by contrast, corresponds to the "writerly" text, which manifests a plurality of meanings and, being unfinished, encourages readers to question the truth (Barthes, *S/Z* 4–5). In modernism, the reader shifts from the role of consumer to that of producer.

Modernist fiction is experimental or innovative in form, displaying marked deviations from preexisting modes of discourse, literary or non-literary. It is concerned with consciousness and with the unconscious workings of the human mind. The modernist novel breaks from the nineteenth-century novel by charging its predecessor with falsely assuming that life and the self

can be made transparent and coherently ordered by the authority of a narrator who organizes the experiences of characters into logically ordered plots. The modernist novel therefore shifts from being monologic to being polyphonic and dialogic. It eschews the reliable, omniscient, and intrusive narrator and employs instead a single limited point of view, or multiple points of view, to show that truth is relative (see the sections on Bakhtin's dialogism and Barthes's "The Death of the Author" in Unit Two).

A modernist novel has no real beginning, since it starts *in medias res* (see the Glossary) and plunges into a flowing stream of consciousness; its ending is usually open or ambiguous, leaving the reader in doubt as to the final destiny of the characters. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, for instance, opens with "But, you may say . . ."—an unusual way to begin, since a beginning cannot logically start with "but." Here, the discourse starts *in medias res*. A modernist text is also characterized by alternative methods of aesthetic ordering such as allusion, mythical archetypes, and the repetition with variation of motifs, images, and symbols. Modernism escapes the chronological order of events and tends towards a fluid or complex handling of time, involving flashbacks and flash-forwards. Echoing Einstein's space-time continuum, modernist writers use techniques such as collage and montage (the combination of fragments of different texts). Finally, in modernist fiction the concept of the stable realist hero falls apart: characters are evolving, unstable, fragmented, and discontinuous, reflecting the fragmented atmosphere of the postwar era.

SEMESTER ONE

Unit Two: Critical Readings on Modernism

IN THIS UNIT

- Lesson 04: Critical Readings on Modernism (Part One)
- Lesson 05: Critical Readings on Modernism (Part Two)
- Glossary of Modernist Concepts

Lesson 04: Critical Readings on Modernism (Part One)

1. Virginia Woolf's "Modern Fiction"

While Joyce and Dorothy Richardson arguably pioneered the new psychological realism, it is Virginia Woolf's formulation of this focus and technique in her essay "Modern Novels" (1919) and its revised version, "Modern Fiction" (1925), that has most influenced later accounts of modernist fictional method. Often read as a manifesto for Woolf's own aesthetic objectives, "Modern Fiction" is in fact largely a critique of the methods of her contemporaries, and it reveals the ambiguities and variations within the emerging literary aesthetics of the 1910s and 1920s rather than advocating any single definition of the modern novel. Its central argument rests on a contrast between the "materialist" narrative focus of H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy and the new "spiritual" focus of the "moderns," exemplified by Joyce. Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, she argues, spend their creative energy "proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story," yet amidst this abundance of external detail they fail to capture life itself. Rather than concentrating on external events and scenes, modern novels should be concerned with the life of the mind in all its conscious, subconscious, and unconscious workings. The writer needs to break from the limits of materialist realism and to find new methods and forms for representing this life in all its immediacy and multiplicity. Modernists, in short, should be more interested in the "spiritual" quality of life—by which Woolf means the mind or consciousness.

> ℹ️ **Key passage**
>
> Woolf's most quoted image for this inner life comes from the same essay: "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."

2. Notes on Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author"

Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" (1967) has several implications. In literary criticism, the death of the Author is the "death" of the physical, real-life author as the guarantor of a work's meaning. In literary writing, it corresponds to the "death" of the omniscient narrator and of the author who calls attention to his presence in the text—for instance by addressing the reader as "dear reader" or by speaking in the first person as the author. Barthes refers to the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, for whom "it is language which speaks, not the author" (Barthes 143); Barthes thus substitutes language for the author. Modernist works exhibit the concept of the death of the author through techniques such as multiple and inconclusive endings, the existential freedom of characters, and the abandonment of the omniscient narrator. Such devices allow the reader to participate in the interpretation of the text. The death of the author is close to T. S. Eliot's theory of impersonality, according to which the poet and the poem are two separate things: the poet may have personal desires and interests, but he should not invest them in his poetry.

In his essay, Barthes criticizes the kind of criticism that relies on aspects of the author's identity —political views, historical context, religion, ethnicity, psychology, or other biographical attributes—to extract meaning. For Barthes, this method of reading distorts the aesthetic and semantic qualities of the text. He concludes that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148), meaning that the meaning of a literary text is not limited to its author's intention. Barthes argues that "to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (147). Readers must therefore separate the literary work from its creator in order to free the text from interpretive tyranny.

Lesson 05: Critical Readings on Modernism (Part Two)

1. Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism, or Polyphony

In the first chapter of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the concept of polyphony. He argues that Dostoevsky's novels are characterized by "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin 6), which exist in dialogic and contrapuntal relationships. Polyphony goes hand in hand with the concept of dialogism. In a polyphonic or dialogic novel, the author rejects the monologic form of the traditional novel, in which the characters' voices, viewpoints, philosophies, and worlds are all objects within a single authorial discourse. Bakhtin stresses that the authorial consciousness should coexist and interact with the consciousnesses of the characters rather than dominate them.

2. Georg Lukács's "The Ideology of Modernism"

"The Ideology of Modernism" is a critical essay by the Hungarian Marxist theorist Georg Lukács, first published in 1957 (in English in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, 1963). In it, Lukács criticizes modernism as anti-realist and defends the realist tradition. As a Marxist, he insists on the primacy of society and history, whereas modernism, in his view, is anti-historical and celebrates the isolated individual. His argument concentrates on the ideological basis of the two movements rather than on their stylistic features alone. Comparing the use of interior monologue in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Thomas Mann's *Lotte in Weimar*, he argues that for Joyce the technique becomes the very principle of the work—an exaggeration of style—whereas for Mann it remains merely a device for presenting a character's thoughts within a larger, socially grounded narrative. As Lukács puts it:

> The distinctions that concern us are not those between stylistic "techniques" in the formalistic sense. It is the view of the world, the ideology or *weltanschauung* underlying a writer's work, that counts. And it is the writer's attempt to reproduce this view of the world which constitutes his "intention" and is the formative principle underlying the style of a given piece of writing. (Lukács 19)

The decisive distinction, then, concerns the writer's view of the world and his intention towards it; that intention determines the style.

Lukács criticizes the modernists' individualism, which reduces society to a mere background: "Man, for these writers, is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (20). Realism, by contrast, rests on the Aristotelian conception of man as a "social animal" (*zoon politikon*) whose individuality cannot be separated from the environment in which he lives and acts. In realist literature, solitude is a particular fate produced by circumstances or by a type of character, not a universal condition of human existence.

Lukács also links modernist ideology to the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger, especially the notion of the individual's "thrownness into being" (*Geworfenheit*). For the modernists, he argues, the individual is thrown into the world without history; his experience is therefore limited, meaningless, and incapable of development, since an individual without history cannot build a future. Lukács distinguishes between two kinds of human potentiality: *abstract* potentiality, which belongs to the realm of subjective imagination, and *concrete* potentiality, which concerns the real possibilities that an individual faces in the world. Modernist subjectivism, he contends, confuses the two and lets the fate of characters depend on abstract possibilities alone. Realism, on the contrary, takes both into account while distinguishing between them, because only through this distinction can literature truthfully reflect the interaction between human beings and their environment.

Glossary of Modernist Concepts

> ℹ️ **About this glossary**
>
> Several entries below reproduce or closely adapt the wording of standard reference works. The source of each borrowed entry is given at its end; when you quote a definition in your own work, cite the reference work it comes from.

The Stream of Consciousness

A focus on the subjective consciousness of the individual mind has become one of the defining features of the modernist novel, identified as both its principal theme and dominant technique. The term is derived from William James' description of the way in which thoughts, perceptions, memories, associations and sensations in all their multitude are experienced by the mind. In *Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James described conscious experience as continuous and unbroken: 'It is nothing jointed; it flows. A "river" or "stream" are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life'. The stream of consciousness as James conceives it here refers to the never-ending associative flow of our conscious or half-conscious thoughts and perceptions and feelings, the activity of the mind that we are always at least vaguely sensible of. To understand some of the different kinds of narrative focus subsumed by the stream-of-consciousness label, it is useful to have some awareness of the ideas that dominated psychological and philosophical thought at the beginning of the twentieth century. A contemporary reader might be likely to assume that the psychological focus of the modernist novel resulted from the impact of the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud (1856– 1939). In the first decades of the twentieth century, however, the celebrity mind of the moment was the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941), whose theories of consciousness, the creative impulse and the nature of time acquired an unprecedented popular following and profoundly influenced the European intellectual and artistic scene.

Free Indirect Discourse

Free indirect discourse is a technique for presenting a character's thoughts or speech without obvious mediation by an external narrator (Genette). It is distinct from direct speech (e.g. '"Look at those clouds. It might rain tomorrow," said Jane') and from indirect report ('Jane pointed to the clouds and warned that it might rain tomorrow'), in that it uses the third-person and past tense while moving inside the character's consciousness to take on the style and tone of their own immediate speaking voice ('The clouds looked dark and foreboding. It might rain tomorrow') because the use of the third-person retains an element of objective narration, free indirect discourse has been described as having a 'dual voice', able to convey at once the immediate thoughts of a character and the detached perspective of an impersonal narrator (Banfield). Jane

Austen is credited with being the first English writer to make sustained use of free indirect discourse, an important technique for the development of the novel, although it is Henry James who is regarded as one of its greatest innovators, extending it to the point that his novels are focused entirely through the non-omniscient perceiving consciousness of one central character. Subsequent theories of the novel, following James' influence, distinguished between modes of narrative that 'tell' (in which the author or authoritative narrator overtly directs the reader's interpretation of the characters and story) and those, like free indirect discourse, that 'show' (in which the author detaches his own point of view from the narrative, presenting scenes so that they tell themselves).

Mimesis

The Greek word for imitation, a central term in aesthetic and literary theory since Aristotle. A literary work that is understood to be reproducing an external reality or any aspect of it is described as mimetic, while mimetic criticism is the kind of criticism that assumes or insists that literary works reflect reality.

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Dramatic Monologue

A monologue is a lengthy speech by a single person. In a play, when a character utters a monologue that expresses his or her private thoughts, it is called a soliloquy. Dramatic monologue, however, does not designate a component in a play, but a type of lyric poem that was perfected by Robert Browning. In its fullest form, as represented in Browning's "My Last Duchess," "The Bishop Orders His Tomb," "Andrea del Sarto," and many other poems, the dramatic monologue has the following features: (1) A single person, who is patently not the poet, utters the speech that makes up the whole of the poem, in a specific situation at a critical moment: the Duke is negotiating with an emissary for a second wife; the Bishop lies dying; Andrea once more attempts wistfully to believe his wife's lies. (2) This person addresses and interacts with one or more other people; but we know of the auditors' presence, and what they say and do, only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker. (3) The main principle controlling the poet's choice and formulation of what the lyric speaker says is to reveal to the reader, in a way that enhances its interest, the speaker's temperament and character. In monologues such as "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" and "Caliban upon Setebos," Browning omits the second feature, the presence of a silent auditor; but features 1 and 3 are the necessary conditions of a dramatic monologue. The third feature—the focus on self-revelation—serves to distinguish a dramatic monologue from its near relation, the dramatic lyric, which is also a monologue uttered in an identifiable situation at a dramatic moment. John Donne's "The Canonization" and "The Flea" (1633), for example, are dramatic lyrics that lack only one feature of the dramatic monologue: the focus of interest is primarily on the speaker's elaborately ingenious argument, rather than on the character he inadvertently reveals in the course of arguing. And

although Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (1798) is spoken by one person to a silent auditor (his sister) in a specific situation at a significant moment in his life, it is not a dramatic monologue proper, both because we are invited to identify the speaker with the poet himself, and because the organizing principle and focus of interest is not the revelation of the speaker's distinctive temperament, but the evolution of his observations, memories, and thoughts toward the resolution of an emotional problem. Tennyson wrote "Ulysses" (1842) and other dramatic monologues, and the form has been used by H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, E. A. Robinson, Ezra Pound, Robert Lowell, and other poets of the twentieth century. The best-known modern instance is T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915).

Source: Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.

Interior Monologue

The written representation of a character's inner thoughts, impressions, and memories as if directly 'overheard' without the apparent intervention of a summarizing and selecting narrator. The term is often loosely used as a synonym for stream of consciousness. However, some confusion arises about the relationship between these two terms when critics distinguish them: some take 'stream of consciousness' as the larger category, embracing all representations of intermingled thoughts and perceptions, within which interior monologue is a special case of 'direct' presentation; others take interior monologue as the larger category, within which stream of consciousness is a special technique emphasizing continuous 'flow' by abandoning strict logic, syntax and punctuation. The second of these alternatives permits us to apply the term 'interior monologue' to that large class of modern poems representing a character's unspoken thoughts and impressions, as distinct from the spoken thoughts imagined in the dramatic monologue: Browning's 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' (1842) is an early example. More often, though, the term refers to prose passages employing stream-of-consciousness techniques: the most celebrated instance in English is the final chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Joyce acknowledged Edouard Dujardin's novel *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887) as a precedent in the use of interior monologue.

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Impressionism

The concept of literary impressionism refers to an aesthetic principle and form of narrative technique typically associated with the writers Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford. Derived from the empirical philosophy of David Hume (1711–76), and advocated by Ford as an extension or revision of realism, it was concerned with both representing the subjective perception of external stimuli by the individual mind, and encouraging the reader's own sensory participation in forming an impressionistic response to the text. Stylistically it is characterised by narrative devices that obscure facts and meaning, such as unreliable or equivocal narrators, or fragmented chronology. In 'On Impressionism' (1914), for example, Ford describes it as 'the record of the

impression of a moment. . . not the correlated chronicle' (Ford 267). In the literary sense borrowed from French painting, a rather vague term applied to works or passages that concentrate on the description of transitory mental impressions as felt by an observer, rather than on the explanation of their external causes. Impressionism in literature is thus neither a school nor a movement but a kind of subjective tendency manifested in descriptive techniques. It is found in symbolist and imagist poetry, and in much modern verse, but also in many works of prose fiction since the late 19th century, as in the novels of Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf. Impressionistic criticism is the kind of criticism that restricts itself to describing the critic's own subjective response to a literary work, rather than ascribing intrinsic qualities to it in the light of general principles. Walter Pater's defence of such criticism, in the Preface to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), was that 'in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly'. The most common kind of impressionistic criticism is found in theatre and book reviews: 'I laughed all night'; 'I couldn't put it down'.

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Expressionism

A general term for a mode of literary or visual art which, in extreme reaction against realism and naturalism, presents a world violently distorted under the pressure of intense personal moods, ideas, and emotions: image and language thus express feeling and imagination rather than represent external reality. Although not an organized movement, expressionism was an important factor in the painting, drama, poetry, and cinema of German-speaking Europe between 1910 and 1924. The term did not come into use until 1911, but has since been applied retrospectively to some important forerunners of expressionist technique, going as far back as Georg Buchner's plays of the 1830s and Vincent Van Gogh's paintings of the 1880s; other significant precursors include the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, the Swedish playwright August Strindberg (in his *Dream Play,* 1902), and the German playwright Frank Wedekind. Within the period 1910-24, consciously expressionist techniques of abstraction were promoted by Wassily Kandinsky and the 'Blue Rider' group of painters, while in drama various anti-naturalist principles of abstract characterization and structural discontinuity were employed in the plays of Ernst Toller, Georg Kaiser, and Walter Hasenclever; these had some influence on the early plays of Bertolt Brecht, notably *Baal* (1922). The poetry of Georg Trakl, Gottfried Benn, August Stramm, and Franz Werfel displayed comparable distortions of accepted structures and syntax in favour of symbolized mood. The nightmarish labyrinths of Franz Kafka's novels are the nearest equivalent in prose fiction. German expressionism is best known today through the wide influence of its cinematic masterpieces: Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926). Along with their much-imitated visual patterns of sinister shadows, these films reveal a shared obsession with automatized, trance-like states, which appears in expressionist literature too: a common concern of

expressionism is with the eruption of irrational and chaotic forces from beneath the surface of a mechanized modern world. In the English-speaking world, expressionist dramatic techniques were adopted in some of the plays of Eugene O'Neill and Sean O'Casey, and in the 'Circe' episode of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922); in poetry, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) may be considered expressionist in its fragmentary rendering of post-war desolation. In a further sense, the term is sometimes applied to the belief that literary works are essentially expressions of their authors' moods and thoughts.

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Dada

Dada, or Dadaism, is an avant-garde movement of anarchic protest against bourgeois society, religion, and art, founded in 1916 in Switzerland by Tristan Tzara, a Rumanian-born French poet. From 1919 the Dadaist group assembled in Paris, issuing nihilistic manifestos against the culture which had been discredited by the 1914-18 war, and experimenting with anti-logical poetry and collage pictures and sculptures. The group included the artists Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, the poet-sculptor Hans Arp, and the young poets Andre Breton, Paul Eluard, and Louis Aragon. Dada was short-lived, but it ushered in the surrealism which superseded it from 1922.

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Surrealism

Surrealism is an anti-rational movement of imaginative liberation in European (mainly French) art and literature in the 1920s and 1930s, launched by Andre Breton in his *Manifeste du Surrealisme* (1924) after his break from the Dada group in 1922. The term *surrealiste* had been used by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917 to indicate an attempt to reach beyond the limits of the 'real'. Surrealism seeks to break down the boundaries between rationality and irrationality, exploring the resources and revolutionary energies of dreams, hallucinations, and sexual desire. Influenced both by the symbolists and by Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious, the surrealists experimented with automatic writing and with the free association of random images brought together in surprising juxtaposition. Although surrealist painting is better known, a significant tradition of surrealist poetry established itself in France, in the work of Breton, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, and Benjamin Peret. Surrealism also attempted to become an international revolutionary movement, associated for a while with the Communist International. Although dissolved as a coherent movement by the end of the 1930s, its tradition has survived in many forms of postwar experimental writing, from the theatre of the absurd to the songs of Bob Dylan. The adjectives surreal and surrealistic are often used in a loose sense to refer to any bizarre imaginative effect.

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Futurism

Futurism is a short-lived avant-garde movement in European art and literature launched in 1909 by the Italian poet Filippo Marinetti in the first of many Futurist manifestos. Rising to prominence in the years following World War I, the futurist aesthetic was all about dynamism as expressed through long, unbroken lines conveying motion and speed as well as the glorification of technology. Futurism violently rejected all previous artistic traditions and conventions along with accepted grammatical rules, in an attempt to express the dynamism and speed of the 20th-century machine age. Its new poetic techniques included typographic experiments and the composition of poems made up of meaningless sounds. Marinetti's aggressive masculine cult of machinery and warfare was eventually exploited by Mussolini as part of official Fascist culture in Italy, although a distinct revolutionary socialist group of Futurists also appeared in Russia in 1912, led by the poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky. The adjective futuristic usually has no reference to this movement, but is applied to fictional works(usually of science fiction or utopian fantasy) that describe some imagined future society.

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Cubism

Cubism is a highly influential visual arts style of the 20th century that was created principally by the artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914. The Cubist style emphasized the flat, two-dimensional surface of the picture plane, rejecting the traditional techniques of perspective, foreshortening, modeling, and chiaroscuro and refuting time-honoured theories that art should imitate nature. Cubist painters were not bound to copying form, texture, colour, and space. Instead, they presented a new reality in paintings that depicted radically fragmented objects.

Source: adapted from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Cubism."

In Medias Res

The Latin phrase meaning 'into the middle of things', applied to the common technique of storytelling by which the narrator begins the story at some exciting point in the middle of the action, thereby gaining the reader's interest before explaining preceding events by analepses ('flashbacks') at some later stage. It was conventional to begin epic poems *in medias res,* as Milton does in *Paradise Lost.* The technique is also common in plays and in prose fiction: for example, Katherine Mansfield's short story 'A Dill Pickle' (1920) begins *in medias res* with the sentence 'And then, after six years, she saw him again.'

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

Epiphany

It means "a manifestation," or "showing forth," and by Christian thinkers was used to signify a manifestation of God's presence within the created world. In the early draft of *A Portrait of the*

Artist as a Young Man entitled *Stephen Hero* (published posthumously in 1944), James Joyce adapted the term to secular experience, to signify the sense of a sudden radiance and revelation that occurs during the perception of a commonplace object. "By an epiphany [Stephen] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation." "Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object. . . seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany." Joyce's short stories and novels include a number of epiphanies; a climactic one is the revelation that Stephen experiences at the sight of the young girl wading on the shore

of the sea in A Portrait of the Artist, chapter 4. "Epiphany" has become the standard term for the description, recurrent in modern poetry and prose fiction, of the sudden flare into revelation of an ordinary object or scene. Joyce, however, had merely substituted this word for what earlier authors had called the moment. Thus Shelley, in his Defense of Poetry (1821), described the "best and happiest moments. . . arising unforeseen and departing unbidden," "visitations of the divinity," which poetry "redeems from decay." William Wordsworth was a pre-eminent poet of what he called "moments," or in more elaborate instances, "spots of time." For examples of short poems which represent a moment of revelation, see Wordsworth's "The Two April Mornings" and "The Solitary Reaper." Wordsworth's Prelude, like some of Joyce's narratives, is constructed as a sequence of such visionary encounters. Thus in Book VIII, lines 543–54 (1850 ed.), Wordsworth describes the "moment" when he for the first time passed in a stagecoach over the "threshold" of London and the "trivial forms / Of houses, pavement, streets" suddenly assumed a profound power and significance:

> 'twas a moment's pause,—
> All that took place within me came and went
> As in a moment; yet with Time it dwells,
> And grateful memory, as a thing divine.

See Irene H. Chayes, "Joyce's Epiphanies," reprinted in Joyce's "Portrait":Criticisms and Critiques, ed. T. E. Connolly (1962); Morris Beja, Epiphany in the Modern Novel (1971); Ashton Nichols, The Poetics of Epiphany: Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Modern Literary Moment (1987).

Source: Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.

The Angel in the House

Woolf's concept of the 'angel of the house' refers to a popular nineteenth-century poem of the same name by Coventry Patmore, which eulogises the influential Victorian ideal of deferential, supportive and domestic womanhood. In 'Professions for Women' Woolf cites this figure as the main obstacle facing the woman writer in the nineteenth century. During her childhood, she notes, 'every house had its angel': She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself

daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her great grace. (Woolf, "Professions" 237) The strength of this cultural myth, Woolf states, internalised by women themselves, was a more subtle yet no less formidable impediment to women's self-expression than their lack of financial independence, and one of the main obstacles that she had faced when starting out as a writer. For Woolf the 'angel' becomes a 'phantom', who appears when she begins to write and tries to control the opinions of her pen. To kill the angel of the house, she declares, was crucial to the profession of a woman writer: Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women.

Allusion

Allusion is a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage. In the Elizabethan poet Thomas Nashe's "Litany in Time of Plague,"

> Brightness falls from the air,
> Queens have died young and fair,
> Dust hath closed Helen's eye,

The unidentified "Helen" in the last line alludes to Helen of Troy. Most allusions serve to illustrate or expand upon or enhance a subject, but some are used in order to undercut it ironically by the discrepancy between the subject and the allusion. In the lines from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) describing a woman at her modern dressing table,

> The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Glowed on the marble,

the echo of Shakespeare's description of Cleopatra's barge in *Antony and Cleopatra* ironically underlines the emptiness of the modern scene. Some modern authors, including Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, include allusions that are very specialized, or drawn from the author's private reading and experience, in the awareness that few readers will recognize them. The current term *intertextuality* includes literary echoes and allusions as one of the many ways in which any text is interlinked with other texts. In some of his poems, W. B. Yeats alludes both to the hero of Celtic legend (Cuchulain) and to the new historical hero (Patrick Pearse) of the 1916 Easter Rising, in

which the revolutionaries captured the Dublin Post Office. In addition to such *topical* allusions to recent events, Yeats often uses *personal* allusions to aspects of his own life and circle of friends.

Source: Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.

Collage

A collage is a work assembled wholly or partly from fragments of other writings, incorporating allusions, quotations, and foreign phrases. Originally applied to paintings with pasted-on elements, the term has been extended to an important kind of modernist poetry, of which the most significant examples are the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land.* The collage technique can also be found sometimes in prose works.

Source: Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

SEMESTER ONE

Unit Three: The New Woman and the Feminist Movement

IN THIS UNIT

- Lesson 06: The New Woman and the Feminist Movement
- Lesson 07: Context, Themes, and Modernist Techniques in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*
- Lesson 08: Woolf's "Professions for Women"

Lesson 06: The New Woman and the Feminist Movement

1. Modernism and the New Woman

The status of the nineteenth century woman who is called "the angel of the house" was also challenged with the emergence of modernism. It is very important to note that Virginia Woolf is one of the famous modernist female writers who were involved in the suffrage movement in 1910. Her commitment influenced her motivation to use the issues of the time in her fiction and non fiction as an advocacy for women's social progress. Many of the issues of the time focused on women's sphere and economic reform, and on opportunities for women in education and work (see Lesson 07).

Defining modernism as the art of a particular historical era (roughly 1890–1930) simplifies the challenges of defining the movement in broader terms. However, it also underscores its temporal overlap with the rise of feminism. Between 1890 and 1930, feminist activism surged as women entered higher education and the workforce in unprecedented numbers, campaigned for suffrage, and brought issues of sexuality and gender to the forefront of political discourse. Literary culture was acutely aware of this phenomenon, encapsulated by the emergence of the "New Woman"—educated, independent, outspoken, and feminist—whose presence epitomized a crisis in sexual politics. The final decades of the 19th century saw a proliferation of literature portraying this "New Woman" and challenging traditional Victorian narratives, with over a hundred such novels published during this time.

The aesthetic radicalism of modernism evolved in tandem with the political radicalism of this "first wave" feminism. Yet, as scholars like Jane Eldridge Miller have noted, feminist authors of the 1890s—such as George Egerton, Olive Schreiner, and Sarah Grand—were often excluded from the modernist canon. Instead, their feminism was frequently cast as an ideological opponent to modernism. In *The Feminine Note in Fiction* (1904), W. L. Courtney criticized "New Woman" novels for failing to uphold artistic neutrality, advocating instead for a "virile" standard of art—a sentiment echoed in subsequent modernist manifestos. For example, F. T. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) denounced feminism alongside moralism and celebrated a hyper-masculine vision of art, equating modernism with heroic masculinity and the rejection of femininity.

This framing of modernism as distinctly masculine persisted in avant-garde publications like Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*, which denounced the Victorian era's perceived effeminacy. Similarly, American modernist journals such as *The Little Review* reinforced this gendered perspective with its tagline, "For virile readers only." Even publications with feminist origins, like *The Freewoman*, shifted focus. Renamed *The New Freewoman* and later *The Egoist*, the journal transformed from a feminist platform into a modernist literary forum under the influence of figures like Ezra Pound, who downplayed the feminist agenda. This transformation reflects the complex and often antagonistic relationship between modernism and feminism. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis observes,

the shift from *The Freewoman* to *The Egoist* symbolizes modernism's tendency to marginalize feminist concerns. Feminist scholars like Bonnie Kime Scott and Shari Benstock have since sought to correct the narrative by highlighting the contributions of women modernists, including Virginia Woolf, H.D., Gertrude Stein, and others. Yet, despite these efforts, the popular image of modernism remains predominantly male, shaped largely by the male writers and critics who defined its canon.

It is worth reflecting on how modernism came to be so closely linked to masculinity. As previously noted, manifestos and definitions of modernism often portrayed it as vigorous and manly, in deliberate opposition to the perceived softness and sentimentality of 19th-century literature, particularly the "social problem" novels associated with "New Woman" writers. This alignment of modernism with masculinity stems from the social conditions of the era, which created distinct experiences of modernity for men and women.

A clear example is found in Marinetti's 1909 *Futurist Manifesto*, which equated modernity with conflict, proposing the destruction of cultural institutions like museums and libraries, while glorifying war and scorning feminism. This rhetoric foreshadowed the Great War (1914–1918), a pivotal event for modernism and an overwhelmingly male cultural phenomenon. Men experienced the trauma of trench warfare, the omnipresence of death, and the psychological impact of shell shock—experiences that, as critics like Benstock argue, profoundly shaped modernist sensibilities. Foundational texts like Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) reflect this influence, with imagery of buried corpses and war-ravaged landscapes. Similarly, novels such as D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) feature male characters bearing the scars of war, whether physical, as with Clifford Chatterley, or psychological, as with Septimus Smith.

In contrast, for many women, the defining experience of this period was their engagement in feminist activism, particularly the campaign for suffrage. The suspension of militant suffrage campaigns in 1914 to support the war effort marked a shift, with women's wartime contributions later acknowledged through the partial granting of the vote in the UK (1918) and the US (1920). However, suffrage was only one aspect of a broader feminist movement that questioned traditional roles in marriage, motherhood, and sexuality. Feminist texts like Christabel Pankhurst's *The Great Scourge and How to End It* (1913) and Cicely Hamilton's *Marriage as a Trade* (1909) challenged prevailing double standards and cultural expectations for women. Organizations like the Freewoman discussion circle explored taboo subjects such as homosexuality and cohabitation, fostering intellectual camaraderie and gender solidarity that paralleled male bonding in wartime.

The feminist credo that "the personal is political" was vividly illustrated in these debates, which emphasized that women's enfranchisement would strengthen their traditional roles as guardians of morality and family life. Propaganda often reinforced this idea, depicting suffragists

performing domestic tasks like baking or knitting, suggesting that feminism need not disrupt the Victorian ideal of separate spheres. Yet this division between public and private life was particularly stark in the urban experience—a central theme in modernist literature. While male modernist figures freely roamed cities like London, Paris, or Dublin, women's access to public spaces was often restricted. As Griselda Pollock observes, the male flâneur symbolized the privilege of anonymity and freedom in the urban landscape, while women's presence in public spaces frequently attracted scrutiny or judgment. Virginia Woolf poignantly captures this disparity in *The Years*, where her female characters navigate the city under strict social constraints, unable to explore freely without a chaperone or socially acceptable pretext, such as shopping or philanthropy. For many women, the city, so integral to modernist writing, remained a place of both opportunity and profound limitation.

During the modernist period, many male writers emphasized "virility" in their artistic approach. Modernism often emerged in male-dominated groups, with figures like Ezra Pound striving to exclude women from key literary spaces. Pound went as far as suggesting that women should not write for publications like *The Little Review*, blaming women for perceived issues in smaller literary magazines. Yet, women were allowed on the fringes as editors, patrons, and salon hosts. For example, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap edited *The Little Review*, while Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier ran the influential Shakespeare and Company bookstore in Paris. Despite this marginalization, women played significant roles in supporting and shaping modernism, often being referred to as its "midwives." However, many women modernists rejected the role of helpers and sought to develop their own artistic voices. Virginia Woolf, for example, addressed women's exclusion from literary culture in her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which highlighted how women lacked the resources and space needed for creativity. Woolf argued that women's writing offered a unique perspective, shaped by their experiences of exclusion and marginalization. She believed women's art often challenged traditional values and sought to redefine what was considered significant or trivial in literature. She also criticized conventional literary styles as male-dominated and advocated for a new, flexible style better suited to women's thoughts.

Woolf praised Dorothy Richardson for developing a literary style she called "the psychological sentence of the feminine gender," which captured the nuances of female experience. In *Pilgrimage* (1915), Richardson's fragmented sentences reflected the flow of her heroine's thoughts and memories, illustrating this innovative approach.

Other women modernists, such as Gertrude Stein and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), also pushed boundaries in form and content. Stein experimented with language to make everyday objects and experiences feel new, as seen in *Tender Buttons* (1914) and *The Making of Americans* (1925). H.D., on the other hand, was a leading figure in Imagism, crafting simple, vivid poems that expressed deep emotion, like "Never More Will the Wind." Women modernists often focused on themes considered "trivial" by their male peers, such as domestic life, relationships, and motherhood.

Woolf's novels, like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, explored the tension between intellectual women and traditional domestic roles. Other writers, such as May Sinclair, Jean Rhys, and Katherine Mansfield, also examined the complexities of women's lives in their works, often challenging societal expectations. Despite resistance from male modernists, women writers saw modernism as an opportunity for creative liberation. Figures like Woolf, Richardson, Stein, and H.D. demonstrated that women could redefine literary content and form, proving their central role in modernism's innovations. Beyond these well-known names, many other women writers, from Djuna Barnes to Zora Neale Hurston, contributed to modernism's diversity, enriching the movement with their unique perspectives.

2. Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity

In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988), Judith Butler argues that gender is not a natural or inner essence but something produced through repeated social action. The idea that gender is constructed did not originate with Butler: Simone de Beauvoir had already declared in *The Second Sex* (1949) that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 267). Butler builds on Beauvoir and on phenomenology, the philosophical tradition that studies how meaning is constituted in lived experience.

Butler distinguishes between *sex*—a set of biological characteristics such as chromosomes, hormonal profile, and anatomy—and *gender*, which she defines as "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler 519). Gender, in other words, is not something we *are* but something we *do*: it is produced by the everyday repetition of gestures, movements, ways of speaking, dressing, and behaving that a culture codes as "masculine" or "feminine." Because gender is constituted through acts performed over time, it is historical rather than fixed, and it can in principle be performed differently. Butler's point is not that individuals freely choose their gender as one might choose a costume; rather, the acts that constitute gender are regulated by social conventions, rewarded when they conform and punished when they do not.

Butler illustrates the force of these conventions with a comparison between the theatre and the street: "the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence" (527). On stage, the audience can reassure itself that "this is only an act"; in everyday life, the same performance threatens the belief that gender is natural. Butler also criticizes what she calls the cultural compulsion towards heterosexuality, which presents a binary, heterosexual model of gender as the only legitimate one and treats other configurations of desire as deviations.

The relevance of Butler's theory to modernism lies in its emphasis on gender as unstable and open to revision. Modernist women writers, like the "New Woman" before them, challenged the Victorian identification of femininity with domesticity, passivity, and self-sacrifice. Butler's

theory offers a vocabulary for reading these challenges: when Woolf "kills" the Angel in the House or imagines the androgynous mind in *A Room of One's Own*, she exposes the conventions through which gender has been performed and suggests that they can be performed otherwise.

Lesson 07: Context, Themes, and Modernist Techniques in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*

1. Context

In *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929, Woolf takes up the battle against patriarchy in favor of women's financial independence and intellectual freedom. The book draws attention to women's need for private space and financial independence in order to live and work freely, and it has become a classic text of the feminist movement. It was written at a crucial moment in women's history, the period of the struggle for women's suffrage. Before and after the First World War, the women's movement focused mainly on the right to vote. Women known as "suffragettes" went to great lengths to win that right: militant demonstrations, suffrage campaigns, and essays supporting women's legal and economic rights all played an important part in the struggle, and some suffragists even went on hunger strike. British women over thirty gained the vote in 1918, and women gained the vote on equal terms with men in 1928.

Woolf herself was involved in the suffrage movement: in 1910 she volunteered for the People's Suffrage Federation. This commitment encouraged her to use the issues of the time in her fiction and nonfiction as advocacy for women's social progress. Many of these issues concerned women's sphere and economic reform, as well as opportunities for women in education and work, including access to jobs and fair pay. For Woolf, economic independence came first, followed by the suffrage that would give women civil rights in the public sphere.

A Room of One's Own grew out of two lectures on "Women and Fiction" that Woolf delivered in October 1928 at Newnham and Girton, the women's colleges of Cambridge University, at a time when women were still excluded from full membership of the university. The lectures were expanded into the extended essay published in 1929. In it, Woolf uses the fictional "Oxbridge" (a blend of Oxford and Cambridge) and "Fernham" College (a version of Newnham) to denounce the privileges of male education in general and of Oxford and Cambridge in particular. The title is significant, for it expresses Woolf's belief that a woman writer needs privacy, space, and sufficient financial means to practice her craft. The "room" is also a metaphor for one's inner space, a personal and gendered private space of thought.

2. Themes

2.1. Money and Privacy

From the very beginning of the essay, Woolf asserts that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf 4). This sentence reflects the fact that women at the time had neither a space of their own nor the money to control their lives or develop their abilities. For the narrator, money is the primary element that prevents women from having a room of their own; having money is therefore of the utmost importance. Because women lack financial, social, and political power, their creativity has been systematically stifled throughout

the ages. Woolf repeatedly stresses the necessity of an income that requires no obligations, and of the privacy of one's own room, for the development of creative genius. She argues historically that the lack of money and privacy prevented talented women of the past from writing. The narrator recalls the legacy left to her by an aunt:

> Indeed, I thought, slipping the silver into my purse, it is remarkable, remembering the bitterness of those days, what a change of temper a fixed income will bring about. No force in the world can take from me my five hundred pounds. Food, house and clothing are mine forever. Therefore not merely do effort and labour cease, but also hatred and bitterness. I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. (Woolf 38)

The role of money in a woman's life is self-evident in this and many other statements. Without money, women remain dependent on men; without privacy, constant interruptions block their creativity, and their freedom of thought is hampered because they are consumed by thoughts of their gender. They write out of anger or insecurity, and such emotions make them think about themselves rather than about their subjects. Aphra Behn, Woolf notes, was the first Englishwoman to earn her living by writing, and she paved the way for the nineteenth-century novelists, such as Jane Austen, who wrote despite the lack of privacy in the family sitting room. Woolf believes that contemporary women writers still largely write out of anger or insecurity; in the future, however, with money and privacy, their minds will be freed from this frustration and their genius will flourish.

2.2. Exclusion from Male Spaces

At Oxbridge, the narrator is chased off the grass by a Beadle, who reminds her that the turf is reserved for the Fellows and Scholars, and she is later turned away from the college library, which she may enter only if accompanied by a Fellow of the college or furnished with a letter of introduction. She is thus restricted to a narrow path on the campus, the grass standing for the space of men: "This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me" (Woolf 6). The fact that only male scholars may walk on the turf shows that intellectual freedom was controlled by men, and that women were excluded from that space because men had protected it for centuries. Later in the book, recalling such prohibitions, Woolf answers all those who would tell women what and how to write: "I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (Woolf 75). The Beadle thus becomes a symbol of patriarchy—of any man who sees it as his right to dominate women—and Woolf's defiant response calls on other women excluded from public space to resist gender injustice.

2.3. The Absence of Women from History

In the British Museum, the narrator finds that women have been studied endlessly by men but that very little is known about their actual lives: "what I find deplorable, I continued, looking about the bookshelves again, is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century" (Woolf 45). She wonders how they were educated, "whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting-rooms to themselves; how many women had children before they were twenty-one; what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight at night" (Woolf 45). Since history has scarcely mentioned women, Woolf decides to reconstruct their existence imaginatively: "Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say" (Woolf 46). Judith Shakespeare is as gifted as her brother but receives no education except what she can give herself. She writes a little, in secret, but hides or burns her work. She is betrothed at a young age and, although she is "the apple of her father's eye" (Woolf 47), she is beaten by her father when she begs not to be married. She runs away to London, is taken up by a theatre manager, becomes pregnant by him, and kills herself. Woolf uses Judith to show the fate of a woman endowed with Shakespeare's genius but deprived of its material and social conditions: had Judith possessed an adequate income and freedom, she might have achieved her brother's fame; lacking money and control over her life, she loses both her creativity and her life.

2.4. Women and Poetry

Women of the past, Woolf observes, tended to write novels rather than poetry. Subject to the control of their male counterparts, they suffered from harsh circumstances, and even the poems they wrote were full of anger, as Woolf finds in the poetry of Anne Finch, Lady Winchilsea:

> How are we fallen! fallen by mistaken rules,
> And Education's more than Nature's fools; (qtd. in Woolf 58)

Few women wrote successful poetry. Woolf attributes this to the constant interruptions that prevented them from sustaining a train of thought. "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things," she writes; "Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom" (Woolf 108). The novel, by contrast, lends itself more easily to frequent starts and stops, which is why women were more likely to write novels than poems.

3. Modernist Techniques

3.1. The Unnamed Narrator

Woolf uses an unnamed female narrator who tells the reader to call her "Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please" (Woolf 5). This device projects a more universal voice: by taking different names, the narrator speaks for all women rather than for Woolf alone.

The use of an unnamed narrator also anticipates the notion of "the death of the author," prominent in modernist and postmodernist thought.

3.2. Fragmentation and the Broken Sentence

Women writers, Woolf suggests, must adapt to frequent interruptions because they lack rooms of their own. Commenting on the novel of the imaginary novelist Mary Carmichael, *Life's Adventure*, she writes: "First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence" (Woolf 85). The broken sentence and sequence reflect both the interruptions to which women writers are subject and the search for new forms capable of expressing women's experience.

3.3. The Metaphor of the Fish

Early in the book, Woolf compares an idea to a fish caught on the end of a line: thought "had let its line down into the stream," and the idea, once caught, may seem small but grows in the mind. The fisherman and the fish thus symbolize the writer who fishes for ideas. Literary creation requires quietness, concentration, meditation, and patience, like the patience of a fisherman waiting for a catch. Constantly interrupted and deprived of privacy, however, women produce literary works that tend to be fragmented.

3.4. *In Medias Res*

As noted in Unit One, the book opens *in medias res*, with "But, you may say . . . ," plunging the reader into an argument that seems already under way—another mark of its modernist technique.

Lesson 08: Woolf's "Professions for Women"

"Professions for Women" is an abbreviated version of a speech that Virginia Woolf delivered to the London/National Society for Women's Service on January 21, 1931, and it was published posthumously in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942). Related to her earlier *A Room of One's Own*, the essay explores women's struggle for social equality and for the freedom to write. It confronts the "Victorian phantom" known as the Angel in the House—a figure borrowed from Coventry Patmore's poem celebrating domestic bliss—that selfless, sacrificial woman of the nineteenth-century ideal whose sole purpose in life was to soothe, to flatter, and to comfort the male half of the world's population. Woolf describes this phantom as follows:

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of the others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty —her blushes, her great grace. (Woolf, "Professions" 237)

"Killing the Angel in the House," Woolf writes, "was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (238). For Woolf, women writers had to kill this phantom in their writing in order to make room for the New Woman. Yet once the phantom was dead, Woolf asks, "what then remained?" What remained was a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot, who had rid herself of falsehood and had only to be herself. Here Woolf identifies a second obstacle to women's existential freedom: the body. Telling the truth about her own experiences as a body, she admits, was a problem she herself had not solved. Following the feminist trend that challenged the treatment of the female body as a sexual object and the repression of women's sexuality, Woolf seeks to break taboos and to speak the unspeakable, calling on women to find solutions to a problem she could not fix alone.

In "Professions for Women," Woolf extends her metaphor of "a room of one's own." Women, she observes, have now won rooms of their own in a house hitherto exclusively owned by men; they are able to pay the rent—but the rooms are still bare. It is now time to decide how these rooms should be furnished and decorated, with whom they should be shared, and upon what terms. The image of furnishing and decorating suggests that women have reached a new stage at which they must face further questions about how they want to live their lives; since furnishings reflect one's personality, the metaphor also develops Woolf's discussion of imagination and self-expression.

SEMESTER ONE

Unit Four: Modernism and Colonialism

IN THIS UNIT

- Lesson 09: Notes on Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Colonial Travel Writing
- Lesson 10: Major Themes of *Heart of Darkness*
- Lesson 11: The Historical Context of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and King Leopold's Colonial Legacy
- Lesson 12: Modernist Techniques in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Part One)
- Lesson 13: Modernist Techniques in *Heart of Darkness* (Part Two)
- Lesson 14: Critical Views on Conrad's Imperialist, Anti-Imperialist, or Sexist Tendencies

Lesson 09: Notes on Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Colonial Travel Writing

1. Edward Said's *Orientalism*

Orientalism, as conceptualized by Edward Said, designates the various disciplinary practices, institutions, frameworks of inquiry, and intellectual traditions through which Europeans produced knowledge about what they defined as the "Orient" across many centuries. This long-standing system of representation, which reached its fullest articulation during the zenith of nineteenth-century imperial expansion, was more than mere scholarship—it was a complex epistemological apparatus buttressing colonial domination. Said presents Orientalism as less a neutral field of study than a strategic way of defining and situating Europe's cultural "others." In his formulation, it functions by reversing what he terms the colonial "gaze," encouraging readers to see Western discourses not as objective accounts but as projections shaped by power (Said 25). His own life experience as a Palestinian Arab inhabiting the United States—where "the East" signifies suspicion, threat, or alterity to the dominant culture—lends his work its profound sense of worldliness and political urgency. As Said describes, Orientalism was borne from his own "punishing destiny," for he used the intellectual tools of the academy he had assimilated into to interrogate and unmask the cultural hegemony sustaining Western authority. The goal, as he explained, was a provocation: to stimulate an entirely different mode of encounter with the Orient, one unbound from entrenched stereotypes (Said 28). The very terminology of Orientalism illustrates its constructedness. Derived from "Orientalist," the term was historically tied to scholars who claimed expertise on Asia and the Middle East. Yet, as Said emphasizes, the referent "Orient" has never been stable; it means radically different things to different contexts. Americans often reduce it to the Far East, primarily China and Japan, while Europeans—particularly the French and British, who played primary imperial roles—conceptualized it in broader, more varied terms. At the heart of Said's argument is the deeply Foucauldian contention that knowledge is intertwined with power. This is dramatized in statements like British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour's 1910 justification for colonial rule in Egypt, where he claimed, "We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know any other country" (Said 32). To know, in such a colonial setting, was to dominate; knowledge was not simply descriptive but prescriptive, conferring political authority over the subject matter. Even literary figures such as Gustave Flaubert, Gérard de Nerval, and Sir Walter Scott, famous for their imaginative representations of the East, were confined by a discursive framework that cast the Orient as strange, feminine, sensual, passive—always in opposition to the rational, masculine, and progressive West. Consequently, Orientalism was never a detached science but, as Said argues, "a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (Said 43).

From a Foucauldian standpoint, then, Orientalism is intelligible as a discourse: a manifestation of the nexus of power/knowledge. Whoever wields power also holds the authority to produce what

counts as knowledge. Accordingly, the West generated representations of the East filled with stereotypes of sensuality, irrationality, and fatalism. Colonial discourse operates as a system of assumptions and statements through which colonizers articulate their relationship to both colonies and colonized peoples. While originating within the cultures of imperial powers, this discourse penetrates so deeply that it even shapes how colonized peoples perceive themselves. For instance, many African intellectuals imbibed the colonial view of themselves as "emotional" and "intuitive" in contrast to Europeans who were deemed "rational" and "self-controlled." Such internalized stereotypes illustrate the insidiousness of Orientalist discourse. At its core lies objectification: treating the Orient and its peoples as objects to be studied, catalogued, and known. The very label "Orient" reduces a staggeringly large and heterogeneous region into a singular, timeless, monolithic essence, opposing it to an Occidental self-image of dynamism and historical change. Within this schema, Orientals appear as passive subjects, denied voice or agency, existing only for the Western observer. Resistance to Orientalism, Said maintains, has two dimensions: first, to seek knowledge of the East outside this discourse, and second, to respond directly—"to write back"—to the Orientalists who excluded the very subjects they described. After all, the entire machinery of Orientalist discourse, with its logical structure and procedural rigor, was never addressed to an Eastern readership but created for "readers and consumers in the metropolitan West" (Said 336).

Within this critique, Said introduces two crucial concepts: strategic formation and strategic location. Strategic formation refers to how Orientalism arises not from a single thinker or monolithic ideology but from an interlocking cluster of texts, academic institutions, and attitudes that build upon one another. Orientalist discourse operates as a network: later colonial administrators, such as British officials of the nineteenth century, drew repeatedly upon earlier Orientalist authorities like William Jones or Edward Lane, thereby reinforcing and reproducing cultural stereotypes of the East as exotic, backward, and irrational. As Said puts it, Orientalism emerges through "a cluster of ideas, attitudes, and styles of thought that have been produced and reproduced by a variety of institutions and individuals" (Said 10). This interdependence created a self-legitimating tradition—a looping, self-reinforcing epistemology that naturalized Western hegemony.

Strategic location, by contrast, stresses the positionality of each Orientalist writer. Every representation of "the Orient" reflects more about the author's own cultural, political, and historical context than it does about the East itself. "Every writer on the Orient, no matter how great or small, however accurate or fantastic, has something to tell us about the relationship between the Orient and the writer's own society" (Said 20). Thus, the accounts of a French missionary in the nineteenth century inevitably bear the imprint of his religious background, portraying the East as pagan, benighted, and in need of Christian salvation. Said emphasizes that Orientalism is never neutral scholarship; rather, Orientalism is not simply a way of thinking about the Orient but also a way of making it. It is simultaneously a mode of seeing and a mode of

being seen, with material consequences for international power relations and cultural domination (Said 13). In other words, Orientalism both shapes and sustains European cultural hegemony.

2. Colonial Travel Writing

It was Said's *Orientalism*, one of the most influential works of postcolonial theory, which first linked travel writing to the colonial project. Travel writing was vital for supporting the Orientalist project and became an increasingly popular genre for audiences back home who wanted to read about how European colonial powers were engaging in 'discoveries', missionary projects, military conflict and trade. These travel narratives included subjective accounts of 'other' places and peoples to construct distinctions between "the Orient" and "the Occident," which supported imperialist expansion through depictions of "the East" as inferior. As a result, these texts were linked to socio-economic and political structures that sought to justify colonization and garner institutional support for imperial expansion.

Mary Louise Pratt's book *Imperial Eyes* (1992), tackles issues related to travel writing. She shows how such writing builds colonial ideologies by viewing the "Other" in a dismissive manner. Moreover, Pratt embeds her personal journey in an exploration of the aftermath of imperialism. She states that attention should be paid to the conventional representations of European travel writing, in which imperial travelers conveyed their own views of the situation and intentionally ignored those of the colonized. Pratt's book begins with the premise that travel writing by Europeans (for European readers) produced knowledge about non-European places and supported expansionist politics by fashioning a domestic subject of European imperialism. Thus, Pratt seeks to decentre the Western eye and reconceptualize the relationship between centre (West) and periphery(Orient or Third world) .

Stephen Greenblatt, for his part, studies in *Marvelous Possessions* (1991), the ways in which Europeans viewed the colonized during the colonization of the New World. They wrote the chronicles of their exploration not as a sustained narrative but as anecdotes that depict the lifestyles and cultural practices of indigenous nations. According to Greenblatt these representational practices are ideologically significant because they emphasize the difference between the colonizer and "the other" as a way to account for colonialism.

Lesson 10: Major Themes of *Heart of Darkness*

1. Imperialism

By writing *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad tries to present a different view about European imperialism and human's consciousness. Conrad saw imperialism and civilization as missions that corrupt the self. He also shows how these forces led to a hidden darkness in the human psyche and cause greed, hate and brutality. The novella was based on a true story of the Belgian control over the Congo. King Leopold II established a new colony in the Congo which he considered as an ideal place for a colonial enterprise. His colonial mission was justified by spreading civilization and eliminating the slave trade. In this vein, King Leopold of Belgium declared in a conference in Brussels that his objective was "to open to civilization the only part of our globe where Christianity has not yet penetrated and to pierce the darkness which envelops the entire population" (qtd. in Ray 21). However, and as the story shows, the conquest of the Congo was all about its raw materials especially rubber and ivory. This process resulted in a high number of deaths, starvation, humiliation and many other inhuman atrocities against the Africans. The conquest of the Congo was one of the darkest and hardest periods in the history of Africa.

Kurtz, who may be read as a figure for King Leopold, had begun as an idealist, and in his report he had quite sincerely proclaimed "we can exert a power for good practically unbounded" (Conrad 51). The"idea"espoused by Kurtz that Marlow seems to admire, then, is civilizing the natives. Marlow contrasts modern British imperialism with the ancient Roman conquest of Britain:

> What saves us [the British] is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps [the Romans] were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got.... The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before and offer a sacrifice to. . . . (Conrad 7)

Conrad seems to oppose only wasteful and selfish imperialism. He appears to justify British imperialism on grounds that it is "efficient" conducted according to some unspecified idea. Readers of *Heart of Darkness* in Blackwood's Magazine in 1899 would have readily understood this meaning of the "idea." The notion of the "civilizing mission" was already well-established, and in that year Kipling provided it with a catchy title in his poem urging the United States to take over the Philippines: "The White Man's Burden."

2. A Psychoanalytical Reading of *Heart of Darkness*

The novella charts a disturbing psychological voyage into the innermost recesses of human evil. As Marlow penetrates deeper into the African wilderness, his inner impulses and subconscious desires undergo noticeable transformation. Kurtz gradually emerges as the ultimate object of Marlow's psychological quest. From a Freudian perspective, the dark immensity of Africa's landscape embodies the unconscious repository of fear, while Kurtz's enigmatic African mistress symbolizes repressed sexual desire. Following Kurtz's death, Marlow undergoes his own unsettling transformation, realizing that he has become a man he vowed never to be—someone who lies. In many respects, Kurtz himself can be interpreted as a concrete dramatization of Marlow's hidden longings, the living embodiment of the Freudian id. Moreover, Marlow's unsettling psychological journey can be aligned with Freud's theory of dreams, since its fragmented and elusive truth resembles dream logic. Marlow points out his deep inability to communicate his lived truth to others, remarking that it is impossible to transmit the true sensation of any lived moment, that subtle essence that gives life its actual meaning. His declaration that "we live as we dream—alone" encapsulates the dreamlike status of his voyage. Psychoanalytically, the difficulties of expressing authentic experience and the enigmatic nature of human truth, as Freud observed, find their closest parallel in the structure and symbolism of dream experience.

3. "The Horror! The Horror!"

Drawing on Lionel Trilling's interpretation, Kurtz's final cry—"The horror! The horror!"—remains profoundly ambiguous. It may suggest that he identifies death itself as horror, or that he recognizes the brutality of Africa's supposed "savagery" as such. Alternately, critics discern another possibility: Kurtz's words may enact a final moment of self-condemnation. They can be read as his anguished acknowledgment of failure—his betrayal of European civilization, his deceit of the Intended who awaited his return, the collapse of his lofty early aspirations, and his bloody domination over the very natives he ruled with unrestrained tyranny. His last utterance is thus a polyvalent expression: a cry directed outward at the cruelty he witnessed, as well as inward at the darkness of his own unredeemable self.

Lesson 11: The Historical Context of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and King Leopold's Colonial Legacy

The nineteenth century marked a profound transformation in human history, characterized by rapid industrialization that reshaped art, architecture, social life, and everyday human experience. This era of the Industrial Revolution propelled European nations into widespread colonization, aiming to extend their geopolitical power across the globe. Among these expanding empires, Belgium played a notable role, through the Congo Free State, ruled as the personal possession of King Leopold II from 1885 until 1908, when it was annexed by Belgium. This specific historical moment, with its violent exploitation and imperial ambitions, forms the backdrop of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Written at the cusp of the twentieth century, the novella serves as a compelling narrative that questions imperialism through Captain Marlow's journey into the colonial heart of Africa. Marlow's voyage unfolds against the broader historical reality known as the Scramble for Africa, a period when European powers—including Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, and Germany—divided the African continent into spheres of influence, often accompanied by aggressive justifications grounded in racist ideology.

Colonial rhetoric depicted Africans as inferior, portraying Africa itself as a bastion of savagery that was supposedly ripe for conquest by the supposedly civilized and superior white European colonizers. These colonizers viewed themselves as almost superhuman, tasked with imposing civilization through their advanced technology and weaponry. Consequently, European travelers' views of Africa and its peoples were deeply influenced by these constructed images and hegemonic ideologies that framed the native populations as fundamentally other and subhuman. The scramble—lasting roughly from 1881 until the outbreak of World War I—occurred over a relatively brief timeframe during which European powers rapidly expanded their territories in Africa, driven by the forces unleashed by the Industrial Revolution and economic crises such as the Great Depression of 1873. The initial European engagement with Africa began much earlier with the Portuguese and the slave trade, which lasted centuries. However, technological advancements like the telegraph revolutionized communication and iron steamboats transformed transportation, propelling colonial ambitions further.

This colonial race fostered intense competition among European nations, prompting the creation of trading posts along Africa's eastern and western coasts to extract valuable raw materials, including palm oil and rubber—used notably in bicycle tire production—and, most lucratively, ivory. Ivory was a highly prized commodity, employed in crafting musical instruments like piano keys and billiard balls. Beyond economic motives, Europeans sought to disseminate their culture and Christianity through missionary activities, believing they had a moral obligation to "civilize" the indigenous peoples deemed savage by prevailing European standards. Among the colonizers was Belgium, led by King Leopold II, whose specific interest was in Central Africa, particularly the vast Congo region, which covered some 900,000 square miles and served strategically as a gateway to the continent. Leopold orchestrated a conference in 1876, convening explorers and

geographers, ostensibly to promote the civilizing mission of Africa's interior. The conference culminated in the establishment of the International African Association, an organization designed to coordinate exploration and promote trade with Europe. Although Leopold presented himself as a benevolent benefactor of Africa, his true ambition was territorial acquisition, famously declaring his eagerness not to miss an opportunity to obtain "a slice of this magnificent African cake."

Leopold's rule in the Congo became notorious for its extreme brutality, characterized by the systematic exploitation and abuse of native populations and the ruthless extraction of resources such as ivory and rubber. Villagers were subjected to terror and coercion to meet demanding quotas; failure often resulted in severe punishments. *Heart of Darkness* vividly depicts this oppressive regime through detailed scenes of forced labor and inhuman treatment. For example, Marlow witnesses emaciated Congolese workers chained and toiling on railway construction, their bodies described as skeletal and bound like animals, highlighting the dehumanization inherent in the colonial enterprise. Starvation and disease led to widespread death, with many laborers abandoned to perish after exhausting themselves under brutal conditions. Marlow also encounters violence firsthand, including the haunting image of a black man shot dead by the roadside and the screams of a man beaten for accidental destruction by fire. Leopold's colonial regime instilled widespread fear, prompting villagers to flee into forests to evade forced conscription as porters or ivory collectors under the harsh orders of Kurtz—Leopold's infamous agent, who personifies colonial excess with acts of murder, rape, and arson. The systemic violence was a tool of control, where disobedience meant death or abandonment to starvation and disease deep in the wilderness. Marlow reflects on why such cruelty was allowed, recognizing it as a product of Belgian colonialism, which masked conquest as philanthropy. Moreover, Marlow's observations reveal the exploitative economy under Leopold's rule, with Africa receiving worthless trinkets like beads and cheap cotton in exchange for valuable ivory, the keystone of the colonial economy before rubber's rise. Marlow notes how agents were incentivized through commissions to extract ivory ruthlessly, encouraging exploitation by any means necessary. Another example of colonial dysfunction is the absence of a stable currency system, as Leopold's regime prioritized forced labor over shaping a consumer economy. The use of brass wire as currency, described by Marlow, illustrates how economic chaos undermined free trade and market development, revealing Leopold's particular administrative inefficiency.

Genocide was a further dark hallmark of Leopold's Congo, with Kurtz's home adorned with severed heads mounted as warning symbols of his authority, representing those who resisted or failed to meet quotas. The widespread mutilation and executions underscore the extreme violence that accompanied resource extraction. Literary critics like Michiko Kakutani have noted how *Heart of Darkness* documents this historic atrocity, reflecting the brutal realities of Leopold's reign and the mass killing underway during that era. Additionally, Kurtz's report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs exemplifies imperialist ideology,

asserting white supremacy and the supposed duty to civilize by demonstrating overwhelming power. His final appeal to "Exterminate all the brutes!" reveals genocidal impulses beneath missionary rhetoric and serves as a biting satire of Leopold's colonial justification. Kurtz symbolizes the embodiment of imperialist darkness, his excesses a natural consequence of a system that prioritized ivory extraction at any cost. He is also a metaphorical European composite—"His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz"— representing the dominant colonial powers shaping the continent.

Lesson 12: Modernist Techniques in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Part One)

Joseph Conrad openly articulated his artistic mission by stating that his aim in writing was to use the power of language to make the reader experience sensory immersion: to hear, to feel, and ultimately most importantly, to see. This progression—from hearing through feeling to vision—is precisely what Conrad sought to accomplish. Drawing on his personal experiences, Conrad crafted *Heart of Darkness* with a sophisticated use of literary and linguistic artistry to forge a new kind of narrative art. As a modernist author, he pioneered a distinctive narrative style that delves deeply into the inner consciousness and psychological subtleties of his characters. This style captures the ambiguity, complexity, and darkness involved in exploring unfamiliar and unsettling realms. Conrad employs a range of narrative techniques in this novella, including stream of consciousness, framed narration, non-linear timelines, impressionistic description, symbolism, an open-ended plot structure, allusions to mythology, and pervasive imagery that evokes uncertainty and obscurity.

1. Framed Narration

One of Conrad's central narrative strategies is framed narration, also referred to as story-within-a-story, which shapes the structure of *Heart of Darkness*. The novella unfolds through two narrators. The initial narrator is unnamed and serves as the listener and observer aboard the ship The Nellie. He introduces the setting—describing the ship at rest with its sails quiet—and presents the company of men aboard, including Marlow, the Accountant, the Lawyer, and the Director of Companies. This narrator does not intervene much in the action but functions as a frame for Marlow's tale.

The second narrator, Marlow, tells the core story in the first person, allowing readers direct access to his thoughts and perceptions. The story he relates is enclosed in quotation marks, making it clear that the narrative voice belongs to him, inviting readers to inhabit his consciousness as he recounts his journey. For example, Marlow's musings such as questioning whether the stillness of the immensity is an appeal or menace expose his contemplative inner state. This immersive narrative technique encourages readers to mentally enter the story's events as though living them firsthand, which aligns with Conrad's artistic goal: to make the audience see, not simply hear or read.

The use of dual narrators adds complexity and ambiguity to the text. The outer narrator presents Marlow first as a character, then Marlow assumes full narrative control, with the outer narrator returning only at the story's end to conclude. Marlow himself acknowledges the challenges in truly seeing and accurately reporting events. His descriptions, especially of Kurtz's final moments, are marked by a more rhetorical and less observational tone. This narrative ambiguity warns readers to remain critical; though generally reliable, Marlow's perspective is not infallible.

2. Non-linear Narrative

Although Marlow's narration generally follows chronological order, Conrad deliberately disrupts linearity in presenting events and memories as they occur within the narrator's mind. Conrad's aim is to offer a truthful depiction of human psychology rather than a straightforward sequence. Marlow's story freely shifts through time and thought, constantly moving between ideas and returning to earlier memories. For example, after discussing two women working in the company office, Marlow later recalls them again upon a suitable reminder. This recursive narrative structure evokes repetition and circularity—symbolized by the novel opening and closing at sunset—adding thematic depth and complexity to the storytelling. This method reflects the intricate workings of the human mind and enhances the story's ambiguity.

Additionally, Conrad weaves together present-time narration with past-event flashbacks. The framing device begins in the present, but most of Marlow's tale unfolds in the past. This temporal layering creates what scholar Joseph Frank terms a "spatial form" in narrative, wherein different temporal moments coexist simultaneously, enriching the reader's temporal experience.

3. Uncertainty

A pervasive theme in *Heart of Darkness* is uncertainty, deliberately conveyed through Conrad's strategic use of language. Marlow frequently employs the verb "seem" to signal doubt or tentative observation, such as when describing the knitting women in the office or other characters and experiences. By using "seem" rather than definitive statements, Marlow signals that his knowledge is provisional, grounded in perception rather than fact. Similar expressions of uncertainty appear throughout the text in phrases like "she seemed somehow to throw a kind of light" and "the man seemed young." Conrad also utilizes terms like "perhaps" to indicate probability rather than certainty, reinforcing the theme of ambiguity. This linguistic hesitance reveals the fragmented and unreliable nature of Marlow's understanding.

Conrad further enhances the atmosphere of vagueness by employing a carefully chosen lexicon of words connoting obscurity and indistinctness. Recurrent motifs include fog, gloom, darkness, haze, dusk, smoke, mist, blur, shadow, shade, phantom, and indistinctness. These lexical choices create a pervasive sense of confusion and uncertainty—integral to the story's mood and meaning. The white fog episode symbolizes the absurdity and instability underlying human existence, countering the illusion of a firm, orderly Western civilization. Instead, images of chaos, mystery, and absurdity challenge the worldview of Marlow and his listeners. Literary critic Watt describes Conrad's fictional world as a panorama of chaos, futility, cruelty, and waste, embodied in a series of disorienting images that force confrontation with a world indifferent to human values.

Ultimately, Marlow comes to see life as "that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose," a conclusion foreshadowed by the motif of white fog as a symbol of existential confusion.

4. Stream of Consciousness Narration

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* also employs stream of consciousness narration, a hallmark of modernist literature that attempts to capture the fluidity of human thoughts and perceptions. The story is shaped by characters' consciousnesses rather than a rigid external chronology. Conrad incorporates interior monologues to reveal how minds grapple with interpreting external reality. For instance, Marlow's reflection on Kurtz's stare—"I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe"—illustrates his internal meditation on the darkness engulfing Kurtz and his inability to perceive light. Through these interior monologues, Conrad offers an alternative mode of seeing and understanding the world, focusing on subjective, psychological truth rather than objective fact.

Conrad's use of interior monologue is closely tied to his modernist narrative approach. This technique allows the reader to delve directly into the characters' thought processes and states of mind, revealing how they internally interpret and respond to their external realities. In *Heart of Darkness*, interior monologues serve as a window into consciousness, showing the unfiltered flow of thoughts and emotions. For example, Marlow contemplates Kurtz's gaze: "I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe." This line exemplifies Marlow's reflective and almost mystical understanding of Kurtz's psychological condition—his inability to perceive light symbolizing a profound darkness within. Through such interior monologues, Conrad conveys a layered, subjective mode of perceiving reality that prioritizes nuanced psychological insight over external facts.

In sum, Conrad's narrative in *Heart of Darkness* exemplifies key features of literary modernism. His fragmented, multi-voiced storytelling challenges traditional narrative coherence by embracing ambiguity and uncertainty. Techniques including framed narration, non-linear temporal shifts, linguistic equivocation, and introspective streams of consciousness work together to evoke the complexity of human consciousness and the moral ambiguities of imperialism. Conrad's style compels readers to engage actively with the text, interpreting multiple layers of meaning and confronting unsettling truths about both the external world and the human psyche.

Lesson 13: Modernist Techniques in *Heart of Darkness* (Part Two)

1. Impressionism

The novella unfolds through a deliberate strategy of impressionistic storytelling, where reality is filtered through the sensory perceptions and subjective experiences of the narrator. Conrad's persistent employment of impressionistic technique demonstrates his fundamental commitment to representing reality not as objective fact, but as it appears to individual consciousness and sensory awareness. This approach is intimately connected to stream of consciousness narration, since both techniques emphasize the subjective interpretation of experience and the individual's psychological processing of external phenomena. From the opening passages of the novella, Conrad demonstrates his mastery of impressionistic description through vivid visual imagery that captures fleeting moments and atmospheric conditions: "The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint."

Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, each character possesses distinctly different perceptions of their shared reality, and these differences emerge through their individual thoughts, reactions, and interpretations. Conrad's use of dual narrative voices serves to illustrate how the world is perceived through multiple subjective lenses, which exemplifies the impressionistic technique of employing multiple perspectives to capture the complexity of truth. The characters' varying perceptions are presented through dialogue and interior reflection, where each individual articulates their unique understanding of events. Conrad's ultimate aim is to extract truth from the layering of impressions rather than through direct exposition, recognizing that life itself does not provide clear narratives but instead leaves behind a series of fragmentary impressions that must be interpreted and synthesized.

According to Conrad's own artistic philosophy, "the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine." This metaphor reveals Conrad's belief that the author should not explain directly but rather communicate through emotional resonance, creating a bridge of feeling between the narrative and the reader's responsive emotions. The meaning should be sought not in explicit messages but in the medium itself—in the particular way the story is told and experienced, emphasizing the distinction between literal words and deeper emotional or psychological significance.

The recurring symbolic objects in the narrative—the serpentine river that fascinates Marlow like a hypnotic force, the severed human heads that grotesquely ornament Kurtz's compound, the mysterious black figure moving across the glow of jungle fire with horned silhouette, the heap of broken drainage pipes, the grove of death filled with dying African workers—all function as

impressionistic focal points that prompt immediate emotional and psychological reactions in readers. As readers respond to these carefully crafted images, they gradually develop an understanding of Conrad's central themes and meanings. The interpretive process requires readers to consider all narrative elements collectively, since only through integrating these impressions can one fully comprehend the darkness that engulfs Kurtz and threatens Marlow, along with understanding the complex psychological relationship between these two central figures.

Conrad himself explained his impressionistic method by asserting that "All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions." For instance, throughout most of the story, Kurtz remains doubly mediated—first through Marlow's recollections and then through additional characters who have encountered him. This layered narrative strategy serves multiple purposes: it builds suspense in the reader's mind while constructing Kurtz's personality entirely through the reactions and testimonies of others who have encountered his extraordinary presence. The intensity of emotional responses shown by Kurtz's indigenous followers, particularly the African woman who serves as his companion, provides compelling testimony to the overwhelming charismatic power that Kurtz wields over those around him. Similar emotional reactions characterize other characters' encounters with Kurtz, especially Marlow himself, who despite harboring strong moral reservations ultimately proclaims Kurtz to have been "a remarkable man."

2. Symbolism

In *Heart of Darkness*, every narrative detail functions on multiple symbolic levels, where characters and objects transcend their literal significance to represent deeper psychological, moral, and political meanings. Conrad's strategic use of symbolism encourages readers to engage in active interpretation, making the reading process more intellectually stimulating while developing imaginative faculties through the decoding of layered meanings.

The title itself operates as a multifaceted symbol that extends far beyond geographical reference. While "Heart of Darkness" literally refers to the Congo region at Africa's center, it symbolically represents the human heart where authentic moral darkness resides. The title can also specifically reference Kurtz's corrupted heart, which has been consumed by imperial greed and the pursuit of ivory. Additionally, Brussels and Europe more broadly can be understood as embodying this darkness, since they represent the source of imperialist ideology that masquerades as civilizing mission while promoting the genocidal slogan "Exterminate all the brutes!" Marlow's physical journey into the Congo functions symbolically as a psychological voyage into human consciousness and the inner self—a journey toward the discovery of uncomfortable truths about human nature. As Marlow progresses toward his encounter with

Kurtz, he uncovers increasingly disturbing facts about humanity while the landscape itself grows progressively darker and more ominous.

Conrad presents his characters as complex symbolic figures rather than simply realistic individuals. Kurtz stands as the most significant symbolic character, representing the dark potential within human nature—embodying evil, greed, and moral corruption. Conrad employs Kurtz to symbolize European imperialism in its entirety, since he represents all its stated ideals and hidden motivations. Although initially presented as an educated and civilized gentleman, Kurtz's time in the Congo reveals his authentic character as someone willing to consume everything in his path for material gain, particularly ivory. This transformation mirrors imperialism itself, which presents itself as a civilizing mission while its true objective is power and exploitation. Kurtz represents the extreme logical conclusion of imperialist ideology, and his descent into savagery becomes unmistakably clear when Marlow discovers human heads displayed as trophies around Kurtz's compound. Kurtz's death, accompanied by his final cry "The horror! The horror!" symbolizes either the ultimate failure of European imperialism in Africa or the inevitable self-destruction that follows from embracing humanity's darkest impulses. Marlow himself functions as a symbolic representation of human consciousness that witnesses and comprehends the appalling reality of European imperial exploitation.

Kurtz's painting serves as a particularly significant symbolic object that cannot be overlooked in any comprehensive analysis. The painting depicts a blindfolded woman carrying a torch, which effectively summarizes the reality of European imperialism that Kurtz himself understood with devastating clarity. The torch represents enlightenment and civilization—the supposed light that Europe claims to bring to African darkness. However, the blindfolded woman represents Europe itself, blind to its own moral failures while attempting to enlighten others. In the painting, the torch's light obscures the woman's face, since "the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister," referring to how imperialism's consequences damage Europe's moral image and render it incapable of seeing truth clearly. This painting poses a fundamental question: how can a civilization that cannot perceive moral light and does not understand true civilization claim the authority to enlighten those it considers savage and ignorant?

The two rivers in the narrative carry distinct symbolic significance reflecting different cultural perspectives on imperialism. The Thames is described as a great waterway from which the journey of enlightenment originated, carrying "Hunters...bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land." The Thames symbolizes how Europeans conceptualize imperialism—as a noble mission leading toward "the mystery of unknown earth." Conversely, the Congo River is described by Marlow as serpentine: "a mighty big river, which you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled." Marlow's comparison of the river to a snake symbolizes danger, evil, and mystery—the threatening unknown that challenges European assumptions. The persistent fog on the Congo River carries additional symbolic weight, as it

makes vision difficult and sometimes impossible, representing the confusion and moral obscurity that prevents Marlow from clearly seeing his destination or understanding truth itself.

Ivory functions as a complex symbol throughout the novella, representing multiple interconnected themes. As a white and precious substance, ivory serves as the economic motivation behind colonialism, but it also symbolizes the values, traditions, and cultural identity of indigenous peoples—pure elements that are stolen and exploited by white colonizers. Moreover, ivory symbolizes the insatiable greed that drives imperial exploitation and transforms civilized individuals into morally corrupted agents of destruction.

The interplay between images of light and darkness provides the novella's most fundamental symbolic framework, though Conrad employs these symbols in deliberately paradoxical ways. Light traditionally symbolizes goodness, clarity, and purity, representing civilization, truth, and moral vision. The frame narrator uses light to describe natural beauty: "the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light." Here light symbolizes clarity and beauty, conditions under which the observer can accurately perceive reality. Marlow uses light metaphorically to represent understanding and insight: "It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me—and into my thoughts."

Conrad employs light symbolically to represent truth and humanity's moral potential—qualities that Kurtz becomes unable to perceive. This symbolic blindness becomes evident when Kurtz cannot see candlelight: "I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle." This occurs because Kurtz has become consumed by his own moral darkness. Importantly, light and darkness exist in dialectical relationship throughout the narrative. For example, ivory appears white and might represent light, yet it serves as the source of darkness that corrupts Kurtz and transforms him from enlightenment (as an educated man) into darkness (as someone willing to commit any atrocity for material gain).

The word "darkness" appears repeatedly throughout the text, drawing reader attention to the novella's central thematic concern—the darkness of both imperialism and human nature. Darkness symbolizes mystery, the unknown, evil, death, and moral corruption. From the beginning of Marlow's narrative, the setting becomes progressively darker, preventing him from clearly seeing his companions' faces, and this darkness intensifies as the story develops. This symbolic progression can be understood from multiple perspectives. First, as the journey approaches the Congo, the environment becomes literally darker since this region represents the heart of what Europeans called the "Dark Continent," shrouded in the moral darkness of European imperial violence. Second, from a psychological perspective, Marlow's search for truth becomes increasingly difficult, and his encounter with Kurtz reveals the profound darkness residing within human nature itself. Darkness also becomes associated with indigenous peoples, whom Marlow describes as "black shadows of disease and starvation," reflecting European racist stereotypes. Additionally, darkness connects to imperialism as a system that corrupts even

initially moral individuals like Kurtz. Concerning this theme, Marlow explains that imperialism "was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness." This analysis demonstrates that imperialism itself generates the moral darkness it claims to eliminate.

Through such symbolic imagery, Conrad adds layers of complexity and uncertainty to his narrative. His personal experience in the Congo enabled him to perceive darkness within apparent enlightenment and light within supposed darkness. Furthermore, readers feel confused about distinguishing authentic light from authentic darkness and about determining what beliefs deserve trust. Conrad employs this deliberate ambiguity to illustrate how complicated and confusing it becomes to understand human psychology and moral reality. He demonstrates how his childhood dreams of visiting the Congo transformed into nightmare: "It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery—a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness." The novella as a complete work explores the complex symbolic relationship between light and darkness, revealing how these seemingly opposite forces interpenetrate and define each other.

3. Allusions and Mythical References in *Heart of Darkness*

Heart of Darkness functions as a highly allusive literary work, where ironic and significant elements from European history and both oriental and occidental canonical texts repeatedly emerge throughout the narrative structure. Each deliberately chosen allusion is intricately woven into the narrative fabric and serves specific semantic functions that deepen thematic complexity and interpretive richness.

Goethe's *Faust*

The essentially ambiguous or "mixed" quality of Conrad's narrative becomes particularly evident when considered alongside Goethe's *Faust*, another archetypal story within the Western literary tradition. Kurtz, like *Faust*, embodies the "universal" man—immensely gifted across multiple domains as artist, writer, publicist, explorer, and administrator. Like *Faust*, Kurtz transcends his society's conventional boundaries to engage with forbidden knowledge, delving deeper into dangerous territory than social norms permit. Similarly, Kurtz experiences the same internal conflict that characterizes *Faust*—torn between the power and pleasure that such transgressive knowledge provides and the crushing guilt that accompanies the crimes he commits in pursuing that knowledge, ultimately forfeiting his spiritual "soul" in the process.

Buddhism

One of the most recognizable archetypal patterns in literature involves the journey motif, though not every journey achieves archetypal significance. The archetypal journey must be cyclic in nature and necessarily accompanied by anagnorisis (discovery), epiphany (initiation), self-realization, and fundamental personality transformation. In other words, the protagonist, like

Buddha, returns to the starting point of the journey as a sagacious, enlightened, and wise individual. Buddhist imagery appears implicitly and tersely through the anonymous narrator's description of Charlie Marlow at the story's opening: "Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol." The image of the meditating Buddha ("the idol") becomes more explicit several pages later: "he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower."

Subsequently, Marlow acknowledges his contemplative practices, stating: "I had plenty of time for meditation." Parallel to Marlow's cyclic journey—he returns to London where he originally departed for Africa and where he narrates his story to fellow passengers—the narrative concludes with the same Buddha imagery that initiated it: "Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha." Marlow begins his journey as a naïve and inexperienced young man but gradually develops insight into his authentic self. He traveled to Africa purely from personal curiosity, initially knowing nothing about imperial hypocrisy, colonial horrors, internal evil, or the darkness of human nature, but coming to understand all these disturbing realities through direct experience.

Biblical Allusions

Biblical allusion represents one of the most prevalent forms of literary reference, where specific passages call to mind particular sections of scripture. A prominent example occurs when Marlow reaches Brussels and refers to the city as a "whited sepulcher." A sepulcher is a type of tomb or relic container that appears decorated externally while remaining hollow internally. The phrase "whited sepulcher" directly alludes to Matthew 23:27-28: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." "Whitewashed tombs" and "whited sepulchers" refer to identical concepts. By employing this Matthew allusion, Conrad characterizes the city, and the European civilization it represents, as fundamentally hypocritical. European culture conceals itself beneath a veneer of civilization, yet in the Congo context, this facade dissolves to reveal only a terrible moral center filled with savagery. Through allusion rather than explicit description, Conrad enables Marlow to convey profound meaning within economical phrasing.

Greek and Roman Mythology

Greco-Roman mythology provides another set of recurring and interrelated allusions throughout *Heart of Darkness*. The first significant mythological figures are the Greek Moirae sisters, known as the sisters of fate (Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos), whose task was "spinning," "measuring," and "cutting" mortal lives. At the company headquarters, Marlow encounters two women who recall

them: "Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool." Marlow feels deeply uncomfortable in their presence: "It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy—I don't know—something not quite right; and I was glad to get out. In the outer room the two women knitted black wool feverishly" and "She glanced at me above the glasses. The swift and indifferent placidity of that look troubled me." The black wool they knit refers simultaneously to Africa and to the ominous fate awaiting people like Marlow. What anticipated them in Congo was nothing less than probable death: "She seemed to know all about them and about me, too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful" and "Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again—not half, by a long way."

Later, the company doctor reinforces this theme of mortality: "'And when they come back, too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them,' he remarked" followed by "Adieu...Adieu...'Du calme, du calme. Adieu,'" meaning "goodbye...goodbye...calm down. Goodbye." The women's "wart," "spectacles," and "cat" all intensify Marlow's psychological restiveness. Conrad makes this allusion more explicit when writing: "Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool."

These women "guarding the door of Darkness" evoke Cerberus—the monstrous, three-headed, snake-tailed dog that guarded the underworld's gate or Hades, preventing the dead from returning to the world of the living. The passage includes the phrase "AVE!...MORITURI TE SALUTANT," a well-known Latin salutation meaning "Hail!...Those who are about to die salute you." Roman Caesars received this greeting from gladiators about to fight to death in the arena. These contextual clues suggest that Marlow stands metaphorically at Hades' threshold within the company setting. The boundary between Hades and earth is demarcated in Greco-Roman mythology by the river Styx (analogous to the serpentine Congo River in *Heart of Darkness*). Styx, the river of hate, supposedly wound around Hades nine times while connecting to four other rivers: "Acheron—the river of woe, Cocytus—the river of lamentation, Phlegethon—the river of fire, and Lethe—the river of forgetfulness." Woe, lamentation, fire, and forgetfulness constitute sustained motifs throughout Marlow's Congo voyage. By implication, Conrad compares Marlow to the few mortals and deities who, in Greco-Roman myths, successfully entered and returned from the Underworld.

Jupiter

Beyond these indirect allusions, Conrad also employs direct allusions where references are explicitly stated though mentioned briefly. One example occurs when Kurtz is carried from his dwelling on a stretcher, followed by men bearing his numerous weapons. Marlow refers to these guns as "the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter." In Roman mythology, Jupiter serves as the principal deity, with thunderbolts or lightning bolts as his characteristic weapons. This allusion reveals that Kurtz has established himself as a godlike figure at the Inner Station, but his physical

deterioration and moral corruption have reduced him to merely a shadow of the powerful "Jupiter" he once represented.

Lesson 14: Critical Views on Conrad's Imperialist, Anti-Imperialist, or Sexist Tendencies

1. Chinua Achebe

The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe is one of the most influential critics of *Heart of Darkness*. On February 18, 1975, he delivered a lecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst entitled "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in which he criticized Conrad for misrepresenting Africa and Africans and famously described him as "a bloody racist" (a phrase later revised to "a thoroughgoing racist"). Achebe turns to Conrad's novella to expose its depiction of African characters as savage and brutal. Through a highly critical reading, he identifies the influence of colonial ideology on Conrad's fiction and asks his audience to consider whether the novel promotes racist views of Africa. How can we celebrate art that fundamentally dehumanizes people? Achebe suggests that, by failing to consider critically the racist and colonialist attitudes in classic texts such as *Heart of Darkness*, critics and readers tacitly support those attitudes:

> The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot. (Achebe 9)

Achebe argues that the racism of Conrad's novel had been overlooked largely because of the quality of Conrad's writing. Although he admired Conrad's artistry, he was troubled by the way that artistry concealed damaging representations of Africa which had gone unnoticed in critical assessments. Achebe accuses Conrad of setting Africa up as the antithesis of Europe and of civilization, and he bases this argument on the contrast between the Thames and the Congo. The novella opens on the Thames, a calm and peaceful scene in which sea and sky are "welded together without a joint":

> The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. (Conrad 2)

The Congo, by contrast, is depicted as a prehistoric, unearthly, dark place—an unknown planet. Achebe notes that while the Thames is presented as having "conquered its darkness," the journey up the Congo is likened to "travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (Achebe 1). According to Achebe, Conrad is obsessed with skin color; Achebe points, for example, to the scene

after Kurtz's death in which the manager's boy puts "his insolent black head in the doorway" (Conrad 69).

Achebe's critique centers on the representation of a specific group—the indigenous Africans of *Heart of Darkness*—as the "Other." The "Other" is a philosophical notion, developed notably in psychoanalysis and phenomenology, that refers to that which is separate and distinct from the self. The notion is central to postcolonial theory, which argues that "Otherness" is deeply embedded in colonial ideologies and forms the basis of negative racial stereotyping. The African is always defined as different from, and in negative relation to, the European. In this way, the European presence in Africa is depicted as a civilizing mission, and the African's natural relation to his or her own home and history is fractured. One way in which Conrad denies Africa its power, Achebe argues, is by denying Africans a voice. In the few instances in which African characters do speak, their language turns them into caricatures, as in the cannibals' "Catch 'im . . . Eat 'im!" Conrad thus silences anything of value that Africa and its people might have to offer.

To counter the idea that African culture is primitive, Achebe briefly shows how African art influenced European modernism. He draws attention to the encounter, in the early years of the twentieth century, between European artists such as Maurice de Vlaminck, André Derain, and Pablo Picasso and African sculpture: a mask made by the Fang people was among the many influences on cubism. In his own novel *Arrow of God* (1964), Achebe dealt with British colonization in Nigeria and the spread of Christian missions, shedding light on African traditions. According to Terry Collits, Achebe's novel nevertheless shares something of Conrad's "mode of representation," particularly in its depiction of the British district officer.

2. Cedric Watts

Achebe's critique provoked a number of vigorous defenses of *Heart of Darkness*, which stress Conrad's critical stance towards imperialism as well as the wide acceptance of racist language and categories in the late Victorian period. Some critics agreed with Achebe; others rejected his charge. Among the latter is Cedric Watts, who answered Achebe in his essay "'A Bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad" (1983). Watts argues that Conrad "most deliberately and incisively debunks such myths. The myth of inevitable progress, for example; the myth that white civilization is necessarily morally superior to 'savagery.'" He considers *Heart of Darkness* one of the great works of fiction and a gateway to modern British literature (Watts 196). According to Watts, Achebe neglected the historical context of the novella, which was written at the height of European imperialism, during the reign of Queen Victoria. Watts rejects the claim that Conrad is "a bloody racist" and reads the depiction of black characters not as a form of dehumanization but as a protest against it (198):

> . . . yet it is precisely against such dehumanization that the tale amply protests. Of all the people described, by far the happiest, healthiest, and most vital are the group of blacks seen paddling their

> canoe through the surf of the coast. (Watts 198)

3. Edward Said: "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*"

The Palestinian American critic Edward Said offers a more nuanced critique in "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*," a chapter of *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Said argues that Conrad's narrative, through the figure of Marlow, expresses the imperial worldview of its time, even as it exposes imperialism's brutality. Although Conrad distinguished between Belgian and British colonial practices, he never ceased to believe in the superiority of the West (Said 23–24). Said admires Conrad's narrative art in *Heart of Darkness* but reads it as bound to the logic of the *mission civilisatrice*, the "civilizing mission" that aimed to civilize the African continent. Both Kurtz and Marlow embody European imperial dominance: Kurtz is the white man who crosses the wilderness, and Marlow is the narrator who frames and transmits that experience (Said 29–30).

Said summarizes the imperial worldview that the novella cannot escape: "Independence was for whites and Europeans; the lesser or subject peoples were to be ruled; science, learning, history emanated from the West" (Said 24). Conrad, he argues, depicts only this worldview and does not imagine the right of indigenous peoples to independence. Hence what Said calls Conrad's tragic limitation: "even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that 'natives' could lead lives free from European domination" (Said 25). As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them.

4. The Feminist Critique

Various feminist critics have argued that the tale also belittles women. Nina Pelikan Straus, Bette London, Johanna M. Smith, and Elaine Showalter are among those who have claimed that *Heart of Darkness* is not only imperialist but also sexist (Watts). Straus declared that male critics had repeatedly become accomplices of Marlow, who "brings truth to men by virtue of his bringing falsehood to women." Marlow himself remarks: "It's queer how out of touch with truth women are" (Conrad 40). Kurtz's Intended, who is denied a name, is also denied access to the truth when Marlow lies to her about Kurtz's last words, in order to preserve the dominant brotherhood of men. Smith similarly argues that the tale "reveals the collusion of imperialism and patriarchy: Marlow's narrative aims to 'colonize' and 'pacify' both savage darkness and women."

SEMESTER TWO

Modernist Poetry and the Modernist Novel

SEMESTER TWO

Unit Five: Modernism in Poetry: T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

IN THIS UNIT

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Lesson 15: The Historical Context of Eliot's *The Waste Land*

The war romantically perceived as "the war to end all wars" brought no peace; rather, it paved the way for further conflicts that eventually led to a second, greater war in 1939. The Great War shattered European confidence and undermined humankind's faith in the progress of Western civilization. As society's certainties and deeply held beliefs were called into question, an atmosphere of chaos, nihilism, disillusionment, and skepticism prevailed all over Europe. For many writers, it was a time of profound disillusionment with the values on which a whole civilization had been founded, and they felt an urgent need for a new art capable of representing contemporary reality. Writers such as Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, and W. B. Yeats not only depicted the chaotic postwar mind and civilization but also turned to the past in search of values that might inspire the construction of a new society and the redemption of people's minds and souls. Among them was T. S. Eliot, who depicted and mourned the ravaged society and its spiritual deadness in many of his poems, above all in *The Waste Land* (1922). The following sections briefly describe the postwar situation.

1. The Casualties of the War

The First World War (1914–1918) caused casualties on an enormous scale, especially in Europe. In four years, more than 8.5 million soldiers died. Many of those who survived were permanently disabled or unable to return to normal life after the terror they had witnessed. Modern weaponry —artillery, machine guns, and poison gas—dominated the trenches and caused immense losses, especially in battles such as the Somme (1916), where the British army suffered some 420,000 casualties, including almost 60,000 on the first day alone; the French lost about 200,000 men and the Germans nearly 500,000. At Verdun (1916), French casualties exceeded 360,000 and German casualties approached 340,000.

Poison gas was the most feared weapon of all. Used on a large scale for the first time by the Germans at the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915, it had an immediate and devastating effect, and the attackers themselves could not always avoid its danger. Gas caused painful damage to internal organs, especially the lungs, and many of those who survived it were blinded or disabled for life. In total, gas caused around 1.3 million casualties during the war, some 90,000 of them fatal. Casualty statistics do not take into account those who died years later or who survived but could never work again. Bombardment—including aerial bombing, first carried out on cities by German Zeppelins in 1915—devastated many European towns, especially in France and Belgium. The medieval city of Ypres was left in ruins, with barely a building left standing. In short, Europe was left in a state of total chaos.

2. The Influenza Pandemic

The influenza pandemic of 1918–1919, misleadingly called the "Spanish flu," was a global disaster that struck in the final year of the war. One of its earliest recorded outbreaks occurred in a

military camp in Kansas, and the flu was carried to Europe by troop movements before spreading rapidly around the globe; perhaps a third of the world's population was infected. The pandemic killed between 20 and 50 million people—more, in a single year, than the war itself had killed in four. Its origins were unknown and widely speculated upon: some believed it was a form of biological warfare, others that it resulted from the miserable conditions of the trenches, the use of mustard gas, or the fumes generated by the war. Patients suffered body aches, muscle and joint pain, dizziness, coughing and difficulty breathing, fevers of 100–104°F (38–40°C), hemorrhage, diarrhea, and vomiting. What began like an ordinary cold often developed into pneumonia, and many patients died of suffocation.

3. Economic Instability

When the war ended, no European nation emerged richer or stronger. Those who survived had to face what Wallbank calls the "desperate and confused situation of European economy" (Wallbank et al. 791). The financial cost of the war has been estimated at between 250 and 300 billion dollars at the value of the time. Under the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was to pay reparations, but it managed to avoid paying much of the bill. The situation was aggravated by the problem of debts, for most war costs had been covered by borrowing. European nations lent money to one another during the war; Britain, as the Allies' "chief banker," lent other countries large sums, and when its own credit dried up it turned to the United States for help. By 1919, the European Allies owed the United States more than 10 billion dollars, which they were unable to repay (Wallbank et al.). World trade failed to recover, and currencies collapsed in many European countries, including Russia, Germany, Austria, and Hungary, so that bank savings became worthless. The roots of this collapse can be traced to prewar agricultural overproduction, bureaucratic regulation, and protectionist policies, all aggravated by the difficulty of shifting from a wartime to a peacetime economy (Wallbank et al.). In *Civilization Past and Present*, Wallbank describes Germany as a laboratory of the horrible impact of inflation on society, where prices rose to a trillion times their prewar level (Wallbank et al. 794). In the 1920s, unemployment rose all over Europe and many people were reduced to abject poverty, which led to social unrest and strikes in Britain, France, Italy, and Germany. In Italy and Germany, the unrest destabilized democracy and opened the way for radical, authoritarian parties.

4. Geographical Chaos

Geographically speaking, Europe was in a state of total disorder after the First World War. The war changed the map of Europe and the Middle East: the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian empires vanished and were replaced by smaller and weaker states stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Suez Canal. Between 1919 and 1923, several treaties signed between the Allies and the Central Powers redrew the map of Europe and the Middle East. First, the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) divided the Ottoman Empire's territories among the victors: the Arab territories were placed under the supervision of the League of Nations as mandates administered by Britain and

France, Greece was awarded western Anatolia, France and Italy were assigned zones in southern Anatolia, and eastern Anatolia was expected to become part of an Armenian state (Storey 30). Second, the German Empire lost about 13 percent of its European territory, ceded at Allied insistence to various countries; the largest part went to Poland, including the "Polish Corridor" that gave Poland access to the sea.

The Russian Empire also disappeared. By the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918), Russia renounced its claims to Finland, the Baltic provinces, Poland, and Ukraine, and further territories were later lost to Romania and Poland. Finally, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was broken into many pieces. Austria became a republic; Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia became part of the newly formed Czechoslovakia; Galicia was transferred to Poland and South Tyrol to Italy; Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, and Vojvodina were joined with Serbia to form the kingdom that later became Yugoslavia; and Transylvania became part of Romania.

5. Shell Shock

The trenches left scars not only on the European landscape but also on the souls and minds of young soldiers. In the trenches they experienced tragedies "that only they could understand" (Livingood 1). Some soldiers resorted to self-inflicted wounds; although this was a serious offence, they took the risk because of the emotional pressure they had to endure. The experience of the war produced a kind of collective trauma in all the countries that took part in it. According to William Kelleher Storey, wartime trauma "pushed the human mind to its natural limits" (Storey 154). In *The First World War: A Concise Global History*, Storey explains that not only soldiers but also civilians "experienced trauma": in places such as France and Belgium, civilians were subjected to "murder, rape, and theft" and were often used as forced labor (154). Soldiers in the trenches suffered emotional stress combined with fear and remorse as they saw their comrades killed in front of them; many suffered nervous breakdowns and mental illnesses grouped under the name "shell shock." Its symptoms varied: some soldiers had panic attacks and fled the battlefield, others suffered physical paralysis, and others simply wore a blank, empty stare. Governments were slow to recognize the condition. Europe recovered relatively quickly from its physical and economic wounds, but many people never recovered from their traumatic experiences.

Lesson 16: The Transformation of Poetry in the Modern Era: Social Forces and Literary Innovation

1. Societal Upheaval and Literary Response

The twentieth century witnessed unprecedented social, economic, and political transformations that fundamentally altered both individual consciousness and collective society. The period was characterized by rapid industrialization, revolutionary technological and scientific developments, and most significantly, the catastrophic devastation of World War I. These monumental changes profoundly influenced modernist writers, fundamentally reshaping their thematic preoccupations and radically transforming their literary methodologies. In poetry particularly, this influence manifested through the emergence of revolutionary themes alongside significant innovations in poetic form and experimental techniques.

As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane observe in their seminal work on modernism, "Modernism is our art; it is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos," highlighting how literary modernism directly reflected the fragmented reality of contemporary existence. The disruption of traditional social structures necessitated new forms of artistic expression capable of capturing the complexity and disorientation of modern life.

2. Revolutionary Thematic Developments in Modernist Poetry

Modernist poets frequently explored profound themes of alienation and existential despair, directly reflecting their internal psychological fragmentation that resulted from the external chaos characterizing the post-war world. The unprecedented violence and destruction of World War I left many literary figures profoundly disillusioned with life itself, compelling them to express overwhelming feelings of depression, disappointment, and spiritual emptiness in their creative work.

Charles E. Bressler emphasizes that the war marked a decisive turning point in the arts, prompting an intensive focus on themes of disintegration, loss, and profound disillusionment. Recurring thematic concerns included the fundamental instability of political and economic systems, widespread social devastation, and the staggering loss of human life caused by mechanized warfare. However, some modernist poets also conveyed cautious hope for humanity's capacity to rebuild civilization and create a more meaningful future, providing a counterbalance to the pervasive atmosphere of despair and nihilism. T.S. Eliot's monumental work *The Waste Land* exemplifies these thematic preoccupations, presenting a desolate landscape that symbolizes both literal death and the spiritual death of modern civilization. As Jahidul Azad notes, "The poem displays the disillusionment, hopelessness, failure, and cynicism of modern life" while exploring "human failure and of perennial quest for salvation."

3. Formal Innovation and Structural Experimentation

The significant social transformations of the twentieth century also fundamentally influenced the structural organization and formal characteristics of modernist poetry. Poets deliberately broke away from established literary conventions, embracing free verse as the distinctive hallmark of their experimental approach to poetic expression. Unlike traditional poetry with its uniform metrical patterns and consistent structural organization, free verse is characterized by irregular line lengths, fragmented rhythmic patterns, and frequently the complete absence of rhyme schemes. As M.H. Abrams observes in his comprehensive analysis of literary forms, these structural innovations enabled poets to more effectively capture the fragmented reality of the modern world, providing artistic techniques suited to expressing the discontinuous nature of contemporary experience. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines free verse as "poetry organized to the cadences of speech and image patterns rather than according to a regular metrical scheme," emphasizing how this form prioritized natural speech rhythms over artificial metrical constraints. The Imagist movement, initiated in England in 1912 by Richard Aldington, Ezra Pound, F.S. Flint, and Hilda Doolittle, established the principle of composing "in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome," fundamentally altering poetic composition methods and emphasizing organic rather than mechanical rhythm.

4. Modernist Techniques: Myth, Symbol, and Image as Literary Innovation

Modernist poets developed distinctive technical approaches to reflect the profound upheaval of their historical era, employing sophisticated literary devices to capture psychological and social complexity. Mythological Framework: Modernists frequently employed myth as a structural device to impose coherent organization upon the apparent chaos of their disordered world. T.S. Eliot famously articulated this approach in his influential review of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, describing myth as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." This mythical method allowed poets to connect fragmented modern experience with timeless archetypal patterns, creating meaningful connections between past and present.

Symbolic Concentration: Symbols became a powerful literary tool for expressing the psychological and social complexities of post-war society. By condensing multiple layers of meaning into single objects or events, poets could convey sophisticated interpretations with remarkable brevity and precision. As Abrams explains, a symbol signifies something beyond its literal meaning, enabling profound thematic depth within economical expression. This technique proved particularly effective for capturing the ambiguity and uncertainty that characterized modern consciousness.

Imagistic Intensity: The strategic use of vivid imagery enabled poets to evoke immediate sensory experiences while simultaneously conveying complex intellectual and emotional meanings. Ezra Pound's influential definition of an image as "an intellectual and emotional

complex in an instant of time" highlights its capacity to engage readers' cognitive and affective responses while inviting multiple interpretative possibilities. This technique compensated for the absence of traditional formal structures by creating powerful moments of concentrated meaning and emotional impact.

5. Thematic Preoccupations in Modernist Literature: Psychological and Social Responses to Historical Trauma

5.1. The Transformative Impact of World War I on Literary Consciousness

World War I fundamentally disrupted established beliefs, traditional values, and conventional lifestyles, precipitating a profound cultural transformation that reshaped artistic expression. The conflict marked a decisive historical rupture, as Cambridge scholar Tim Kendall observes: "The First World War is still seen as creating a social, cultural, and artistic rupture which marks the emergence, post-war, of a full-blown modernism." This catastrophic event left modernist writers feeling psychologically rootless and spiritually disconnected from previously held values, compelling them to reflect this comprehensive psychological and social upheaval in their literary works. Central thematic concerns included profound alienation, omnipresent death, pervasive pessimism, and existential chaos—each expressing the collective trauma and uncertainty characterizing the post-war era. As I.A. Richards influentially observed, Eliot succeeded in describing the shared post-war "sense of desolation, of uncertainty, of futility, of the groundlessness of aspirations, of the vanity of endeavor."

5.2. Alienation as Universal Psychological Phenomenon

Alienation emerged as a central thematic preoccupation in modernist literature, representing a universal psychological response to the trauma of mechanized warfare and social disruption. Following the unprecedented horrors of World War I, many individuals experienced profound isolation and estrangement, both from their authentic selves and from their surrounding communities. Psychological analysis identifies alienation as manifesting through disconnection from one's genuine identity or immediate environment, a psychological state extensively explored in modernist artistic and literary works. Modernist writers attributed this widespread alienation to three primary sociological causes.

Loss of Traditional Value Systems: The devastating impact of warfare led many individuals to question and ultimately reject the traditional values they had previously accepted unquestioningly, resulting in profound detachment from established societal norms and moral frameworks.

Social and Political Instability: The comprehensive collapse of stable governmental and social systems left individuals feeling fundamentally disconnected from one another and from any unified societal framework that might provide meaning and coherence. Erosion of Religious Faith: Many became profoundly disillusioned by organized religion's apparent inability to provide spiritual solace or divine protection during wartime catastrophe, leading them to

abandon traditional beliefs and deepening their existential alienation. W.B. Yeats observed a significant societal transformation away from Christianity toward Paganism, reflecting this widespread estrangement from established religious doctrines and the search for alternative spiritual frameworks.

5.3. Death as Literal and Metaphorical Reality

Modernist poets extensively explored death in both its concrete manifestations and abstract symbolic dimensions. The literal aspect directly addressed the immense loss of human life during warfare, encompassing soldiers, civilians, and innocent children who perished in mechanized conflict. The abstract dimension symbolized the metaphorical death of moral values, ethical principles, and humanitarian ideals—representing the spiritual death of civilization itself. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* masterfully encapsulates this dual conception of death, portraying the post-war world as a barren, spiritually lifeless landscape while simultaneously symbolizing the death of fundamental moral principles including love, peace, and human freedom. Eliot's vision, as scholars note, "reflects a world in irreversible decline" where "references to death and dying are frequent in the poem, starting with the title." Modernist poets employed innovative technical approaches to emphasize the theme of death, utilizing fragmented imagery and complex allusions to highlight the pervasive sense of loss and existential despair. These sophisticated techniques created layered and emotionally evocative narratives that reflected death as both a literal historical reality and an existential philosophical dilemma.

5.4. Pessimism as Cultural Response

Modernist poetry frequently mirrored the profoundly bleak reality of post-war society, expressing collective fears, hopelessness, and comprehensive disillusionment with human progress. The widespread social devastation left entire populations with an overwhelmingly grim outlook concerning both present existence and future possibilities. Modernists often perceived contemporary society in terms of Thomas Carlyle's image of the universe as "one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine," recalled by Justin Quinn, embodying mechanical indifference and systematic destruction of human values. This pessimistic worldview achieved its most powerful artistic expression in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where images such as "April is the cruellest month" and desolate depictions of urban existence convey profound spiritual despair and psychological emptiness. Peter Childs notes that modernists following World War I became "noticeable by their pessimism and their sense of a failed and fragmented society," making pessimism a dominant thematic element in the majority of modernist literary works. This artistic pessimism served as the most appropriate means for reflecting inner despair, social destruction, and comprehensive disillusionment within a technologically advanced yet dangerously destructive civilization.

5.5. Chaos as Defining Cultural Condition

The twentieth century, characterized by unprecedented social and political instability, earned recognition as "the age of chaos and disorder." The massive destruction wrought by World War I fundamentally shattered societal harmony, leading to the systematic erosion of traditional values, cultural traditions, and social institutions. Individuals became psychologically lost and alienated from their communities, while their anarchic existence led them to disconnect from established social norms and fundamental beliefs. In literature, modernist writers consciously sought to reflect this social anarchy through innovative stylistic approaches and experimental technical methods. As Bradbury and McFarlane definitively assert, "Modernism is our art; it is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos," emphasizing literature's capacity to capture and express social fragmentation. Astradur Eysteinsson observes that modernist works reflected contemporary chaos through "chaotic subversion of the communicative and semiotic norms of society," demonstrating how artistic techniques mirrored social disruption. To effectively represent this chaotic cultural condition, modernist writers employed innovative technical approaches: in novels, they utilized fragmented narrative structures to reflect their rejection of traditional chronological storytelling, while in poetry, modern poets employed free verse to demonstrate their liberation from conventional poetic forms. This comprehensive thematic and technical revolution in modernist literature represented a direct artistic response to the profound societal transformations of the twentieth century, capturing the essence of modern existence—its chaos, destruction, and disillusionment—while simultaneously breaking decisively from established Victorian literary conventions.

6. The Major Themes of *The Waste Land*

Eliot's major concern in *The Waste Land* is the most pressing issue of his time: cultural degeneration. This degeneration manifests itself as a spiritual, historical, political, and socio-economic decadence in the era following the Great War. Each part of the poem laments the loss of one aspect of the traditional order and registers the rise of a new and unbearable one.

6.1. Death

Death is one of the major themes of the poem; nearly every section includes at least one reference to it. In *The Waste Land*, death is not only physical but also spiritual. Physical death finds expression in images of corpses, the "dead land," "death by water," decay, and bones, to name only a few. Spiritual death manifests itself in the mental and emotional demise of the inhabitants of the waste land. Modern "waste landers" are like phantoms who have lost their sense of life; they are unable to give, to sympathize, or to control themselves, and they are caught in the deadening routine of a rapidly growing technological and materialistic society. They are so hopeless, aimless, and spiritually empty that they wish only for death—like the Sibyl of the epigraph—rather than for a renewed life. People in the waste land live mechanical, sterile, and barren lives in what Eliot calls the "Unreal City." Death is present throughout the poem, especially in "The Burial of the Dead" and "Death by Water": the "dead land," the "dried tubers," the "dull roots," the

"dead sound on the final stroke of nine," the drowned Phlebas, the corpse planted in Stetson's garden, and the "rattle of the bones." All these images suggest the deadness of the people in the poem, whom Eliot describes as ghosts—spiritually dead though physically alive. There is nothing to be written in their obituaries by which they might be remembered. To evoke this deadness, Eliot conveys the futility and sterility of modern life through macabre and elegiac elements, such as the crowd of the dead flowing over London Bridge, the rats, and the bones that recur in every section.

6.2. Sexuality and the Absence of Love

Sexuality is the second theme that pervades the poem. *The Waste Land* presents a number of couples whose relationships are obsessive, manipulative, or tormented, and it shows how marriage in its traditional sense has been replaced by mechanical sex. The traditional institution of marriage is associated with regeneration, harmony, love, and respect, whereas the sexual encounters of the modern waste land are sterile: they promise no life, no regeneration, and no love. Unless modern society recovers a traditional sense of life, it will remain a waste land. Eliot also shows how deprived of love the modern heart has become. Love does not exist in the waste land, a fact emphasized by the contrast between legendary love stories—Antony and Cleopatra, Dido and Aeneas, Tristan and Isolde—and contemporary ones such as the episode of the hyacinth girl. The poem also exposes the sterility and degradation of relationships between men and women, as in "A Game of Chess," where the nervous woman desperately seeks communication with her husband. Sex, as Eliot describes it, is a futile and mechanical act: the typist in "The Fire Sermon" remains indifferent to her lover, the "young man carbuncular." Sex offers neither pleasure nor fertility in the modern world. In the poem we encounter the raped Philomel, the violated Thames maidens, the typist and the clerk, and Mrs. Porter and Sweeney—all examples through which Eliot develops the futility and degradation of sexual relationships into a mechanical pleasure that brings neither fertility nor satisfaction.

6.3. Regeneration

Regeneration is another prominent theme. Although *The Waste Land* is a pessimistic poem, it closes on a note of hope. The last section, "What the Thunder Said," treats death in the light of Christ's passion and resurrection: for the waste landers, death can become a source of rebirth, as it did for Christ. The Indian voice of the thunder, which reveals the three virtues of giving, sympathizing, and self-control, further enhances the idea of restoration. What the waste land needs in order to live again is not only water but spirituality. Eliot turns to India because of its cultural and religious tradition: although India had been subjected to several invasions, it retained its traditional character, and religion remains the backbone of everyday life there. India thus appears as a spiritually fertile land in which the divine word is not only heard but believed and obeyed—a place where one can find solace and inspiration for a peaceful life, "the peace which passeth understanding" that Eliot's note attaches to the poem's final words, "Shantih shantih shantih."

This spiritual value explains why, at the climax of the poem, rain-bearing clouds gather "far distant, over Himavant," above the sacred river Ganga. The Himalayas (Himavant) and the Ganges hold great spiritual significance in Indian culture. Ganga is the Sanskrit name of the Ganges, a sacred river that plays an integral part in Hindu life; it is believed to be the liquid form of a goddess who descended from heaven, so that the river and the goddess are worshipped as one. According to Hindu mythology, Ganga came down to earth from heaven in order to purify the ashes of the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara, who had been burned to ashes after disturbing the sage Kapila; Shiva broke her fall by catching her in his matted hair (Eck 145). The river is thus believed to link earth and heaven: when the ashes of the dead touch its waters, their souls are purified and begin their journey towards liberation. Bathing in the river, drinking its water, or being cremated on its banks is believed to bring liberation (Eck 138–45). The Ganges is also called "Mother Ganga," for it is believed to offer compassion and love to those who seek refuge in it; it not only gives life to the land but also purifies the souls of human beings. The Ganges rises in the Himalayas, where Mount Kailash—identified with the cosmic Mount Meru and revered as the abode of Shiva (Alter 75)—draws thousands of pilgrims each year, especially to Kailash–Manasarovar, the site most frequently mentioned in Hindu religious texts.

The rain promised over Himavant and the Ganges thus reflects the religious value of these places: their people are not indifferent to the divine, and such faith makes the land fertile and peaceful. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot refers to two major religions of India, Buddhism and Hinduism. He does not call Christians to convert, but rather to draw inspiration from them, offering Europeans a new hope of renewal and of "the peace which passeth understanding." Through these references to India and Eastern civilization, he advocates faith as the way to salvation and regeneration. Eliot refers to the teachings of the Buddha in the third section, "The Fire Sermon," whose title alludes to the Buddha's sermon urging his disciples to free themselves from passion for earthly things. He refers to Hinduism in the last section through the three virtues taught in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

Eliot borrows the Buddha's teaching and the three virtues of the *Upanishad* in order to call Europeans back to faith and away from earthly passions; in his view, indifference to the divine voice and the pursuit of earthly passions are the root causes of Western disillusionment and spiritual deadness. In the Fire Sermon, according to Alasdair Macrae, the Buddha told his followers that all the senses are burning "with the fire of lust, with the fire of anger, with the fire of ignorance," and with the troubles of "birth, death, grief, lamentation, misery, dejection and despair" (Macrae 31). After the First World War, many people were full of anger; they did not understand why the war had been declared, and they were desperate and grieving because everything they had believed in seemed to have been a lie. They wanted only to enjoy themselves and forget what had happened by giving in to instinct and lust. Eliot, like the Buddha, advises them to free themselves from earthly things. In "The Fire Sermon" he presents episodes that emphasize the absence of love and the sterility of sexual relationships—the typist's indifference

towards her lover, the Thames maidens, and Mrs. Porter and Sweeney. The section ends with lines from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which emphasize man's inability to save himself and his desperate need for God:

> To Carthage then I came
> Burning burning burning burning
> O Lord Thou pluckest me out
> O Lord Thou pluckest
> burning (lines 307–11)

The first line echoes Augustine's *Confessions*: "to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears." The "unholy loves" may correspond to the songs of the Thames maidens. Augustine was born in Thagaste, in present-day Algeria (modern Souk Ahras); he went to Carthage as a young man and experienced the power of lust before gradually discovering spiritual love (Macrae). "O Lord Thou pluckest me out" suggests man's weakness and his need for divine help to escape his desperate condition. The final word, "burning," may refer to everything in the section that burns in the flames of lust and passion—flames that will become the fires of hell without faith.

Eliot also borrows the three virtues to counsel people to hold to their faith in order to be saved and renewed—counsel well suited to the situation of Europeans at the time. The thunder speaks the words of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The Upanishads, also known as Vedanta, are philosophical texts of Hinduism believed to contain revealed truth about human salvation. The three words with which the thunder speaks—*Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata*—are Sanskrit, the classical language of Hinduism, whose name means "refined" or "perfected." In order, the three words mean "give," "sympathize," and "control." According to Macrae, "In *The Waste Land* these virtues are absent" (Macrae 41). All three derive from the same syllable, *DA*.

> Datta: what have we given?
> My friend, blood shaking my heart
> The awful daring of a moment's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract
> By this, and this only, we have existed
> Which is not to be found in our obituaries
> Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
> Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
> In our empty rooms (lines 401–09)

The "moment's surrender" may refer to moments of surrender to the power of lust, like those of the typist, the Thames maidens, and the hyacinth girl. The thunder seems to lament the state of

modern civilization and to counsel us to give, since what we give—and only that—is the measure of our existence, not what is recorded in our obituaries or in the memories of others. According to Eliot, the people of the waste land have nothing to give, and this makes their existence empty.

> Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison
> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
> Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
> Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus (lines 411–16)

Dayadhvam means "be compassionate" or "sympathize." In these lines, everyone is locked in his own prison, like the woman in "A Game of Chess," between whom and her husband there is no compassion.

> Damyata: The boat responded
> Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
> The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
> Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
> To controlling hands (lines 418–22)

In these lines, Eliot uses the image of the sailor. The wise sailor controls himself and responds to wind and water, which represent life and spiritual values in the poem. A sailor who fails to respond to them meets the fate of Phlebas the Phoenician and the one-eyed merchant. Eliot advises his readers to draw inspiration from Eastern beliefs: just as the boat moves when it responds to the wind, people must respond to the divine word and obey it in order to reach salvation.

Lesson 17: "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and the Poetic Techniques of *The Waste Land* (Part One)

1. Techniques in Modernist Poetry

Modernist poetry, influenced by Ezra Pound's call to "make it new," embraced innovative techniques that departed from Romantic and Victorian conventions. Instead of relying on personal voice, modern poets prioritized imagery and symbolism. Key techniques include the use of language, symbols, imagery, metaphor, allusion, and myth.

Language

Modernist poets favored everyday language over traditional literary diction, believing it best conveyed emotions and connected with society. However, their poetic language was often complex and fragmented, requiring readers to uncover hidden meanings. Paradox became a defining feature, emphasizing tension and ambiguity. Word choice was critical, with poets crafting metaphors, symbols, and images to create layered, challenging texts. Repetition also emerged as a prominent device, giving emphasis to themes and enhancing poetic rhythm.

Symbolism

Symbolism, a hallmark of modernist poetry, introduced ambiguity and indirect expression. Symbols represented deeper meanings, encouraging readers to explore beyond the surface. This technique allowed poets to convey complex emotions and existential themes, such as alienation and isolation. By employing symbols, modernist poets created multi-dimensional works that required careful interpretation.

Imagery

Imagery played a central role in modernist poetry, depicting real-life experiences and emotions through vivid, sensory details. Unlike Romanticism's idealized imagination, modernist imagery reflected reality, often portraying urban life, alienation, and mortality. Poets used unconventional metaphors and similes to craft complex and thought-provoking images, making the image itself the focal point of their work.

Metaphor

Modernist poets redefined the use of metaphor, moving beyond its traditional decorative function. They employed imaginative and unconventional metaphors to reveal psychological depth and spiritual truths. These metaphors created new meanings, enriching the poetic experience and reflecting the poets' inner complexities.

Allusion

Allusion allowed modernist poets to connect present themes with historical and mythical references. By incorporating external texts, poets added depth and ambiguity, requiring readers

to decode layered meanings. T. S. Eliot, for instance, used allusions to evoke historical parallels and emphasize cultural disintegration.

Myth

Modernist poets extensively used myth to provide structure and meaning to contemporary chaos, particularly in the aftermath of war. Unlike history, which evolves over time, myths retain their adaptability and relevance. Eliot's "mythical method" linked past narratives to modern contexts, offering insight into societal decline and renewal. Poets like Yeats and Eliot used myths to explore universal themes and spiritual transformation. In sum, modernist poetry revolutionized traditional techniques, fostering complexity and engaging readers in active interpretation. Through innovative language, symbols, and structures, modernists captured the fragmented realities of their era.

2. An Overview of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) sees Eliot defending the role of tradition in helping new writers to be modern. This is one of the central paradoxes of Eliot's writing – indeed,of much modernism– that in order to move forward it often looks to the past, even more directly and more pointedly than previous poets had. This theory of tradition also highlights Eliot's anti-Romanticism. Unlike the Romantics' idea of original creation and inspiration, Eliot's concept of tradition foregrounds how important older writers are to contemporary writers: Homer and Dante are Eliot's contemporaries because they inform his work as much as those alive in the twentieth century do. Eliot's essay goes on to champion impersonality over personality. That is, the poet's personality does not matter, as it's the poetry that s/he produces that is important. Famously, he observes: 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.'This is more or less a direct riposte to William Wordsworth's statement (in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800) that poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Once again, Eliot sets himself apart from such a Romantic notion of poetry. This is in keeping with his earlier argument about the importance of tradition: the poet's personality does not matter,only how their work responds to, and fits into,the poetic tradition. Tradition in *The Waste Land* is manifest through the abundant use of allusions and references to classical, mythical and religious texts while impersonalisation is manifest through the use of a variety of speakers and the technique of the objective correlative.

3. The Structure of *The Waste Land*

English poetry comprises several types—dramatic, descriptive, narrative, lyrical, and meditative, among others—each with its own pattern of organization. *The Waste Land* fits none of these patterns. It is a hybrid poem with no conventional plot or arrangement, and its form appears chaotic because of Eliot's extensive use of references and allusions. This chaotic form is one of the

means by which Eliot expresses the chaotic mind of the postwar Western generation, including his own. It also reflects the music and art of the modern era, especially Dada and cubism. In a sense, the apparent absence of form in *The Waste Land* is itself a form, and the poem does have its own distinctive structure. It consists of 433 lines divided into five titled sections, each made up of juxtaposed verse paragraphs: "The Burial of the Dead," "A Game of Chess," "The Fire Sermon," "Death by Water," and "What the Thunder Said." The poem opens with an epigraph in Latin and Greek taken from Petronius's *Satyricon*, in which the Sibyl of Cumae, granted eternal life without eternal youth, declares that she wants to die; the epigraph functions as a leitmotif for the entire poem.

Although the poem is chaotic and fragmented, Eliot maintains its unity through several techniques, notably the allusive and the mythical methods; he skillfully blends disparate allusions into the body of the poem. According to Alasdair Macrae, Eliot acknowledges his debt to Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, which suggested the title, the plan, and much of the symbolism of the poem. Throughout the poem, Eliot establishes a network of references to the legend of the Holy Grail and to vegetation myths. Macrae compares *The Waste Land* to a musical work in which "the main tune or pattern of notes is hinted at, elaborated on, and returned to" (Macrae 49). In the same way, certain "motifs, themes, tones, even characters" develop "through repetition, echoes, and similarities" (Macrae 49).

The figure of Tiresias is another means by which Eliot unifies the poem. Reading through the sections of *The Waste Land*, we encounter different speakers who change abruptly without transition; Eliot's note tells us that all the characters, male and female, meet in Tiresias, the mythical seer who has "foresuffered all." This variety of voices also enables the poet to achieve impersonality. Closely related is the technique of collage, in which fragments of different texts are juxtaposed without explicit links, producing a sense of chaos and aimlessness in the reader. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot shifts from one voice to another without warning and incorporates passages in other languages—German, Latin, French, Italian, and Sanskrit. In "The Burial of the Dead," for instance, a German line abruptly interrupts Marie's recollections:

> And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
> And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
> Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
> And when we were children, staying at the archduke's, (lines 10–13)

Eliot also uses juxtaposition to contrast "high" and "low" culture and so to create paradox and enigma. In "A Game of Chess," he moves directly from the description of the rich woman to the pub conversation about Lil, without any transition. Similarly, the speaker recalls a song from Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* and then shifts suddenly to his memory of the hyacinth girl. Perhaps the most striking unifying technique is cinematic montage. Like a film director, Eliot

arranges scenes in a particular order, cuts abruptly from one to another, moves backwards and forwards in time to evoke memories, fantasies, and dreams, and inserts sound effects to create atmosphere, stir feelings, and raise expectations (Macrae). Although *The Waste Land* may seem a poem of disjointed fragments with no definite structure, Eliot helps his readers to perceive its unity through collage and through mythical, cinematic, and musical techniques.

4. The Style of *The Waste Land*

The Waste Land has a unique style that revitalized English poetry. It is complex, obscure, allusive, fragmented, and apparently chaotic, which makes it a very difficult poem to understand. Because of its collage technique, it follows no regular pattern of organization, and it can best be approached through musical and cinematic analogies. Harold Bloom notes that the poem is "filled with repetitions, allusions, and quotations the way a jazz tune is peppered with references to other tunes" and suggests that approaching it as we would "approach a piece of music" will help us find its structural coherence (Bloom 41).

In *The Waste Land* there is no "consistent meter, no pattern of stressed syllables" (Macrae 55). The number of syllables per line varies widely, and rhyme is irregular: some passages are rhymed while others are not. Eliot tends to use more regular, rhythmical verse when he echoes a traditional text—recalling the harmony of the past—and free verse to convey the fragmentation of the present. Punctuation is used unconventionally as well. The passage of rock and drought that opens "What the Thunder Said" (lines 331–58), for instance, "has no marks of punctuation and reading the passage depends heavily on Eliot's manipulation of the line and his use of repetitions and parallel phrases" (Macrae 56). In this passage, many words are repeated —"water," "rock," and "mountain" recur again and again (Macrae). According to Macrae, the "repetitions, lack of punctuation, and the negation" describe an unending, nightmarish journey (56). Eliot also uses a variety of verb forms. In "A Game of Chess," past participles and past-tense verbs such as "burnished," "glowed," "fruited," "wrought," and "held up" function almost as adjectives, creating a sense of confusion, while the opening lines of the poem rely on present participles—"breeding," "mixing," "stirring," "covering," "feeding"—to evoke continuity.

In *The Waste Land*, no single mood prevails; any mood Eliot creates is soon interrupted. Macrae gives the example of the refrain "Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song," borrowed from Spenser's "Prothalamion," which expresses an elegiac, mourning mood that is suddenly broken by macabre elements—"bones," "chuckle," the "rat" with its "slimy belly"—before briefly returning when the speaker muses "upon the king my brother's wreck / And on the king my father's death before him" (Macrae 57). Similarly, in "The Fire Sermon," a moment of tranquility conveyed by the "pleasant whining of a mandoline" does not last: Eliot interrupts it with a description of the river's spoiled beauty, a reminder of the deterioration of modern civilization.

Lesson 18: Modernist Techniques in *The Waste Land* (Part Two)

1. Symbolism

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses religious, elegiac, and macabre elements. The religious elements dominate the poem; they show how people have abandoned their faith and their values and are misled by false prophets such as Madame Sosostris. Examples include the Hanged Man, the address to the "Son of man," the "heap of broken images," and the echoes of Augustine's *Confessions*. The poem is also obsessed with death. Through elegiac elements, Eliot mourns the death of everything that was once valuable and has now fallen into ruin, showing how death has entered the realm of the living: the maternal lamentation of the last section, the sad fate of the raped Philomel, the lament for the Thames's lost beauty and innocence, the drowned Phlebas, and the loss of the Fisher King, the figure of the savior. Together these elements lament modern civilization, suggesting that nothing is real and that there is only destruction and emptiness. A fascination with death is also evident in the disturbing, ghostly images through which death is described: the corpse planted in Stetson's garden, the Dog that might dig it up, the rattle of bones, the "bats with baby faces," and the decomposing body of Phlebas. Eliot's pessimism can be felt everywhere in the poem.

2. Allusion

No writer creates from a vacuum. Eliot believed that a writer should place his work within the larger context of his predecessors, and that the best parts of a poem are those in which other writers assert themselves. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," collected in *The Sacred Wood* (1920), Eliot argues that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (Eliot, *Sacred Wood* 48). In his essay "Philip Massinger," in the same volume, he asserts that "the good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion" (125). In "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), he develops the point further, arguing that "the poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning" (qtd. in Macrae 51). In *The Waste Land*, Eliot accordingly weaves a dense network of allusions, most of them to ancient, classical, and religious texts. As Harold Bloom puts it, the poem becomes a riddle that the reader "must unravel in the quest to find 'roots that clutch' and something that is more than 'a heap of broken images'" (Bloom 28). Nidhi likewise describes it as a "sea where all rivers merge" (Nidhi 201).

According to M. H. Abrams, an allusion is "a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage" (Abrams 9). In his notes to the poem, Eliot declared his debt to Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and to James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. He also draws on Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Baudelaire's "Unreal City," Wagner, Spenser, Marvell, Shakespeare, and many

other writers. The first line of "The Burial of the Dead," "April is the cruellest month," for example, alludes to the opening of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote" ("When April with his sweet showers"). The contrast with Chaucer's fruitful spring emphasizes Eliot's distorted vision of spring and the degradation and spiritual emptiness that the modern world has reached. Eliot also alludes to the Bible—to the Gospel of St. Luke, the Book of Ezekiel, and Ecclesiastes—as well as to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, to Buddhist teachings, and to the rituals of the Anglican Church. One example is the passage about the two travelers in "What the Thunder Said," which alludes to the journey to Emmaus (Luke 24); another is the address "Son of man," God's words to Ezekiel.

Eliot also alludes to figures and passages from ancient and medieval myths and legends, such as the Sibyl, Tiresias, Dido and Aeneas, Philomel, and "the barbarous king" Tereus. *The Waste Land* combines contrasting religious and ancient references that create a sense of multiplicity, ambivalence, meaninglessness, and confusion—characteristics of the modern world (Rhee). Eliot's purpose in including so many references is ambiguous: the abundance of allusions not only displays his learning but also reflects the prevailing philosophies of his time (Rhee). Many allusions are not self-explanatory and require readers to return to the original texts, which interrupts the reading of the poem and disrupts its continuity (Macrae); readers must stop at each reference and research it. Yet the allusions, however complex, contribute to the general theme of the poem. The epigraph, for instance, presents the Sibyl of Cumae from Petronius's *Satyricon*, whose wish to die expresses despair and hopelessness. Even the most obscure allusions add significance to the panorama of disillusionment and futility of post–World War I society.

Allusion also expresses a desire to return to the past. According to Semey Rhee, allusions signify "nostalgia for culture and values of the past when life seemed to make sense." Ian Johnston distinguishes three ways in which Eliot invokes the past: first, by direct reference to a famous literary, historical, or cultural figure such as Tiresias; second, by more or less explicit allusions that immediately recall famous passages—for instance, the first line of "A Game of Chess," "The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne," which recalls Shakespeare's description of Cleopatra in her barge; and third, by direct quotation from famous sources, as with *Tristan und Isolde* and Augustine's *Confessions* (Johnston). As Johnston explains in his lecture on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, delivered at Malaspina University-College (now Vancouver Island University), "Eliot's poetic style in the Waste Land brings out the sense of collapse of the past, a pile of fragments shored up against ruins, and he deliberately invokes the past to insist upon his point. What once has a meaning no longer does."

3. Fragmentation

Fragmentation is the most prominent aspect of both the form and the content of *The Waste Land*. Its fragmented, or "kaleidoscopic," form parallels the cubist art of Braque and Picasso. Cubist painting, as Harold Bloom describes it, "presents a decomposed re-organization of apparently

incoherently arranged shards of things no longer congruent with everyday perception" (Bloom 28); both cubist painting and *The Waste Land* present "oddly juxtaposed planes of being and experience" (27). In the poem, Eliot shifts from one section to another, from place to place, from one time to another, and from one speaker to another without transition or warning. In the first eighteen lines of "The Burial of the Dead," for example, we move from spring to winter and then to summer, and from a German urban setting to the desert landscape of the following passage; the speaker, too, changes suddenly. This feature pervades the whole poem, creating a sense of fragmentation and incoherence.

Bloom argues that the fragmented poem mirrors the fragmented mind and experience of its poet, as well as the fragmented consciousness, faith, and culture of the civilization in which he lived (Bloom 20). The fragmented nature of *The Waste Land* results not only from its allusiveness but also from Ezra Pound's extensive editing: Pound recommended substantial cuts in several sections. After Pound's editing, as Bloom puts it, the poem was "decomposed and left standing, deliberate ruins with gaping spaces for the reader to look through and beyond" (Bloom 29). Bloom even suggests that *The Waste Land* is less a poem than the remains of a poem, reflecting the remains of a culture: the "heap of broken images" it presents are the ruins of something once "presumably solid" (Bloom 32).

4. The Multiplicity of Voices

The variety of voices in *The Waste Land* is one of the elements that most strongly produce its sense of fragmentation and chaos. As noted above, voices change repeatedly and without warning. Eliot creates a number of personae—male and female, young and old—distinguished, as Harold Bloom notes, by differences of diction, language, and style. We often cannot tell who is speaking; we simply know that it is someone who "sounds different from the voice immediately before" (Johnston). To unify the poem, Eliot merges all these speakers in the single figure of Tiresias, the mythical seer "throbbing between two lives," the "old man with wrinkled female dugs" who has lived in the past and foretells the future. Indeed, Eliot's working title for the poem was "He Do the Police in Different Voices," a phrase from Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, which implies a single speaker able to speak in many voices—most likely Tiresias. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker describes "a heap of broken images," and near the end he declares: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." This shows that the speaker—whether protagonist or poet—is aware of the fragmented images he sees in the waste land.

5. The Objective Correlative

One of the most important devices of the poem is the objective correlative, which Eliot himself defines in "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919): "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked"

(Eliot, *Sacred Wood* 100). In other words, the poet does not moralize or tell the reader how to feel or think; he lets a set of images, situations, or characters do the work. Eliot's chief use of the objective correlative lies in contrasting the grandeur of the past with the vulgar, meaningless present. In *The Waste Land*, for instance, we are first given a description of a lady seated in a chair "like a burnished throne," recalling Cleopatra in her barge going to meet Antony; the details are of gold, jewels, carved dolphins, and rich colors. Eliot follows this scene with one in which a neurotic modern woman begs her bored husband or lover to talk to her; the details are now "rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" and "The wind under the door." Eliot heightens the contrast through rhythm: the opening scene is written in something like the blank verse of Spenser or Shakespeare, with a noble tone, while the modern scene has almost no rhythm at all—it is a series of broken questions and repetitions. To reinforce the contrast further, Eliot "jazzes up" Shakespeare: "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag— / It's so elegant / So intelligent." Thus, without saying so directly, Eliot makes us feel the cheapness of modern "love." Of course, the objective correlative is not objective in a scientific sense, since Eliot chooses the details and the manner of their presentation; it is objective in the sense that he does not tell the reader how to interpret them.

6. The Disruption of Time

Eliot presents both the present and the past within a single poem, glorifying the past in contrast with a corrupt present. Time in *The Waste Land* does not move chronologically; instead, it is fragmented, complex, and multidirectional, an effect created largely through allusions and references.

SEMESTER TWO

Unit Six: William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*

IN THIS UNIT

- Lesson 19: Context and Major Themes in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*
- Lesson 20: Modernist Elements in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*

Lesson 19: Context and Major Themes in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*

1. Historical Foundations: Faulkner's Personal Heritage and the Southern Aristocratic Myth

1.1. Biographical Origins of Literary Commitment

William Faulkner's artistic representation of Southern aristocracy's decline emerges directly from his profound personal connection to the traditions and values he would later examine with both reverence and critical scrutiny. Born into a family that maintained aristocratic pretensions and social consciousness, Faulkner was immersed from childhood in an environment where social manners, family reputation, and hierarchical status constituted fundamental aspects of identity formation. His upbringing was profoundly shaped by the somewhat prideful and ceremonial attitudes characteristic of families who considered themselves inheritors of antebellum grandeur.

Faulkner's aristocratic heritage was reinforced by his family's historical prominence in Mississippi, where his ancestors had achieved notable distinction in both military and literary spheres. His great-grandfather, Colonel William Clark Falkner, served as a commanding officer for the Confederate Army during the Civil War, establishing a legacy of military honor that would profoundly influence the family's self-perception. Beyond his military achievements, Colonel Faulkner distinguished himself as the founding figure of the family's literary tradition through his novels and other creative works, establishing a precedent for artistic expression that would culminate in his great-grandson's literary genius.

Faulkner's own articulation of his ancestral admiration reveals the depth of his connection to this heritage: "My great-grandfather, whose name I bear, was a considerable figure in his time and provincial milieu. He was a prototype of John Sartoris: raised, organised, paid the expenses of and commanded the 2nd Mississippi Infantry. . . He built the first railroad in our county, wrote a few books, made grand European tour of his time, died in a duel and the county raised a marble effigy which still stands in Tippah County." This statement illuminates how Colonel Faulkner embodied the archetypal Southern gentleman—combining military valor, entrepreneurial vision, literary accomplishment, and romantic honor that would become central to Faulkner's conception of Southern nobility.

1.2. Ideological Foundation of the Southern Aristocratic Myth

Faulkner's profound commitment to Southern aristocratic values had a decisive influence on his artistic vision of the idealized South. The fundamental principles of this tradition—including pride, honor, gallantry, bravery, honesty, grace, sanctification of women, and devotion to preserving regional integrity—constituted the moral framework that Faulkner considered essential to Southern identity. Consequently, the systematic devastation of these cherished

concepts following the Civil War and during the traumatic Reconstruction period profoundly impacted his historical consciousness and literary imagination.

As John Easterbrook observes, "The events surrounding the Civil War and Reconstruction led to the decline of patriarchy in the Old South. With the end of the war and abolition of slavery, the patriarchal system that had dominated the region for generations began to crumble." This collapse of traditional authority structures created the fundamental tension that would drive much of Faulkner's literary exploration of Southern decline.

1.3. The Civil War as Historical Watershed

The Civil War represents the pivotal historical event around which Southern history revolves, fundamentally dividing the region's experience into two distinct epochs. The antebellum period represents the "Old South" characterized by slavery, plantation agricultural systems, and rigid social and moral hierarchies that defined both individual identity and collective social organization. As the historian Ulrich Bonnell Phillips argued, "Slavery was instituted not merely to provide control of labor but also as a system of racial adjustment and social order," emphasizing how the institution shaped every aspect of Southern civilization.

The devastating conflict fundamentally transformed Southern society, ushering in the postbellum era marked by economic ruin, social disorientation, and the desperate search for new forms of identity and social organization. The South found itself torn between nostalgia for the antebellum period when slavery and plantation life provided social stability and the pressures of modernization emphasizing industrialization and urbanization imposed by Northern victory.

Although Faulkner was born nearly thirty years after the war's conclusion, the ideological framework of antebellum society, particularly its racial hierarchies, remained powerfully alive through the systematic implementation of Jim Crow laws. These legal structures, named after "an antebellum minstrel song-and-dance routine," rigidly separated blacks and whites while dominating virtually all aspects of Southern social existence. As John Boles notes, "Jim Crow—a system of laws and custom—rigidly separated blacks and whites and dominated virtually all aspects of southern life," demonstrating how legal segregation perpetuated antebellum racial ideologies.

The Jim Crow system served specific political and economic functions for the white Southern elite. As Louis Gros observes, "The Southern aristocrats started to fear that poor whites and blacks would create an alliance against their interests and thus passed a series of 'Jim Crow' laws to ensure that their privilege would remain untouched." This analysis reveals how legal segregation functioned as a mechanism for preserving class privilege by preventing interracial political coalitions that might challenge elite power.

1.4. Cultural Psychology of the Post-War South

Although Faulkner matured long after the Civil War's end, the conflict continued metaphorically "in the heads of the people who tried to restore the South to its glorious prewar self while opposing the modernization imposed by the North." This psychological continuation of the conflict trapped the South between veneration of its "glorious past" and the demands of modernistic progress, creating a profound cultural dichotomy.

Southern consciousness became fundamentally divided between two competing visions of regional identity. The Progressivists sought to "cast off the chains of the past and to be reborn in the new era," embracing modernization and integration with national economic and social systems. Conversely, the Traditionalists "glorified the South and wanted to return to its prewar state and revive the plantation life and the slavery system," maintaining ideological commitment to antebellum social structures.

The temporal setting of *The Sound and the Fury* in 1928 positions the narrative within this ongoing cultural struggle. The Compson family, despite living in the post-war period, remains psychologically anchored to their glorious past when they ranked among Jefferson, Mississippi's most prominent families. They continue to maintain relationships with African American servants who, while technically free, function more as "free willing family helpers than forced servants," perpetuating paternalistic social relations reminiscent of slavery.

1.5. The Double Impact of World Wars

The First World War compounded the South's existing cultural disorientation by introducing another layer of disillusionment that affected the entire United States. Post-World War I America experienced a profound "crisis of morals and identity," as traditional prewar ideals and moral frameworks collapsed under the weight of mechanized warfare's unprecedented destruction. Citizens found themselves psychologically torn between discredited prewar values and the moral chaos of the modern world.

This national disillusionment proved particularly devastating for the South, which had built its regional identity around pride in its historical legacy. The region now faced the unprecedented challenge of simultaneously navigating post-Civil War reconstruction and post-World War I modernization. The South's characteristic "aversion to everything that seemed to corrupt the values of the Old South, to everything that was new and modern" became its defining tragic flaw, condemning it to perpetual decline. Therefore, the Compson family symbolizes a South attempting to "live in the present through its past," illustrating the psychological impossibility of maintaining antebellum values in a fundamentally transformed world. Faulkner demonstrates what occurs when individuals attempt to navigate contemporary reality using "the codes of the past world that has been long forgotten." The Compsons' reliance on obsolete Old South morals and ideals to cope with present challenges proves not only ineffective but actively destructive.As Johnson notes, "The Compson family represents both aspects of the effects of Modernism:

assimilation into the Modern ethos and the unwillingness to let go of the dying Southern traditions." This dual consciousness—simultaneously embracing and rejecting modernity—creates the fundamental tension that drives the family's tragic trajectory.

2. The Compson Family Decline: Microcosm of Southern Aristocratic Decay

2.1. Family as the Foundation of Southern Social Order

Within Southern cultural tradition, the family unit represents the fundamental cornerstone of both individual identity and broader social organization. Southern society particularly prided itself on the strength of familial bonds and their essential contribution to social stability and cultural continuity. In the antebellum South, family was regarded as a sacred social institution from which individual identity, social worth, and moral standing derived their essential meaning and legitimacy.

Family structures, especially following the Civil War, provided crucial spaces of comfort, understanding, and psychological refuge in a devastated social landscape. Traditional gender roles were strictly defined within this system: men were expected to embody gentlemanly behavior, displaying courage, moral strength, perseverance, and chivalric honor in defense of their family's reputation and social standing. Women were expected to serve as paragons of feminine purity, grace, and virginity until marriage, when they would assume responsibility for producing children to continue the family legacy. Religious faith and profound concern for preserving family reputation provided the moral foundation for these cultural expectations. However, the Civil War and Reconstruction devastated many formerly prominent Southern families economically, socially, and psychologically. Faulkner argues that during this traumatic process, families like the Compsons became disconnected from contemporary reality and retreated into destructive self-absorption. This psychological withdrawal corrupted the core values these families had previously cherished and left subsequent generations completely unprepared to navigate the complexities of the modern world. With the emergence of modernism, traditional family-centered values began systematic deterioration, transforming the Southern family from a reality-based social institution into a nostalgic myth. As one study guide puts it, "The Compsons' corruption of Southern values results in a household that is completely devoid of love, the force that once held the family together."

2.2. The Compson Family's Fundamental Dysfunction

The collapse of the Compson family's integrity can be analyzed through their inability to accept the exhaustion of their pre-Civil War social prominence. As suggested by the epigraph from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the Compsons' present existence represents merely "a shadow" of their illustrious past. Their failure to reconcile themselves with the transformed South and their refusal to acknowledge the depletion of Southern aristocratic power drag them into emotional indifference, destructive self-absorption, and moral depravity. Consequently, life becomes an endless ordeal of suffering, ultimately "signifying nothing."

Corruption permeates every level of the Compson family structure. Mr. Compson maintains only a vague conception of family honor—something he attempts to transmit to Quentin—but remains trapped in alcoholism and fatalistic belief that he cannot control the events affecting his family. Mrs. Compson exhibits equally destructive self-absorption, indulging in hypochondria and self-pity while maintaining emotional distance from her children. Quentin's obsession with traditional Southern morality renders him psychologically paralyzed and unable to move beyond his family's moral failures. Caddy violates Southern ideals of feminine purity through sexual promiscuity, behavior that her daughter will later repeat. Jason wastes his intellectual abilities on self-pity and greed, constantly pursuing personal gain without higher moral aspirations. Benjy commits no intentional moral violations, but the Compsons' decline manifests physically through his intellectual disability and his inability to distinguish between moral and immoral behavior.

This comprehensive corruption results in a household completely devoid of love—the essential force that traditionally held Southern families together. Both parents remain distant and ineffective in their roles, while Caddy, the only child capable of genuine affection, is eventually disowned by the family. Although Quentin loves Caddy, his affection is neurotic, obsessive, and overprotective rather than healthy. None of the male family members experience authentic romantic love, rendering them incapable of marriage and family continuation.

2.3. Parental Failure and Emotional Abandonment

Contrary to superficial analysis, Caddy's loss of honor and sexual behavior is not the primary cause of the Compson family's disintegration. While she certainly becomes the focus of Quentin's psychological obsession and Jason considers her responsible for his personal failures, and even Benjy's most painful memories relate to Caddy's sexual activities, the fundamental problem lies elsewhere. The true source of family disintegration stems from the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Compson have consistently isolated themselves from their children, creating emotional distance that prevents genuine family bonding.

The core dysfunction of the Compson family is the absence of significant emotional connections and meaningful communication among family members. They function not as an authentic family unit but merely as a collection of related individuals seeking shelter under the same roof. They never intentionally gather as a family group, and when they accidentally encounter each other, they immediately engage in bitter arguments and mutual recrimination. Despite neither parent having important obligations or responsibilities, both deliberately shut themselves off from their children's emotional needs.

2.4. Mr. Jason Compson III: The Ineffective Patriarch

Pride, gallantry, and protection of family honor represent the defining characteristics of Southern aristocracy that should logically be embodied by the head of a family with aristocratic origins. However, contrary to these noble expectations, Mr. Jason Compson III appears as a completely ineffective figure within his family relationships. David Minter provides a

comprehensive description of the Compson household head as "an impotent, nihilistic alcoholic who amuses himself with the feelings and demands of his children. He is unsuccessful at displaying the tenderness and benevolence he feels for them."

Mr. Compson's statements to his son Quentin reveal his nihilistic worldview and failure as a father: "Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said." This excerpt demonstrates the cynical life philosophy Mr. Compson has developed through years of disappointment and defeat. Unaware of his son's sensitive psychological nature, he constantly expresses ideas about temporal displacement in relation to sorrow and disappointment. Consequently, as an inconsiderate father, he subjects his son to physical and emotional experiences of psychological dispossession. This quotation also exemplifies Mr. Compson's fundamental nihilism. His cynical attitude leads him to conceptualize time as the primary destructive force that ruins human existence. As long as temporal consciousness exists, humanity remains doomed to successive experiences of misfortune and suffering. Surrendering to fatalistic philosophy, he believes he possesses no power to alter the course of events that signal his family's inevitable disintegration.

2.5. Mrs. Caroline Compson: The Self-Absorbed Matriarch

Like her husband, Mrs. Compson proves unable to reconcile the conflict between the South's glorious past and its diminished present circumstances. Her psychological difficulties share common ground with her husband's, but she faces an additional challenge in adapting to the transformed South. Within traditional Southern aristocracy, women were closely associated with ideals of purity, chastity, and moral virtue. They were regarded as devoted and affectionate protectors of their families, serving as guardians of domestic harmony and moral instruction. Furthermore, their social status as cherished objects prevented them from developing substantial intellectual capacity or engaging in serious social discourse. While they received education, it was designed not to enable discussion of important social issues but to fulfill the requirements of respectable education appropriate to their aristocratic tradition. Their predetermined social roles rendered them ineffective participants in broader social and political matters. Consequently, their primary concern became displaying their family's affluence and nobility through elaborate dress at ostentatious and artificial social gatherings. However, following the Civil War, none of these markers of aristocratic distinction retained their former importance or social value. Women of Southern gentry found themselves reduced to mere shadows of their previous splendor and social significance. Consequently, they could do nothing but witness the systematic disintegration of their families and social world.

Mrs. Caroline Bascomb Compson exemplifies a woman who follows this tragic trajectory of decline. The conflict between traditional concepts of womanhood and new behavioral expectations presents serious challenges that Mrs. Compson cannot successfully navigate. She finds it impossible to act contrary to the behavioral framework she internalized throughout her

upbringing and adult life. As a consequence of her incompetence in resolving this psychological conflict, she retreats into hypochondria and self-absorption, just as her husband seeks refuge in nihilism and fatalistic philosophy. Incapable of fulfilling basic maternal responsibilities, she depends entirely upon her African American servant Dilsey for the care of her children and the management of the entire household. Cleanth Brooks provides a penetrating analysis of Mrs. Compson's character in his essay "Man, Time, and Eternity": "The basic cause of the breakup of the Compson family...is the cold and self-centered mother who is sensitive about the social status of her own family, the Bascombs, who feels the birth of an idiot son [Benjy] as a kind of personal affront, who spoils and corrupts her favorite son [Jason], and who withholds any real love and affection from her children and her husband."

Brooks's analysis reveals how Mrs. Compson's selfishness and negligence deprive her children of essential maternal love and emotional support. Rather than attending to her children's developmental needs, she focuses her energy obsessively on family reputation and social status. Her attempt to change her mentally disabled son's name demonstrates this preoccupation with social appearance. Because she regards her Bascomb lineage as distinguished, she initially names her youngest son Maury after her brother, honoring her family heritage. However, when the boy's intellectual disability becomes apparent and threatens to damage the family reputation, his name is changed to Benjamin at age five.

Moreover, Mrs. Compson's fixation on family honor causes her to repudiate her daughter Caddy because of the disgrace Caddy brings upon the family through her marriage to a man who is not the father of her child. After severing her relationship with Caddy, Mrs. Compson's inflexible arrogance leads her to forbid other family members from mentioning Caddy's name. Consequently, Caddy learns of her father's death only by chance while reading a newspaper, highlighting the complete breakdown of family communication and emotional connection.

2.6. Dilsey as Moral Contrast and Hope for Redemption

The children, thus emotionally abandoned by their parents, become dependent upon the care of Dilsey, the elderly African American servant who emerges as the novel's true heroine and stands in sharp contrast to the Compson family's moral corruption. Dilsey represents the only genuinely loving member of the household and the only character who maintains her moral values without succumbing to the corrupting influence of self-absorption. She thus comes to represent hope for the renewal of traditional Southern values in an uncorrupted and positive form.

The novel concludes with Dilsey serving as the torchbearer for authentic Southern values and, as such, represents the only possibility for preserving what remains valuable in the Compson legacy. Through Dilsey's character, Faulkner creates a powerful irony regarding white supremacist ideology and demonstrates the hypocrisy of the white Southern aristocratic family. As one commentary notes, "Only Dilsey seems to preserve the old Southern values—honor, kindness, hard work, and religious faith—without the corruption of self-absorption."

This characterization proves particularly significant because Dilsey, as an African American servant, exists outside the family structure yet embodies the moral principles that the white aristocratic family has completely abandoned. Her presence suggests that authentic Southern values—when divorced from the corrupting influences of racial superiority and class privilege—might provide a foundation for genuine human dignity and social renewal. Through this ironic reversal, Faulkner implies that "the problem is not necessarily the values of the old South, but the fact that these values were corrupted by families such as the Compsons and must be recaptured for any Southern greatness to return.»

Lesson 20: Modernist Elements in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*

Beyond examining modernist themes such as Southern cultural decay, identity crisis, and nihilistic philosophy, *The Sound and the Fury* exemplifies modernist literature through its sophisticated employment of stream of consciousness, Freudian psychological analysis, subjective truth relativism, multiple narrative perspectives, temporal disruption, fragmented structural organization, discontinuous storytelling, foreshadowing, symbolism, imagery, and literary allusions.

1. Stream of Consciousness as Narrative Innovation

1.1. Theoretical Foundation and Literary Application

Stream of consciousness represents a revolutionary narrative technique that provides readers direct access to characters' spontaneous flow of thoughts and emotions, enabling profound understanding of the psychological mechanisms driving the Compson family toward their tragic conclusion. This technique proves superior to conventional monologue by presenting character thoughts in their natural, unorganized state rather than logical, sequential arrangement. Through stream of consciousness, readers can penetrate characters' psychological depths, particularly accessing unconscious layers where authentic truth resides.

As Ahmed and Mohammed note, "Stream of consciousness can be well understood systematically. Consciousness is abstract and alterable, but from their interior monologue, different emotions can truly be shown in the writing." The technique allows writers to capture the natural flow of human thought, which often moves associatively rather than logically.

1.2. Benjy's Section: Sensory-Based Consciousness

The novel's opening section presents Benjy's interior monologue, demonstrating how a mentally disabled individual depends entirely on sensory perceptions to communicate his inner experience to readers. Benjy's stream of consciousness emerges through smell, hearing, and vision, helping readers understand his emotional reality despite his inability to articulate feelings verbally. For instance, Benjy consistently associates his sister Caddy with the smell of trees: "Caddy smelled like trees." This quotation represents Benjy's stream of consciousness, where he relies on olfactory memory to express his deep love for his sister—a scent that remains exclusively associated with her throughout his consciousness.

Benjy's mental disability prevents him from expressing his profound attachment to Caddy and his overwhelming sadness at her loss through conventional communication. His stream of consciousness reveals free association between the word "caddie" heard while in the former Compson pasture and his sister "Caddy." This association is not random but demonstrates Benjy's intense emotional connection to his sister and his inability to accept her absence.

Benjy's narrative appears incoherent because he presents family episodes without logical connection, reinforcing his mental state as a child who observes family decay without possessing the capacity to intervene. This incoherence stems from Benjy's inability to comprehend temporal sequence—he exists in a chaotic world where time lacks meaning. Consequently, Benjy moves forward and backward through time in ways that initially puzzle readers but ultimately reveal the associative nature of memory and consciousness.

1.3. Quentin's Section: Psychological Imbalance and Temporal Obsession

Quentin's stream of consciousness reveals his profound psychological instability and his obsession with traditional moral values that render him incapable of distinguishing between reality and fantasy. Due to Quentin's inability to abandon past values in the modern world, he imagines confessing incest to his father—a fantasy that demonstrates his confusion between actual experience and psychological wish fulfillment. His obsession with family honor causes him to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, as evidenced in his interior monologue: "I have committed incest I said father It was I it was not Dalton Ames."

Quentin's stream of consciousness is particularly significant because it illuminates the theme of family disintegration while he studies at Harvard University. Through his interior monologue, readers learn about the causes and consequences of actions contributing to family decay, including Caddy's promiscuity, Quentin's relationship with his nihilistic father, and the psychological factors leading to his eventual suicide. His stream of consciousness reveals his inability to live meaningfully in a world devoid of the moral values he considers essential to existence.

1.4. Jason's Section: Materialistic Consciousness

Jason's stream of consciousness reveals his materialistic character, which results from his mother's influence and her conviction that Caddy has stolen his rightful inheritance. Mrs. Compson has convinced Jason that his sister's behavior has deprived him of financial security, leading him to develop sadistic tendencies and an obsession with recovering money through any available means. Jason's materialistic nature becomes clear through his interior monologue, which focuses primarily on financial concerns and personal grievances rather than emotional or moral considerations.

2. Freudian Psychology and Unconscious Desires

2.1. Theoretical Framework of Psychoanalytic Influence

The integration of Freudian psychology, emphasizing unconscious mental processes, represents a fundamental characteristic of modernist literature. Freud argued that authentic human desires are repressed from conscious awareness due to societal expectations and moral standards defining acceptable behavior. He proposed that these repressed desires continue to influence behavior from what he termed "the subconscious" or "unconscious" mind.

According to Monte (1977), "Psychoanalytic theories assume the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate an individual's overt actions." Freud's tripartite model of the mind —consisting of the id (instinctual drives), ego (rational mediator), and superego (moral conscience)—provides a framework for understanding character motivation and psychological conflict.

2.2. Quentin's Incestuous Desires and Social Taboos

Faulkner incorporates Freudian concepts through Quentin's character, who develops feelings that violate societal norms by desiring a sexual relationship with his sister Caddy. Quentin's stream of consciousness reveals this forbidden desire: "we [Quentin and Caddy] could have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us." Quentin recognizes his feelings as morally wrong, describing them as worthy of damnation, yet he remains psychologically unable to abandon these desires.

This psychological conflict exemplifies Freud's theory of repression, where socially unacceptable desires are forced into the unconscious but continue to influence behavior and emotional well-being. Quentin's inability to resolve this conflict between unconscious desire and social prohibition ultimately contributes to his psychological deterioration and suicide.

3. Multiple Perspectives, Truth Relativity, and Narrative Polyphony

3.1. Theoretical Foundation of Polyphonic Narrative

By presenting four distinct narrative perspectives on identical situations, Faulkner questions the existence of singular, objective reality. For Faulkner, reality consists of "individual realities" resembling images produced by kaleidoscopes or impressionistic paintings, leading critics to describe his style as impressionistic. Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the concept of polyphony to describe fiction characterized by "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (Bakhtin 6). In polyphonic novels, character voices are not dominated by authorial perspective; instead, multiple voices coexist and interact, each maintaining distinct worldviews and values.

3.2. Structural Organization of Multiple Perspectives

The four sections are narrated from different viewpoints, each presenting situations and character reactions either filtered through involved narrators' consciousness or from pseudo-external perspectives. They differ significantly in stylistic approach due to characters' varying levels of consciousness and differing mental and emotional capacities.

Language usage varies dramatically across sections, ranging from colloquial, familiar spoken language in Benjy's and Jason's sections to refined intellectual discourse in Quentin's section and the final omniscient portion. Sentence structures range from simple constructions with finite past-tense verbs to complex modified sentences reflecting characters' educational and psychological sophistication.

3.3. Temporal and Perspectival Limitations

Benjy's section presents a mentally disabled person's limited perspective that nonetheless remains unrestricted temporally, switching between time periods and covering various phases of Caddy's story. Readers receive a comprehensive but confused introduction to central family problems through Benjy's fragmented consciousness.

Quentin's narrative restricts itself to one person's internal perspective while being additionally constrained temporally to a single day, with memories focusing exclusively on topics related to Caddy's moral fall. Jason's section primarily presents contemporary events with memories restricted to circumstances surrounding his niece's admission to the family, connected to Caddy's disappearance from Compson life.

The innovative structural organization results from perspective shifts throughout the four sections, with Faulkner's primary objective being psychological description rather than plot development. As one scholar notes, "This conveys the idea that there is no one, true reality, but that reality is dependent on the person who perceives it, i.e. reality is always subjective and never objective."

4. Temporal Disruption and Chronological Fragmentation

4.1. Revolutionary Treatment of Time

Faulkner's treatment and representation of time in *The Sound and the Fury* was recognized as revolutionary, suggesting that time is not a constant or objectively comprehensible entity. Faulkner demonstrates that humans can interact with temporal experience in various subjective ways.

In Benjy's section, conventional clock time is almost completely disregarded because Benjy remains oblivious to temporal sequence. He makes no distinction between recent events and those occurring years previously, with memories of childhood experiences remaining as vivid as contemporary occurrences.

4.2. Character-Specific Temporal Relationships

Sartre explains that "In Faulkner's work there is never any progression, never anything which comes from the future," emphasizing how characters remain psychologically anchored to past experiences rather than moving toward future possibilities. Benjy's enthusiasm in 1928 at the memory of walking with Caddy is as fresh as his excitement in childhood because he remembers only events that brought happiness.

Unlike Benjy's temporal oblivion, Quentin expends enormous energy attempting to understand and control time. His psychological fixation on past events renders the present submerged in historical memory. Quentin attempts to stop time's progression through suicide, which he views as the only escape from temporal consciousness.

Jason, conversely, has no use for the past, focusing exclusively on present circumstances and immediate future opportunities. For Jason, time exists solely for personal advantage and cannot be wasted on nostalgic reflection.

5. Symbolism and Imagery

5.1. Symbolic Representation of Family Decline

The Compson family's sale of Benjy's former pasture symbolizes their aristocratic decline, as they sacrifice their last remaining asset from their former status to finance Caddy's wedding and Quentin's Harvard education and so preserve their damaged reputation. The novel's temporal setting in April symbolizes "growth and decay," reflecting the family's transformation from their former prominence in the Old South to their current moral and financial deterioration. Narcissus flowers that Benjy holds at the novel's conclusion symbolize the inevitable disintegration of the Compson family. The fact that these flowers are broken directly represents family fragmentation and moral collapse.

5.2. Olfactory and Temporal Symbolism

Perfume represents Caddy's rebellion against family and societal norms, symbolizing her loss of virginity and moral purity. Benjy dislikes this odor because it signals his sister's loss of innocence, which he cherished and which contributed to family stability. Quentin's watch symbolizes his obsession with temporal control. His attempt to stop time by removing watch hands demonstrates his psychological desire to escape temporal progression, though his broken watch continues ticking, indicating the futility of his efforts. The snake symbol represents destruction and family disintegration, appearing when Caddy climbs a tree to observe family secrets. Honeysuckle connects to death, appearing after Quentin learns of Caddy's sexual behavior and decides upon suicide as his solution to unbearable truth.

6. Literary Allusions and Intertextual Connections

6.1. Shakespearean Foundation

The novel's title derives from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, specifically Act V, Scene 5, where *Macbeth* declares life to be "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." This allusion establishes the thematic framework for understanding modern existence as chaotic, fragmented, and ultimately meaningless. Faulkner implements the Shakespearean concept that life represents merely a shadow, with this imagery appearing throughout Quentin's section and the entire novel. The implication suggests that modern humanity performs only shadow-actions, being unsuitable for coping with contemporary problems.

6.2. Biblical and Contemporary Literary References

The apple tree near the Compson mansion alludes to the Garden of Eden, with Caddy's climbing representing Eve's disobedience and original sin. When Caddy climbs the tree during her

grandmother's funeral, she disobeys paternal authority and accepts potential punishment, paralleling Eve's defiance of divine command.

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