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Modernism: Characteristic Features: Style

Introduction

Modernism in English literature was not merely a new artistic movement; it was a cultural revolution that redefined how writers perceived reality, self, and art. The confident realism of the Victorian era could no longer express the fragmentation, uncertainty, and alienation of modern experience. Modernist writers therefore sought new techniques and styles that would break from convention and capture the disjointed rhythms of contemporary life. Their work is characterized by experimentation in form and language and subjectivity in perception.

I. Stream of Consciousness:

One of the most distinctive stylistic innovations of Modernist literature is the stream of consciousness technique, which seeks to represent the continuous flow of thoughts, feelings, and sensory impressions within a character's mind. Unlike traditional narrative forms that present events in logical sequence, stream of consciousness attempts to capture the *inner workings of consciousness* as they occur — fragmented, non-linear, and often unpunctuated. This technique was influenced by the psychological theories of William James and Sigmund Freud, who emphasized the complexity of human thought and the significance of the unconscious. Writers such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Dorothy Richardson used this method to portray the subjectivity of experience, blurring the boundaries between memory, perception, and imagination. In Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, for instance, the narrative moves fluidly between Clarissa's inner reflections and external reality, allowing readers to experience the immediacy of her consciousness. Similarly, Joyce's *Ulysses* brings readers inside Leopold Bloom's mind through fragmented associations and sensory impressions that mirror the rhythm of thought itself. The stream of consciousness

technique thus became a hallmark of modernist style, reflecting both the psychological depth and the formal experimentation that define the movement.

II. Fragmentation and Non-linear Structure:

Modernist literature is often fragmented in form and structure, mirroring the disordered and uncertain nature of modern existence. The traditional linear narrative is abandoned in favor of discontinuous, collage-like forms. In T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, multiple voices, languages, and cultural references coexist without a single guiding perspective. Similarly, Joyce's *Ulysses* unfolds through a complex structure that blurs the boundaries between reality, myth, and consciousness. This fragmentation not only reflects the chaos of modern life but also invites readers to participate actively in constructing meaning. The text becomes open and interpretative, emphasizing ambiguity rather than resolution.

II. The Use of Myth Symbolism and Allusion

Modernist writers frequently used myth and symbolism as organizing principles in their works. T. S. Eliot described this approach as the “mythic method,” a way of imposing order on the “immense panorama of futility and anarchy.” Myths provided a universal framework through which the modern world could be understood. In *Ulysses*, Joyce parallels the ordinary life of Leopold Bloom with Homer's *Odyssey*, suggesting that mythic patterns still shape human experience. Symbolism, borrowed partly from French Symbolist poets, became a vital stylistic device — enabling writers to express abstract ideas and emotions through vivid imagery and suggestion.

III. Irony and Paradox

Modernist literature often employs irony, paradox, and contrast to express the contradictions of modern life. Writers used irony not only as a stylistic device but as a worldview — a way to confront the absurdity and disillusionment of the age. The juxtaposition of high culture with everyday language, or of the sacred with the profane, became a common feature of Modernist writing. This ironic style reflects the tension between despair and artistic vitality, between the recognition of meaninglessness and the will to create.

Conclusion

Modernism revolutionized literature by redefining both style and substance. Its characteristic features, experimentation, subjectivity, fragmentation, mythic structure, and linguistic innovation, arose from a profound awareness of the instability of modern life. Rejecting tradition, Modernist writers turned to art as a means of understanding a world marked by disillusionment and change. Their style is at once introspective and experimental, intellectual and emotional, fragmented yet deeply unified by its search for meaning. Through their daring innovations, writers such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf transformed literature into a mirror of the modern mind — restless, uncertain, and endlessly creative. Modernism thus remains one of the most influential and challenging movements in the history of English literature, a testimony to humanity's struggle to find order and beauty amid chaos.