



Tikrit University
College Of Education For Women
English Department

Subject: Drama

Stage: Fourth Stage

Title of the lecture: MODERNISM IN ENGLISH DRAMA

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MODERNISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

1. INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY MODERNISM (C. 1890–1940)

Modernism was an unprecedented cultural, aesthetic, and intellectual movement that swept through Western literature and art in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rooted in the dreadful sociopolitical disruptions of World War I, rapid industrialization, urbanization, and groundbreaking intellectual shifts (such as Freud's psychoanalysis, Marx's political economy, Nietzsche's philosophy, and Einstein's physics), Modernism rejected 19th-century Victorian conventionalism, linear storytelling, and moral didacticism.

"Make it new!" — Ezra Pound's famous modernism rallying cry encapsulating the radical break from traditional forms.

CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF LITERARY MODERNISM

Fragmentation & Non-linear Narrative: Modernist texts abandon chronological plots, presenting worldviews through fragmented structures, multiple perspectives, and collage techniques.

Subjectivity & Internal Consciousness: Emphasis shifted from external social reality to internal psychological states, popularizing techniques like stream of consciousness and interior monologues.

Disillusionment & Alienation: Reflecting the trauma of WWI, literature explored urban loneliness, existential dread, and the collapse of traditional religious and moral certainty.

Mythic Method: Writers used classical mythology as an architectural frame to bring order to the chaos of the contemporary world (e.g., T.S. Eliot, James Joyce).

MAJOR FIGURES & LANDMARK WORKS IN MODERNIST LITERATURE

GENRE	AUTHOR	KEY WORKS	LITERARY CONTRIBUTION
Fiction	James Joyce	<i>James Joyce Ulysses (1922), A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>	Pioneered epic stream-of-consciousness and complex mythic parallels.
Fiction	Virginia Woolf	<i>Mrs. Dalloway (1925), To the Lighthouse (1927)</i>	Explored fluid temporal subjective experience and female consciousness.
Poetry	T. S. Eliot	<i>The Waste Land (1922), The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock</i>	Defined the fragmented, disillusioned postwar spiritual landscape.
Poetry	W. B. Yeats	<i>The Second Coming, Sailing to Byzantium</i>	Bridged 19th-century Romanticism with dark Modernist symbolism.
Fiction	Joseph Conrad	<i>Heart of Darkness (1899), Lord Jim</i>	Examined moral ambiguity, imperialism, and narrative unreliability.

2. MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA & ITS CHARACTERISTICS

Modern English Drama emerged as a powerful departure from 19th-century melodramas, well-made plays, and superficial farce. Heavily influenced by Continental European pioneers like Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, and August Strindberg, British theater transformed into a serious medium for critical social inquiry, psychological exploration, and radical aesthetic experimentation.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

Realism and Naturalism (Drama of Ideas): Theater shifted toward authentic representations of middle- and working-class life, addressing controversial socio-economic issues such as poverty, women's rights, class hypocrisy, and disease.

Poetic and Mythic Drama: Reacting against pure prose realism, dramatists revived verse drama and incorporated regional folklore to express deeper spiritual and universal truths.

The Theatre of the Absurd: Emerging post-WWII, absurdist drama abandoned logical plots and articulate dialogue to depict the fundamental meaningless, repetitive, and illogical nature of human existence.

Psychological Subtext & Interiority: Dialogue became rich with subtext—what characters leave unsaid became as important as what is explicitly spoken (e.g., silence, pauses, monologues).

Experimental Staging & Minimal Minimalism: Breakdown of the "fourth wall", usage of bare or symbolic sets, mimes, and alienation effects (Brechtian techniques) to engage the audience intellectually rather than purely emotionally.