

# MODERNISM: Literature 1914-1945





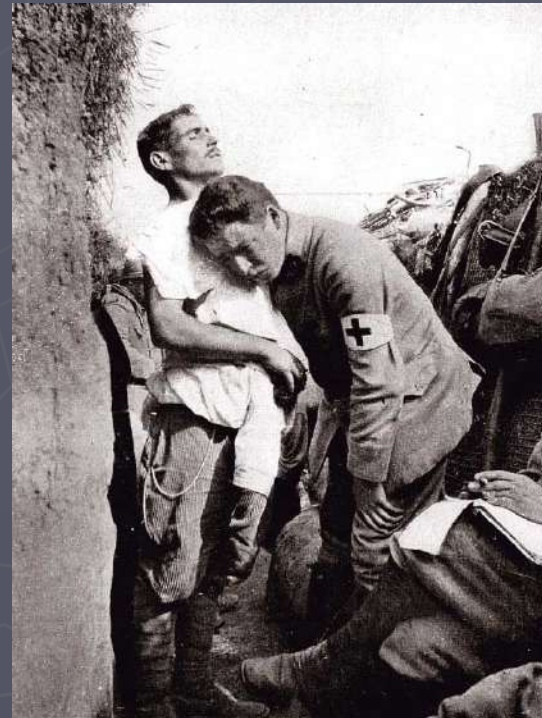


# Causes of the Modernist Temper

- ▶ WWI
- ▶ Urbanization
- ▶ Industrialization
- ▶ Immigration
- ▶ Technological Evolution
- ▶ Growth of Modern Science
- ▶ Influence of Austrian Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)
- ▶ Influence of German Karl Marx (1818-1883)



# WWI



# URBANIZATION

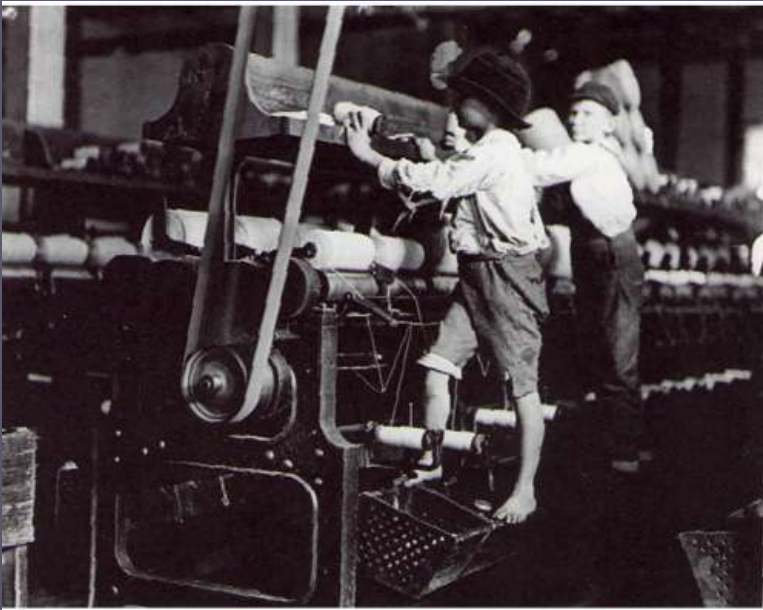


Looking North along Mulberry St., c 1900





# INDUSTRIALIZATION



**Replacing bobbins on machinery**

*Kids At Work, Russell Freedman, Scholastic, 1994. Photo by Lewis Hine*



**Winding Large Rotating and Stationary Armatures**

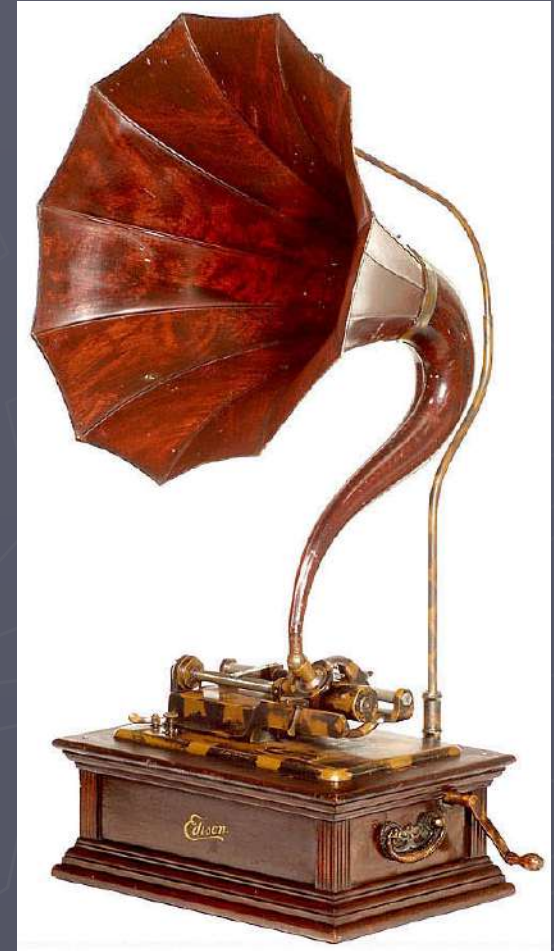
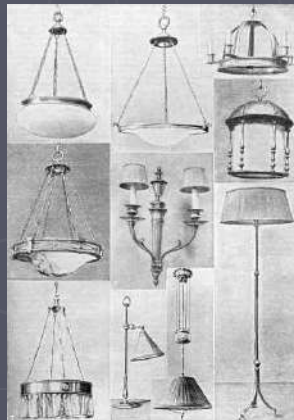
# IMMIGRATION

Oscar Handlin states, "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history."





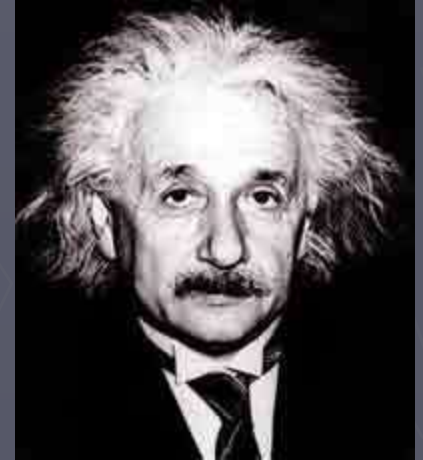
# TECHNOLOGICAL EVOLUTION



# GROWTH OF MODERN SCIENCE

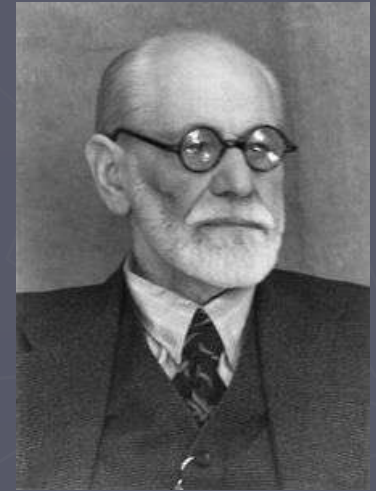
Scientists became aware that

- ▶ the atom was not the smallest unit of matter
- ▶ matter was not indestructible
- ▶ both time and space were relative to an observer's position
- ▶ some phenomena were so small that attempts at measurement would alter them
- ▶ Some outcomes could be predicted only in terms of statistical probability
- ▶ the universe might be infinite in size and yet infinitely expanding



# SIGMUND FREUD (1856-1939)

Invented the use of psychoanalysis  
as a means to study one's  
“unconscious”

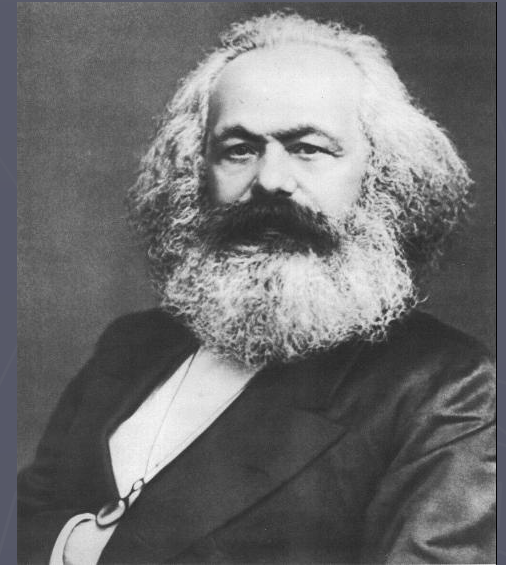




# KARL MARX (1818-1883)

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”

“The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”



# SHIFTS IN THE MODERN NATION

- ▶ from country to city
- ▶ from farm to factory
- ▶ from native born to new citizen
- ▶ introduction to “mass” culture (pop culture)
- ▶ continual movement
- ▶ split between science and the literary tradition (“science vs. letters”)

# 1920's: THE JAZZ AGE

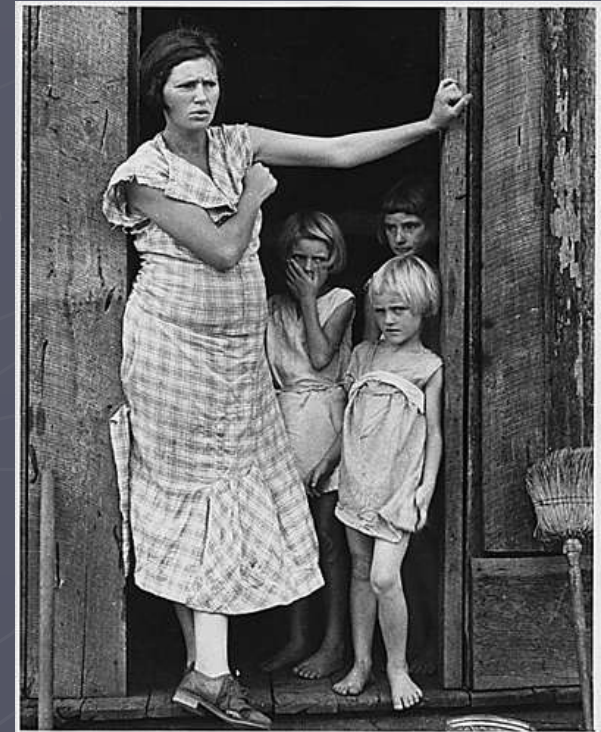
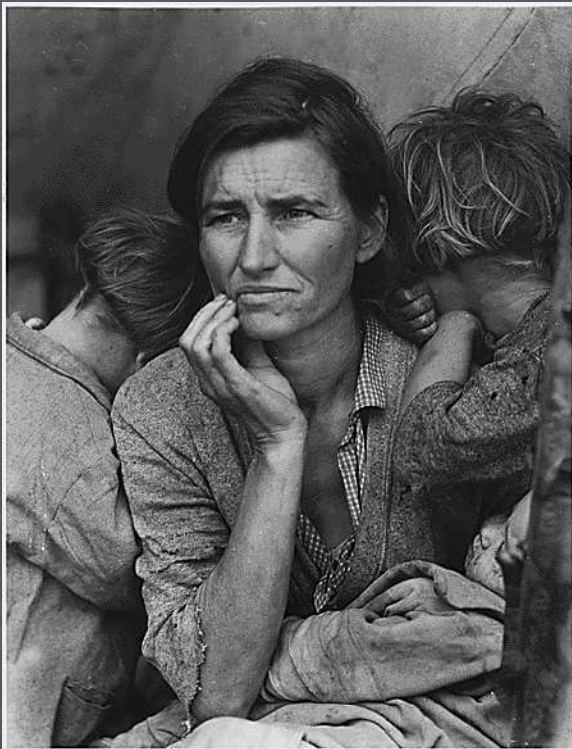
To F. Scott Fitzgerald it was an "age of miracles, an age of art, an age of excess, an age of satire."





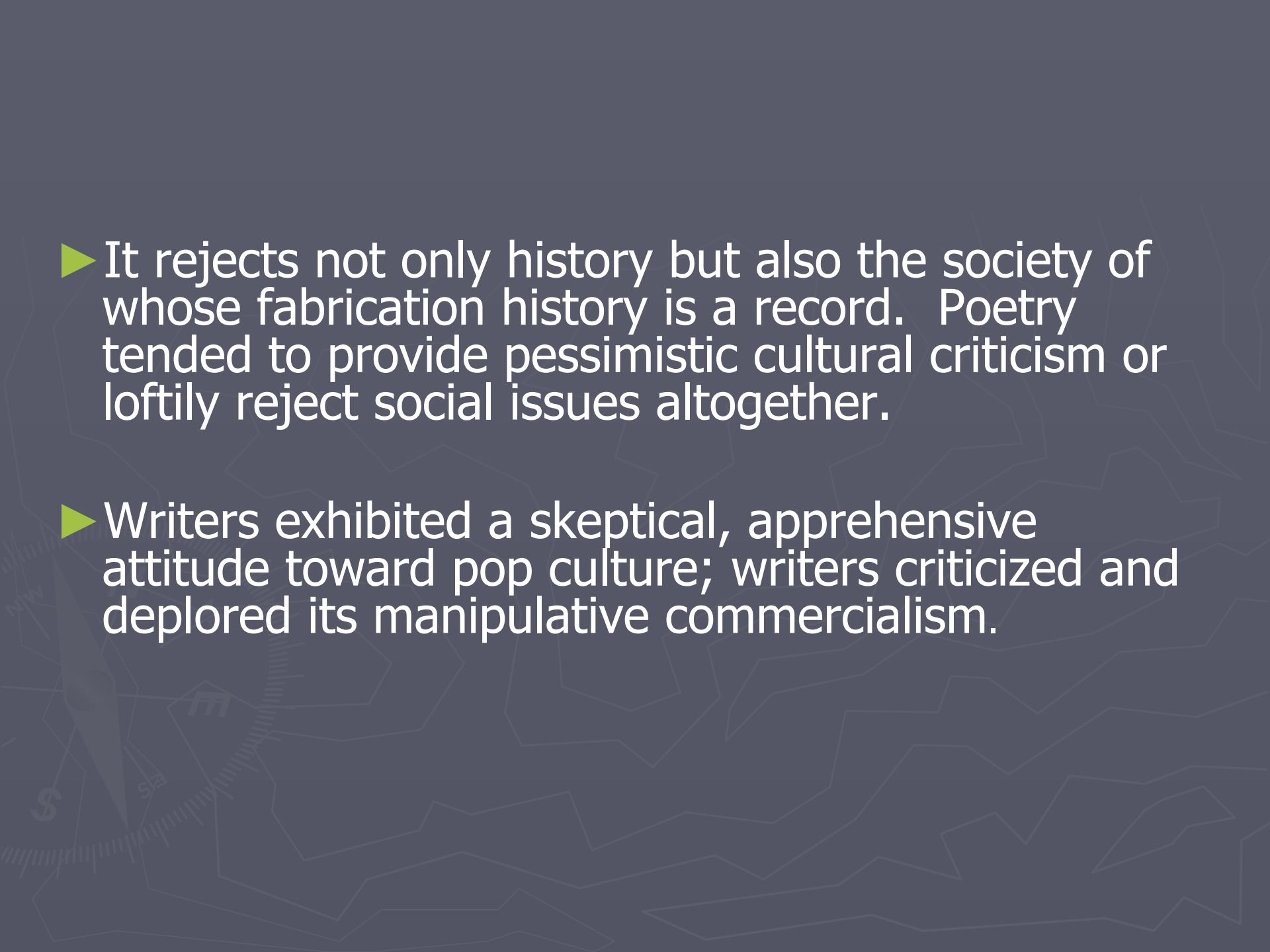
# 1930's: THE DEPRESSION

"True individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made." – Franklin D. Roosevelt



# THE SPIRIT OF MODERNIST LITERATURE

- ▶ Conviction that the previously sustaining structures of human life, whether social, political, religious, or artistic, had been either destroyed or shown up as falsehoods or fantasies. Therefore, art had to be renovated.
- ▶ Modernist writing is marked by a strong and conscious break with tradition. It rejects traditional values and assumptions.
- ▶ “Modern” implies a historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, loss, and despair.

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- The background of the slide features a faint, stylized graphic of a compass rose and a ruler. The compass rose is located in the lower-left quadrant, with its needle pointing towards the top-left. The ruler is positioned horizontally across the lower-left, with markings and numbers visible. The overall background is a dark, textured grey with subtle geometric patterns.
- ▶ It rejects not only history but also the society of whose fabrication history is a record. Poetry tended to provide pessimistic cultural criticism or loftily reject social issues altogether.
  - ▶ Writers exhibited a skeptical, apprehensive attitude toward pop culture; writers criticized and deplored its manipulative commercialism.



# CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNIST WRITING

- ▶ A movement away from realism into abstractions
- ▶ A deliberate complexity, even to the point of elitism, forcing readers to be very well-educated in order to read these works
- ▶ A high degree of aesthetic self-consciousness
- ▶ Questions of what constitutes the nature of being
- ▶ A breaking with tradition and conventional modes of form, resulting in fragmentation and bold, highly innovative experimentation
- ▶ A variety in content because with a stable external world in question, subjectivity was ever more valued and accepted in literature
- ▶ Along with the social realist and proletarian prose of the 1920s and 1930s came a significant outpouring of political and protest poetry.

# TECHNIQUES IN MODERNIST WORKS

The modernists were highly conscious that they were being modern—that they were “making it new”—and this consciousness is manifest in the modernists’ radical use of a kind of formlessness.

- ▶ Collapsed plots
- ▶ Fragmentary techniques
- ▶ Shifts in perspective, voice, and tone
- ▶ Stream-of-consciousness point of view

# COLLAPSED PLOTS

- ▶ It will seem to begin arbitrarily, to advance without explanation, and to end without resolution, consisting of vivid segments juxtaposed without cushioning or integrating transitions.
- ▶ It will suggest rather than assert, making use of symbols and images instead of statements.
- ▶ The reader must participate in the making of the poem or story by digging the coherent structure out that, on its surface, it seems to lack. Therefore, the search for meaning, even if it does not succeed, becomes meaningful in itself.
- ▶ Its rhetoric will be understated, ironic.



# FRAGMENTARY TECHNIQUES

- ▶ Compared with earlier writing, modernist literature is notable for what it omits—the explanations, interpretations, connections, summaries, and distancing that provide continuity, perspective, and security in traditional literature.
- ▶ The idea of order, sequence, and unity in works of art is sometimes abandoned because they are now considered by writers as only expressions of a desire for coherence rather than actual reflections of reality. The long work will be an assemblage of fragments, the short work a carefully realized fragment. Some modernist literature registers more as a collage. This fragmentation in literature was meant to reflect the reality of the flux and fragmentation of one's life.
- ▶ Fragments will be drawn from diverse areas of experience. Vignettes of contemporary life, chunks of popular culture, dream imagery, and symbolism drawn from the author's private repertory of life experiences are also important. A work built from these various levels and kinds of material may move across time and space, shift from the public to the personal, and open literature as a field for every sort of concern.

# SHIFTS IN PERSPECTIVE, VOICE, AND TONE

- ▶ The inclusion of all sorts of material previously deemed “unliterary” in works of high seriousness involved the use of language that would also previously have been thought improper, including representations of the speech of the uneducated and the inarticulate, the colloquial, slangy, and the popular. The traditional educated literary voice, conveying truth and culture, lost its authority.
- ▶ Prose writers strove for directness, compression, and vividness. They were sparing of words. The average novel became quite a bit shorter than it had been in the nineteenth century.
- ▶ Modern fiction tends to be written in the first person or to limit the reader to one character’s point of view on the action. This limitation accorded with the modernist sense that “truth” does not exist objectively but is the product of a personal interaction with reality. The selected point of view was often that of a naïve or marginal person—a child or an outsider—to convey better the reality of confusion rather than the myth of certainty.

# STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS

- ▶ Stream-of-consciousness is a literary practice that attempts to depict the mental and emotional reactions of characters to external events, rather than the events themselves, through the practice of reproducing the unedited, continuous sequence of thoughts that run through a person's head, most usually without punctuation or literary interference.
- ▶ The writers of the stream-of-consciousness novel seem to share certain common assumptions:
  - that the significant existence of human beings is to be found in their mental-emotional processes and not in the outside world,
  - that this mental-emotional life is disjointed and illogical, and
  - that a pattern of free psychological association rather than of logical relation determines the shifting sequence of thought and feeling
- ▶ The present day stream-of-consciousness novel is a product of Freudian psychology with its structure of subliminal levels.

# ASSOCIATIVE TECHNIQUES

- ▶ Modernists sometimes used a collection of seemingly random impressions and literary, historical, philosophical, or religious allusions with which readers are expected to make the connections on their own.
- ▶ This reference to details of the past was a way of reminding readers of the old, lost coherence.
- ▶ T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is arguably the greatest example of this allusive manner of writing; it includes a variety of Buddhist, Christian, Greek, Judaic, German and occult references, among others.



# IMAGISM

- ▶ Includes an eclectic group of English and American poets working between 1912 and 1917 including Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and William Carlos Williams.
- ▶ It was a reaction against a prevailing cultural romanticism which encouraged social optimism concerning the ultimate perfectibility of humankind and which led, in turn, to art that imagists believed was soft and weakly expressive.
- ▶ The imagists aimed to strip away poetry's tendency toward dense wordiness and sentimentality and to crystallize poetic meaning in clear, neatly juxtaposed images.
- ▶ Ezra Pound defines the image in almost photographic terms as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. . . . It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."
- ▶ Early influences on the imagists included the symbolist poets, classical Greek and Roman poetry, and Chinese and Japanese verse forms, in particular the haiku, or *hokku*.

# MODERNISM INCLUDES OTHER “ISMS”

- ▶ Fauvism
- ▶ Cubism
- ▶ Dadaism
- ▶ Expressionism
- ▶ Surrealism
- ▶ Symbolism

# FAUVISM

- ▶ A number of French artists such as Rouault, Derain, Dufy, Vlaminck, and Braque who grouped around Matisse and exhibited together from 1905 to 1907.
- ▶ The outraged critical reaction to their free use of color and distortion of form led to their being called Les Fauves (“the wild beasts”). Although Matisse was the only member of the group to continue with the fauvist style, the movement had a revolutionary impact on the development of modern art. Many of its adherents moved on to experiments with cubism.
- ▶ According to Tate, the United Kingdom’s national museum of British and Modern Art, fauvist paintings were characterized by artists’ use of strident color and seemingly wild brushwork.



Henri Matisse. *Woman with a Hat*, 1905.

# CUBISM

- ▶ A 20<sup>th</sup> century art movement that inspired other art forms.
- ▶ In cubist artworks, objects are broken up and reassembled into an abstract form.
- ▶ Analytic cubism used geometric shapes rather than color to represent the real world.
- ▶ Synthetic cubism incorporated the idea of collage: pulling together a variety of materials to create a new whole.
- ▶ Cubist poetry attempts to do in verse what cubist painters do on canvas; that is, take the elements of an experience, fragment them (creating what Picasso calls “destructions”), and then rearrange them in a meaningful new synthesis (Picasso’s “sum of destructions”).



Georges Braque. *Woman with a Guitar*, 1913.



# DADAISM

- ▶ A movement in Europe during and just after WWI, which ignored logical relationship between idea and statement, argued for absolute freedom, and delivered itself of numerous provocative manifestoes.
- ▶ It was founded in Zurich in 1916 by Tristan Tzara with the ostensibly destructive intent of demolishing art and philosophy, intending to replace them with conscious madness as a protest against the insanity of the war.



Marcel Duchamp. *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* 1912

# EXPRESSIONISM

- ▶ A subjective art form in which an artist distorts reality for an emotional effect.
- ▶ A response to several different forces: the growing mass and mechanism of society, with its tendency to depress the value of the arts, made artists seek new ways of making art forms valuable instruments; at the same time, Freud laid bare the phantasms in the human unconscious and offered artists a challenge to record them accurately.
- ▶ Expressionistic drama flourished in the 1920s and was marked by unreal atmosphere; nightmarish action; distortion and oversimplification; the de-emphasis of the individual; antirealistic settings; the spiritual awakening and sufferings of their protagonists; and staccato, telegraphic dialogue. Its influence can primarily be seen in the plays of Eugene O'Neill.
- ▶ In the novel the presentation of the objective outer world as it expresses itself in the impressions or moods of a character is a widely used device.
- ▶ The revolt against realism, the distortion of the objects of the outer world, and the violent dislocation of time sequence and spatial logic in an effort accurately but not representationally to show the world as it appears to a troubled mind can be found in modern poetry.



*The Scream.* 1893. Edvard Munch

# SURREALISM

- ▶ A movement in art emphasizing the expression of the imagination as realized in dreams and presented without conscious control.
- ▶ Paintings were not literal depictions of the known world but disconcerting “realistic” representations of the subconscious.
- ▶ Surrealism is often regarded as an outgrowth of Dada.



*The Persistence of Memory. 1931. Salvador Dali*

# SYMBOLISM

- ▶ Symbolists were a group of French poets who were active during the last thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- ▶ Symbolism in France began as a revolt against the cold impersonality of the realistic novel and its minute descriptions of an objective, external reality. The rebel poets turned inward, in order to explore and express the shifting, subtle states of the human psyche. They believed that poetry should evoke and suggest, raising itself above the level of objective description only; hence, they sought poetic techniques that would make possible the recreation of human consciousness. The symbol and the metaphor enabled them to suggest mysterious and inexpressible subjective emotion. Often the symbols were highly personal, and their use resulted in obscure, esoteric verse. At its finest, however, symbolist poetry achieved a richness of meaning and created an awareness of the mystery at the heart of human existence.
- ▶ As symbolism sought freedom from rigidity in the selection of subject matter, so it desired to free poetry from the restrictions of conventional versification. The art that seemed most to resemble poetry was not that of sculptured precision of plastic forms but music; fluid melody and delicate lyricism characterized symbolist poetry.
- ▶ During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the use of symbolism became a major force in British literature. T. S. Eliot adapted it in the development of his individual style and praised it in his criticism.
- ▶ The most outstanding development of symbolism was in the art of the novel.



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