



Unit Five

Modernism



- The large cultural wave of Modernism, which gradually emerged in Europe and the United States in the early years of the 20th century, expressed a sense of modern life through art as a sharp break from the past, as well as from Western civilization's classical traditions. Modern life seemed radically different from traditional life -- more scientific, faster, more technological, and more mechanized.



Poetry 1914-1945: Experiments in Form

- Ezra Pound 1885-1972
- Thomas S. Elliot 1888-1965
- Robert Frost 1874-1963
- Wallace Stevens 1879-1955
- William Carlos Williams 1883-1963



Ezra Pound 1885-1972

- Pound's interests and reading were universal. His adaptations and brilliant, if sometimes flawed, translations introduced new literary possibilities from many cultures to modern writers. His life-work was *The Cantos*, which he wrote and published until his death.



- Pound's poetry is best known for its clear, visual images, fresh rhythms, and muscular, intelligent, unusual lines, such as, in Canto LXXXI, "The ant's a centaur in his dragon world,"



Thomas S. Eliot 1888-1965

- One of the most respected poets of his day, his modernist, seemingly illogical or abstract iconoclastic poetry had revolutionary impact. He also wrote influential essays and dramas, and championed the importance of literary and social traditions for the modern poet.
- His main works: “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, “The Waste Land”, “Gerpnation”



Robert Frost 1874-1963

- Frost's work is often deceptively simple. Many poems suggest a deeper meaning. For example, a quiet snowy evening by an almost hypnotic rhyme scheme may suggest the not entirely unwelcome approach of death. From: "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"



Wallace Stevens 1879-1955

- Stevens's poetry dwells upon themes of the imagination, the necessity for aesthetic form, and the belief that the order of art corresponds with an order in nature. His vocabulary is rich and various: He paints lush tropical scenes but also manages dry, humorous, and ironic vignettes.



- In private he continued to develop extremely complex ideas of aesthetic order throughout his life in aptly named books such as *Harmonium* (enlarged edition 1931), *Ideas of Order* (1935), and *Parts of a World* (1942). Some of his best known poems are "Sunday Morning," "Peter Quince at the Clavier,"



William Carlos Williams 1883-1963

- Williams cultivated a relaxed, natural poetry.
- Williams writes for a more general audience. Though he studied abroad, he elected to live in the United States. His epic, *Paterson* (five vols., 1946-58), celebrates his hometown of Paterson, New Jersey, as seen by an autobiographical "Dr. Paterson." In it, Williams juxtaposed lyric passages, prose, letters, autobiography, newspaper accounts, and historical facts.



Between the Wars

- Robinson Jeffers 1887-1962
- Edward Estlin Cummings 1894-1962
- Hart Crane 1899-1932
- Marianne Moore 1887-1972
- Langston Hughes 1902-1967



Langston Hughes 1902-1967

- He embraced African- American jazz rhythms and was one of the first black writers to attempt to make a profitable career out of his writing. Hughes incorporated blues, spirituals, colloquial speech, and folkways in his poetry.
- One of his most beloved poems, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921, 1925), embraces his African -- and universal -- heritage in a grand epic catalogue.



Prose Writing 1914-1945 American Realism

- Francis Scott Fitzgerald 1896-1940
- Ernest Hemingway 1899-1961
- William Faulkner 1897-1962



Francis Scott Fitzgerald 1896-1940

- Fitzgerald's secure place in American literature rests primarily on his novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925), a brilliantly written, economically structured story about the American dream of the self-made man. The protagonist, the mysterious Jay Gatsby, discovers the devastating cost of success in terms of personal fulfillment and love.
- Other fine works include *Tender Is the Night* (1934), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), and *All the Sad Young Men* (1926). *This Side of Paradise* was heralded as the voice of modern American youth. His second novel, *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922), continued his exploration of the self-destructive extravagance of his times.



Ernest Hemingway 1899-1961

- *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a short poetic novel about a poor, old fisherman who heroically catches a huge fish devoured by sharks, won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1953; the next year he received the Nobel Prize. Discouraged by a troubled family background, illness, and the belief that he was losing his gift for writing, Hemingway shot himself to death in 1961.



- Hemingway's fine ear for dialogue and exact description shows in his excellent short stories, such as "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." Critical opinion, in fact, generally holds his short stories equal or superior to his novels. His best novels include *The Sun Also Rises*, about the demoralized life of expatriates after World War I; *A Farewell to Arms*, about the tragic love affair of an American soldier and an English nurse during the war; *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), set during the Spanish Civil War; and *The Old Man and the Sea*.



Novels of Social Awareness

- Sinclair Lewis 1885-1951
- John Dos Passos 1896-1970
- John Steinbeck 1902-1968



The Harlem Renaissance

- Jean Toomer 1894-1967
- Richard Wright 1908-1960
- Zora Neale Hurston 1903-1960



Richard Wright 1908-1960

- Wright was the first African-American novelist to reach a general audience, even though he had barely a ninth grade education. His harsh childhood is depicted in one of his best books, his autobiography, *Black Boy* (1945). He later said that his sense of deprivation, due to racism, was so great that only reading kept him alive.



Literary Currents: The Fugitive and New Criticism

- Eugene O'Neill 1888-1953
- Thornton Wilder 1897-1975
- Clifford Odets 1903-1963



Eugene O'Neill 1888-1953

- He is generally acknowledged to have been America's foremost dramatist. In 1936 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature -- the first American playwright to be so honored.
- His later plays include the acknowledged masterpieces *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), a stark work on the theme of death, and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956) - - a powerful, extended autobiography in dramatic form focusing on his own family and their physical and psychological deterioration, as witnessed in the course of one night.