



Major Writers & Literary Works

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1. Introduction

The Modern Age in literature was a modernism movement that lasted approximately from 1914-1950, though broadly its characteristics may be seen from 1890s itself. Ezra Pound emerges as the most notable writer of this age; not so much by his own writing as by his influence on the writers of the time. Make it new, he instructed his colleagues, by which he meant, change the rules for writing and for reading. And thus, with Modernism began the breaking of traditional writing styles that we know today. During this period, artists began to develop their own individual styles as they felt that individuals, especially artists, were becoming increasingly isolated by a mass culture. This movement began with the horrible awakening that World War I impacted upon the world.

2. Major writers and their works

2.1 *Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)*

Born in Poland, Joseph Conrad brought a non-English sensibility to English Literature. From 1896 through 1904 Conrad wrote novels about places he visited and he explored themes such as the uncertainties of human sympathy. His first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, set on the east coast of Borneo, was published in 1895. His early novels included *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897), *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), and *Lord Jim* (1900). *Almayer's Folly*, together with its successor, *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), laid the foundation for Conrad's reputation as a romantic teller of exotic tales. Almost all of Conrad's writings were first published in newspapers and magazines and influential reviews like *The Fortnightly Review* and the *North American Review*; avant-garde publications like the *Savoy*, *New Review*, and *The English Review*; popular short-fiction magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Harper's Magazine*. He also wrote for *The Outlook*, an imperialist weekly magazine, between 1898 and 1906. Though his talent was early on recognized by English intellectuals, popular success eluded him until the 1913 publication of *Chance*. From the 1890s to World War I, Conrad wrote most of his great works, including *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900). *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) were some of the other novels written in this phase. *Victory* (1915), Conrad's last important novel, is another study in solitude and sympathy, though he wrote *The Shadow Line* (1917) and *The Rover* (1923) after that. Conrad was interested in showing psycho-political situations that drew parallels between the inner lives of single characters and the broader sweep of human history.

2.2 *T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)*

After Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot is the most influential figure in the Modernist literature. His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, published in 1917 immediately established him as a leading poet of the avant-garde. With the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922 Eliot's reputation began to grow; by 1930, he had become the most iconic figure in poetry and literary criticism in the English-speaking world. Eliot's poems in many respects articulated the disillusionment of a younger post-World War-I generation with the values of the Victorian era. As a critic also, he had a huge impact on contemporary literary taste. His major later poetry collections include *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1943); his books of literary and social criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), *After Strange Gods* (1934), and *Notes Towards the Definition*

of Culture (1940). Eliot was also an important playwright, whose verse dramas include *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, and *The Cocktail Party*. Eliot struggled to create new verse rhymes based on the rhymes of contemporary speech. He sought a poetic diction that might be spoken by an educated person, being neither pedantic nor vulgar. *The Waste Land* expresses with great power the disenchantment, disillusionment, and disgust of the period after World War I.

2.3 Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961)

Ernest Hemingway was an American journalist, novelist, short-story writer, and noted sportsman. His economical and understated style—which he termed the iceberg theory—had a strong influence on 20th-century fiction. In 1926 Hemingway published *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel with which he scored his first solid success. A pessimistic but sparkling book, it deals with a group of aimless expatriates in France and Spain—members of the post war Lost Generation, a phrase that Hemingway scorned while at the same time making it famous. Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring*, a parody of the American writer Sherwood Anderson's book *Dark Laughter*, also appeared in 1926.

In 1953 he received the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a short heroic novel about an old Cuban fisherman who, after an extended struggle, hooks and boats a giant marlin only to have it eaten by voracious sharks during the long voyage home. Hemingway's characters plainly embody his own values and view of life. The main characters of *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are young men whose strength and self-confidence coexist with a sensitivity that leaves them deeply scarred by their wartime experiences. War was for Hemingway a potent symbol of the world, which he viewed as complex, filled with moral ambiguities, and offering almost unavoidable pain, and destruction. To survive in such a world, and perhaps emerge victorious, one must conduct oneself with honour, courage, endurance, and dignity.

2.4 David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930)

D. H. Lawrence was a prolific writer - of poetry, novels, short stories, plays, essays, and criticism. His works are heavily autobiographical and the experiences of his early years in Nottinghamshire continued to exert a profound influence throughout his life. Though better known as a novelist, Lawrence's first-published works (in 1909) were poems, and his poetry, especially his evocations of the natural world, have since had a significant influence on many poets on both sides of the Atlantic. *The White Peacock* published in 1911 is his first novel. In 1913 came the heavily autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*, which is acclaimed as his masterpiece. Lawrence was a rebellious and profoundly polemical writer with radical views. Tremendously prolific, his work was often uneven in quality, and he was a continual source of controversy, often involved in widely-publicized censorship cases, most famously for his novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928).

2.5 George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

G. B. Shaw was an Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist. Though he began his literary career as a novelist; he decided to write plays in order to illustrate his criticism of the English stage. His earliest dramas were appropriately called *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898). He wrote more than sixty plays, including major works such as *Man and Superman* (1902), *Pygmalion* (1912) and *Saint Joan* (1923). With a range incorporating both contemporary satire and historical allegory, Shaw became the leading dramatist of his generation, and in 1925 was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. As a playwright Shaw has been deemed second only to Shakespeare. Among these, *Widower's Houses* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* savagely attack social hypocrisy, while in plays such as *Arms and the Man* and *The Man of Destiny* the criticism is less fierce. Shaw's radical rationalism, his utter disregard of conventions, his keen dialectic interest and verbal wit often turn the stage into a forum of ideas, and nowhere more openly than in the famous discourses on the Life Force. The Life Force concept of George Bernard Shaw contains the central idea that Life is a vital force or impulse that strives to attain greater power of contemplation and self-realization. The ultimate desire of the Life Force is to establish the city of God on earth.

Shaw was a staunch socialist and member of the Fabian Society which he joined in 1884. The Fabian Society is a British socialist organization whose purpose is to advance the principles of democratic socialism via gradualist and reformist effort in democracies, rather than by revolutionary overthrow. Shaw wrote many political essays and articles during his lifetime including *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (1889), *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1912), and *Everybody's Political What's What* (1944).

2.6 Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Virginia Woolf was one of the most famous writers of the modernist era and wrote many best-selling books such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Room of One's Own* and *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf's novels were written with the stream-of-consciousness literary technique which focuses more on the character's inner thoughts than on the plot. Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* was published in 1915 and her last novel, *Between the Acts* was published posthumously a few months after her death in 1941. Woolf was one of the most notable members of the Bloomsbury Group. This was a group of artists and writers' groups who openly supported gay rights, women in the arts, pacifism, uninhibited sexuality and many other social and political issues from the Bloomsbury District in London during the early 20th century. The other members included Leonard Woolf, Vanessa Bell, E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey and some other great personalities.

2.7 William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

W.B. Yeats is generally considered one of the twentieth century key English language poets. In 1885 he saw his first poem as well as an essay *The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson* in the *Dublin University Review*. In 1889 he published his first volume of poetry *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems*, which was swiftly followed by more publications of poetry and non-fiction, including several anthologies of Irish legends, Irish folklore, and Irish ballads and songs one of the predominant themes of his work. As one of the founders of the Irish Literary Revival, along with J. M. Synge (1871-1909), Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), and Padraic Colum (1881-1972) Yeats' works draw heavily on Irish mythology and history. In 1894 Yeats became involved with the Irish Literary Theatre, later becoming its chief playwright, with many of his plays being performed there and at the Abbey Theatre, also known as the National Theatre of Ireland which opened in 1904. Yeats was a Symbolist poet, using allusive imagery and symbolic structures throughout his career. He chose words and assembled them so that, in addition to a particular meaning, they suggest abstract thoughts that may seem more significant and resonant. His use of symbols is usually something physical that is both itself and a suggestion of other, perhaps immaterial, timeless qualities. In 1923 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He went on to pen more influential works, including *The Tower* (1928) and *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems* (1932). Unlike other modernists who experimented with free verse, Yeats was a master of the traditional forms.

3. Major Works

3.1 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

First published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899, and then in book form in 1902, *Heart of Darkness* thus straddles the Victorian and modern eras: it first appeared when Victoria was still on the throne, but by the time the book version was published, Britain had a new monarch and was firmly in a new century. This novella examines the evils of Belgian imperialism in Africa, but also interrogates the very nature of storytelling itself – and all that comes with it, whether truth, trust, the reliability of language to convey one's experiences, and a whole host of other quasi-metaphysical issues. The book also inspired the 1979 film *Apocalypse*.

3.2 T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

This 1922 long poem is one of the landmark works of modernist literature – perhaps the most important poem in all of modernism. In the poem, T. S. Eliot draws on personal experience (his first marriage, his knowledge of London, his convalescence following some sort of nervous breakdown) but transmutes it

into something universal and, in his word, impersonal-a poem that spoke for an entire generation. The poem is a medley of Arthurian legend, Greek myth, quotations from Shakespeare, jazz rhythms, and Wagner and more.

3.3 Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

This novella was a big success for Ernest Hemingway when it was published in 1952. At first glance, the story appears to be a simple tale of an old Cuban fisherman who catches an enormous fish, only to lose it. But, there's much more to the story -- a tale of bravery and heroism, of one man's struggle against his own doubts, the elements, a massive fish, sharks and even his desire to give up. The old man eventually succeeds, then fails, and then wins again. It's the story of perseverance and the machismo of the old man against the elements. This slim novella -- it's only 127 pages -- helped to revive Hemingway's reputation as a writer, winning him great acclaim, including the Nobel Prize for literature.

3.4 D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

The last of Lawrence novel that became the subject of a landmark obscenity trial (Regina v. Penguin Books, Ltd.) that turned largely on the justification of the use in the novel of until-then taboo sexual terms. It depicts a woman's experience of the exquisite pleasure of good sex and her fulfillment in truly making love. The novel is also a sustained and profound reflection on the state of modern society and the threat to culture and humanity of the unceasing tide of industrialization and capitalism.

3.5 George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*

Pygmalion is a play by George Bernard Shaw that tells the story of a poor, young flower girl who has been disrespected and overlooked because of her appearance and the dialect she speaks. When given the opportunity, she decides to get language lessons in order to gain the respect of others and improve her overall status in life. The outcome of her training is not what she expected, and she is not only able to change her appearance and speech but also gain confidence in her own abilities. The play is Shaw's comment on the British society where one is judged by one's social class and the markers of class happen to be clothing, mannerisms, and accent.

3.6 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

This path breaking novel is set over the course of one day, in June 1923. It's one of the finest modernist novels in the English language. Originally titled. The Hours', Mrs. Dalloway details a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway in post-World war I England. The story travels forwards and back in time, and in and out of the characters' minds, to construct a complete image of Clarissa's life and of the inter-war social structure.

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