



# Modernism 1910-1945

Dr. Alex E. Blazer  
English 4665/5665  
8 January 2013  
[http://faculty.gcsu.edu/webdav/alex\\_blazer/](http://faculty.gcsu.edu/webdav/alex_blazer/)

# Contexts

Historical and Literary

★ Modernity

★ Modernism



# Modernity

Historical Era

from the Industrial Revolution to the mid-1900s

- ★ Industrialization (the rise of factories)
- ★ Urbanization (from rural, agrarian)
- ★ Exponential technological progress (cars and machine guns)
- ★ Rise of mass, popular, consumer culture (radio and film, department stores)
- ★ Global political conflicts and modern warfare (World War I and World War II)

# Modernism

Literary Period from the late-1800s to 1945

- ★ Crisis of belief in traditional authority,
  - ★ Joyce's *Stephen Dedalus*: “non servium: I will not serve”
- ★ Resulting in the critique of culture that would use its technological progress not for civilization but for mechanized slaughter
  - ★ Eliot's *The Waste Land*: “I think we are in rats' alley / where the dead men lost their bones.”
- ★ And the wistful search for new teleological meanings in the fragmentation and flux of the lost generation's waste land.
  - ★ Pound's “Hugh Selwyn Mauberly”: “Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;”

# Modernism

## Continued

- ★ Radical experimentation with form,
  - ★ Such that modernism foregoes conventional forms and structures in order to invent new forms and systems of thought adequate to modern experience.
  - ★ Poetry: Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Williams' *Paterson*
  - ★ Fiction: Joyce's *Ulysses*, Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*
  - ★ Drama: Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Rice's *The Adding Machine*

# Modernism

Concluded

## ★ Crisis of representation

- ★ Pulp and popular conventions of representation no longer convey the modern experience of reality;
- ★ And so authors find new, utterly impressionistic and perspectivist, ways of representing the real
  - ★ Imagism and Objectivism and Surrealism in poetry
  - ★ Stream of consciousness in fiction by Joyce, Faulkner, and Woolf
  - ★ Expressionism in drama by O'Neill and Treadwell

# Modernism

Concluded

## ★ High vs Low

★ During modernism, culture becomes bifurcated between the high (academic, elite) and the low (popular, mass).

- ★ Pound's *Cantos* XLII–LI (1937) and LII–LXXI (1940), Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Faulkner's *The Hamlet* (1940) are published during the same period as genre fiction Tolkein's *The Hobbit* (1937) and Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1939). Orson Welles broadcast *The War of the Worlds* (1938). 1939 films *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Stagecoach*, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* were nominated for Best Picture Oscar. Benny Goodman's big band and Duke Ellington's jazz band are prominent in the late 1930s.
- ★ In 1939, T. S. Eliot published *The Love Song of Gerontion*, *Waste Land*, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* and the detective play *The Family Reunion*.

# MLA Citation

Blazer, Alex E. "Modernism." English 4665/5665  
American Literature 1920 to the Present. Georgia  
College & State University, Milledgeville, GA.  
<[http://faculty.gcsu.edu/webdav/alex\\_blazer/4665/Lectures-13-SP.pdf](http://faculty.gcsu.edu/webdav/alex_blazer/4665/Lectures-13-SP.pdf)>. 8 Jan. 2013. Class Lecture.