

# Modernism in american literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Modernism Modernism is an artistic movement that began in Europe, eventually reaching the United States during a time of change, confusion, discovery, invention and war. From 1914-1945, modernism in American literature reflected the unease of those grappling with a changed post-war world. This world, characterized by a growing youth culture, became the backdrop in which many writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway portrayed this lost generation. Breaking with tradition and convention, some writers wrote of a life that was markedly different from the stable, moral, patriotic pre-war America they remembered, a world in which wealth and excess seemed to signal a larger lack of moral code. A world in which rural life no longer seemed as relevant.

Other writers, like William Faulkner, focused on experimentation in form and style, specifically employing point-of-view, fragmentation and stream of consciousness in new ways. A greater interest in psychology led many to question religion, contributing further to a changing worldview where there were more questions than answers, more uncertainty than stability. It is through modern literature that the reader can understand a feeling of alienation and loss that many young men and women had after having crossed through the first very modern war.

Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* *Winesburg, Ohio*, by Sherwood Anderson, is part short-story cycle and part novel. In it, the reader meets several inhabitants of Winesburg, all of whom in some way relate to the protagonist of the work, newspaper reporter George Willard. What is evident from each story is that the people of this quaint, all-American Midwestern town suffer individually from sadness and loneliness. It serves as a grim

picture of the human condition in a place where they are unable to change, despite an outsider's perspective that a town like this should be a sunny place to live. Many believe this is what makes *Winesburg, Ohio* a naturalist work.

In addition, this is a classic in the post-war literary community. It breaks from traditional form in that it is not one continuous novel, but rather 22 short stories. Anderson also creates a unique work here in his choice to focus on plain prose that gives insight into character emotion rather than creating a plot-focused work. Published in 1919, *Winesburg, Ohio* is emblematic of that shift from pre-war ideals to post-war disillusionment.

The Lost Generation: Expatriate Writers of the 20th Century  
In the literary community, the Lost Generation referred to those young writers who came of age during World War I and whose writing reflects, either directly or abstractly, what is perceived as the effects of that very modern war. Feeling as though the United States was no longer the home they remembered, many relocated (either permanently or several times throughout their lives) to Europe, becoming a part of the flourishing expatriate literary community there, whose figurehead, many argue, was Gertrude Stein. Clearly a break from the past, this work often explored feelings of loss and aimlessness, while critiquing the materialism and immorality that emerged in America post-war.

The literary community also saw breaks in traditional form, with many writers experimenting with sentence structure, dialogue, action and narrative in general. What made The Lost Generation of writers so markedly

different was that they were experiencing the shift themselves, they were a part of the change, they were trying to make sense of a new life in a new world, and they wrote about that struggle. Historically, we can look at this work and recognize the way this literature really reflects this young generation and the need to define oneself in a truly changed cultural, social, and political world.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald: Biography and Works**  
In summary, F. Scott Fitzgerald was a novelist and short story writer closely associated with the Jazz Age and Modernism. He often wrote of socialites in the post-World War I era. His most notable novel is *The Great Gatsby*. Other novels include *Tender Is the Night* and *This Side of Paradise*. His wife, Zelda, was the inspiration for much in Fitzgerald's work. Their tumultuous marriage ended badly as she lived out her days in mental hospitals.

**The Great Gatsby: Summary, Themes, Symbols, and Character**  
In summary, F. Scott Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby* in 1925. It was a novel that some viewed as shallow because it focused primarily on the lives of wealthy people pursuing a good time, but a closer look at the character of Gatsby and symbols, like the green light, show that there was more going on in the novel than just the surface events - namely an examination of the American dream and the value of the pursuit of wealth.

**Ernest Hemingway**  
In summary, American writer Ernest Hemingway led a fascinating and complicated life that informed many of his major novels and short stories, including *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hemingway was part of a group of American expatriates who spent a lot of time in Paris, known as 'The Lost Generation'. The Lost Generation included other prominent American authors, namely

Gertrude Stein. Though his life ended tragically in 1961, his novels and short stories are considered some of the greatest in American literature.

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* Though Ernest Hemingway set his novel *A Farewell to Arms* around World War I, it is not a book that glorifies war. This novel shows how war can inflict both physical and emotional wounds, and even if it doesn't kill you, can still destroy your life. No one said Hemingway was a major upper. That being said, by having Frederic and Catherine's romance develop in a military hospital in World War I Italy, it does also show how love can make people happy and hopeful, even in the most grim of circumstances. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Hemingway In summary, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is Ernest Hemingway's novel about the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s. It follows Robert Jordan, an American fighting for the leftist Republicans against the Fascist Nationalists. His goal is to blow up a bridge. Along the way, he finds love with Maria. There's also a great deal of death, brutality and, yes, one blown up bridge. *William Faulkner* In summary, William Faulkner is perhaps the most celebrated Southern novelist. His novels, which are typical of the Modernist style, feature varying, complex writing techniques, including stream of consciousness, time shifts and multiple narrators. His most notable works include *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* In summary, William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is a Modernist masterpiece. It uses over a dozen narrators and a stream-of-consciousness style to piece together the story of the Bundren family.

Their matriarch, Addie, dies early in the novel and then the family sets out to bury her in nearby Jefferson. Along the way, their problems and issues

bubble to the surface. Through the shifts in perspective, we gain a remarkably detailed portrait of this troubled Southern family.

**John Steinbeck** In summary, John Steinbeck is a Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, known for works including *Of Mice and Men*, *East of Eden* and *Travels with Charley*. One of his most famous novels, *The Grapes of Wrath*, follows the Joad family as they travel from Oklahoma to California during the Great Depression, in search of farm work.

Steinbeck often wrote about migrant farmers, labor struggles and similar stories of the poor and downtrodden. He also wrote with stark realism and a deep appreciation of the natural world. A recurring setting for his works is Monterey County in Northern California, where he grew up and which he considered a kind of paradise.

**Of Mice and Men** Though the tragic deaths in *Of Mice and Men* can make it seem like a really sad book, it's actually the tale of two devoted friends who make it through the somewhat bleak reality of their lives as migrant workers by sticking together and fantasizing about a happier future. When George is called upon to commit the ultimate act of mercy on Lennie's behalf, he does it, seemingly without hesitation. To have a friend like that, and to be a friend like that, is a pretty phenomenal thing. **ON MODERNISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE SPECIFICALLY FOR YOU FOR ONLY \$13.90/PAGE Order Now**