

English Literature

Modernism (1901-1945)



Which historical events influenced English literature of early XX century?

- The South African War (the Boer War: 1899–1902)
- World War I
- The militarization of the world has led militarization of the country => deteriorating living conditions of workers
- The strike movement in England
- Revolution in Russia in 1917
- Crisis of capitalism and the intensification of class contradictions

How these historical events influenced English literature of early XX century?

Writers chose the most complicated problems of the country as themes of their works:

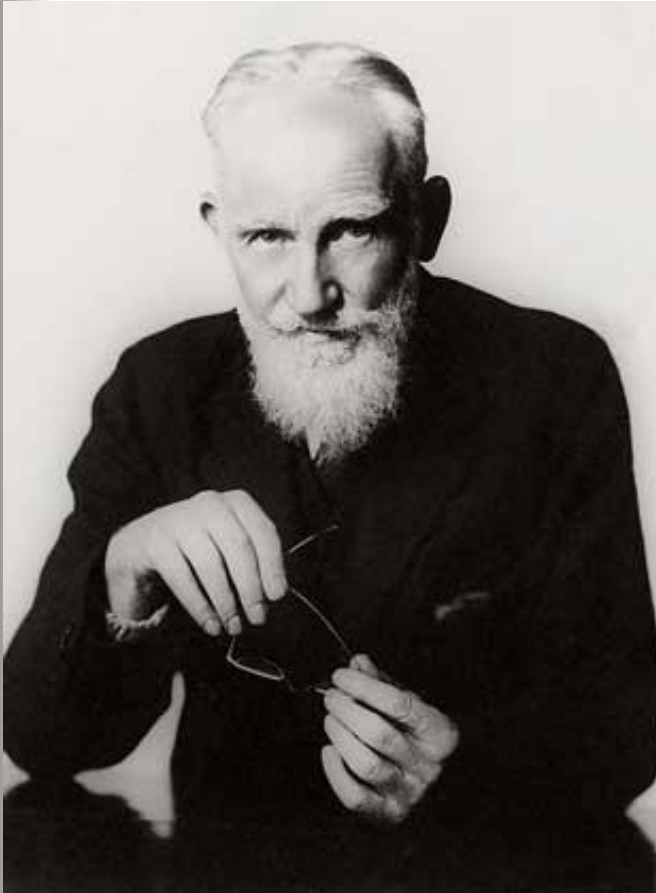
- Anti-war sentiments and perceptions
- Rising of the revolutionary and national liberation movements
- Struggle against fascism
- Social inequality
- Women emancipation
- Great hopes, liberation of the human spirit
- Society, Politics
- Feelings of a collapse
- Imperial civilization in decline

Characteristics of Modernism

- Marked by a strong and intentional break with tradition.
- Belief that the world is what we say it is
- There is no such thing as absolute truth
- No connection with history or institutions
- Championship of the individual and celebration of inner strength
- Life is unordered
- Concerned with the sub-conscious

G. Bernard Shaw

(1856-1950)



- Shaw's plays, including *Misalliance*, are filled with **problematic parent-child relationships**, concerns about **poverty and women's rights**. The plays implied socialism could help to solve these and other problems ("Man and Superman" (1902), "John Bull's Other Island" (1904), "Saint John" (1914))
- He wrote about **social and political** issues ("*Heartbreak House*", into which he projected his bitterness and despair about British politics and society)
- Shaw possesses a **deep love of language, high comedy, and social consciousness**
- He wrote pamphlets on the progressive arts, including *The Perfect Wagnerite* and *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*
- Shaw's pamphlets supported **equality of income** ("The True Radical Programme", "The Impossibilities of Anarchism", "Socialism for Millionaires")

Major Themes (Pygmalion)

- Social hierarchy
- Gentility and Manners
- Marriage and Prostitution
- Myths of Creation
- Language
- Professionalism
- Gender Solidarity or Antagonism

Contributions

- the only person to have been awarded both a **Nobel Prize** for Literature (1925) and an **Oscar** (1938)
- founded the **Fabian Society** (a socialist political organization)
- In the late 1920s, a **Shaw festival** was established in England (in Malvern town)

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)



- "a classicist in literature"
- His most famous works
 - *The Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939), was the inspiration for the hit musical *Cats*
 - "The Waste Land" (mysterious, complicated poem that helped to start Modernism)
 - "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)
- He was a publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and "arguably the most important English-language poet of the 20th century"

Thomas Stearns Eliot

- His vital contribution is the **reaction against romanticism and humanism** which brought a classical revival in art and criticism
- He rejected the romantic view of the individual's perfectibility, stressed **the doctrine of the original sin** and exposed the **futility of the romantic faith in the "Inner Voice"**
- Instead of following his 'inner voice', a critic must follow objective standards and must conform to tradition.
- **A sense of tradition, respect for order and authority** is central to Eliot's classicism.

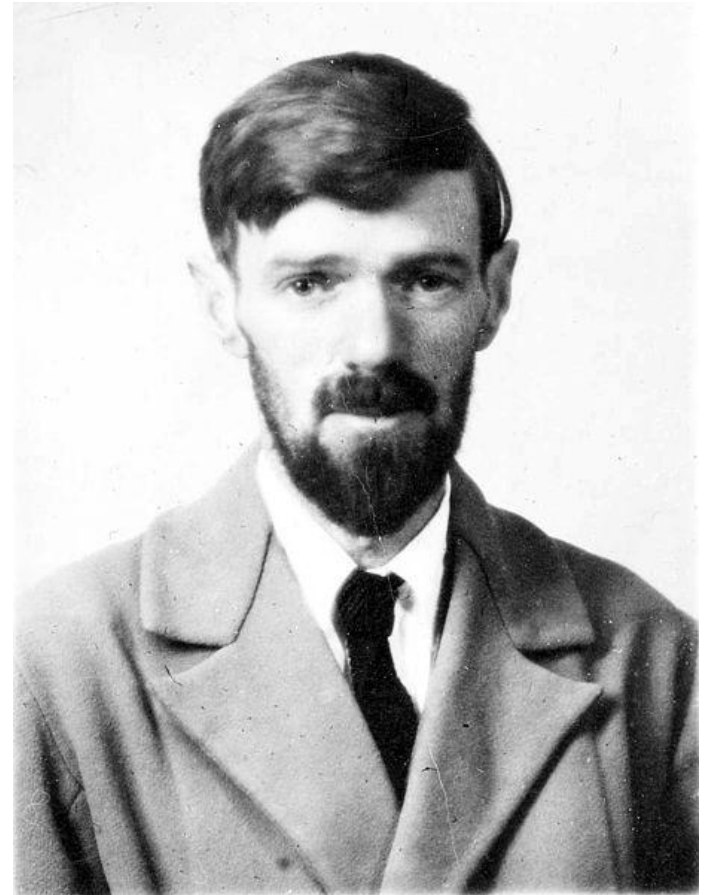
Contributions:

- 1948 - Eliot won the **Nobel Prize** for Literature and was awarded the **order of Merit** by Britain

David Herbert Lawrence

(1885 –1930)

- an English novelist, poet, playwright, essayist, literary critic and painter
- the **first** important writer coming from a working class.
- **Genres:** novels, poems, paintings, translations, plays.
- His best known works are:
«**Sons and Lovers**» (1913),
«**The Rainbow**» (1917),
«**Women in Love**» (1917),
«**Lady Chatterley's Lover**» (1928).
- his works are full of **spontaneity and sincere description**



David Herbert Lawrence

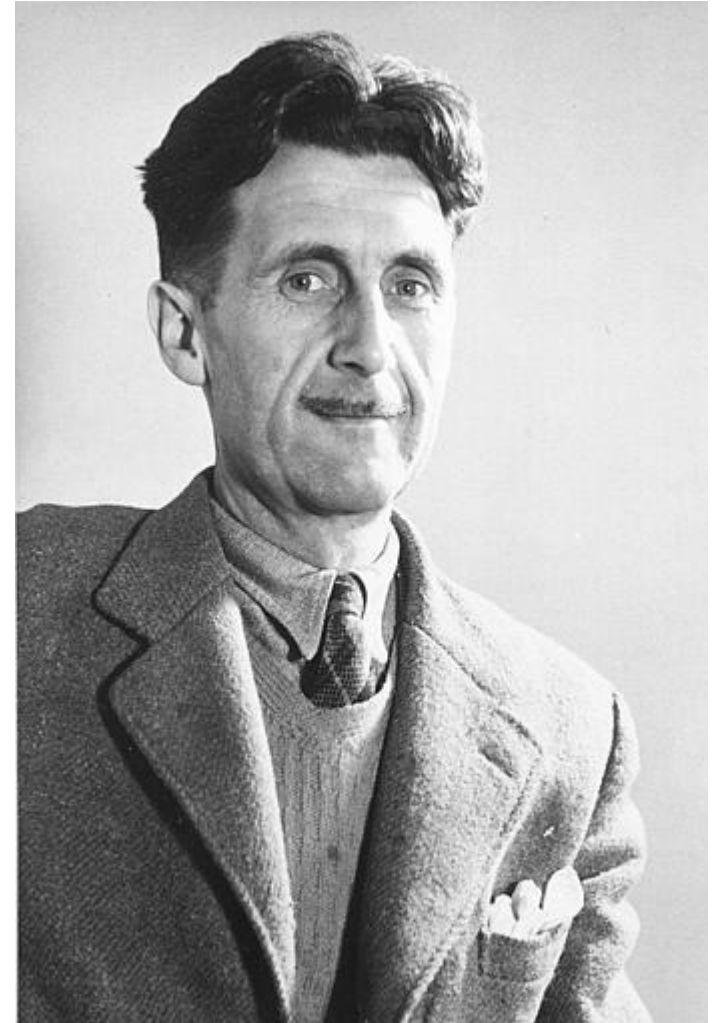
- Lawrence is concerned with the **nature of relationships**
- His use of **sexual activity** has its roots in this highly personal way of thinking and being
- Lawrence was very interested in **human touch behaviour**
- In his later years Lawrence developed the potentialities of the **short novel form** in *St Mawr*, *The Virgin and the Gypsy* and *The Escaped Cock*
- Lawrence rewrote many of his novels several times to perfect

George Orwell (real name Eric Arthur Blair) (1903 – 1950)



an English novelist and journalist. His work is marked by **clarity, intelligence and wit, awareness of social injustice, opposition to totalitarianism, and belief in democratic socialism**

- He is the author of two brilliant satires attacking totalitarianism (*Animal Farm* (1945)), a modern beast-fable attacking Stalinism, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a dystopian novel setting forth his fears of an intrusively bureaucratized state of the future)
- Orwell wrote literary criticism, poetry, fiction and polemical journalism



George Orwell

- Orwell was best known for his journalism, in essays, reviews, columns in newspapers and magazines and in his books of reportage: *Down and Out in Paris and London* (describing a period of poverty in these cities), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (describing the living conditions of the poor in northern England, and the class divide generally) and *Homage to Catalonia*.

His poems:

- *Awake! Young Men of England* (1914)
- *Ballade* (1929)
- *A Dressed Man and a Naked Man* (1933)
- *Kitchener* (1916)
- *The Lesser Evil* (1924)
- *A Little Poem* (1935)
- *Our Minds Are Married, but We Are Too Young* (1918)
- *Romance* (1925)
- *Sometimes in the Middle Autumn Days* (1933)
- *Summer-like for an Instant* (1933)

James Joyce (1882 –1941)

an Irish novelist and poet, considered to be one of the most influential writers in the modernist avant-garde of the early 20th century

Joyce is best known for *Ulysses* (1922), a landmark work in which the episodes of Homer's *Odyssey* are paralleled in (and with) an array of contrasting literary styles, perhaps most prominent amongst these the **stream of consciousness** technique he perfected

Other major works are the short-story collection *Dubliners* (1914), and the novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

His works also include three books of poetry, a play, occasional journalism, and his published letters



Adeline Virginia Woolf

(1882 -1941)

- one of the most important modernist writers
- Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915
- Woolf is considered one of the greatest **innovators** in the English language.
- In her works she experimented with **stream-of-consciousness** ('interior monologue') and underlying psychological as well as emotional motives of characters.



Adeline Virginia Woolf

- published 8 novels and a lot of criticism
- In 1907, Virginia Woolf and a few like-minded friends created the creative association "**Bloomsbury**", which lasted until about 1930
- She was very critical of the Victorian writers, of the boredom and shapelessness of their novels and of their concern for the externals of living. She calls all the Victorians amateurs.
- The only mature and professional writer to her mind was **Henry James**.

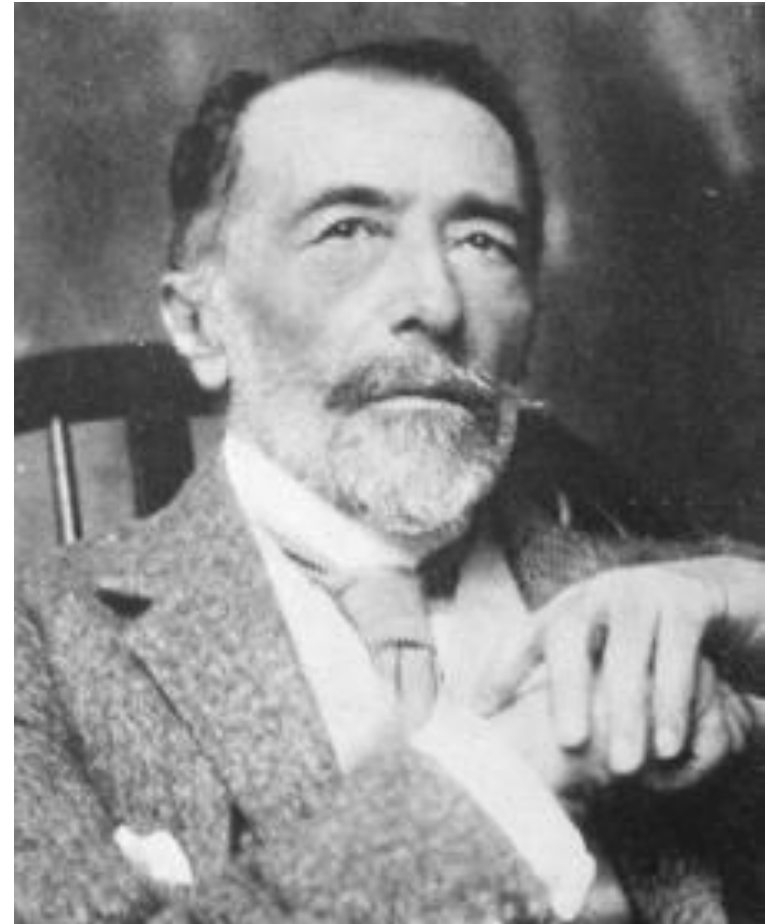
- Her novels are:
 - «The Voyage Out» (1912);
 - «Night and Day» (1919),
 - «Jacob's Room' (1922),
 - «To the Lighthouse» (1927),
 - «Orlando» (1931),
 - «Between the Acts» (1941).

Adeline Virginia Woolf

- Virginia Woolf's peculiarities as a fiction writer have tended to obscure her central strength: Woolf is arguably **the major lyrical novelist** in the English language
- Her novels are highly **experimental: a narrative, frequently uneventful and commonplace, is refracted – and sometimes almost dissolved – in the characters' receptive consciousness**
- **Intense lyricism and stylistic virtuosity** fuse to create a world overabundant with auditory and visual impressions
- The intensity of Virginia Woolf's poetic vision elevates the ordinary, sometimes banal settings – often wartime environments – of most of her novels (*Mrs Dalloway* (1925))

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)

- Conrad was regarded as a major innovator in literary modernism. Writing in what to the visual arts was the age of Impressionism, Conrad showed himself in many of his works a prose poet of the highest order



Joseph Conrad

Ford Madox - essay “The Critical Attitude”:

- His characters **face deep problems**, ones with difficult or no answers
- **Symbol and myth** fill his fiction, and much of his story lies beneath the surface narrative
- Reading a work by Conrad requires patience, diligence, and concentration
- He is much less concerned with **spiritual relationships** and much more with a sort of **material fatalism**
- Every situation must be rendered inescapable

Joseph Conrad

- His most known novels are: «Lord Jim» (1900), «The Heart of Darkness» (1902), «Nostromo» (1904), «The Secret Agent»(1907), «Under Western Eyes» (1911)
- His later works are «Victory» (1915), «The Rescue»(1920), «The Rover» (1923).

Joseph Conrad

- The singularity of the universe depicted in Conrad's novels, especially compared to those of near-contemporaries like John Galsworthy, is such as to open him to criticism similar to that later applied to Graham Greene.
- Often he chose to have his characters play out their destinies in isolated or confined circumstances

Similarities and differences

American modernism

- 20s-40s of XX century
- Influenced by WWI and economical crisis of 30s and european modernism
- The theme of race relations

English modernism

- 1901-1939
- Influenced by WWI and crisis of 1899 – 1930
- Relations between generations

Similarities and differences

American modernism

- Women emancipation

English modernism

- tradition of working class novels and theme of women rights



**Thank you
for your
attention**