

AMERICAN MODERNISM

C. 1900-1950

Changes in thought that led to the development of Modernism

- ~ Three Theorist of the late 19th century impacted the thought of the 20th century
- ~ Charles Darwin - The Origin of the Species
- ~ Karl Marx - The Communist Manifesto
- ~ Freud - Early Psychological Theories

Changes in Society that led to the development of Modernism

- ~ Erosion of strict rules of society that had been necessary during Reconstruction following the Civil War
- ~ Increase in literacy - public schools came into existence
- ~ Socialism - Labor Party - Unions

The Great War - the most influential force on American Writers

- ~ World War I or the Great War was the most influential force on American writers of the early 20th century
- ~ Fought from 1914 -1918, it involved 32 nations, including the United States, and took the lives of over 20 million people (U.S. involvement was a shorter time frame)
- ~ A new kind of war with terrible new weapons - machine guns, poison gases, airplanes, tanks, and submarines
- ~ No glory in war anymore, just carnage

Other historical events that led to the development of Modernism

- ~ 19th Amendment allowed women to vote and women had more freedom
- ~ The Rise of Consumer Culture/Mass Production/Mass Media
- ~ The Stock Market Crash (1929)
- ~ The Great Depression (1930s)
- ~ International political instability that led to WWII

The Effects of Modernism

- ~ People became cynical and disillusioned/
questioned authority and tradition
- ~ In literature, we often see characters *isolated*
from each other, struggling internally and
struggling to communicate with others
- ~ Literature and art changed in form to reflect
the changes in society

Important U.S. Poets

- ~ Edna St. Vincent Millay, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, Williams
Carlos Williams
- ~ Poetry became experimental in form, imagery changed, fragmented, full of difficult allusions

Important U.S. Prose Writers

- ~ F. Scott Fitzgerald - the king of elegant prose and the jazz age - *The Great Gatsby, Tender is the Night*
- ~ William Faulkner - explored the human mind, used stream of consciousness - *The Sound and the Fury, As I lay Dying*

More Prose

- ~ Ernest Hemingway - famous for short, reporterish prose and societal dysfunction - *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Sun Also Rises*
- ~ John Steinbeck - captured true (gritty) images of America - *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men*