

Lecture 8: Modernism and the Novel

Modernism: Background

By the end of the 19th century, artists and novelists were already becoming ❖
unsatisfied with realism.

Rejection of Realism and Naturalism became common ❖

a wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends (all the –isms: dadaism, ❖
surrealism, expressionism, futurism, etc.)

A reaction to the modern, urban experience ❖

A rejection of bourgeois values ❖

Discontinuity and Fragmentation

Realism stressed the role of art as a mirror of social reality, the values of bourgeois ❖
society, and notions of progress.

Modernism questioned art's capability to reflect reality, questioned the coherence ❖
of that reality, the bourgeois values of society and the notions of progress and
happiness.

Life and reality are not coherent or simple and it is an illusion to think that the novel ❖
or art in general can simply depict them like a mirror.

Bourgeois values and morality are fake and superficial ❖

What modernism stressed instead was:

Discontinuity and fragmentation ❖

Juxtaposition and multiple points of view ❖

Lack of a unitary self ❖

“Self” is seen as artificial, a social fiction ❖

The individual is stripped of the traditional defining categories of personhood ❖

Modernist fiction

Stressed:

Crisis rather than coherent reality ❖

Attempts to represent multiple truths as reflected in consciousness and the psyche ❖

Rejection of external, unitary, coherent appearance of realist conventions ❖

Stresses a lack of causality (chaos) ❖

Insufficiency of language (incapability to represent) ❖

Oppositional relations between the individual and the social, (the alienation of the individual in his/her social environment) ❖

Antibourgeois (because bourgeois values and lifestyle are fake and superficial) ❖

Uses first person narrator, and he/she is often unreliable, reflecting the difficulty to represent reality ❖

Reflects a sense of urban dislocation and alienation ❖

Works by male writers tend to be misogynistic ❖

**Compare: Édouard Manet, “Breakfast in the Studio”
(Realist Art)**



With: Picasso “Weeping Woman” (Modernist Art)



- ❖ Discontinuity and fragmentation
- ❖ Juxtaposition and multiple points of view
- ❖ Lack of a unitary self
- ❖ “Self” is seen as artificial, a social fiction of undetermined status
- ❖ Individual is stripped of the traditional defining categories of personhood

Or Picasso's famous Guernica 1937



Or any of Salvador Dali's work

