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Djuna Barnes, "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett and "Exiles" by James JoyceAkker, R., Gibbons, A., and Vermeulen, T. (2017) *Metamodernism*. Available at: Baker, H. (2013) *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. The University of Chicago Press. Available at: Barnes, D. (2015) *Nightwood*. Faber and Faber. Available at: Berman, J. (2012) *Modernist Commitments*. Columbia University Press. Available at: K. (2011) *Intermedia: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*. Edinburgh University Press. Available at: Bradbury, M., and McFarlane, J. (1976) *Modernism: 1890-1930*. Penguin. Brown, N. (2021) *Assembly*. Penguin. Available at: Childs, P. (2011) *Modernist Literature: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Available at: Westmoreland, W. (2018) *Colette*. Bold Films, British Film Institute and HanWay Films. Available at: Netflix. Collins, S. (2021) "Assembly by Natasha Brown Review - A Modern Mrs Dalloway". *The Guardian*. Available at: Conrad, J. 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Available at: Dr. Polly HemberPhD, Media Arts and English Literature (Royal Holloway, University of London)Polly Hember is a researcher, writer, and visiting tutor working on modernism and queer networks. She holds a PhD in Media Arts and English Literature from Royal Holloway, University of London, where her doctoral thesis attended to the neglected literary works of the POOL group". Her research interests include twentieth-century literature, queer theory, affect studies, technology, and visual cultures. She has published in *Modernist Cultures* and *Hotel Modernisms* (Routledge, 2023), and currently co-hosts the *Modernist Conversations* podcast. Explore the definition of modern literature, discover common themes from modernist authors and read examples of their works. The term "modern literature" doesn't refer to current-day novels and poems. Instead, it describes the literary period between 1901 and the 1960s. It refers to the works of authors and poets who embraced the substantial societal and technological changes proceeding World War I and the Great Depression while also taking creative risks with form and expression. The themes, ideas, and writing style of modern literature broke from the Victorian era in ways that would have shocked authors of that generation. It also gave rise to post-modern literature. Before diving into our guide to literary modernism, check out our guide to classic literature. Victorian-era literature describes works published between 1837 and 1901. Often, authors wrote books in installments and published them in periodicals. They strove for a realistic, natural style and sought to tell a captivating story. Authors like Charles Dickens featured dramatic characters mostly to move the plot forward rather than explore the intricacies of being human. This type of literature focused on everyday moral and social issues. It dealt with complex moral and ethical questions, depicted through detailed and realistic characters and settings. Expect to find formal language and clear plotlines concerned with strict social conventions of the day. For example, many of Jane Austen's books focus on themes like marriage and family. World War I, the Spanish flu, and the Great Depression prompted the rise of modernist literature. The decline of farming and small family businesses led to people leaving home for work in factories and cities, a theme often found in American literature written during this time. Societal changes and industrialization meant many families grew apart. The era of prosperity in the 1920s and the hardships of the Great Depression gave modernist writers a unique, if cynical, perspective on life, leading to a reinterpretation of the human experience. The devastating impact of the First World War also left many modernist writers feeling disillusioned with societal norms like the ruling classes, the monarchy, and racialization. As a result of these experiences, modernist literature often reflects themes of fragmentation, subjectivity, disillusionment, and experimentation. Modernist writers sought to capture the complexities of modern life through innovative techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness narration, fragmented narratives, and symbols and allusions. They also challenged traditional literary forms and structures and incorporated elements of diverse cultural and ethnic experiences, creating complex, layered, and multi-dimensional works. Following the modernist period and World War II, postmodernist authors skewed further away from the style of the Victorian and modernist periods. They employed concepts like metafiction and play to explore the idea that there's no one way to explain the human experience. Postmodernist authors like Kurt Vonnegut didn't delve into a deep analysis of human nature. Instead, they told their subjective truths in a way that they knew might alienate some audience members. Postmodernist authors were not afraid to be controversial and often found that their work polarized readers while sparking essential conversations about right, wrong, and gray areas. Modernism and postmodernism describe two distinct literary movements of the early to mid and mid to late 20th century periods respectively. Modernism focuses on individual experience, fragmentation, and experimentation, while postmodernism rejects objective truth and certainty. It employs irony, parody and satire. Famous modernist authors include Franz Kafka, E.E. Cummings and Virginia Woolf, whereas noted post-modernist authors include Vladimir Nabokov, George Orwell and even Salman Rushdie. Readers can find examples of noted authors and poets who worked in both periods. These include Irishman Samuel Beckett and the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges. Beckett's works, such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* reflect the themes of fragmentation and existentialism. Borges' works, including *The Garden of Forking Paths* and *The Library of Babel* also reflect both modernist and postmodern influences, addressing similar themes. Classic and Victorian literature moved stories forward using easy-to-follow plotlines and dialogue. On first read, anyone can follow the plotline of books like *Pride and Prejudice* or *Jane Eyre*read. Modernist literature is often harder to follow. Modernist books like *Mrs Dalloway* or poems like *The Second Coming* requires interpretation and analysis. For more, learn how to analyze a book. These works are characterized by experimentation, subjective writing, symbolism, new forms, and cultural diversity. Modernist writers like T.S. Elliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce captured these themes through fragmented and subjective writing. They used techniques like stream-of-consciousness, fragmented narratives, symbols, and allusions. They also broke from traditional literary forms and include diverse cultural experiences. Readers of this genre can expect to find the following themes: Individualism and subjectivity: Modernist literature emphasized individuals' inner experiences and perspectives rather than an objective reality. Alienation and disillusionment: Modernist writers like Joyce explored feelings of alienation, disillusionment, and the search for meaning in the early 20th century. The fragmentation of society and the self: Modernist writers like Ezra Pound tried to capture the fragmented, complex nature of modern life and the fragmented experiences of the individual. A search for identity: Modernist literature raised questions of identity, including issues of race, gender, sex, and cultural identity. Time and memory: Modernist literature explored the nature of time and memory, including the past and its influence on early 20th century society. The collapse of traditional values: Modernist works often criticized traditional values and institutions like the ruling classes and monarchy and explored the effects of their decline. The impact of science and technology: Modernist writers often considered the impact of new technological and scientific developments on society and the individual, such as factories and big cities. Modern literature is emotional and raw and exposes brutal truths about characters and humanity. Sometimes, authors experimented with non-linear literary timelines, telling readers one part of the story before narrating a past event. This conceit gave rise to the concept of the unreliable narrator. Individualism formed a vital part of the modern literature movement. Short stories and novels from this period typically focused on individual character and their inner journey—one famous example is *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka. Modernist authors leaned heavily on symbolism and imagery. For example, T.S. Eliot's uses images of death, decay, and fragmentation in *The Waste Land* to express the cultural and psychological effects of World War I. The river in the poem symbolizes life and death, while the image of the drowned sailor and the rat creeping through the sewage represents a sense of despair and decay. W.B Yeats employs similar imagery in his famous poem *The Second Coming*. Many modernist authors wrote their novels in the first person. The point of view of modernist works allowed the reader to understand that the protagonist's perception of other characters was subjective. It forced readers to consider whether the protagonist was fair in their judgment of others in the story. In modernist literature, writers often employ a stream-of-consciousness style. Their characters' thoughts, speech, feelings and reactions come at once in a dense rush of prose. Readers can often find an unreliable narrator whose perspective shifts with the story. You might also be interested in learning the definition of logos in literature. Before the modern era, poets mostly followed a specific rhyme scheme or style. Modernist poets changed all that. They disregarded rules regarding the number of syllables and rhymes at the end of each line. They also changed conventions relating to structure and length. Instead, free verse became king. Poets of the day, like Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and T.S. Eliot, expressed themselves however they saw fit. They turned away from typical poetical devices like brevity and imagery, and instead, their creative output became much longer and even more cynical. Many modernist poets sparked debates about what poetry is—without rhyme and metered verses. For more, read our guide to the most common types of poetry. Here, we'll look at some of the most famous examples of modernist literature from American literature and English literature. How cold and slimy the water had been! A fellow had once seen a big rat jump into the scum. Mother was sitting at the fire with Dante waiting for Brigid to bring in the tea. She had her feet on the fender and her jewelry slippers were so hot and they had such a lovely warm smell!James Joyce Joyce expertly uses imagery to paint a picture for readers throughout his novel. The story is about the Irish author's life (with fictional details added). Literary critics have long heralded the book for its detailed, vivid descriptions that make readers feel like they're growing up with the protagonist. The book goes through many hardships Joyce faced growing up, including understanding political problems, pondering his thoughts on religion, and deciding to leave his homeland. Many of Joyce's other works, including *Ulysses* and *The Dubliners*, are considered modernist classics. Check out our round-up of the best classic literature books to learn more. In this novel about a group of ex-pats living in Paris, Hemingway perfectly portrays the stream of consciousness associated with modernism. His meandering passages take the reader through his characters' thoughts, making them feel like they're walking down post-World War I European streets, wandering through the Parisian nightlife and the excitement of Spanish bullfights. Unlike many modernist authors, Hemingway often experimented with spare prose and with much of his character's motivations taking place beneath the surface. Check out the Best Ernest Hemingway books. He was married five years, had three children, lost most of the fifty thousand dollars his father left him, the balance of the estate having gone to his mother, hardened into a rather unattractive mould under domestic unhappiness with a rich wife, and just when he had made up his mind to leave his wife she left him and went off with a miniature-painter. As he had been thinking for months about leaving his wife and had not done it because it would be too cruel to deprive her of himself, her departure was a very healthful shock. Ernest Hemingway Heralded by many as the great American novel, *The Great Gatsby* paints a clear picture of luxury, love, and loss. Told from the first-person point of view, Fitzgerald provides the reader with Nick Carraway's perspective, taking readers through his endless quest to win Daisy's heart. The way that Fitzgerald described *Gatsby's* opulent parties still has readers talking about the book nearly a century after its release. For more, check out our guide to the best American authors. She laughed again, as if she said something very witty, and held my hand for a moment, looking up into my face, promising that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see. That was a way she had. She hinted in a murmur that the surname of the balancing girl was Baker. (I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming.) F. Scott Fitzgerald This famous poem by Eliot is a lengthy, fragmented, multilingual poem. First published in 1922, Eliot explores themes of disillusionment and fragmentation. The poem's central theme is disillusionment and fragmentation in the aftermath of World War I. The structure and style of *The Waste Land* had a significant influence on subsequent modernist and postmodernist literature. Read our guide to free verse poetry to learn more. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" T.S. Eliot Franz Kafka This horrifying novella by Czech novelist and short story writer Franz Kafka was published in 19015. It depicts how its protagonist George Samsa changes into a huge insect or cockroach. The book addresses themes like identity, a person's place in the world, and the shifting nature of reality. "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." Franz Kafka Published in 1929, this American novel employs a fragmented, non-linear style. It's told from multiple perspectives, each with its distinct voice and style. Faulkner uses stream-of-consciousness narration to delve into the psychological states of his characters. He challenged= traditional storytelling methods of the day. The plot focuses on the decline of a Southern family, the loss of traditional values and ways of life, and the psychological toll of such changes. Expect themes like disillusionment, decay, and the struggle for identity. "Clocks slay time... time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life." William Faulkner W.B. Yeats Published in 1919, explores the themes of change, decay, and the end of an era. Like many noted modernist poets, Yeats wrote this famous work in the aftermath of World War I. It reflects the sense of disillusionment and instability that characterized the early 20th century. He employs vivid imagery and metaphors to convey a sense of impending apocalypse and the collapse of traditional cultural and social structures. Turning and turning in the widening gyre The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, William Butler Yeats Critics define modern literature as works produced during the late 19th century to the mid-20th century. However, the themes and subjects in modern literature range from social and political issues of the day to universal human experiences. For example, modernist writers like James Joyce and William Faulkner explored the psychological and philosophical implications of a rapidly changing world. Their work is as relevant as ever.