

Modernism

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- ▶ “Modernism” is a catchall term for any kind of literary production in the interwar period that deals with modern world.
 - ▶ It refers to work that represents the transformation of traditional society under the pressures of modernity, and that breaks down traditional literary forms in doing so.
 - ▶ Much modernist literature of this sort, which critics increasingly now set apart as “high modernism,” is in a sense antimodern: it interprets modernity as an experience of loss.

Artistic Movement

- ▶ As an artistic movement, however, modernism reached a defining level of international coherence and momentum in response to the effects of World War I.
- ▶ It involved other art forms—sculpture, painting, dance—as well as literature.
- ▶ At the heart of the high modernist aesthetic lay the conviction that the previously sustaining structures of human life, whether social, political, religious, or artistic, had been destroyed or shown up as falsehoods, or at best, arbitrary and fragile human constructions.

Cubism

Pablo Picasso



Surrealism

Salvador Dali



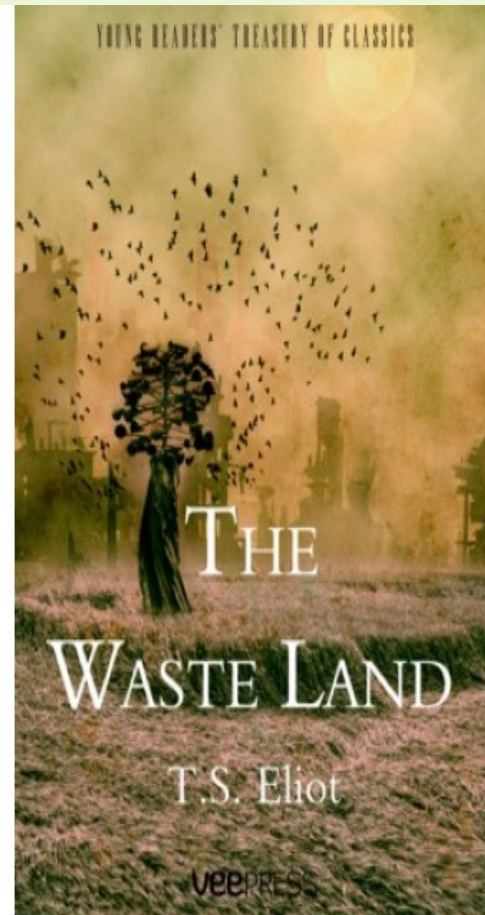
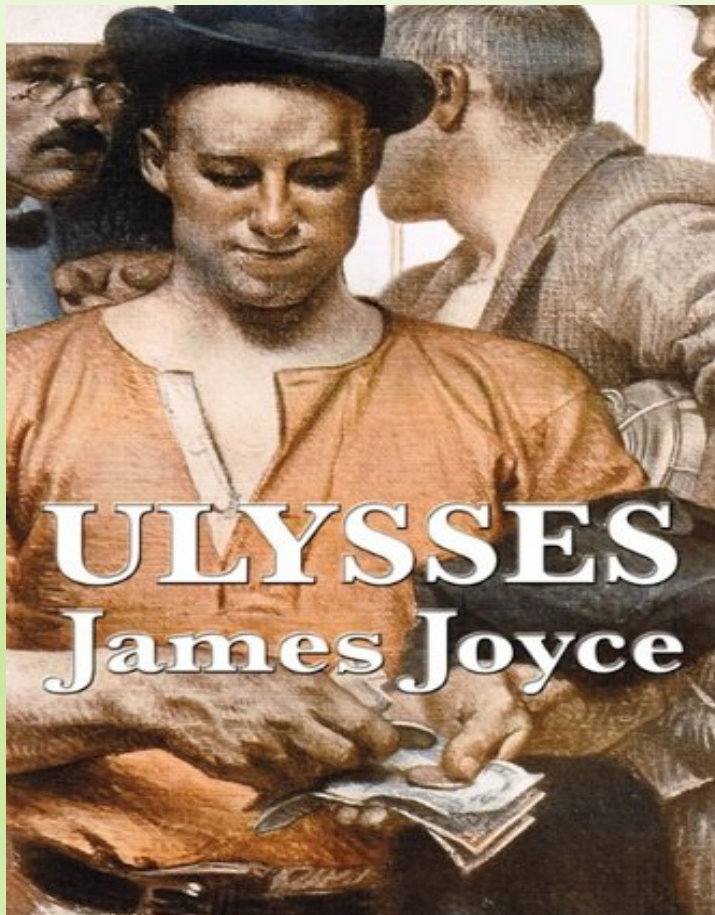
Marcel Duchamp

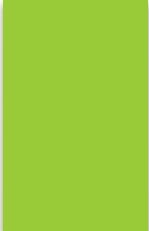


The “Shape” of Modern Literature

- ▶ Modernist literature is often notable for what it omits: the explanations, interpretations, connections, summaries, and distancing that provide continuity, perspective, and security in earlier literatures.
- ▶ There may be shifts in perspective, voice, or tone. Its rhetoric may be understated, ironic. It may suggest rather than assert, making use of symbols and images instead of statements.

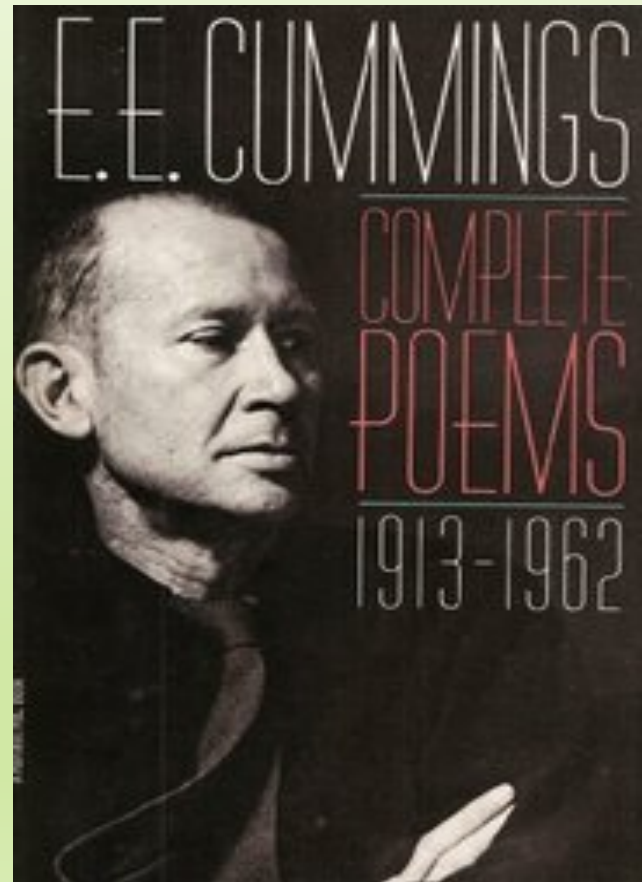
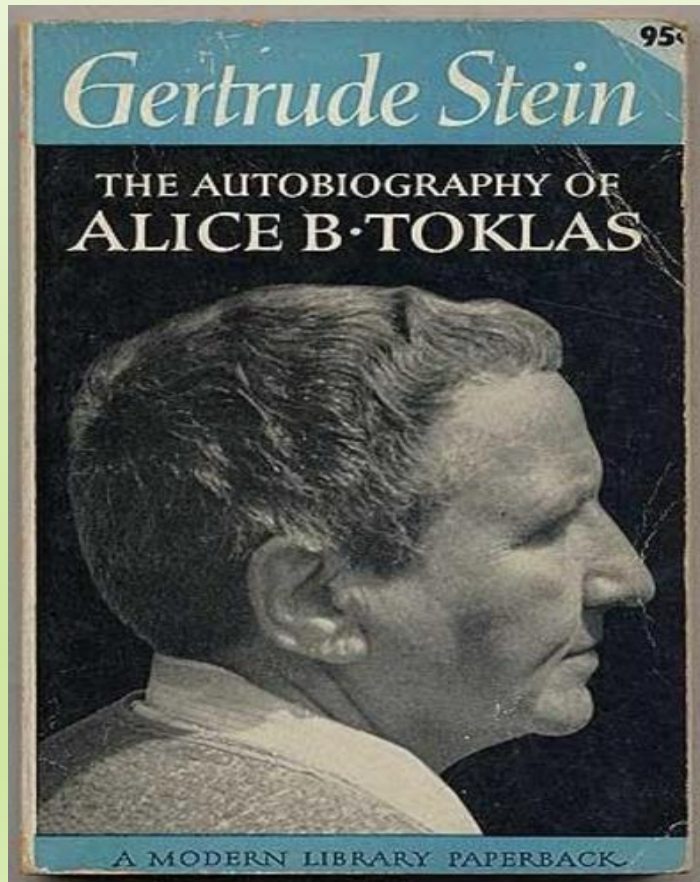
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- ▶ Some high modernist works, however, order their discontinuous elements into conspicuous larger patterns, patterns often drawn from world literature, mythologies, and religions.
 - ▶ The question for readers lies in the meaning of these borrowed structures and mythic parallels: do they reveal profound similarities or ironic contrasts between the modern world and earlier times?



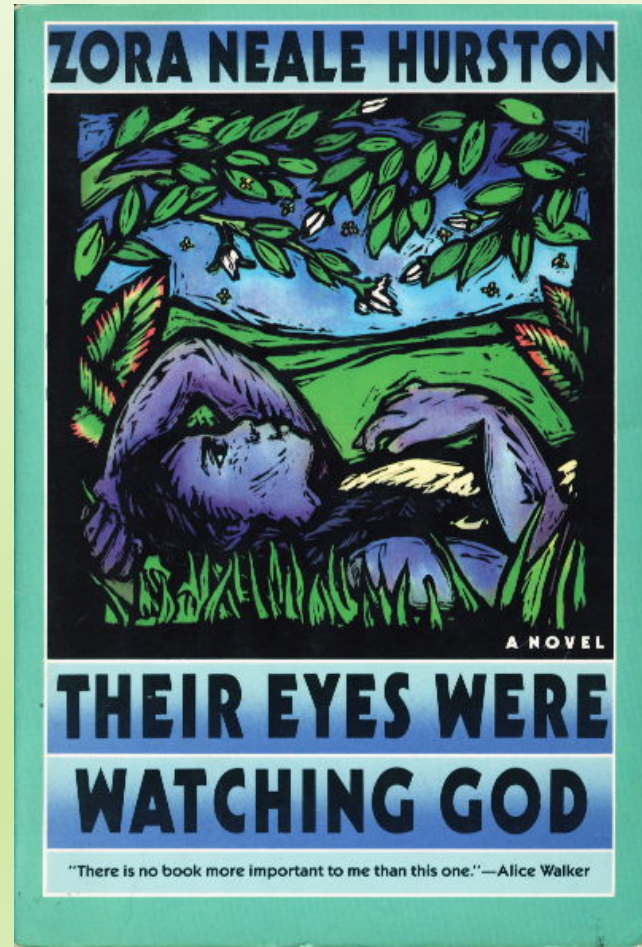
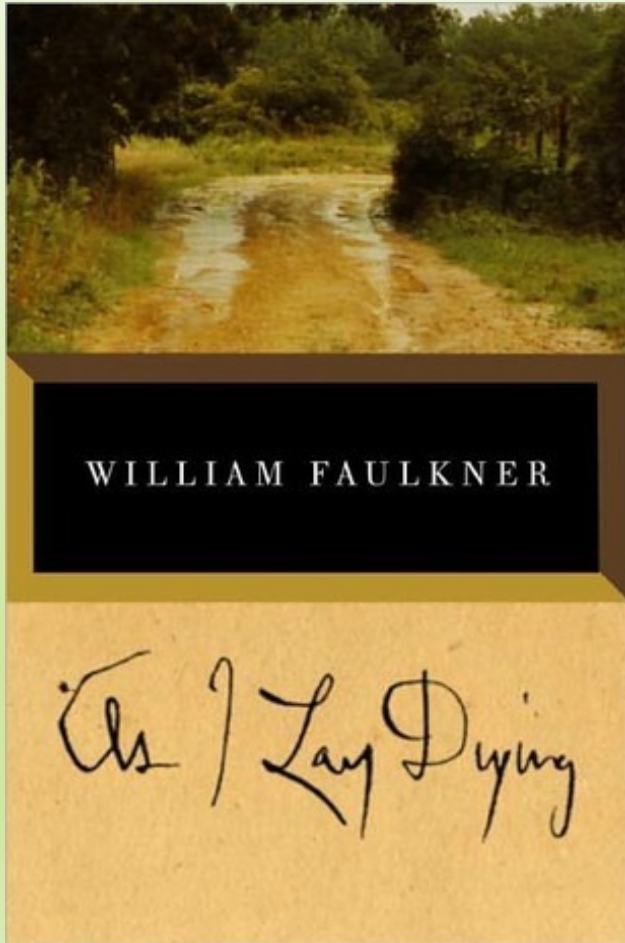
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- ▶ High modernist writing was especially self-reflexive, concerned with its own nature as art with its questioning of previous traditions of literature.
 - ▶ Prose writers strove for directness, compression, and vividness. They were often sparing of words.
 - ▶ The modernist aesthetic gave a new significance to the short story, which had previously been thought of as a relatively slight artistic form.

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- ▶ Poems, too, became shorter, as narrative poems lost ground to lyrics, and the repetitive patterns of rhyme and meter that had helped sustain long poems in previous centuries lost ground to free verse.
 - ▶ Modern fiction preferred suggestion.
 - ▶ Modern fiction tended to be written in the first person or to limit the reader to one character's point of view on the action.

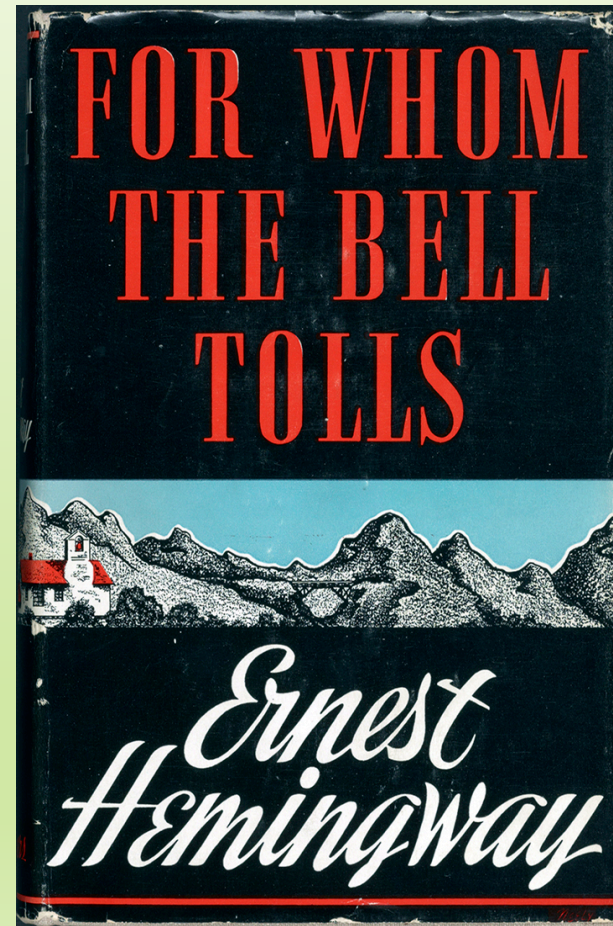
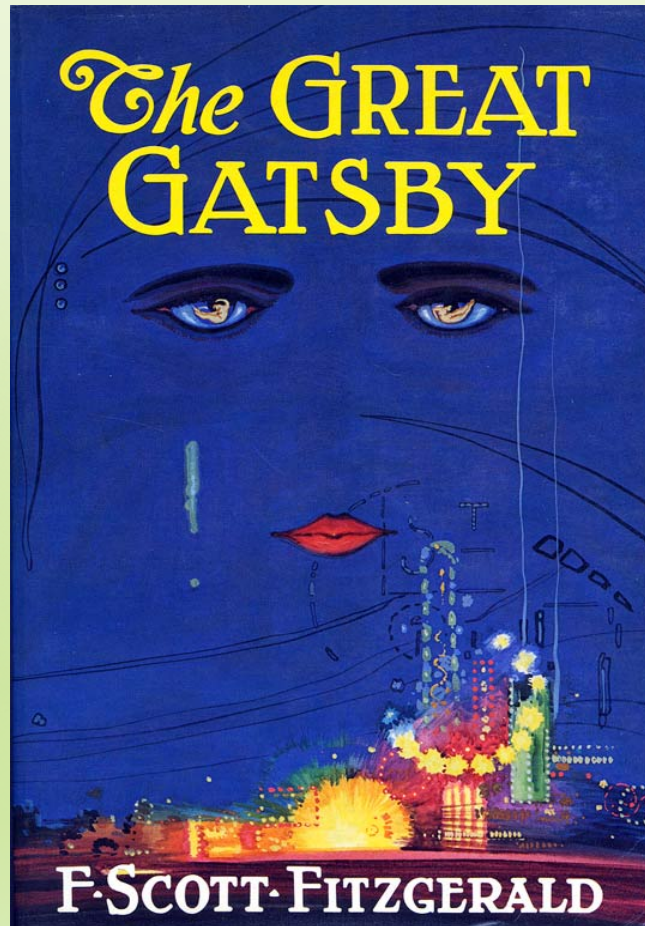
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- ▶ In both poetry and fiction, modernists tended to emphasize the concrete sensory image or detail over general statement.
 - ▶ Allusions to literary, historical, philosophical, or religious details of the past often kept company, in modernist works, with vignettes of contemporary life, chunks of popular culture dream imagery, and symbolism drawn from the author's private repertory of life experiences.



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- ▶ The inclusion of material previously deemed “unliterary” in works of high seriousness extended to language that might previously have been thought improper, including representations of the speech of the uneducated and the inarticulate, the colloquial, slangy, and the popular.



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- ▶ “Serious” literature between two world wars thus found itself in a curious relationship with the culture at large.
 - ▶ If it attacked the old-style ideals of polite literature, it felt itself attacked in turn by the ever-growing industry of popular literature.
 - ▶ The reading audience in American was vast, but it preferred a kind of book quite different from that turned out by literary high modernists: tales of romance or adventure, historical novels, crime fiction, and westerns became popular modes.



Work Cited

- ▶ Baym, Nina, ed. *The Norton Anthology of*
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- ▶ Norton, 2012. Print.