

Modernism- 1890-1940

“Make it new.”

-Ezra Pound

Overview: Modernism was a movement in art, poetry, drama, the novel, and music that lasted (roughly) from 1890-1925, with “High Modernism” from about 1920-1925.

General Beliefs

- The assurances of religion, politics, and society no longer work to reassure people.
- History is coming to an end.
- Modern life is futile.
- Many modernists believed art had replaced religion as the guiding force to make sense of the world.
- Many modernists sought back to ancient myths for inspiration.
- Others felt that artists must reject the past and create one’s own sense of coherence.
- Literature should unsettle readers.

Changes in Poetic Form

- Modernists tended to make radical experiments in form and expression
- Began with “burying the art” technique of hiding/minimizing meter and rhyme
- Some poets, like Pound, sought to revive old forms like the epic
- Progressed to a focus on strong central images – images not necessarily “logically” linked
- Focus on words as pure sound
- Strong interaction between poetry and other arts – painting and music especially
- Free verse

Changes in Prose Form

- Influence of psychology especially important with stream-of-consciousness narrative.