

Describe the Development of Modernism in Literature

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Due Date

Modernism is a movement in art, literature, architecture and music that appeared following World War I. It differed greatly from all other styles and tendencies that were accepted in the world of culture during the periods of classicism and romanticism.

The movement had strong influences that created the foundation for its development. World War I, as well as a number of revolutions, had a tremendous influence on society, everywhere. These historical events, harsh consequences, and technical progress led to the search for new values and perspectives. Thus, the beginning of the 20th century is viewed as the starting point for the literary movement called 'modernism' (Gay, 2007; Hughes, 2012). It was a new way of thinking and of expressing those thoughts.

After World War I, people were completely disillusioned and suffered from despair. There were no reasons to feel optimistic; thus, the plots presented in literature were also rather pessimistic. All social events and processes seemed pointless. It was quite clear that there was no way back to the life society had before the Great War, so a search for new morals began, and with it, a cultural transformation also began (Hughes, 2012). This new thought permeated all forms of expression in art and literature.

Modernism can be viewed as a rejection of classicism and its characteristics. Moreover, it was a step away from the moral norms and tendencies previously accepted by society and as a part of culture. In the period of classicism, writers tended to focus mostly on objects, as well as relationships. Also, classical writers were very much focused on social issues. They looked for universal truths and aimed to please everyone. Modernist writers, on the other hand, shifted the focus to the feelings and emotions of their main characters. They thought it was much more important to feel the music and art rather than to analyze it (Butler, 2010). Such an approach was

accepted in literature during the post-war era. The inner-self and realm of consciousness were in focus for every writer and artist.

The writers decided to refuse the traditions that had been accepted during the 19th century. Writers were looking for new ways to express their ideas. As a result, very often they created new forms of writing (Gay, 2007). James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Franz Kafka, and Marcel Proust are just a few names of the most prominent writers during that time who created literary masterpieces.

The founders of modernism in French literature were Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine. Their works enriched French poetry through the use of a wide range of colorful images and new literary methods (Hughes, 2012). For example, special importance was paid to the suggested meaning of a word. French poets focused on word associations to evoke thought or feeling. The basic idea was often hidden very far from the associations initially made by the reader. For instance, it was difficult to determine to what idea or object the writer was referring in his poem. Such an approach made the reader use his power of imagination to interpret the images created in the poems.

In addition, the French poets often coined words in their literary pieces in a rather unexpected way and developed new literary devices. The poets and writers were constantly looking for new ways to combine them to make images more vivid and expressive. In doing so, the artists tried to depict reality from new and unexpected angles. For example, James Joy's presented a new direction in the Irish literature, called 'the stream of consciousness'. His world famous book is entitled 'Ulysses'. This masterpiece is an excellent example of the literary shift from actual events to what happens in the mind (Hughes, 2012). What is intriguing is that

thoughts occur much faster than actual events so that a moment in time can seem much longer than the event taking place.

In addition, writers paid much attention to the use of words. The modernist literary movement involved expressing one's reactions to events rather than describing the events (Hughes, 2012). The main characters in the novels, short stories and poems expressed their feelings and emotions. In doing so, they showed a part of their inner world to others. Sometimes it's difficult to interpret a sense of the content, but the key point is to make the reader feel rather than think.

Among the styles that started to form during the era of modernism are impressionism, expressionism, futurism, surrealism, symbolism, intellectual prose, cubism, and avant-garde (Gay, 2007). Writers and poets from various countries tried to find answers to questions that dealt with deep thoughts and feelings. Each tried to go to the depths of one's soul, often referred to as subconsciousness.

The typical characteristics of modernism are:

1. Philosophical ideas
2. Intellectuality
3. Refusal of a linear plot line
4. Chronological leaps in time
5. Absence of distinct description of a character's personality and appearance
6. Disappearance of character narration and summary

7. Importance of the current moment
8. Unresolved and open endings
9. Highlighted role of the subconsciousness
10. Attention to a character's feelings and emotions
11. Focus on associations
12. Frequent absence of logical connections

Beauty played a special role for the modernist writers, as well. It was considered to be the unity of kindness and evil. During this literary movement, beauty was thought to serve a great purpose, which was to save the world (Keep et al., 1993). It was seen as the only possible way to react to the horror of social life at that time. So, every writer and poet tried to perfect beauty in his literary pieces. The authors who composed their works during this period often tended to describe exotic countries and to use various ancient myths and mysticism as a way to add a sense of beauty.

Many readers felt challenged by the writers' new motives and forms of writing. Though sometimes shocking and rather unexpected, the literary works of modernists, created at the beginning of the 20th century, played a vital role in the formation of the modern paradigm of thinking in perceiving today's reality. Moreover, these writers enriched the world of literature with a great number of fresh vivid images, and they set various directions for further creative development.

References

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