

## Modern English Fiction

Modern fiction and short stories were published from the 1880s to 1940s. The world underwent a rapid change after World War I, Globalization and the rise of industrial technology gave way to new narratives. Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* shocked the readers with their labour-theories, human origin and the human mind. Friedrich Nietzsche's "will to power" introduced the human driving force behind all actions. Writers from over the globe looked towards philosophy, anthropology and psychology to get new plots. Writers sought to redefine the past, present and future.

What D. H. Lawrence called "the struggle of becoming" applied to society and culture. Groups like the Bloomsbury Group and the Auden Group were full of artists with diverse thoughts. New techniques like the stream of consciousness, poetic prose and the metonymic mode were employed by modern writers. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) uses metonymy to describe the people of India thus "The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving."

Joseph Conrad used the worlds beyond England as his settings to represent colonialism. He used his experiences as a sailor to make the majority of his characters. *Lord Jim* (1900) is a tale of a young English sailor who deliberately dies an honourable death because he deserted his ship in danger. Moral conflicts, human decisions and extreme locations mark the narratives of Conrad. *Nostramo* (1904) is Conrad's masterpiece about a man's obsession with treasure. Conrad explores trust, betrayal and corruption. He uses one narrator, Marlowe, to provide coherence to all his novels. F. R. Leavis placed Conrad in his 'great tradition' of novelists because of his techniques. Some of them are the multiple points of view, time-shifting, flashbacks and exploration of both land and mind. Darkness of the psyche is the major theme in his novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Commercial exploitation of colonies makes men like Kurtz hollow and questions the purpose of morality.

Henry James' (1843-1916) early novels like *Daisy Miller* (1879) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) explore differences between European and American high society. The novels are in the manner of *Bildungsroman* where an innocent character gains experience. In *The Ambassadors* (1903) James uses the stream of consciousness technique to explore the outsiders of a city. James explores everything from design in the short story *The Figure in the Carpet* (1895), female psychology through the Gothic in *The Turn of the Screw* and the obsession with art in *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

Herbert George Wells (1866-1946) is better known today for his science fiction. His belief is of materialistic enlightenment through the advances of science. Time travel, aliens, invisibility and time-space continuum are all explored with a reason for promoting a new world order. His first novel, *The Time Machine* (1895) not only examines scientific problems but also racial segregation in a capitalistic England. *The War of the Worlds* (1898) is also on

social structures and the collapse of them after a catastrophe. Wells turned to social progress in *A Modern Utopia* (1905).

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is the centre of the 'Bloomsbury Group' which included her father Leslie Stephen, the biographer and her husband Leonard Woolf. She rebelled against materialism of novelists like H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy. She used a poetic style with the stream of consciousness to capture the thoughts of her characters in detail. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) explores the individuality of a single character in one day in London. Clarissa Dalloway's past is analysed through memory and recollection. In *The Waves* (1931) Woolf explores the lives of six characters who have been affected by the death of a person. Her most popular *To the Lighthouse* (1927) is an adventure of Mrs Ramsay and her family during a vacation before World War I and after. Mrs Ramsay is a woman of strong imagination searching for truth in life. But her husband Mr Ramsay is literal and blank. In the second part of the novel, Mrs Ramsay has died but her presence is still felt by the others. The lighthouse represents a symbol of ambiguity that provides different meanings for different characters and even the reader. Woolf was also a journalist and essayist. Her influential *A Room of One's Own* (1928) explains the need for women's independence and isolation to become an artist.

While Woolf used the poetic stream of consciousness method, James Joyce (1882-1941) prefers the fragmentary and free form. *Ulysses* (1922) is a Homeric but ordinary day (June 1904) in the lives of Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. Leopold is an Everyman, an Irish advertising agent, representing Homer's Odysseus. His wife, Molly is a modern Penelope. But the legends of modern day Dublin question their morality, their purpose in life and their relationship to each other.