

out so much of what lies beneath the surface. The Father of Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, is profoundly influential in this vision, as he mapped out an inner world of human beings that includes the subconscious and the unconscious and the psychic structures of the id, ego, and superego. The superego influences identity, as it acts as a kind of internal judge of one's actions and enforces civilizing qualities that repress humans' baser instincts. Modernist literature reflects the heavy influence of the linguistic attributes of Freudian thinking, with elements such as dreams, jokes, and slips of the tongue expressing very real but inaccessible forces working in a character's inner world.

The modernist writer challenges narrative traditions; rather than use a sequential flow to tell a story, modernists may instead break up the chronology within a text. Narrators may change in mid-page or mid-poem in a modernist text. Modernist literature often uses devices such as stream-of-consciousness in narration, the use of fragments, and the experience of epiphany—the sudden realization of a profound revelation that usually comes from common experiences. The following quote by the renowned modernist writer Virginia Woolf offers one way to understand the modernist rejection of literature that adheres to a chronological sequencing of events and to an identifiable narrative origin:

*Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?*⁴

The rich notion that experience—especially inner experience—is not symmetrically arranged but diffuse in both space and in time creates possibilities for writers to explore interior consciousness in a manner that at times has some kinship with the artistic period of Impressionism. Edges are not sharply defined, and there is a flow from one description to another that creates the mental image. Revelation comes not in a chronological progression, but in pieces, as Eliot expresses near the end of his great poem, "The Waste Land," when the poem's speaker claims, "these fragments I have shored against my ruins"—as if the ruined civilization of the twentieth century might find salvation in the collection of fragments available in the mind of the artist.

The ambition of modernism comes in part from another



*British writer T. S. Eliot, photographed in 1934. The narrative voice of Eliot's *Prufrock* seems to presage the focus on Hamlet's side-men, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*

influential thinker, the nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's overarching complaint was of the inherent meekness of humanity in the current state of Christianity. His well-known antidote to this was for humans to seize the will to power and realize the creation of the self as the *übermensch* or superman. This superman responds to a crisis in civilization—where humans are led by religion to an unproductive and complacent attitude and a retreat to the values of the herd—by striving to create and define new values for humanity. In modernist terms, the artist is seen as the creative force, and the task is one in which the world, or the representation of the world, shapes a new and vital reality for the reader, viewer, or audience.

Some modernist art is descriptive of what the civilized world lacks in its vital performance of life. Some modernist art attempts to suggest how a new kind of understanding can lead to new ways of being in the world that create meaning for human existence. The ambition of the modernist artist is seen in a passage from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, when the protagonist, the arrogant scholar Stephen Dedalus, is ready to leave his home of Dublin and the comforts of Catholicism with the loftiest of ambitions. "Welcome, O life!" he writes in his

