

**The Modern Novel, 1900-1930, Modern English Literature, 1890-1960**  
**Dr. Eglantina Rempert, Autumn 2019**

**Literary market in UK**

education – rates of literacy were on the increase

(around 80% of population was literate in the 1890s )

market for literary products was expanding

newspaper culture was expanding

-- many writers worked as journalists

**Great Thematic Variation, 1890s-1920s**

gothic / horror fiction (James)

travel writing (Conrad)

realist fiction (Galsworthy)

social chronicles (Forster)

psychological novels (Lawrence, Woolf)

**New ideas by the 1910s and the 1920s**

Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Henri-Louis Bergson,

Albert Einstein, Friedrich Nietzsche

the novel (as a genre) needed to engage

with the new ideas

**Debate over the renewal of the Genre**

**Content and Form**

- H. G. Wells, 'The Contemporary Novel'
- E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel
- Virginia Woolf, 'Is Fiction an Art?'
- 'Modern Fiction'
- D. H. Lawrence, 'The Novel'

**E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910)**

*Wilcoxes*

English, empire-builders,  
 masculine, unsentimental

(new world)

*Schlegels*

half-German, intellectual,  
 feminine, impractical,  
 devoted to the arts

(old world)

Questions E. M. Forster poses:

(→ **Content**)

Is it possible to reconcile the contrasting values of the families?...and to reconcile the contrasting values emerging in England at the time?

**Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)**

On the beginning of Modernism:

In or about December 1910 human character changed.

I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen laid an egg. The change was not sudden or definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910.

All human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature.

(Virginia Woolf in 'Modern Fiction')

→ **paradigm shift**

*Mrs Dalloway*: The narrative is in a constant state of flux to reflect on life being in a constant state of flux (→ **Form**)

Modernist characteristics: sequencing (time)  
 language (style)  
 relation between main plot and subplot  
 characterisation

She had torn it. Someone had trod on her skirt. By artificial light the green shone, but lost its colour now in the sun. She would mend it.

Her maids had too much to do. She would wear it tonight. She would take her silk, her scissors, her – what was it? – her thimble, of course, down into the drawing-room, for she must also write, and see that things generally were more or less in order.

*(Mrs Dalloway)*

→ **stream of consciousness technique**

**Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (1903)**

H. G. Wells on Henry James's style: (→ **Form**)  
 formal perfectionist  
 known for purism  
 ('The Contemporary Novel')

He had dropped back on his bench, alone again for a time, and the more conscious of little Bilham's defection of his unexpressed thought; in respect to which, however, this next converser was a still more capacious vessel. 'It's the child' he exclaimed to her almost as soon as she appeared; and though her direct response was for some time delayed he could feel in her meanwhile the working of this truth

*(The Ambassadors 144)*

Style (**Form**): traditional, sometimes academic  
 Plot (**Content**): modern, even if not yet Modernist

Mrs Newsome      Chad Newsome  
 Lambert Strether      Waymarsh

Questions James poses: (→ **Content**)

Is it possible to reconcile the contrasting values of the families?...and to reconcile the contrasting values that were emerging in Europe at the time? (1900s)

European values (that are more traditional)  
 vs. American values (that are perceived to be more progressive)

Compare the theme of reconciliation in James, in Forster, and in Woolf.