“Modern” or “modernism” can imply at least three similar meanings. On the most general level, it can mean an innovation, novelty, that is something which is in contrast to the old and thus it expresses a certain belief in progress. The other, more specific meaning refers to the modern period understood, from the philosophical point of view, as connected to Enlightenment thinking, rationality and the period since the 18th century that started to emphasize reason as the means of “objective” exploration of reality that is closely connected with empiricism in philosophy (John Locke, Rene Descartes, David Hume). Last, but not least, the term modern, or modernism, is associated with the particular tendency in arts starting in the late 19th century (Symbolism, Impressionism) that emphasizes subjective experience, psychology and non-mimetic, non-realistic representation of reality as manifested in the works of avantgarde and other poetic tendencies (Dadaism, Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, Poeticism, Cubism) and the works of mostly European (Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, British Bloomsbury Group of authors, James Joyce) and American authors (T. S. Eliot, the Lost Generation and others). In difference from postmodernist vision of the world, modernism especially of the early 20th century and the post-WW I period (avantgarde movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism, Poeticism, Imagism, the Bloomsbury Group, the Lost Generation authors), tried to present a literary work as a way out of the chaotic post-World War I reality, but also as a whole, however fragmented, creating a transcendental meaning. Modernism was also a reaction to traditional realistic depiction of reality and put an emphasis on a subjective experience. In difference from realism and mimetic representation techniques that tried to „imitate” reality, modernist literary works put the emphasis on subjective experience rather on a belief in a possibility of a literary work to express the objective meaning and truth. All this was stimulated by a new period of industrialism, new large scale production, especially in Great Britain and the USA, technological inventions (telephone, cars, film, aircrafts, electric bulb) as well as by the socio-historical events and atmosphere of the period. This period, especially of late 19th and early 20th century, was also connected with the above socio-economic and industrial changes that have required a new perception of the world. Industrial production and scientific inventions have stimulated not only technological progress, but also growing
alienation in the rapidly growing urban environments, but also skepticism associated with the misuse of technologies for massive killing during the World War I. However experimental and often fragmented, literary works and arts offered an artistic and aesthetic experience as an alternative to the chaotic and depressive reality. In difference from realistic literary works based on mimetic principle of imitation of the nature (reality), that is the works which presented the world as objective, knowable and imitable through language (of a literary work), experience and reason, the modernist literary works expressed a skeptical view on such a vision of reality and the ability of a literary work to give an objective, truthful and objective picture of reality. Rather than attempting to describe the outer, external and social reality and class conflict, modernist literary works focused on the inner life, psychology, mind and subjective experience of characters. It was associated not only with the general skepticism of the post- World War I period, but especially with a growing distrust of scientists, artists, philosophers and scholars in the ability of reason to grasp, understand and explain reality. The belief in reason, its ability to understand and explain the world and thus also master the nature was a typical feature of the Enlightenment period of the 18th century and its philosophers such as Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke as expressed in a typical Descartian statement: Cogito Ergo Sum – I think, therefore I am (thinking and reason are the basic aspects of human personality and give a way to understanding of the world). The novel, especially the English realistic novel of the 18th century as represented by Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smolett, and Samuel Richardson was a typical product of the Enlightenment and expressed, especially through the omniscient narrator who was in a God-like position knowing everything about the world, the rationalistic vision of the world. A growing distrust in rationality partly stemmed from the misuse of technology for massive killing of people during the World War I, and partly from the philosophic ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche and psychology of Sigmund Freud who expressed a skeptical view on a human being during the period of growing industrialism, commercialism and consumerism. Arthur Schopenhauer....., Friedrich Nietzsche has theorized man’s will to power and unreliability of language to represent the world, Ludwig Wittgenstein was dealing with a philosophy of language and the unexpected meaning it produces through “the language games”, and Sigmund Freud understood human being as irrational rather rational being driven by unconscious forces, suppressed dreams and sexual desires. In Steven Connor’s view, in his Philosophical Investigations (1958), Wittgenstein understood language games as “different modes of utterance corresponding to different social institutions, each following its
own set of rules” (Connor 2004: 39), that is the idea expressing a meaning and dependence of a language on the particular context rather than creating meaning by a simple reference to the as-if pre-given object. Similarly, also another important philosopher who has influenced not only modernist, but also postmodernist thinking, especially in relation to the language and the representation of reality through it, was Martin Heidegger who also understood language as an unreliable medium of referring to reality and emphasized its power to create the unexpected and uncontrolled meanings. From the philosophical and aesthetic point of view, the emphasis of a modernist literary work is on the epistemological aspects and that of postmodernist ontological (Brian Mc Hale speaks about the “epistemological” and “ontological” dominants and he has overtaken the concept of the dominant from Roman Jakobson’s theories (Mc Hale 1987). And Anton Pokrivčák summarizes about a difference between Modernism and Postmodernism in the following way: “The shift from modernism to postmodernism is understood as the shift within ontology from determinacy to indeterminacy of being, from transcendence to immanence, from symbol to allegory, from the world of ideology to the world of play”[emphasis mine] (Pokrivčák 1998:39), and this shift, in his view, can be also characterized as “the substitution of a semantic way of making sense for a semiotic one” [emphasis mine] (41).

In their literary works, Modernist fiction writers of the early 20th century such as Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Edgar Morgan Forster, American Lost Generation authors (Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Francis Scott Fitzgerald and others), in keeping with these ideas subjectivized human experience and put the emphasis on inner subjective experience as mostly expressed by a first person narrator and stream-of-consciousness narrative method, a term overtaken from psychological theories of William James, a brother of writer Henry James. Modernist writers thus subjectivized experience and, in their literary works, presented the idea that the world cannot be objectively known only subjectively perceived by human mind. This subjectivity manifested mostly itself, as it was mentioned above, in the first person narrative and the use of the stream-of-consciousness narrative method expressing the subjective perception of reality by human mind. In modernist literary works, chaotic reality manifested itself in authors’ use of non-chronological, fragmentary composition and in a depiction of the relationships between the characters. Fragmentary composition, the use of non-linear and non-chronological time expressed a new sensibility of the chaotic world and the alienation as
a product of modern era and life in the cities. Alienation manifests itself in the characters’ relationship to other characters, society, work, and the city that can finally lead to the feelings of nihilism. Alienation is also closely connected to skepticism which manifests itself in the characters’ attitudes to the society. Modernist literary work is often ironic and parodic, and irony and parody are used as a form critique both of realistic or romantic literary tradition and of the society. Modernist writers often use ancient myths that are transformed and recontextualized in a modern context and thus they become modern myths related to modernist cultural experience as expressed, for example, in James Joyce’s Ulysses (1922). The cities became cultural, educational, industrial and economic centers of technologically advanced societies and life in the cities and suburbs one of the major themes of the modernist literary works. Typical statement of the modernists was “Make it new!” by Ezra Pound, an American poet in the early 20th century. Virginia Woolf, an English modernist author, argued that “In or about December, 1910, human character changed” (in Hoffmann, Hornung, Kunow 13). Both statements meant a belief that the society and its sensibility had changed in the early 20th century and, at the same time, a belief in the possibilities of new forms of arts that would reflect a new technological progress, sensibility but also skepticism and chaos of the modern age. Modernist literary works incorporated the techniques of new technologies, media and other forms of art to express this sensibility of a new period. For example, in his works, an American writer John Dos Passos was using a narrative method reminiscent of camera shooting ("camera-eye technique") that gives a limited scope and picture of reality; John Dos Passos also incorporated cinematic newsreels in his novels to emphasize documentary picture of reality as presented in the movie theatres in contrast to plot in his novels such as Manhattan Transfer or The 42nd Parallel, and such authors as Stephen Crane used impressionistic artistic techniques as painters to emphasize visuality and the atmosphere (his novella the The Open Boat); also the title of Henry James’ novel The Portrait of a Lady is reminiscent of a picture rather than a literary work; the poets of the Harlem Renaissance in the USA (Langston Hughes) used the rhythms of traditional popular folk and oral cultures such as blues and jazz in their poetry. Within a literary work, we can speak about the mixture of genres as manifested itself, for example, in the literary works of James Joyce whose Ulysses (1922) used a genre of a diary, myth, essay and other forms of writing and genres to point out the modernist sensibility.
Summary

Modernism can be characterized:

1) **philosophically and aesthetically**

   in the emphasis on the epistemology and semantic approach of a literary text (see Pokrivčák 1998:41)

   - a skeptical vision of the world and a distrust in the possibility of reason to understand and explain the world
   - by a growing impact of technology (cars, airplanes, telephones, media such as radio, telephone, telegraph, film) on the life style and the human perception of the world
   - a skeptical view on the use (misuse of technology) and power (the World War I)
   - seeing a man as irrational rather rational being influenced by her/his suppressed and unfulfilled desires and dreams

2) **in literature and arts these attitudes manifest themselves in:**

   - the subjectivized experience rendered mostly through the first person narrator, interior monologue, and especially stream-of-consciousness narrative method
   - a depiction of characters who are mostly unbalanced, alienated and hesitating individuals searching for their identity and a sense of life
   - in a depiction of urban setting as a site of new social experience and a producer of new relationships between people and between the individual and the society. The individual is mostly in opposition to the social structures and the society.
   - in mostly unfinished, open ending through the authors leave a space for a reader to participate in a completion of a literary work
   - in the use of fragmentation, elimination of the chronology of plot, open ending, and a mixture of different literary and non-literary genres and techniques typical of other
media and arts within a single literary work (essay, diary, letter, popular literary genres such as thriller, fantasy, detective, love story etc., the use of camera-eye techniques and newsreels that represent cinematic methods, techniques, and vision of reality, emphasis on the imagery of color as in painting)

- in the “spatialization” of time (J. Frank), its suspension to a single day or a moment like in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), a lengthy novel depicting a single day of a life of a young protagonist, or, similarly, like in Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway*

- the use of irony and parody as the means of critical approach to both reality and past literary forms and genres

- reference to myths, classical and other mythology, literary and artistic work and the consequent transformation and re-writing their original meaning to emphasize a critical distance from the past and contemporary life

- in the emphasis on art as a way out of and alternative to the chaotic and uncertain world

**Examples of Modernist Fiction:**

- Franz Kafka: The Castle

- A Trial

- Robert Musil: Man Without Qualities

- Thomas Mann: Death in Venice

- Marcel Proust:

- Joseph Conrad: Lord Jim

- Heart of Darkness

- D. H. Lawrence: Sons and Lovers;

- James Joyce: The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man
• Ulysses (1922)

• V. Woolf: Mrs. Dalloway
  o To the Lighthouse
  o The Waves

• the work of the so-called the Lost Generation group of American authors (G. Stein, E. Hemingway, John Dos Passos, F. S. Fitzgerald)

• William Faulkner: Sound and the Fury; As I Lay Dying

**Poetry:**

• symbolism and avantgarde movements of the early 20th century such as Imagism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism, Constructivism, Poeticism, Vorticism and others

• T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land (1922)

• American **Harlem Renaissance** movement of the 1920’s

• American authors such as Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, later Wallace Stevens, Robert Lowell, Edgar Lee Masters and others

• Drama: H. Ibsen
  o French playwrights Alfred Jarry, Romanian Eugene Ionesco, an Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello and with his plays, and especially experimental Characters in Search for their Author

• American playwrights Eugene O’Neill (see Javorčíková, 2004) Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller