



Solitude and Its Ambiguities in Modernist Fiction

Edward Engelberg

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In this study of solitude in modernist fiction, Edward Engelberg explores the ways in which solitude functions thematically to shape meaning in literary works, and how solitude as a condition has contributed to the making of a topos. Selected novels are analyzed to highlight the ambiguities that solitude brings to their meanings. The freedom that solitude bestows also becomes a burden from which the protagonists seek release. Although such ambiguities about solitude have existed from the Bible and the Ancients through the centuries following, they alter their shape within the context of time. The story of solitude in the 20th century moves from the Self's removal from society and retreat into nature to a condition external to Society, where the Self confronts itself, with uncertain consequences. A chapter is devoted to a synoptic analysis of solitude in the West, with emphasis on the Renaissance to the 20th century, and another chapter analyzes the ambiguities of solitude that set the stage for modernism: Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; selected works by Woolf, Mann, Sartre, Camus, and Beckett illuminate particular modernist issues of solitude and how their authors sought to resolve them.

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