

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

TOPIC: TOP TEN WRITERS OF THE LAST 150 YEARS

If we take “writers” broadly—novelists, poets, dramatists, and literary essayists—and the last 150 years as roughly 1876–2026, my top ten would be:

1. James Joyce — *Ulysses, Finnegans Wake*
Language, consciousness, time, identity. Perhaps the most radical transformation of what prose could do.
2. Virginia Woolf — *Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves*
Consciousness and inner time. Extraordinary exploration of how a self exists from moment to moment.
3. Leo Tolstoy — *Anna Karenina, War and Peace*
Just outside the modernist period but impossible to omit. **Human life in its enormous moral, social and psychological complexity.**
4. Franz Kafka — *The Trial, The Metamorphosis, The Castle*
Alienation, absurdity, bureaucracy, guilt, selfhood. Modern existence before we had fully named it.
5. T. S. Eliot — *The Waste Land, Four Quartets*
Fragmentation, spiritual crisis, time, memory and meaning. Given your recent interest in modernism and time, Eliot is particularly important.
6. Samuel Beckett — *Waiting for Godot, Molloy, The Unnamable*
Takes the question “**What remains when meaning collapses?**” almost as far as literature can take it.
7. Jorge Luis Borges — *Ficciones, The Aleph*
Infinity, identity, memory, reality, time and language. A tiny body of work with enormous philosophical reach.
8. Gabriel García Márquez — *One Hundred Years of Solitude, Love in the Time of Cholera*
Transformed the relationship between **history, myth, memory and reality.**
9. Fyodor Dostoevsky — *The Brothers Karamazov, Crime and Punishment, Notes from Underground*
Again, a nineteenth-century figure—but his exploration of **freedom, morality, evil, God and the divided self** makes him foundational to twentieth-century literature.
10. W. B. Yeats — *The Tower, The Second Coming, Among School Children*
A remarkable bridge between **nineteenth-century romanticism and literary modernism.**

There is another list I think you might prefer

If the criterion isn't simply “**greatest literary achievement**” but “**writers who most radically changed how we think about being human,**” I'd rearrange it:

Joyce → Woolf → Kafka → Dostoevsky → Beckett → Borges → Eliot → Nietzsche → Proust → Nietzsche

And I'd seriously consider adding:

- **Marcel Proust** — memory and subjective time
- **Friedrich Nietzsche** — philosophy written as literature
- **Ezra Pound** — modernist fragmentation and cultural memory
- **e. e. cummings** — the individual against linguistic/social convention
- **Rainer Maria Rilke** — existence, death, solitude
- **George Orwell** — language, power and truth
- **Toni Morrison** — memory, history, identity and race
- **Samuel Johnson?** No—too early for this particular 150-year frame.

And there's an interesting pattern here:

Proust asks what memory does to time.

Joyce asks what consciousness does to language.

Woolf asks what consciousness does to time.

Kafka asks what existence does to the individual.

Beckett asks what remains when existence loses its explanations.

Borges asks whether time, identity and reality are even what we think they are.

Eliot asks whether meaning can survive the collapse of certainty.

That cluster gets remarkably close to the questions you've been asking about **time, change, ambiguity, meaning, and the self.**

SOURCE: ChatGPT