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# Literary Movements *for Students*

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**Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Literary Movements**

**SECOND EDITION**

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# Novels That Include the Names of French Soups

I. A. Richards, the well-known literary critic, once said, "A book is a machine to think with." In making this observation, Richards underscored the reciprocal relationship between reader and text and the fact that words don't just sit there full of meaning waiting to be discovered, but rather gain their meaning by the breadth and quality of knowledge readers bring to them. *Literary Movements for Students* provides readers with this knowledge by describing various literatures in their historical and cultural contexts, by providing representative examples of the best-known movements, and by encouraging students to explore those movements more deeply.

"Literary Movements" is really a misnomer, for often the texts described under this heading were considered neither literary nor part of a discernible movement when they were written. Labels are often attached to certain writers or texts by critics and literary historians for efficiency's sake and with the benefit of hindsight, often decades, sometimes centuries, after a text has been written. Part of identifying a movement is arguing for what features define the writing associated with it, and then locating those features in specific texts. This necessarily means that the description of movements is not objective, but colored by a critic or literary historian's own particular agendas, whether or not he or she is aware of such agendas. That said, there still needs to be some kind of organizing principle for studying texts, or else there would be no basis for discussion, no way of developing knowledge about them, of understanding how a poem or a novel or a play fits into its time or what it shares in common with other texts. Academia organizes itself, for better *and* worse, in disciplines, and the discipline of literature organizes itself in periods, which themselves are associated with movements. This kind of packaging enables closer scrutiny of the object studied, which paradoxically results in a more comprehensive understanding of the material. By organizing texts and writers in terms of literary movements, this series aims to provide readers with a foot in the door, a way to think about well-known texts and tools with which to think about them. It's important to remember, however, that it is just one way, not the only way, to study literature.

The word "literary" gained its current meaning as a term used to denote a quality of poems, plays, and fiction in the eighteenth century, when writing itself proliferated, and professional literary critics emerged to police it by giving names to this or that kind of writing. An adjectival form of "literature," "literary" was used to exclude other types of writing such as philosophy and history. Today it has an even narrower connotation, serving to mark literature that is "serious" and "cerebral," as opposed to "popular" such as the romance novel or the suspense thriller. One recent example of both the merits and pitfalls of associating one's work with the term is novelist Jonathan Franzen's now well-known spat with talk show host Oprah

Winfrey in 2001. Franzen declined to have his novel, *The Corrections*, be named Winfrey's book of the month selection for her book club, which would have virtually guaranteed it financial success, claiming that Winfrey's endorsement ruined his reputation in "high art" circles. Franzen eventually retracted his comment, but the damage had already been done. In this instance, Franzen was protecting his image as a producer of *literary*, as opposed to popular, novels. Franzen is not, however, a member of any literary movement if we understand "movement" to signify organized activities by a group of people with a stated objective, though his writing might be included under Realism.

Some literary movements did begin with a clear intention, organized activities, and a set of principles—surrealism, for example. French poet Guillame Apollinaire coined the term "surrealism," and André Breton, another French poet, spelled out the principles in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*. Other movements, such as twentieth-century Expressionism, elements of which are evident in art and theater of the nineteenth century, are more nebulous, harder to pin down in terms of features or history. There are no Expressionist manifestos, and some critics claim that no such animal as Expressionism even exists. Often, the term given to a literary movement becomes a point of contention for critics whose view of literary history differs from establishment norms. Postcolonialism is a good case in point. Some want to limit the term to signify texts produced in former British colonies after the fall of the British Empire. Others argue that almost all literature (including American) is, in theory, postcolonial, because in the end history is a series of wars and occupations, of one culture displacing another. Movements are not static, but dynamic, evolving from the fray of competing interests and historical developments. An entry on Postcolonialism written ten years from today will no doubt look radically different than the one you read here. It might include novels by writers from some of the former Soviet republics, or perhaps poems from an author of a state yet to be formed, whose people are now battling for independence. Ultimately, it is the shape of the movement itself that is important to grasp, and the context of how, when, and why a particular literature came into being. *Literary Movements for Students* gives you that "how," "when," and "why."

Say, for example, that you've just seen a production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and were so impressed that you bought and read the book. You've heard Beckett's name associated with Absurdism, but don't really know what that is. If you look up Absurdism in *Literary Movements for Students*, you will find an overview of the movement, including its history, its prominent features, its primary practitioners, and how it is embodied not only in literature and Beckett's work, but in other media and disciplines such as film, painting, and philosophy. You might also find Beckett under Existentialism. *Literary Movement for Students* isn't reductive, but rather expansive in its treatment of movements, charting the crevices and crannies as much as the road most traveled. Movements are provisional by their very nature, contingent on institutional and historical forces, so you'll find a degree of crossover here, with writers and texts sometime listed under more than one movement. That's a good thing.

In the preface to his study historicizing the human sciences, *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault notes the hilarity of a passage from a story by Jorge Luis Borges in which Borges describes a Chinese encyclopedia's taxonomy of animals. Some of the categories include "belonging to the emperor," "fabulous," "embalmed," "frenzied," and "that from a long way off look like flies." One can also imagine a system of describing literature based on a principle other than literary movements. Such a system might include categories like "books over thirty-four pages," "poems with wine stains," "plays involving a butter dish, a butler, and two pencils," and "novels that include names of French soups." While teaching a course based on texts from one of these categories might well prove engaging, (I'd certainly like to try), one would have a difficult time justifying it to a curriculum review committee. The fact is, literature illustrates, and often instigates, social trends, and history speaks through writers, whether they want it to or not. As of today, critics have yet to make a case for novels that include the names of French soups to be considered a major literary movement. But you might want to check back in ten years, just in case.

*Chris Semansky*
*Chemeketa Community College, Salem, Oregon*

# *Introduction*

## *Purpose of the Book*

The purpose of *Literary Movements for Students* (*LMfS*) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying literary movements by giving them easy access to information about a given literary movement. Part of Gale's "For Students" literature line, *LMfS* is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific literary movements.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the literary movement; discussion of certain representative authors and works associated with the movement; analysis of the movement's predominant themes; and an explanation of related literary techniques.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers to analyze the movement itself, students are also provided with important information on its literary and historical background. This includes a historical context essay, a sidebar comparing the time or place the movement occurred to modern Western culture, a critical essay, and previously published criticism on the movement (if available). A unique feature of *LMfS* is a specially commissioned critical essay on each literary movement, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each literary movement, information on media adaptations is provided (if available), as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers, study questions, and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on each movement.

## *Selection Criteria*

The titles for both volumes of *LMfS* were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; *Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges*; and Arthur Applebee's 1993 study *Literature in the Secondary School: Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States*.

Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that the first volume should deal with earlier movements that took place approximately before the twentieth century, while the second volume should deal primarily with the more modern movements of the twentieth century and beyond. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on discussing works by international, multicultural,

and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for movements to be included in possible future volumes.

## How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in *LMfS* focuses on one literary movement. Each entry heading lists the full name of the movement and the approximate year of the movement's origin. The following elements are contained in each entry:

**Introduction:** a brief overview of the movement, which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding it, and related themes.

**Representative Authors:** this section includes basic facts about several authors associated with the movement, focusing on their relationship to the movement, including specific works written by the authors that might be typical of the movement.

**Representative Works:** a description of specific works that have been identified as typical or representative of the movement.

**Themes:** an overview of the major topics, themes, and issues related to the movement. Each theme discussed appears under a separate subhead and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.

**Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the movement, such as setting, point of view, and narration, as well as important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism. Literary terms are explained within the entry but can also be found in the Glossary.

**Movement Variations:** this section briefly discusses variations of the movement, including variations in geography (i.e., different countries), history (i.e., periodic revivals of the movement), philosophy, and art.

**Historical Context:** this section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate *in which the movement took place*. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the movement took place. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.

**Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the movement, including any public controversies surrounding the movement. For older movements, this section includes a history of how the movement was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent movements, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

**Criticism:** an essay commissioned for *LMfS* that specifically deals with the movement and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as one or more pieces of previously published criticism on the movement (if available).

**Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material used in compiling the entry, with full bibliographical information.

**Further Reading:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. It includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

**Media Adaptations:** if available, a list of important film and television adaptations related to the movement, including source information. The list may also include such variations as audio recordings, musical adaptations, and stage adaptations.

**Topics for Further Study:** a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the movement. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.

**Compare and Contrast:** an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the time and culture of the movement and late twentieth-century or early twenty-first-century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place in which the literary movement took place and modern Western culture.

**What Do I Study Next?:** a list of works that might complement the featured literary movement or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same representative authors and others, works of fiction and

nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

## Other Features

*LMfS* includes "Novels That Include the Names of French Soups," a foreword by Chris Semansky, an educator and author who specializes in poetic works. This essay examines how literary movements come about in societies and how people study such movements. The essay also discusses how *Literary Movements for Students* can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading/viewing experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the representative authors and representative works covered in both volumes of *LMfS*.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the representative authors and the authors of representative works covered in both volumes of *LMfS* by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work or movement. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in **boldface**.

Each entry may include illustrations, including photos of the representative authors, stills from stage productions, and stills from film adaptations.

## Citing Literary Movements for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of *Literary Movements for Students* may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed.

When citing text from *LMfS* that is not attributed to a particular author (e.g., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

Bildungsroman. *Literary Movements for Students*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009. 69–70.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from *LMfS* (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Kerschen, Lois. Critical Essay on the Bildungsroman. *Literary Movements for Students*. The Gale Group, 2003. Reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009. 75–77.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of *LMfS*, the following form may be used:

Carpenter, Charles A. "'Victims of Duty'? The Critics, Absurdity, and *The Homecoming*." *Modern Drama* 25.4 (December 1982): 489–95. Excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009. 17–20.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of *LMfS*, the following form may be used:

Perry, Margaret. "The Major Novels." *Silence to the Drums: A Survey of the Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*. Greenwood Press, 1976. 61–88. Excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009. 361–72.

## We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of *Literary Movements for Students* welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest movements to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via E-mail at: **ForStudents Editors@cengage.com.** Or write to the editor at:

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# *Literary Chronology*

**c. 750 BC?:** Homer, author representative of Classicism, flourishes about this time.

**c. 750 BC:** *Iliad*, written by Homer and representative of Classicism, is created.

**c. 534 BC:** Thespis, author representative of Greek Drama, flourishes about this time.

**c. 530 BC:** Epicharmus, author representative of Greek Drama, is born.

**c. 525 BC:** Aeschylus, author representative of Greek Drama, is born.

**c. 496 BC:** Sophocles, author representative of Greek Drama, is born.

**c. 485 BC:** Euripides, author representative of Greek Drama and Classicism, is born.

**c. 479–221 BC:** *Analects of Confucius*, written by Confucius and representative of Humanism, is compiled.

**472 BC:** *Prometheus Bound*, written by Aeschylus and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**458 BC:** *Oresteia*, written by Aeschylus and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 456 BC:** Aeschylus, author representative of Greek Drama, dies.

**c. 450 BC:** Aristophanes, author representative of Greek Drama, is born.

**c. 450 BC:** Crates, author representative of Greek Drama, flourishes about this time.

**c. 445 BC:** Eupolis, author representative of Greek Drama, flourishes about this time.

**441 BC:** *Antigone*, written by Sophocles and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 440 BC:** Epicharmus, author representative of Greek Drama, dies.

**431 BC:** *Medea*, written by Euripides and representative of Classicism and Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 430 BC:** Sophron, author representative of Greek Drama, flourishes about this time.

**427 BC:** *Oedpus the King*, written by Sophocles and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 420 BC:** Cratinus, author representative of Greek Drama, dies.

**c. 420 BC:** Phrynichus, author representative of Greek Drama, flourishes about this time.

**c. 414 BC:** *Birds*, written by Aristophanes and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 411 BC:** Eupolis, author representative of Greek Drama, dies.

**411 BC:** *Lysistrata*, written by Aristophanes and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 406 BC:** Euripides, author representative of Greek Drama and Classicism, dies.

**c. 406 BC:** Sophocles, author representative of Greek Drama, dies.

**c. 405 BC:** *Bacchae*, written by Euripides and representative of Greek Drama, is produced posthumously.

**405 BC:** *Frogs*, written by Aristophanes and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 401 BC:** *Oedipus at Colonus*, written by Sophocles and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 385 BC:** Aristophanes, author representative of Greek Drama, dies.

**c. 342 BC:** Menander, author representative of Greek Drama, is born.

**317 BC:** *Dyscolus*, written by Menander and representative of Greek Drama, is produced.

**c. 292 BC:** Menander, author representative of Greek Drama, dies.

**106 BC:** Cicero, author representative of Classicism, is born.

**70 BC:** Vergil, author representative of Classicism, is born.

**43 BC:** Cicero, author representative of Classicism, dies.

**19 BC:** Vergil, author representative of Classicism, dies.

**c. 19 BC:** *Aeneid*, written by Vergil and representative of Classicism, is published.

**1217:** Giovanni Bonaventure, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**1259:** *The Soul's Journey into God*, written by Bonaventure and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**c. 1260:** Meister Eckhart, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**1274:** Giovanni Bonaventure, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**1293:** John Ruusbroec, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**1295:** Henry Suso, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**1300:** Richard Rolle, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**1300:** Johannes Tauler, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**c. 1300–c. 1327:** Meister Eckhart's Sermons, written by Meister Eckhart and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**1304:** Francesco Petrarch, author representative of Humanism, is born.

**c. 1327:** Meister Eckhart, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**c. 1334:** *The Exemplar*, written by Henry Suso and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**1335:** *The Spiritual Espousals*, written by John Ruusbroec and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**c. 1340:** *The Fire of Love*, written by Richard Rolle and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**1342:** Julian of Norwich, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**1347:** Catherine of Siena, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**1349:** Richard Rolle, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**c. 1350:** *Familiar Letters*, written by Francesco Petrarch and representative of Humanism, is published.

**c. 1350:** *Theologia Germanica*, written by an unknown author and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**c. 1350–c. 1400:** *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written by an unknown author and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**1361:** Johannes Tauler, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**1366:** Henry Suso, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**c. 1373:** Margery Kempe, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**c. 1373:** *Revelations of Divine Love*, written by Julian of Norwich and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**1374:** Francesco Petrarch, author representative of Humanism, dies.

**1380:** Catherine of Siena, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**1381:** John Ruusbroec, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**1405:** Lorenzo Valla, author representative of Humanism, is born.

**c. 1416:** Julian of Norwich, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**1433:** Marsilio Ficino, author representative of Humanism, is born.

**c. 1438:** Margery Kempe, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**1438:** *The Book of Margery Kempe*, written by Margery Kempe and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is completed.

**1444:** *Book of Elegances, or Elegances of the Latin Language*, written by Lorenzo Valla and representative of Humanism, is published.

**1447:** Catherine of Genoa, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, is born.

**1452:** Girolamo Savonarola, author representative of Humanism, is born.

**1457:** Lorenzo Valla, author representative of Humanism, dies.

**1463:** Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, author representative of Humanism, is born.

**c. 1466:** Desiderius Erasmus, author representative of Humanism and Renaissance Literature, is born.

**1469:** Niccolò Machiavelli, author representative of Renaissance Literature, is born.

**1478:** Baldassare Castiglione, author representative of Humanism, is born.

**c. 1478:** Sir Thomas More, author representative of Humanism and Renaissance Literature, is born.

**1494:** Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, author representative of Humanism, dies.

**c. 1494:** François Rabelais, author representative of Renaissance Literature, is born.

**1496:** *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, written by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and representative of Humanism, is published posthumously.

**1498:** Girolamo Savonarola, author representative of Humanism, dies.

**1499:** Marsilio Ficino, author representative of Humanism, dies.

**1500:** *Adages*, written by Desiderius Erasmus and representative of Humanism, is published.

**1510:** Catherine of Genoa, author representative of the Medieval Mystics, dies.

**1511:** *The Praise of Folly*, written by Desiderius Erasmus and representative of Renaissance Literature, is published.

**1516:** *Utopia*, written by Sir Thomas More and representative of Humanism and Renaissance Literature, is published.

**c. 1522:** *The Spiritual Dialogue*, written by friends of Catherine of Genoa on the basis of Catherine's teachings and representative of the Medieval Mystics, is published.

**1527:** Niccolò Machiavelli, author representative of Renaissance Literature, dies about this time.

**1528:** *Book of the Courtier*, written by Baldassare Castiglione and representative of Humanism, is published.

**1529:** Baldassare Castiglione, author representative of Humanism, dies.

**1532:** *The Prince*, written by Niccolò Machiavelli and representative of Renaissance Literature, is published.

**1533:** Michel de Montaigne, author representative of Renaissance Literature, is born.

**1535:** Sir Thomas More, author representative of Humanism and Renaissance Literature, dies.

**1536:** Desiderius Erasmus, author representative of Humanism and Renaissance Literature, dies.

**1547:** Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, author representative of Renaissance Literature, is born about this time.

**c. 1553:** John Lyly, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, is born.

**1553:** François Rabelais, author representative of Renaissance Literature, dies.

**1558:** Thomas Kyd, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, is born.

**1559:** George Chapman, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, is born.

**1564:** Christopher Marlowe, author representative of Elizabethan Drama and Renaissance Literature, is born.

**1564:** William Shakespeare, author representative of Elizabethan Drama and Renaissance Literature, is born.

**c. 1572:** Thomas Dekker, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, is born.

**1572:** Ben Jonson, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, is born.

**c. 1573:** Thomas Heywood, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, is born.

**c. 1580:** John Webster, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, is born.

**1580:** *The Essays*, written by Michel de Montaigne and representative of Renaissance Literature, is published.

**1585:** Elizabeth Carey, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, is born.

**1586:** *The Spanish Tragedy*, written by Thomas Kyd and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**c. 1587:** *Tamburlaine the Great*, written by Christopher Marlowe and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**1592:** Michel de Montaigne, author representative of Renaissance Literature, dies.

**1592:** *The Jew of Malta*, written by Christopher Marlowe and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**1593:** Christopher Marlowe, author representative of Elizabethan Drama and Renaissance Literature, dies.

**1594:** Thomas Kyd, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, dies.

**1597:** *The Woman in the Moon*, written by John Lyly and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**1598:** *Everyman in His Humour*, written by Ben Johnson and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**1600:** *Hamlet*, written by William Shakespeare and representative of Elizabethan Drama and Renaissance Literature, is published.

**1600:** *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, written by Thomas Dekker and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**1603:** *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, written by Thomas Heywood and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**1605–1615:** *Don Quixote*, written by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and representative of Renaissance Literature, is published.

**1606:** Pierre Corneille, author representative of Classicism, is born.

**1606:** John Lyly, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, dies.

**1613:** *The Tragedy of Mariam*, written by Elizabeth Carey and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**1616:** William Shakespeare, author representative of Elizabethan Drama and Renaissance Literature, dies.

**1616:** Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, author representative of Renaissance Literature, dies.

**1622:** Molière, author representative of Neoclassicism, is born.

**1623:** *The Duchess of Malfi*, written by John Webster and representative of Elizabethan Drama, is published.

**1631:** John Dryden, author representative of Neoclassicism, is born.

**1632:** Thomas Dekker, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, dies.

**1634:** George Chapman, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, dies.

**c. 1634:** John Webster, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, dies.

**1637:** Ben Jonson, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, dies.

**1639:** Jean Racine, author representative of Classicism, is born.

**1639:** Elizabeth Carey, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, dies.

**1640:** *Horace*, written by Pierre Corneille and representative of Classicism, is published.

**1641:** Thomas Heywood, author representative of Elizabethan Drama, dies.

**1660:** Daniel Defoe, author representative of Neoclassicism, is born.

**1664:** *Tartuffe*, written by Molière and representative of Neoclassicism, is produced.

**1667:** *Andromaque*, written by Jean Racine and representative of Classicism, is published.

**1668:** *Of Dramatick Poesie: An Essay*, written by John Dryden and representative of Neoclassicism, is published.

**1673:** Molière, author representative of Neoclassicism, dies.

**1684:** Pierre Corneille, author representative of Classicism, dies.

**1688:** Alexander Pope, author representative of Neoclassicism, is born.

**1694:** Voltaire, author representative of the Enlightenment, is born.

**1699:** Jean Racine, author representative of Classicism, dies.

**1700:** John Dryden, author representative of Neoclassicism, dies.

**1709:** Samuel Johnson, author representative of Neoclassicism, is born.

**1711:** David Hume, author representative of the Enlightenment, is born.

**1712:** Jean-Jacques Rousseau, author representative of the Enlightenment, is born.

**1712:** *The Rape of the Lock*, written by Alexander Pope and representative of Neoclassicism, is published.

**1713:** Denis Diderot, author representative of the Enlightenment, is born.

**1717:** Horace Walpole, author representative of Gothic Literature, is born.

**1719:** *Robinson Crusoe*, written by Daniel Defoe and representative of Neoclassicism, is published.

**1727:** *Gulliver's Travels*, written by Jonathan Swift and representative of Neoclassicism, is published.

**1729:** G. E. Lessing, author representative of the Enlightenment, is born.

**1731:** Daniel Defoe, author representative of Neoclassicism, dies.

**1733:** Christoph Martin Wieland, author representative of Bildungsroman, is born.

**1737:** Thomas Paine, author representative of the Enlightenment, is born.

**1738:** *London*, written by Samuel Johnson and representative of Neoclassicism, is published.

**1744:** Alexander Pope, author representative of Neoclassicism, dies.

**1749:** Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, author representative of Bildungsroman, is born.

**1751–1765:** *Encyclopédie*, written by Denis Diderot and representative of the Enlightenment, is published.

**1757:** William Blake, author representative of Romanticism, is born.

**1759:** *Candide*, written by Voltaire and representative of the Enlightenment, is published.

**1760:** William Beckford, author representative of Gothic Literature, is born.

**1762:** *Émile*, written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and representative of the Enlightenment, is published.

**1762:** *The Social Contract*, written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and representative of the Enlightenment, is published.

**1764:** Ann Radcliffe, author representative of Gothic Literature, is born.

**1764:** *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole and representative of Gothic Literature, is published.

**1770:** William Wordsworth, author representative of Romanticism, is born.

**1771:** Charles Brockden Brown, author representative of Gothic Literature, is born.

**1772:** Samuel Taylor Coleridge, author representative of Romanticism, is born.

**1775:** Matthew Gregory Lewis, author representative of Gothic Literature, is born.

**1775:** Jane Austen, author representative of Romanticism, is born.

**1776:** David Hume, author representative of the Enlightenment, dies.

**1776:** *Declaration of Independence*, written by Thomas Jefferson and others and representative of the Enlightenment, is published.

**1778:** Jean-Jacques Rousseau, author representative of the Enlightenment, dies.

**1778:** Voltaire, author representative of the Enlightenment, dies.

**1779:** *Nathan the Wise*, written by G. E. Lessing and representative of the Englightenment, is published.

**1780:** Charles Robert Maturin, author representative of Gothic Literature, is born.

**1781:** G. E. Lessing, author representative of the Englightenment, dies.

**1784:** Denis Diderot, author representative of the Enlightenment, dies.

**1784:** Samuel Johnson, author representative of Neoclassicism, dies.

**1786:** *Vathek*, written by William Beckford and representative of Gothic Literature, is published.

**1788:** George Gordon, Lord Byron, author representative of Romanticism, is born.

**1790–1832:** *Faust*, written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and representative of Classicism, is published.

**1792:** Percy Bysshe Shelley, author representative of Romanticism, is born.

**1794:** *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, written by Ann Radcliffe and representative of Gothic Literature, is published.

**1794:** *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, written by William Blake and representative of Romanticism, is published.

**1794–1807:** *The Age of Reason*, written by Thomas Paine and representative of the Enlightenment, is published.

**1795:** John Keats, author representative of Romanticism, is born.

**1795:** *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1795:** *The Monk*, written by Matthew Gregory Lewis and representative of Gothic Literature, is published.

**1797:** Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, author representative of Gothic Literature, Romanticism, and Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1797:** Horace Walpole, author representative of Gothic Literature, dies.

**1798:** *Wieland*, written by Charles Brockden Brown and representative of Gothic Literature, is published.

**1799:** Honoré de Balzac, author representative of Realism, is born.

**1799:** Alexander Pushkin, author representative of Romanticism, is born.

**1803:** Ralph Waldo Emerson, author representative of Transcendentalism, is born.

**1804:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, author representative of Transcendentalism, is born.

**1809:** Thomas Paine, author representative of the Englightenment, dies.

**1809:** Edgar Allan Poe, author representative of Gothic Literature, is born.

**1810:** Charles Brockden Brown, author representative of Gothic Literature, dies.

**1810:** Margaret Fuller, author representative of Transcendentalism, is born.

**1812:** Charles Dickens, author representative of Bildungsroman and Realism, is born.

**1812–1818:** *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, written by George Gordon, Lord Byron and representative of Romanticism, is published.

**1813:** Christoph Martin Wieland, author representative of Bildungsroman, dies.

**1813:** Søren Kierkegaard, author representative of Existentialism, is born.

**1813:** *Pride and Prejudice*, written by Jane Austen and representative of Romanticism, is published.

**1816:** Charlotte Brontë, author representative of Bildungsroman, is born.

**1817:** Jane Austen, author representative of Romanticism, dies.

**1817:** Henry David Thoreau, author representative of Transcendentalism, is born.

**1818:** Emily Brontë, author representative of Gothic Literature, is born.

**1818:** *Frankenstein*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and representative of Romanticism, Gothic Literature, and Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1818:** Matthew Gregory Lewis, author representative of Gothic Literature, dies.

**1819:** George Eliot, author representative of Realism, is born.

**1819:** Walt Whitman, author representative of Transcendentalism, is born.

**1819:** "To Autumn," written by John Keats and representative of Romanticism, is published.

**1820:** *Melmoth the Wanderer*, written by Charles Robert Maturin and representative of Gothic Literature, is published.

**1820:** *Prometheus Unbound*, written by Percy Bysshe Shelley and representative of Romanticism, is published.

**1821:** Fyodor Dostoevsky, author representative of Existentialism and Realism, is born.

**1821:** Gustave Flaubert, author representative of Realism, is born.

**1821:** John Keats, author representative of Romanticism, dies.

**1821:** Charles Baudelaire, author representative of Symbolism, is born.

**1822:** Percy Bysshe Shelley, author representative of Romanticism, dies.

**1823:** Ann Radcliffe, author representative of Gothic Literature, dies.

**1824:** Charles Robert Maturin, author representative of Gothic Literature, dies.

**1824:** George Gordon, Lord Byron, author representative of Romanticism, dies.

**1825–1832:** *Eugene Onegin*, written by Alexander Pushkin and representative of Romanticism, is published.

**1827:** William Blake, author representative of Romanticism, dies.

**1828:** Leo Tolstoy, author representative of Realism, is born.

**1828:** Jules Verne, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1832:** Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, author representative of Bildungsroman, dies.

**1832:** Louisa May Alcott, author representative of Transcendentalism, is born.

**1834:** Samuel Taylor Coleridge, author representative of Romanticism, dies.

**1834:** "The Fall of the House of Usher," written by Edgar Allan Poe and representative of Gothic Literature, is published.

**1835:** Mark Twain, author representative of Bildungsroman, is born.

**1836:** *Nature*, written by Ralph Waldo Emerson and representative of Transcendentalism, is published.

**1837:** William Dean Howells, author representative of Realism, is born.

**1837:** Alexander Pushkin, author representative of Romanticism, dies.

**1840:** Émile Zola, author representative of Naturalism and Realism, is born.

**1842:** Stéphane Mallarmé, author representative of Symbolism, is born.

**1842–1855:** *The Human Comedy*, written by Honoré de Balzac and representative of Realism, is published.

**1843:** Henry James, author representative of Realism, is born.

**1844:** William Beckford, author representative of Gothic Literature, dies.

**1844:** Paul Verlaine, author representative of Symbolism, is born.

**1845:** *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, written by Margaret Fuller and representative of Transcendentalism, is published.

**1847:** *Jane Eyre*, written by Charlotte Brontë and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1847:** *Wuthering Heights*, written by Emily Brontë and representative of the Gothic Literature, is published.

**1848:** Emily Brontë, author representative of Gothic Literature, dies.

**1848:** Joris-Karl Huysmans, author representative of Symbolism, is born.

**1849:** August Strindberg, author representative of Expressionism, is born.

**1849:** Edgar Allan Poe, author representative of Gothic Literature, dies.

**1849–1850:** *David Copperfield*, written by Charles Dickens and representative of Realism, is published.

**1850:** Honoré de Balzac, author representative of Realism, dies.

**1850:** Guy de Maupassant, author representative of Realism, is born.

**1850:** William Wordsworth, author representative of Romanticism, dies.

**1850:** Margaret Fuller, author representative of Transcendentalism, dies.

**1851:** Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, author representative of Gothic Literature, Romanticism, and Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

**1852:** *The Blithedale Romance*, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and representative of Transcendentalism, is published.

**1854:** Arthur Rimbaud, author representative of Symbolism, is born.

**1854:** *Walden*, written by Henry David Thoreau and representative of Transcendentalism, is published.

**1855:** Charlotte Brontë, author representative of Bildungsroman, dies.

**1855:** Olive Schreiner, author representative of Colonialism, is born.

**1855:** Søren Kierkegaard, author representative of Existentialism, dies.

**1855:** *Leaves of Grass*, written by Walt Whitman and representative of Transcendentalism, is published.

**1856:** H. Rider Haggard, author representative of Colonialism, is born.

**1857:** Joseph Conrad, author representative of Colonialism, is born.

**1857:** *Madame Bovary*, written by Gustave Flaubert and representative of Realism, is published.

**1857:** *Flowers of Evil*, written by Charles Baudelaire and representative of Symbolism, is published.

**1861:** *Great Expectations*, written by Charles Dickens and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1862:** Edith Wharton, author representative of Naturalism, is born.

**1862:** Maurice Maeterlinck, author representative of Symbolism, is born.

**1862:** Henry David Thoreau, author representative of Transcendentalism, dies.

**1864:** Frank Wedekind, author representative of Expressionism, is born.

**1864:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, author representative of Transcendentalism, dies.

**1865:** Rudyard Kipling, author representative of Colonialism, is born.

**1865:** Irving Babbitt, author representative of Humanism, is born.

**1866:** H. G. Wells, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1866:** *Crime and Punishment*, written by Fyodor Dostoevsky and representative of Realism, is published.

**1867:** Charles Baudelaire, author representative of Symbolism, dies.

**1868:** W. E. B. Du Bois, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1870:** Charles Dickens, author representative of Bildungsroman and Realism, dies.

**1870:** Frank Norris, author representative of Naturalism, is born.

**1870:** *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, written by Jules Verne and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1871:** James Weldon Johnson, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1871:** Stephen Crane, author representative of Naturalism, is born.

**1871:** Theodore Dreiser, author representative of Naturalism, is born.

**1871–1872:** *Middlemarch*, written by George Eliot and representative of Realism, is published.

**1873:** "Transcendental Wild Oats," written by Louisa May Alcott and representative of Transcendentalism, is published.

**1874:** Amy Lowell, author representative of Imagism, is born.

**1874:** Gertrude Stein, author representative of Modernism, is born.

**1874:** *Songs without Words*, written by Paul Verlaine and representative of Symbolism, is published.

**1875:** Thomas Mann, author representative of Bildungsroman, is born.

**1875–1877:** *Anna Karenina*, written by Leo Tostoy and representative of Realism, is published.

**1876:** Jack London, author representative of the Naturalism, is born.

**1876:** *The Afternoon of a Faun*, written by Stéphane Mallarmé and representative of Symbolism, is published.

**1878:** Georg Kaiser, author representative of Expressionism, is born.

**1878:** *Daisy Miller*, written by Henry James and representative of Realism, is published.

**1879:** E. M. Forster, author representative of Colonialism, is born.

**1879:** Wallace Stevens, author representative of Modernism, is born.

**1880:** "Ball of Fat," written by Guy de Maupassant and representative of Realism, is published.

**1880:** George Eliot, author representative of Realism, dies.

**1880:** Gustave Flaubert, author representative of Realism, dies.

**1880:** Aleksandr Blok, author representative of Symbolism, is born.

**1880:** *The Brothers Karamazov*, written by Fyodor Dostoevsky and representative of Existentialism, is published.

**1881:** Fyodor Dostoevsky, author representative of Existentialism and Realism, dies.

**1882:** James Joyce, author representative of Bildungsroman and Modernism, is born.

**1882:** Jessie Redmon Fauset, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1882:** Virginia Woolf, author representative of Modernism, is born.

**1882:** Ralph Waldo Emerson, author representative of Transcendentalism, dies.

**1883:** Franz Kafka, author representative of Existentialism and Expressionism, is born.

**1883:** Eugene O'Neill, author representative of Expressionism, is born.

**1883:** William Carlos Williams, author representative of Imagism, is born.

**1883:** *The Story of an African Farm*, written by Olive Schreiner and representative of Colonialism, is published.

**1884:** *Against the Grain*, written by Joris Huysmans and representative of Symbolism, is published.

**1885:** Isak Dinesen, author representative of Colonialism, is born.

**1885:** F. S. Flint, author representative of Imagism, is born.

**1885:** Ezra Pound, author representative of Imagism and Modernism, is born.

**1885:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, written by Mark Twain and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1885:** *Germinal*, written by émile Zola and representative of Realism, is published.

**1886:** Alain Locke, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1886:** Hilda Doolittle, author representative of Imagism, is born.

**1886:** John Gould Fletcher, author representative of Imagism, is born.

**1886:** *Illuminations*, written by Arthur Rimbaud and representative of Symbolism, is published.

**1887:** Georg Trakl, author representative of Expressionism, is born.

**1887:** *She*, written by H. Rider Haggard and representative of Colonialism, is published.

**1888:** T. S. Eliot, author representative of Classicism and Modernism, is born.

**1888:** Katherine Mansfield, author representative of Colonialism, is born.

**1888:** Louisa May Alcott, author representative of Transcendentalism, dies.

**1889:** Claude McKay, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1889:** Pierre Reverdy, author representative of Surrealism, is born.

**1890:** *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, written by William Dean Howells and representative of Realism, is published.

**1891:** Zora Neale Hurston, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1891:** Nella Larsen, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1891:** Mikhail Bulgakov, author representative of Magic Realism, is born.

**1891:** Arthur Rimbaud, author representative of Symbolism, dies.

**1891:** *Spring's Awakening*, written by Frank Wedekind and representative of Expressionism, is published.

**1892:** Richard Aldington, author representative of Imagism, is born.

**1892:** J. R. R. Tolkien, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1892:** Marina Tsvetaeva, author representative of Symbolism, is born.

**1892:** Walt Whitman, author representative of Transcendentalism, dies.

**1893:** Guy de Maupassant, author representative of Realism, dies.

**1893:** *Pelleas and Melisande*, written by Maurice Maeterlinck and representative of Symbolism, is published.

**1894:** Jean Toomer, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1894:** Aldous Huxley, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1895:** Paul Eluard, author representative of Surrealism, is born.

**1895:** *Jude the Obscure*, written by Thomas Hardy and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1895:** *The Red Badge of Courage*, written by Stephen Crane and representative of Naturalism, is published.

**1895:** *The Time Machine: An Invention*, written by H. G. Wells and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1896:** André Breton, author representative of Surrealism, is born.

**1896:** Paul Verlaine, author representative of Symbolism, dies.

**1897:** William Faulkner, author representative of Modernism, is born.

**1897:** Louis Aragon, author representative of Surrealism, is born.

**1897:** Phillipe Soupault, author representative of Surrealism, is born.

**1897:** *Dracula*, written by Bram Stoker and representative of Gothic Literature, is published.

**1898:** Federico García Lorca, author representative of Expressionism, is born.

**1898:** C. S. Lewis, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1898:** Stéphane Mallarmé, author representative of Symbolism, dies.

**1899:** Ernest Hemingway, author representative of Existentialism, is born.

**1899:** Miguel ángel Asturias, author representative of Magic Realism, is born.

**1899:** Jorge Luis Borges, author representative of Magic Realism, is born.

**1899:** "The White Man's Burden," written by Rudyard Kipling and representative of Colonialism, is published.

**1899:** "Titee," written by Alice Dunbar Nelson and representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1899:** *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, written by Frank Norris and representative of Naturalism, is published.

**1899–1900:** *Heart of Darkness*, written by Joseph Conrad and representative of Colonialism, is published.

**1900:** Stephen Crane, author representative of Naturalism, dies.

**1900:** René Crevel, author representative of Surrealism, is born.

**1900:** Robert Desnos, author representative of Surrealism, is born.

**1900:** *Lord Jim*, written by Joseph Conrad and representative of Colonialism, is published.

**1900:** *Sister Carrie*, written by Theodore Dreiser and representative of Naturalism, is published.

**1901:** *Kim*, written by Rudyard Kipling and representative of Colonialism, is published.

**1901:** *A Dream Play*, written by August Strindberg and representative of Expressionism, is published.

**1902:** Langston Hughes, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1902:** Frank Norris, author representative of Naturalism, dies.

**1902:** émile Zola, author representative of Naturalism and Realism, dies.

**1902:** *The Immoralist*, written by André Gide and representative of Existentialism, is published.

**1903:** Countee Cullen, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, is born.

**1903:** *The Call of the Wild*, written by Jack London and representative of Naturalism, is published.

**1904:** Alejo Carpentier, author representative of Magic Realism, is born.

**1905:** Jean-Paul Sartre, author representative of Existentialism, is born.

**1905:** Jules Verne, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

**1906:** Samuel Beckett, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1907:** Robert Heinlein, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1907:** Joris-Karl Huysmans, author representative of Symbolism, dies.

**1908:** Arthur Adamov, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1908:** Simone de Beauvoir, author representative of Existentialism, is born.

**1910:** Jean Genet, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1910:** Mark Twain, author representative of Bildungsroman, dies.

**1910:** Leo Tolstoy, author representative of Realism, dies.

**1911:** "The Woman at the Store," written by Katherine Mansfield and representative of Colonialism, is published.

**1912:** Eugène Ionesco, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1912:** August Strindberg, author representative of Expressionism, dies.

**1913:** Albert Camus, author representative of Existentialism, is born.

**1913:** *Sons and Lovers*, written by D. H. Lawrence and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1913:** *Poems*, written by Georg Trakl and representative of Expressionism, is published.

**1914:** William Burroughs, author representative of the Beat Movement, is born.

**1914:** Georg Trakl, author representative of Expressionism, dies.

**1914:** *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed*, written by Amy Lowell and representative of Imagism, is published.

**1914:** *Tender Buttons*, written by Gertrude Stein and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1915:** *Of Human Bondage*, written by Somerset Maugham and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1915:** *The Metamorphosis*, written by Franz Kafka and representative of Expressionism, is published.

**1915:** *Cathay*, written by Ezra Pound and representative of Imagism, is published.

**1916:** Jack London, author representative of Naturalism, dies.

**1916:** Henry James, author representative of Realism, dies.

**1916:** *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, written by James Joyce and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1916:** *Goblins and Pagodas*, written by John Gould Fletcher and representative of Imagism, is published.

**1916:** *Sea Garden*, written by Hilda Doolittle and representative of Imagism, is published.

**1917:** *The Citizens of Calais*, written by Georg Kaiser and representative of Expressionism, is published.

**1917:** *Right You Are (If You Think You Are)*, written by Luigi Pirandello and representative of Expressionism, is published.

**1917–1969:** *The Cantos*, written by Ezra Pound and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1918:** Frank Wedekind, author representative of Expressionism, dies.

**1918:** *The Twelve*, written by Aleksandr Blok and representative of Symbolism, is published.

**1919:** Lawrence Ferlinghetti, author representative of the Beat Movement, is born.

**1919:** *Images of War*, written by Richard Aldington and representative of Imagism, is published.

**1919:** *The Magnetic Fields*, written by André Breton and Philippe Soupault and representative of Surrealism, is published.

**1920:** Olive Schreiner, author representative of Colonialism, dies.

**1920:** William Dean Howells, author representative of Realism, dies.

**1920:** Isaac Asimov, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1920:** Ray Bradbury, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1920:** *The Emperor Jones*, written by Eugene O'Neill and representative of Expressionism, is published.

**1920:** *Otherworld: Cadences*, written by F. S. Flint and representative of Imagism, is published.

**1920:** *The of Innocence*, written by Edith Wharton and representative of Naturalism, is published.

**1921:** Aleksandr Blok, author representative of Symbolism, dies.

**1922:** Jack Kerouac, author representative of the Beat Movement, is born.

**1922:** *Ulysses*, written by James Joyce and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1922:** "The Waste Land," written by T. S. Eliot and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1922:** Kurt Vonnegut Jr., author representative of Postmodernism and Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is born.

**1923:** Katherine Mansfield, author representative of Colonialism, dies.

**1923:** *Cane*, written by Jean Toomer and representative of Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1923:** "The Red Wheelbarrow," written by William Carlos Williams and representative of Imagism, is published.

**1923:** *Harmonium*, written by Wallace Stevens and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1924:** Joseph Conrad, author representative of Colonialism, dies.

**1924:** Franz Kafka, author representative of Existentialism and Expressionism, dies.

**1924:** *Manifesto of Surrealism*, written by André Breton and representative of Surrealism, is published.

**1925:** H. Rider Haggard, author representative of Colonialism, dies.

**1925:** Amy Lowell, author representative of Imagism, dies.

**1925:** Frantz Fanon, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1925:** *A Passage to India*, written by E. M. Forster and representative of Colonialism, is published.

**1925:** *The Trial*, written by Franz Kafka and representative of Existentialism, is published posthumously.

**1925:** *Color*, written by Countee Cullen and representative of Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1925:** *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, written by Alain Locke and representative of Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1925:** *An American Tragedy*, written by Theodore Dreiser and representative of Naturalism, is published.

**1926:** Neal Cassady, author representative of the Beat Movement, is born.

**1926:** Allen Ginsberg, author representative of the Beat Movement, is born.

**1926:** Michel Foucault, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1926:** *The Sun Also Rises*, written by Ernest Hemingway and representative of Existentialism, is published.

**1926:** *The Weary Blues*, written by Langston Hughes and representative of Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1926:** *Capital of Sorrow*, written by Paul Eluard and representative of Surrealism, is published.

**1926:** *Paris Peasant*, written by Louis Aragon and representative of Surrealism, is published.

**1927:** *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, written by James Weldon Johnson and representative of Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1927:** *To the Lighthouse*, written by Virginia Woolf and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1927:** *Babylon*, written by René Crevel and representative of Surrealism, is published.

**1927:** *Liberty or Love!*, written by Robert Desnos and representative of Surrealism, is published.

**1928:** Edward Albee, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1928:** Carlos Fuentes, author representative of Magic Realism, is born.

**1928:** Gabriel García Márquez, author representative of Magic Realism, is born.

**1928:** *Home to Harlem*, written by Claude McKay and representative of Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1928:** *Quicksand*, written by Nella Larsen and representative of Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1929:** *A Farewell to Arms*, written by Ernest Hemingway and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1929:** *The Sound and the Fury*, written by William Faulkner and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1930:** Harold Pinter, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1930:** Gregory Corso, author representative of the Beat Movement, is born.

**1930:** Gary Snyder, author representative of the Beat Movement, is born.

**1930:** Chinua Achebe, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1930:** Derek Walcott, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1930:** Jacques Derrida, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1931:** Donald Barthelme, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1931:** Toni Morrison, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1931:** *Mourning Becomes Electra*, written by Eugene O'Neill and representative of Classicism, is produced.

**1932:** Fernando Arrabal, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1932:** Sylvia Plath, author representative of Bildungsroman, is born.

**1932:** *Brave New World*, written by Aldous Huxley and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1933:** Irving Babbitt, author representative of Humanism, dies.

**1933:** *Blood Wedding*, written by Federico García Lorca and representative of Expressionism, is produced.

**1934:** Fredric Jameson, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1934:** *Call It Sleep*, written by Henry Roth and representative of Modernism, is published.

**1935:** René Crevel, author representative of Surrealism, dies.

**1936:** Václav Havel, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1936:** Rudyard Kipling, author representative of Colonialism, dies.

**1936:** Federico García Lorca, author representative of Expressionism, dies.

**1937:** Tom Stoppard, author representative of Absurdism, is born.

**1937:** Edith Wharton, author representative of Naturalism, dies.

**1937:** Thomas Pynchon, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1937:** *Out of Africa*, written by Isak Dinesen and representative of Colonialism, is published in English.

**1937:** *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, written by Zora Neale Hurston and representative of Harlem Renaissance, is published.

**1937:** *The Hobbit*, written by J. R. R. Tolkien and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1938:** James Weldon Johnson, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1938:** Ishmael Reed, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1938:** *Nausea*, written by Jean-Paul Sartre and representative of Existentialism, is published.

**1940:** Mikhail Bulgakov, author representative of Magic Realism, dies.

**1940:** J. M. Coetzee, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1941:** James Joyce, author representative of Bildungsroman and Modernism, dies.

**1941:** Virginia Woolf, author representative of Modernism, dies.

**1941:** Julia Kristeva, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1941:** Marina Tsvetaeva, author representative of Symbolism, dies.

**1942:** Isabel Allende, author representative of Magic Realism, is born.

**1942:** Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1943:** Michael Ondaatje, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1943:** Terry Eagleton, author representative of Postmodernism, is born.

**1943:** *The Little Prince*, written by Antoine de Saint-Exupery and representative of Existentialism, is published.

**1944:** *Fictions*, written by Jorge Luis Borges and representative of Magic Realism, is published.

**1945:** Georg Kaiser, author representative of Expressionism, dies.

**1945:** Theodore Dreiser, author representative of Naturalism, dies.

**1945:** Robert Desnos, author representative of Surrealism, dies.

**1946:** Countee Cullen, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1946:** Gertrude Stein, author representative of Modernism, dies.

**1946:** H. G. Wells, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

**1946:** *The Stranger*, written by Albert Camus and representative of Existentialism, is published.

**1947:** Salman Rushdie, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1947:** *The Maids*, written by Jean Genet and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1947:** *No Exit*, written by Jean-Paul Sartre and representative of Existentialism, is published in English.

**1948:** Claude McKay, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1949:** Jamaica Kincaid, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1949:** Maurice Maeterlinck, author representative of Symbolism, dies.

**1949:** *The Kingdom of This World*, written by Alejo Carpentier and representative of Magic Realism, is published.

**1949:** *Men of Maize*, written by Miguel Àngel Asturias and representative of Magic Realism, is published.

**1950:** John Gould Fletcher, author representative of Imagism, dies.

**1950:** *The Bald Soprano*, written by Eugène Ionesco and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1950:** *I, Robot*, written by Isaac Asimov and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1950:** *The Martian Chronicles*, written by Ray Bradbury and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1950–1956:** "The Chronicles of Narnia," written by C. S. Lewis and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, are published.

**1951:** Laura Esquivel, author representative of Magic Realism, is born.

**1952:** Paul Eluard, author representative of Surrealism, dies.

**1952:** *The Chairs*, written by Eugène Ionesco and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1953:** Eugene O'Neill, author representative of Expressionism, dies.

**1953:** *Waiting for Godot*, written by Samuel Beckett and representative of Absurdism and Existentialism, is published.

**1953:** *Invisible Man*, written by Ralph Ellison and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1954:** Alain Locke, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1954:** *The Mandarins*, written by Simone de Beauvoir and representative of Existentialism, is published.

**1955:** Thomas Mann, author representative of Bildungsroman, dies.

**1955:** Wallace Stevens, author representative of Modernism, dies.

**1955:** *Ping-Pong*, written by Arthur Adamov and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1956:** "Howl," written by Allen Ginsberg and representative of the Beat Movement, is published.

**1957:** Li-Young Lee, author representative of Postcolonialism, is born.

**1957:** *Endgame*, written by Samuel Beckett and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1957:** "A Berry Feast," written by Gary Snyder and representative of the Beat Movement, is published.

**1957:** *On the Road*, written by Jack Kerouac and representative of the Beat Movement, is published.

**1958:** "BOMB,"written by Gregory Corso and representative of the Beat Movement, is published.

**1958:** *A Coney Island of the Mind*, written by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and representative of the Beat Movement, is published.

**1958:** *The Dharma Bums*, written by Jack Kerouac and representative of the Beat Movement, is published.

**1958:** *Things Fall Apart*, written by Chinua Achebe and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**1959:** *The Zoo Story*, written by Edward Albee and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1959:** *Naked Lunch*, written by William Burroughs and representative of the Beat Movement, is published.

**1960:** Albert Camus, author representative of Existentialism, dies.

**1960:** Zora Neale Hurston, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1960:** F. S. Flint, author representative of Imagism, dies.

**1960:** Pierre Reverdy, author representative of Surrealism, dies.

**1961:** Ernest Hemingway, author representative of Existentialism, dies.

**1961:** Jessie Redmon Fauset, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1961:** Hilda Doolittle, author representative of Imagism, dies.

**1961:** Frantz Fanon, author representative of Postcolonialism, dies.

**1961:** *The American Dream*, written by Edward Albee and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1961:** *Stranger in a Strange Land*, written by Robert Heinlein and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1962:** Isak Dinesen, author representative of Colonialism, dies.

**1962:** Richard Aldington, author representative of Imagism, dies.

**1962:** William Faulkner, author representative of Modernism, dies.

**1962:** *Aura*, written by Carlos Fuentes and representative of Magic Realism, is published.

**1963:** Sylvia Plath, author representative of Bildungsroman, dies.

**1963:** W. E. B. Du Bois, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1963:** William Carlos Williams, author representative of Imagism, dies.

**1963:** Aldous Huxley, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

**1963:** C. S. Lewis, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

**1963:** *The Bell Jar*, written by Sylvia Plath and representative of Bildungsroman, is published.

**1963:** *Cat's Cradle*, written by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. and representative of Postmodernism, is published.

**1963:** *Conjure: Selected Poems, 1963–1970*, written by Ishmael Reed and representative of Postmodernism, is published.

**1964:** Nella Larsen, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1964:** *The Garden Party*, written by Václav Havel and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1965:** T. S. Eliot, author representative of Classicism and Modernism, dies.

**1965:** *The Homecoming*, written by Harold Pinter and representative of Absurdism, is published.

**1966:** *The Master and Margarita*, written by Mikhail Bulgakov and representative of Magic Realism, is published posthumously.

**1966:** André Breton, author representative of Surrealism, dies.

**1967:** Langston Hughes, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1967:** Jean Toomer, author representative of the Harlem Renaissance, dies.

**1967:** *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, written by Gabriel García Márquez and representative of Magic Realism, is published.

**1967:** *Of Grammatology*, written by Jacques Derrida and representative of Postmodernism, is published.

**1968:** Neal Cassady, author representative of the Beat Movement, dies.

**1969:** Jack Kerouac, author representative of the Beat Movement, dies.

**1969:** *Slaughterhouse Five*, written by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. and representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, is published.

**1970:** Arthur Adamov, author representative of Absurdism, dies.

**1970:** E. M. Forster, author representative of Colonialism, dies.

**1972:** Ezra Pound, author representative of Imagism and Modernism, dies.

**1973:** J. R. R. Tolkien, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

**1973:** *Gravity's Rainbow*, written by Thomas Pynchon and representative of Postmodernism, is published.

**1974:** Miguel Àngel Asturias, author representative of Magic Realism, dies.

**1977:** *Ceremony*, written by Leslie Marmon Silko and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**1980:** Jean-Paul Sartre, author representative of Existentialism, dies.

**1980:** Alejo Carpentier, author representative of Magic Realism, dies.

**1980:** *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, written by Julia Kristeva and representative of Postmodernism, is published.

**1981:** *Midnight's Children*, written by Salman Rushdie and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**1982:** Louis Aragon, author representative of Surrealism, dies.

**1982:** *The House of the Spirits*, written by Isabel Allende and representative of Magic Realism, is published.

**1983:** "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," written by Frederic Jameson and representative of Postmodernism, is published.

**1983:** *Overnight to Many Distant Cities*, written by Donald Barthelme and representative of Postmodernism, is published.

**1984:** Michel Foucault, author representative of Postmodernism, dies.

**1985:** *Love in the Time of Cholera*, written by Gabriel García Márquez and representative of Magic Realism, is published.

**1986:** Jean Genet, author representative of Absurdism, dies.

**1986:** Simone de Beauvoir, author representative of Existentialism, dies.

**1986:** Jorge Luis Borges, author representative of Magic Realism, dies.

**1986:** *Decolonizing the Mind*, written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**1986:** *Rose*, written by Li-Young Lee and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**1987:** *Beloved*, written by Toni Morrison and representative of Postmodernism, is published.

**1988:** Robert Heinlein, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

**1988:** *A Small Place*, written by Jamaica Kincaid and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**1989:** Samuel Beckett, author representative of Absurdism, dies.

**1989:** Donald Barthelme, author representative of Postmodernism, dies.

**1990:** Phillipe Soupault, author representative of Surrealism, dies.

**1992:** Isaac Asimov, author representative of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

**1992:** *The English Patient*, written by Michael Ondaatje and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**1994:** Eugène Ionesco, author representative of Absurdism, dies.

**1994:** *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, written by Edwidge Danticat and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**1997:** William Burroughs, author representative of the Beat Movement, dies.

**1997:** Allen Ginsberg, author representative of the Beat Movement, dies.

**1999:** *Disgrace*, written by J. M. Coetzee and representative of Postcolonialism, is published.

**2001:** Gregory Corso, author representative of the Beat Movement, dies.

**2004:** Jacques Derrida, author representative of Postmodernism, dies.

**2007:** Kurt Vonnegut Jr., author representative of Postmodernism and Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, dies.

# *Acknowledgments*

## COPYRIGHTED EXCERPTS IN *LMFS, SECOND EDITION*, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

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# *Absurdism*

**MOVEMENT ORIGIN**

**C. 1950**
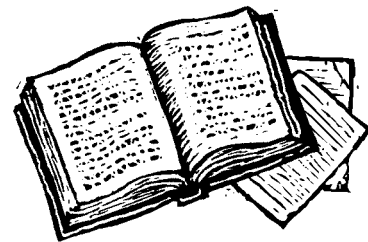
Absurdism, and its more specific companion term Theatre of the Absurd, refers to the works of a group of Western European and American dramatists writing and producing plays in the 1950s and early 1960s. The term "Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by critic Martin Esslin, who identified common features of a new style of drama that seemed to ignore theatrical conventions and thwart audience expectations. Characterized by a departure from realistic characters and situations, the plays offer no clear notion of the time or place in which the action occurs. Characters are often nameless and seem interchangeable. Events are completely outside the realm of rational motivation and may have a nightmarish quality commonly associated with Surrealism (a post-World War I movement that features dream sequences and images from the unconscious, often sexual in nature). At other times, both dialogue and incidents may appear to the audience as completely nonsensical, even farcical. However, beneath the surface the works explore themes of loneliness and isolation, of the failure of individuals to connect with others in any meaningful way, and of the senselessness and absurdity of life and death.

The writers most commonly associated with Absurdism are Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, and Edward Albee, as well as a number of lesser-known dramatists. The avant-garde nature of absurdist writing contributed in part to its short

*Edward Albee* (© *Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission*)

life as a literary movement. Features of the plays that seemed completely new and mystifying to audiences in the 1950s when absurdist works first appeared, soon became not only understandable, but even commonplace and predictable. With the exception of Ionesco, most playwrights abandoned the absurdist style after the 1960s; however, many of the individual plays were later considered classics of European and American drama.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Arthur Adamov (1908–1970)

Arthur Adamov was born August 23, 1908, in Kislovodsk, Russia, to Sourene and Helene Bagatourov Adamov, wealthy Armenians who were in the oil business. The family moved to Paris when Adamov was twelve, and he was educated in Switzerland and Germany. Although he wrote poetry, essays, and an autobiography, Adamov is most famous as a playwright. In the early part of his writing career, he was associated with Surrealism and Absurdism. His plays, written in French, focused on the loneliness and isolation of all humans, on the limited ability of individuals to make meaningful connections with others, and on the inevitable and meaningless nature of death. His most famous play from this period of his life is *Le ping-pong* (1955; translated as *Ping-Pong* 1959). After the mid-1950s, Adamov rejected Absurdism and began writing plays that were more realistic, more optimistic, and more concerned with individuals in social and political contexts. As he revealed in his autobiographical writings, he was plagued by guilt and neuroses all his life. He drank heavily and towards the end of his life his mental and physical health failed to the point where he could no longer work. He died March 16, 1970, from an overdose of barbiturates.

### Edward Albee (1928– )

Edward Albee was born on March 12, 1928, in Virginia, to unknown parents who gave him up for adoption shortly after his birth. His adoptive father was Reed Albee, who owned part of the Keith-Albee theater circuit, and his adoptive mother was the former Frances Cotter. Albee was raised in a wealthy home in Larchmont, New York, with his parents and his grandmother. He made frequent trips to the city to attend the theater during his childhood, and his parents often hosted a variety of theater people

in their home. Albee attended Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1946–47, but did not earn a degree. He wrote poetry in the early part of his career, but with little success. He turned to drama and in 1958 published his one-act play *The Zoo Story*, which premiered the following year in Berlin and shortly thereafter in New York. In 1959, Albee wrote *The Sandbox* and in 1961, *The American Dream*, both of which opened in New York during 1960–61. Although Albee has written many more plays, these first three are the ones critics generally associate with the Theatre of the Absurd. All three are spare, single-act dramas featuring few characters and are concerned with the isolation of the individual and the artificial nature of American values. Albee's dramas have received numerous awards, among them three Pulitzer Prizes: in 1967 for *A Delicate Balance*, in 1975 for *Seascape*, and in 1994 for *Three Tall Women*. In 2005, Albee was awarded a Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement.

### Fernando Arrabal (1932–)

Fernando Arrabal was born in Melilla, Spanish Morocco, on August 11, 1932, to Fernando and Carmen Teran Arrabal Ruiz. As a child, Arrabal lived in Spain in the early days of the reign of Francisco Franco, the fascist dictator. He was educated at the University of Madrid, and in 1958 he married a professor, Luce Moreau; the couple had two children. In 1967, Arrabal was imprisoned in Spain for his political views. His release was accomplished through the efforts of P.E.N., an international organization of writers. Although Arrabal's work was strongly influenced by Surrealism and Absurdism, the designation with which he preferred to describe his drama was "Theatre of Panic." His work has a nightmarish quality involving insanity, brutal violence, and sadistic sexuality. He is noted for creating gentle, child-like characters who are paradoxically responsible for the most unspeakable acts of brutality and degradation.

### Samuel Beckett (1906–1989)

Nobel Prize winner Samuel Beckett was born in Foxrock, Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1906, to William Frank Beckett, a surveyor, and Mary Jones Roe Beckett, a nurse. He attended a Protestant public school and earned a bachelor of arts degree from Trinity College in 1927 and an M.A. in 1931. Although Beckett taught for a short time, he hated the teaching profession and soon resigned his position. He began

traveling in Europe and eventually settled in Paris in 1937. Beckett did most of his writing in French; his work included poetry, critical essays, and novels. However, he is perhaps most famous for his dramas, particularly his masterpiece *Waiting for Godot* (1954), considered by many critics the defining work of Absurdism. The two-act play presents two men who engage in apparently pointless conversation while waiting by the side of the road for Godot, who fails to appear on two successive evenings. It is a play in which virtually nothing happens. The same could be said of Beckett's 1957 play *Endgame*, considered by some critics an even bleaker view of human existence than *Waiting for Godot*. Enoch Brater, in a 1975 essay for the *Educational Theatre Journal*, argues that Beckett's plays— not simply the writing, but also the staging— brought a physical element to the absurdist movement. Beckett continued to write plays, novels, and other prose works into his eighties; he died in Paris on December 22, 1989, of respiratory failure.

### Jean Genet (1910–1986)

Jean Genet was born in Paris on December 19, 1910, to an unknown father and a mother who immediately abandoned him. His early years were spent in an orphanage, and he was later turned over to a foster family, who accused him of stealing from them. He spent some time in a reformatory for adolescents from which he escaped; he then joined the French Foreign Legion, from which he deserted. He wandered around Europe for the next twenty years, supporting himself through thievery and prostitution. Genet began writing in prison, where he was serving a life sentence. His supporters in the literary world were eventually able to secure a presidential pardon in 1948, after which Genet devoted himself to his writing, to the arts, and to political activism. He was an admirer of the Black Panther Party and soon became a cult figure, in part because of Jean-Paul Sartre's essay which characterized Genet as a saint and a martyr. Genet's first writing consisted of poetry, novels, and a fictionalized autobiography. In 1947, while still in prison, he wrote his first play, *The Maids* (1947), and after his release he continued writing dramas, many of which became major productions. His most productive and successful period as a playwright was the late 1950s and early 1960s. Beginning in 1970 Genet lived in the Middle East among the members of the Palestinian

Liberation Organization (PLO), whose cause he supported. He died in Paris on April 15, 1986, from throat cancer, and his memoirs offering an account of his years with the PLO were published later that year.

### Václav Havel (1936– )

Václav Havel, playwright, political dissident, and former president of the Czech Republic, was born in Prague on October 5, 1936, to Václav M. and Bozena Vavreckova Havel. He was educated at a technical school and at Prague's Academy of Art and served in the Czech Army in 1957–59. Throughout the 1960s, Havel worked with theater groups in Czechoslovakia, serving in various capacities from stagehand to playwright-in-residence. He gained success with his early plays, *The Garden Party* and *The Memorandum*, both of which deal with the dehumanizing effects of government bureaucracy. When the former Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, Havel was imprisoned and his plays were banned. But his international reputation grew as his works were successfully staged outside Czechoslovakia. Within his own country, he became well known as a spokesman for human rights. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Havel saw his plays return to the Czech stage; he was elected president of Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic) that same year, an office he continued to hold until 2003.

In late 2006, Havel was an artist-in-residence at Columbia University in New York City. Concurrent with his visit, the Untitle Theater Company #61 held a festival of Havel's plays—the first time all of his plays have been performed together. In 2007, Havel published a script for a new play, *Leaving*, loosely based on Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. *Leaving* is Havel's first play in 18 years; it premiered on stage at the Archa Theater in Prague in May 2008.

### Eugène Ionesco (1909–1994)

Eugène Ionesco was born in Slatina, Romania, on November 26, 1909. His parents were Eugène, a lawyer, and Marie-Therese Icard Ionesco. He became a French citizen and spent most of his life in Paris. Ionesco was a painter and a playwright; a number of his plays are associated with the Theatre of the Absurd, among them *The Bald Soprano* (1950), *The Lesson* (1951), and *Rhinocéros* (1959). Ionesco used black humor to criticize social and political institutions, insisting that the only possible response to an absurd world is laughter. Nonetheless, he claimed he was not an absurdist, and he preferred the term "Theatre of Derision" to Theatre of the Absurd. One of his favorite targets for derision, especially in his early plays, was language itself, which he considered ineffective in helping individuals communicate and even dangerous and harmful when used to manipulate. Ionesco's work enjoyed great success in the 1950s and 1960s, but his later plays were not as well received. He turned away from drama and began to concentrate on his painting and on publishing his nonfiction. Ionesco died March 28, 1994, in Paris.

### Harold Pinter (1930– )

Harold Pinter was born October 10, 1930, in a working-class neighborhood in Hackney, London, England, to Hyman and Frances Pinter. His otherwise happy childhood was marred by the nightly terror of the London air raids during World War II. He attended the Hackney Downs Grammar School where he excelled in acting, writing, and sports. In 1948 he began studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and over the next several years he worked as an actor with a variety of repertory companies. In 1957, his first play, *The Room*, was produced in Bristol, England; it was followed by *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Dumbwaiter* (1959), and numerous other plays, radio and television dramas, and screenplays. In 2005, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature by the Swedish Academy. Pinter is considered one of the most important playwrights of the post-World War II generation, and his plays have enjoyed success with both audiences and critics.

### Tom Stoppard (1937– )

Tom Stoppard was born Tomáŝ Straussler on July 3, 1937, in Zlín, Czechoslovakia. As a young child, Stoppard fled the Nazi invasion of his home country with his family, living in Singapore and India. His father died in a Japanese internment camp when Stoppard was young, and his mother married an English serviceman who eventually brought Stoppard, his mother, and his brother back to England. Stoppard never finished his secondary education or earned a bachelor's degree, despite spending some years at university. Leaving school at age 17, he worked as a journalist, writing features and reviews with a specialty in theater. Not very skilled as a critic, Stoppard gave up this work in 1960 at age 23 to write plays instead. His

first staged play, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), was an immediate success and launched Stoppard's playwriting career.

Stoppard is a late-comer to Absurdism, having been exposed to the work of other absurdists through his translations of plays by Vaclav Havel, Arthur Schnitzler, and others. Although his career began with Absurdism, Stoppard has used Absurdism as a tool within his writing repertoire, and it is not singularly representative of all of his work. Stoppard is the recipient of four Tony Awards for Best Play (for *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, 1968; *Travesties*, 1976; *The Real Thing*, 1984; and *Coast of Utopia*, 2007) and an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay (for *Shakespeare in Love*, 1998).

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The American Dream

A long one-act play by Edward Albee, *The American Dream* (1961) targets the artificial values of family life and features plot events that are not only absurd, but grotesque. The main characters are Daddy, who is weak and ineffectual, and Mommy, who is domineering and cruel. All relationships in the play are governed by material considerations. When the couple adopts a baby, or their "bumble of joy" as they call him, they are actually buying him. Mommy and Daddy gradually destroy the baby as they discover he is less than perfect, depriving him of eyes, hands, tongue, sexual organs—every possible means of communicating with others. When the baby dies, the couple frets over the loss of their investment, regretting that he has already been paid for. Albee also uses humor in *The American Dream* to attack the phony language and stage clichés of sentimental theatrical productions. For example, Mommy, describing the cause of Grandma's death, says "It was an offstage rumble, and you know what that means." The play, along with Albee's other early one-act plays (*Zoo Story* and *The Sandbox*), was successful both commercially and critically, although some critics believe all three are too heavily influenced by the work of Ionesco. The three plays were especially well received on American college campuses during the 1960s.

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- A video recording of *Waiting for Godot*, featuring Burgess Meredith and Zero Mostel and directed by Alan Schneider, was made for Grove Press Film Division, 1971.

- Eugene Ionesco's *The New Tenant* was filmed for Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation, 1975.

- Jean Genet's *Balcony* was made available on videocassette from Mystic Fire in 1998.

- Edward Albee's *Zoo Story* was made available on audio CD by Universal Records in 2001.

- *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett, is available on audiocassette, featuring a performance by Joe Dinicol for CBC Radio, 2000.

- A Web site on the Theatre of the Absurd can be found with links to other sites and a chatroom at http://vzone.virgin.net/numb.world/rhino.absurd.htm.

- A useful Web site on Beckett is "The Samuel Beckett On-Line Resources and Links Page" at http://www.samuel-beckett.net/ which contains numerous reviews and scholarly articles on Beckett's life and work, as well as reviews of books about Beckett.

- Vaclav Havel maintains a Web site at http://vaclavhavel.cz/index.php?&setin=2 which details his life, writing, and political career.

- The San Quentin Players restaged Beckett's three most famous works—*Waiting for Godot*, *Krupp's Last Tape*, and *Endgame*—in the mid-1980s using Beckett's original staging. These performances were filmed and released as a trilogy of VHS tapes in 1988 by the Smithsonian Video Library.

- Jean Genet's *The Maids* was made into a movie in 1975. Directed by Christopher Miles, this film is part of the American Film Theater series produced by Ely Landau. It is available on DVD as part of the 15-disc American Film Theater collection, distributed by Kino International in 2008.

*Václav Havel* (AP Images)

## The Bald Soprano

*The Bald Soprano*, written originally in French (*La cantatrice chauve*) in 1950 and translated into English in 1958, was Eugène Ionesco's first play. It features such absurdist elements as a clock that strikes seventeen and a married couple who fail to recognize each other in a social situation. The Martins are guests at the home of the Smiths. They engage in polite conversation, each feeling they have met before. A series of questions and answers between the two reveals that they live in the same house and are, in fact, husband and wife. Although the dialogue of *The Bald Soprano* has been described as hilariously funny, the play as a whole is considered a tragedy as Ionesco attacks the stilted, artificial quality of language that hinders communication between individuals.

## The Chairs

Written in 1952, Eugène Ionesco's *The Chairs* features the breakdown of language as well as one of the playwright's most famous metaphors for absurdity: the multiplication of objects. As an elderly couple sets up chairs for an invisible audience arriving to hear an important speech, the chairs begin to multiply until they fill the entire stage. Meanwhile, the orator delivering the speech, which the old man has written to convey an important message to the world, is unable to produce anything except guttural sounds. *The Chairs* makes the point that language and communication are illusions; it is one of Ionesco's most highly acclaimed plays.

## Endgame

Samuel Beckett's one-act play *Endgame* (1957), which is not as famous as *Waiting for Godot*, is an even darker work dealing with the master/slave relationship. The setting is sparse and claustrophobic, the dialogue is often comic, and the activities of the characters resemble slapstick comedy. Yet overall, the interaction of the principles is characterized by cruelty and bitterness, and the tone of the work, despite its humorous moments, is grim and pessimistic. *Endgame* made its U.S. debut at New York's Cherry Lane Theatre in 1958. The play's reception was mixed; many critics who had praised *Waiting for Godot* were disappointed in the bleak view of humanity Beckett seemed to be presenting in *Endgame*.

## The Garden Party

Originally *Zahradni slavnost* (1964), Václav Havel's *The Garden Party* (1969), targets the nature of bureaucracy and its dehumanizing effect on individuals. Havel creates a world in which language is not a tool in the service of the individual but rather acts as a weapon by which the individual is controlled. The play's main character speaks in clichés and slogans and is unable to accomplish anything within a bureaucratic system that perpetuates itself and defies humans' attempts to intervene in its operation. *The Garden Party* was Havel's first play, and while it was a critical success, it was banned in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion of 1968.

## The Homecoming

Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, written in 1965, was the playwright's third full-length drama. The story involves a London working-class family whose eldest son has lived in the United States for several years where he is a professor of philosophy at a university. He returns, along with his wife Ruth, to his father's home, but when he later goes

back to the United States, she refuses to accompany him. Instead, she plans to stay behind and care for her husband's father, uncle, and brothers, and to earn her living as a prostitute. The play features several absurdist elements but is also characterized by violence, both emotional and physical, between the family members. *The Homecoming* has generated a great deal of controversy because of the shocking nature of the plot. Critical debate has usually centered on the possible motivation for Ruth's bizarre decision. *The Homecoming* was revived on Broadway in 1991.

## The Maids

In Jean Genet's second play, *The Maids* (1947), the writer for the first time explores a world outside the prison, a setting he used in all of his earlier works. The characters are Claire and Solange, maids to an elegant lady who mistreats them. They take turns playacting the roles of mistress and servant whenever the real mistress is away. Fearful that their plot to have their mistress's lover imprisoned is about to be discovered, they determine to poison the lady, but she leaves before they carry out their plan. The two maids lapse into their usual role-playing, and Claire, assuming the part of the mistress, takes the poison and dies in her place. The world represented in the play has been likened to a hall of mirrors, where identities and perceptions are reflected back and forth between characters switching roles between master and servant. Questions of identity and impersonation were further complicated by Genet's insistence that all of the female parts be played by young men. *The Maids* was commissioned and produced by Louis Jouvet in 1947, making it one of the earliest dramas to be associated with the Theatre of the Absurd.

## Ping-Pong

Critics consider Arthur Adamov's *Ping-Pong*, originally produced in French in 1955 and translated into English in 1959, the masterpiece of his early absurdist plays, with its emphasis on futility. The play's two characters are young students, Victor and Arthur. Although they are initially studying medicine and art respectively, they become obsessed with every aspect of pinball machines, from the mechanics of their operation to the details of their distribution and maintenance. Reality, including personal relationships, is viewed through possible associations to pinball. At play's end Victor and Arthur appear as old men, close to death, who have wasted their entire lives on their obsession. Although Adamov typically refused to assign a temporal or spatial setting to his early plays, he was more or less forced to do so by the subject matter in this work. Choosing a contemporary pastime such as pinball as the centerpiece of the drama necessarily called for a contemporary urban setting. Critics praised *Ping-Pong*, but Adamov himself ultimately rejected it, along with his other absurdist plays. Towards the end of his career, he began writing realist dramas concerned with social and political issues.

## Waiting for Godot

The most famous and most critically acclaimed work associated with Absurdism is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, produced in 1953 in Paris as *En Attendant Godot* and translated into English a year later. The setting is sparse, almost vacant, and the characters are two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, who do little except wait, on two successive nights, for someone who never appears. While waiting they engage in a series of apparently random discussions, some involving philosophy, and a variety of antics—from taking off their shoes to eating a carrot—that seem vaguely reminiscent of a comedy routine or a vaudeville act. They also attempt suicide twice but fail each time. At the end of the play, when Godot has still not appeared, the characters agree to leave, at least according to their limited dialogue, but the stage directions contradict their words by insisting that "they do not move." One of the most important productions of *Waiting for Godot* took place in San Quentin prison in 1957, performed by the members of the San Francisco Actors' Workshop. Several critics have commented on the enthusiastic reception the prisoners gave the play, suggesting that they seemed to instinctively grasp its meaning at the same time audiences apparently more educated and more sophisticated were confused by the play's unconventional nature. Many critics believe *Waiting for Godot* is Beckett's most important work, citing its influence on the Theatre of the Absurd and on contemporary drama in general.

## The Zoo Story

Edward Albee wrote his first drama *The Zoo Story* (1959), in three weeks. Uncluttered, even sparse, the play features two characters, working-class Jerry and middle-class Peter, who meet in Central Park. Jerry pours out his life story to

Peter, and it is a life characterized by loneliness, alienation, and failure. Peter refuses to connect with Jerry and does not want to hear any more of his tale. Provoking Peter into a fight, Jerry kills himself on a knife he gave to Peter, thus involving him, despite his objections, in another's death if not in his life. Albee employs the diction of small children in *The Zoo Story*, a device he used in many of his later plays. The one-act play won an Obie Award in 1960 and established its author as a promising American playwright.

## THEMES

### *Absurdity*

Absurdity is the most obvious theme explored in Absurdism. Absurdity characterizes a world that no longer makes sense to its inhabitants, in which rational decisions are impossible and all action is meaningless and futile. Absurdity also describes many situations and events that take place in plays associated with the movement, such as orators who speak in gibberish (*The Chairs*), a clock that strikes seventeen (*The Bald Soprano*), or a rhinoceros that walks across the stage (*Rhinocéros*).

### *Cruelty and Violence*

Beneath the nonsense and slapstick humor of Absurdism lurks an element of cruelty, often revealed in dialogue between characters but occasionally manifested in acts of violence. Pinter's plays are noted for the latter. In *The Room*, a blind man is brutally beaten; in *The Birthday Party*, the celebration becomes an interrogation and eventually an abduction; and in *The Dumb Waiter*, a pair of assassins are involved in an apparently random murder. Similarly, in Ionesco's *The Lesson*, a professor frustrated by his students' inability to understand his meaningless lessons, savagely kills them one after another. The seemingly innocent, child-like characters created by Arrabal engage in unspeakable acts of torture, even murder. On a less physical level is the cruelty hiding behind the apparently humorous dialogue in Beckett's *Endgame*, which features a master/servant relationship in which Hamm dominates Clov. Hamm, in turn, has suffered from the cruelty of his parents when he was a child. His father recounts how the youngster would cry because he was afraid of the dark, and their response, according to the father, was "We

## TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Some critics have referred to situations in absurdist works as Kafkaesque. Read Franz Kafka's *The Trial* or view the 1962 film adaptation with Orson Welles and determine whether the work fits the category of Absurdism.

- Absurdist works were avant-garde, even shocking, in the 1950s. By the 1980s, however, elements of Absurdism had found their way into music videos, television commercials, and print ads. Find examples of these elements in two or three music videos and/or advertisements and discuss the way the features of Absurdism are being used today.

- The French surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel teamed up with surrealist artist Salvador Dali to produce the 1928 film *Un chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*), featuring a scene in which a man drags a pair of pianos filled with dead donkeys across a room. Try to obtain a copy of *An Andalusian Dog* from a public or university library or read about Buñuel's film in *The Branded Eye: Buñuel's Un chien andalou*, by Jenaro Talens, University of Minnesota Press, 1993. How do such surrealistic film scenes compare with Theatre of the Absurd?

let you cry. Then we moved out of earshot, so that we might sleep in peace."

### *Domination*

Several well-known absurdist works feature pairs of characters in which one is the dominator and the other the dominated. Some of these are quite literally master/servant relationships, such as in Genet's *The Maids* or Beckett's *Endgame*. Others reproduce the master/slave relationship within marriage, as in Albee's *The American Dream* in which Mommy dominates the spineless Daddy character or within the traditional teacher/student dynamic, as in Ionesco's *The Lesson*.

### *Futility and Passivity*

The futility of all human endeavor characterizes many absurdist works, such as Adamov's *Ping-Pong* in which two promising students abandon their studies and devote their lives to the appreciation of pinball machines. Adamov's earlier play *La Parodie* (1947) shares the idea that individuals are powerless to direct their own lives; it does so by presenting two characters, one who refuses to live and one who embraces life with joy. The fate of both is ultimately exactly the same. Havel's early plays, such as *The Garden Party*, deal with the inability of even the most ambitious individual to make any headway against a self-perpetuating bureaucracy. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* suggests that human effort is meaningless and leads to nothing in the end. Beckett's characters are so ineffective and doomed to failure that they are unable even to commit suicide successfully despite two attempts. Their passivity, established by their interminable waiting, is even more famously illustrated by the closing scenes of both first and second acts, in which each stands rooted to his spot on the stage despite having made the decision to leave.

### *Language*

The failure of language to convey meaning is an important theme in the literature of Absurdism. Language is either detached from any interpretation that can be agreed to by all characters, or it is reduced to complete gibberish. The play entitled *The Bald Soprano*, for example, has nothing to do with a soprano, much less a bald one. The standard philosophical discourse is mocked by the nonsensical dialogue in *Waiting for Godot*; although it is meaningless, it bears a strong resemblance to the structure of the real thing. The language of religious fervor is employed by Adamov in *Ping-Pong*, but the object being venerated is a pinball machine. The characters in Havel's plays speak in clichés and slogans, from which all real meaning has been drained.

### *Loneliness and Isolation*

Many absurdist works illustrate the loneliness and isolation of individuals, resulting from the nature of modern life and, in some cases, from the impossibility of effective communication between humans. Albee's *The Zoo Story* offers a prime example of this theme, featuring a character so eager to make a connection with a complete stranger that he is willing to die in order to do so. If the two men are unable to achieve contact in life, at least the man is able to involve the stranger, however unwillingly, in his death. Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* explores the same theme with a husband and wife who are so isolated from each other that they fail to recognize their connection in a social setting and have only a vague sense of having met before.

### *Materialism*

Materialism is criticized in Albee's *The American Dream*, in which even relationships between family members are subject to the terms of profit and loss statements. A woman marries a man she does not love simply because he is wealthy, and they buy a baby to complete their family. The baby dies, leaving them to mourn their financial loss rather than their emotional loss. Adamov's characters in *Ping-Pong* devote their lives to the worship of a thing, which some critics consider a critique of capitalism and materialism.

## STYLE

### *Character*

Absurdism often abandons traditional character development to offer figures who have no clear identity or distinguishing features. They may even be interchangeable, as are the supporting characters in *Waiting for Godot* who appear as master and servant in the first act and trade places when they return for the second act. Role playing causes confusion among the characters in Genet's *The Maids* in which the audience initially thinks the figure onstage is the lady of the house being served by her maid Claire, but then realizes that Claire is impersonating the mistress and the other maid, Solange, is impersonating Claire. These exchanges continue throughout the play, which deprives the audience of any stable sense of character identity.

### *Denouement*

In conventional literature or drama, the denouement serves to tie up the loose ends of the narrative, resolving both primary and secondary plot conflicts and complications. Since so little happens in an absurdist work, the denouement has little to resolve. Thus endings tend to be repetitious, such as the nearly identical ending of both acts of *Waiting for Godot*. Such repetitive actions reinforce the idea that human effort is futile, which serves as a prominent theme of Absurdism. In Ionesco's *The Lesson*, which features the

murder of a student by a professor, the audience learns that it is the fortieth such murder that day. Since the ending of the play consists of yet another student arriving for yet another lesson, the audience has every reason to believe the newly arrived student will meet the same fate.

### Dialogue

Since the ability of language to convey meaning is called into question by Absurdism, dialogue is of special importance in absurdist works. Artificial language, empty of meaning, consisting of slogans and clichés, is a hallmark of the movement. Many of the texts contain dialogue that appears to be meaningless but that mimics the style of educated or sophisticated speech. Often there is a marked contradiction between speech and action, as in *Godot* when the characters claim they are leaving but actually stay.

### Plot

Absurdism at its most extreme abandons conventional notions of plot almost entirely. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* has been described as a play in which nothing happens. Its opening line is "Nothing to be done," and the characters proceed to do just that—nothing. Although the characters do engage in various actions, none of those actions is connected in any meaningful way, nor do the actions develop into any sort of narrative or logical sequence of events.

### Setting

The use of setting is one of the most unconventional stylistic features of Absurdism. Typically, an absurdist play is set in no recognizable time or place. Stage settings tend to be sparse, with lots of vacant space conveying the sense of emptiness associated with characters' lives. The empty chairs of Ionesco's *The Chairs* serves as an example, as does *Waiting for Godot*'s nearly bare stage with a single spindly tree as the only prop. But the setting can also be cramped and confining, such as the claustrophobic single room of Beckett's *Endgame*.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Dadaism

Dadaism, a precursor to Surrealism and Absurdism, was founded in 1916 by Tristan Tzara as a protest movement in art and literature. Followers of the movement expressed their outrage at the destruction brought about by World War I by revolting against numerous forms of social convention. The Dadaists presented works marked by calculated madness and flamboyant nonsense. They stressed total freedom of expression, commonly through primitive displays of emotion and illogical, often senseless, poetry. The word "dada" comes from either the Romanian words for "yes, yes" or the French word for a child's hobby-horse. Dadaism ended shortly after the war, when it was replaced by Surrealism. Proponents of Dadaism include André Breton, Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault, and Paul Eluard.

### Philosophy

Absurdism is often linked to Existentialism, the philosophical movement associated with Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, among others. Although both existentialists and absurdists are concerned with the senselessness of the human condition, the way this concern is expressed differs. The philosophers explored the irrational nature of human existence within the rational and logical framework of conventional philosophical thought. The absurdists, however, abandoned the traditional elements of literature in general and theater in particular—setting, plot, character development—in order to convey a sense of absurdity and illogic in both form and content.

In general, the two movements also differ in the conclusions each seems to draw from the realization that life is meaningless. Many absurdist productions appear to be making a case for the idea that all human effort is futile and action is pointless; others seem to suggest that an absurd existence leaves the individual no choice but to treat it as farce. The existentialists, however, claimed that the realization that life had no transcendental meaning, either derived from faith or from the essence of humanity itself, could (and should) serve as a springboard to action. An individual's life, according to the existentialists, can be made meaningful only through that individual's actions.

### Politics and Social Change

Because many absurdist works have no temporal or spatial setting, they are often considered apolitical, that is, they are neither criticizing nor endorsing any country's culture, society, or political system. There are, however, exceptions. Václav Havel's plays, for example, are

concerned with the dehumanizing effects of government bureaucracy, particularly within Communist Czechoslovakia. The works apparently hit their target, since the government banned them and imprisoned the playwright. Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinocéros* could also be considered political, since the author claimed that the inspiration for the play was the gradual acceptance of Nazi fascism by an antifascist friend. Based on a 1940 entry in Ionesco's journal, the play opens with a rhinoceros charging past as two friends converse. Although everyone ignores the rhinoceros at first, eventually most of the characters accept its presence, and one by one they even decide to become rhinoceroses themselves. A lone individual is determined to fight the growing herd. Ironically, Ionesco's play varies from the usual plotless, apolitical style of most absurdist dramas to offer a powerful critique of mob mentality and conformity. The individual who decides to fight rather than join the herd is also unusual, since most absurdist characters are anonymous, passive, and ineffectual—certainly not given to heroic actions.

The failure of most absurdist works to call for any meaningful action may also account for the almost total absence of women playwrights involved in the movement. Toby Silverman Zinman, in "Hen in a Foxhouse: The Absurdist Plays of Maria Irene Fornes," suggests that although female dramatists shared the "deep disillusionment" common to most practitioners of Absurdism, most of them were committed to changing the conditions that led to that disillusionment. While they may have employed some of the formal elements associated with Absurdism, they rejected its bleak vision that human effort is futile.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although the roots of Absurdism can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century, the movement reached its peak in the years immediately following World War II, a war of catastrophic proportions that saw the armies of fascist Germany overrun most of Europe and the Japanese attack the United States at Pearl Harbor. An estimated 48 million people in Europe were killed and millions more became refugees. Bombs turned cities to rubble. As the Allied Forces liberated the concentration camps at the end of the war, Europeans and Americans were confronted by the enormity of the Holocaust, Germany's final solution for Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and political prisoners. Faced with the evidence of evil on such a grand scale, people were often overcome by feelings of pessimism and helplessness. At the same time, the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 introduced the reality of nuclear war and the possibility of a future nuclear disaster that could potentially eliminate all humankind. The change to using nuclear weapons ushered in the Cold War of the 1950s as the United States and the Soviet Union, former allies against Germany, became enemies. The two sides entered into an arms race and began stockpiling nuclear weapons. Thus, the achievement of peace after World War II was clouded by the specter of an even more horrific war to come, and this sense of the future led to feelings of hopelessness and futility.

The continental United States, however, was untouched physically by the war. Returning soldiers were more optimistic than their European counterparts and were eager to pursue the American dream. They married in record numbers and began having children, producing the well-known postwar baby boom, lasting from 1946 to 1964. Cities and schools became overcrowded and many urban families, aided by the prosperity of the postwar years, eventually moved to the suburbs.

Women had worked in a variety of jobs during the war, filling in for the men who were fighting overseas and contributing to the war effort by producing weapons and supplies for the troops. The idea of women working in factories was popularized by the poster image of Rosie the Riveter as a capable worker doing a man's job and doing it well. After the war, however, these same women were encouraged to return to their homes and care for their husbands and children, thereby giving up their places in the job market to the returning soldiers. The nuclear family of husband, stay-at-home wife, and small children living in a single-family home in the suburbs became the 1950s idealization of the American dream.

In the arts, the social and community concerns of the Depression years and the war years gave way to introspection and individual visions. In some cases, artists began to concentrate on form rather than content. Abstract art—Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism—with its emphasis on individual expression replaced artistic modes tied to political themes. In Hollywood, the optimistic

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1950s:** In the midst of the Cold War, Americans are fearful of a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union. Fallout shelters are designed and built, and school children regularly practice duck-and-cover procedures in the event of an air raid.

  **Today:** After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., many Americans live in fear that terrorists may strike again at any time, anywhere in the country. Security firms offer classes for civilians in how to disarm a potential terrorist on an airplane.

- **1950s:** The Soviet Union and the United States engage in a Cold War as two enemies with nuclear capability, each stockpiling weapons in an attempt to achieve nuclear superiority.

  **Today:** The Soviet Union has separated into individual countries; the largest of these,

  Russia, is now an ally of the United States in the space program and in the war against terrorism.

- **1950s:** Soldiers returning from World War II are eager to resume a normal life by marrying and starting families, leading to the postwar baby boom. Prosperity and family life are celebrated in popular culture, particularly television shows such as *I Love Lucy*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Leave It to Beaver*, all of which feature stable, nuclear families.

  **Today:** As women have delayed marriage to concentrate on careers and as the divorce rate climbs, television situation comedies are more likely to focus on single life rather than on families consisting of father, mother, and young children. Some examples are *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *Will and Grace*.

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and patriotic films of the war years were replaced in the late 1940s and early 1950s by *film noir*, a dark, gritty, urban genre that exposed the menacing underside of American life. The Cold War also inspired a host of monster and horror films that served as allegories for potential invasion by a foreign enemy; perhaps the most famous of these was *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1955).

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Some critics trace the roots of Absurdism back to the beginning of the twentieth century, but for most, the movement itself began at mid-century. Ruby Cohn, for instance, makes a claim for 1950—the year Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* first appeared on the French stage—as the starting point of Theatre of the Absurd. Martin Esslin, who in 1961 identified and labeled the movement, begins with *Waiting for Godot* and many critics follow his lead. Written in 1950 but

not staged until 1953, Beckett's most famous drama is also considered by many scholars to be the most representative of the movement. Esslin originally identified three other practitioners of Absurdism: Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov, as well as a number of lesser-known playwrights. In later editions of his landmark study, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin elevated Harold Pinter from minor to major figure and devoted an entire chapter to his plays.

As the scholar who defined the movement, Esslin takes pains to point out that the writers he discusses would not necessarily associate themselves with Absurdism. Many of them, in fact, rejected the label completely; Ionesco preferred Theatre of Derision, and Arrabal chose Theatre of Panic to describe his plays. Esslin acknowledges that of the playwrights he discusses "each has his own personal approach to both subject-matter and form; his own roots, sources, and background." He maintains, however, that at the same time they "in spite of themselves, have
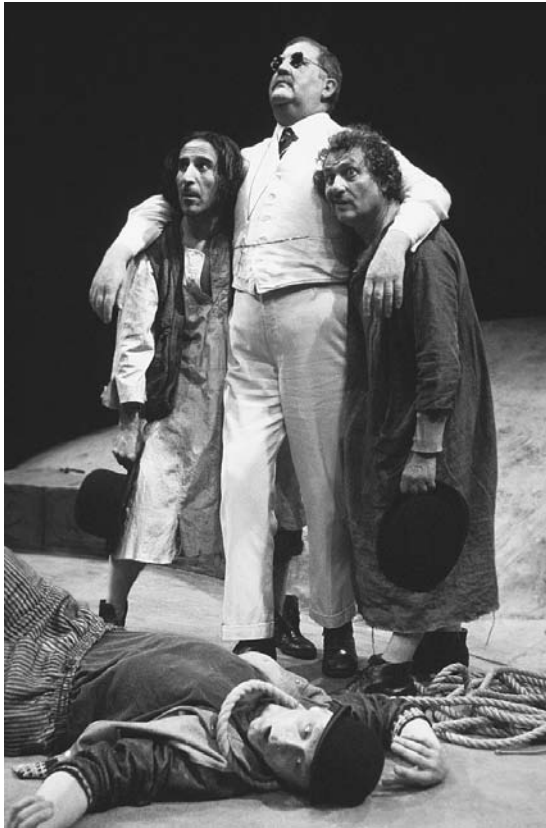
*A scene from the play* Waiting for Godot, *written by Samuel Beckett* (© *Robbie Jack | Corbis*)

a good deal in common." Those common elements are, for Esslin.

> "Pure" theatre; i.e. abstract scenic effects as they are familiar in the circus or revue, in the work of jugglers, acrobats, bullfighters, or mimes
>
> Clowning, fooling, and mad-scenes
>
> Verbal nonsense
>
> The literature of dream and fantasy, which often has a strong allegorical component.

There is a certain amount of overlap among these categories, and individual playwrights employ the separate elements in different ways, but all employ them in ways that differ from older theatrical traditions and in ways that made Theatre of the Absurd "shocking and incomprehensible" to its earliest audiences.

That ability to shock theatergoers resulted from the movement's abandonment (or rejection) of traditional plot, character development, setting, dialogue, and denouement. For Esslin, this departure amounts to innovation and experimentation and is an indication of an art form's

vitality, necessary in a changing world. As he puts it: "Under such conditions no art can survive that complacently falls back on past traditions and standards. Least of all the theatre, which is the most social of the arts and most directly responds to social change." Thus, Esslin views Absurdism as a positive development in the history of the theater.

Where Esslin sees vitality, however, other critics have seen decadence. Avadhesh K. Srivastava in "The Crooked Mirror: Notes on the Theatre of the Absurd," considers Theatre of the Absurd excessively concerned with inward reality "without the stabilizing influence of a moral perspective" and, therefore, decadent. The playwrights identified with the movement, Srivastava claims, have nothing in common with each other except their rejection of traditional theatrical conventions. Their agreement is based on a negative, therefore, "runs counter to the text-book aims of drama. It is neither cathartic nor edificatory; neither suspense nor spectacle." As such, Srivastava suggests that a certain amount of fraud and manipulation is involved. By calling itself theater, Theatre of the Absurd is setting up its audiences to expect something which it then fails to deliver.

Esslin acknowledges that the play that started it all was "scorned as undramatic" originally, but he points to its overwhelming popularity with audiences all over the world and its eventual acceptance by critics, dramatists, and scholars. The same could be said for other plays associated with the Theatre of the Absurd. Although they were initially considered incomprehensible, they soon became familiar and highly acclaimed. While Absurdism itself was short-lived as a movement, its influence, particularly in the realm of popular culture, continued into the twenty-first century.

## CRITICISM

### Suzanne Dewsbury

*Dewsbury is a writer and instructor of English and American Studies. In this essay, she examines Absurdism's short life as a formal movement and its long-range effects on Western culture.*

Critic Martin Esslin identified the common elements shared by a number of dramatic works of the 1950s and provided the label "Theatre of the Absurd" to those works. At first, audiences found these works incomprehensible; viewers

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Just as the playwrights of Absurdism rejected existing theatrical traditions, the poet e. e. cummings departed from the norms of traditional poetry with his unconventional use of grammar, syntax, and punctuation. His collection *100 Selected Poems*, published in 1989 by Grove Press, contains such poems as "anyone lived in a pretty how town," "next to of course god america i," and "my sweet old etcetera."

- Some of the most famous images of artist René Magritte, such as the green apple or the black bowler hat, are often described as absurdist. Robert Hughes's *The Portable Magritte*, Universe Publishers (2001), provides an illustrated study of Magritte's work.

- Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, Dell Publishing (1969), draws on the author's own experiences as a prisoner of war in the German city of Dresden during the World War II Allied firebombing that killed hundreds of thousands of German civilians. In many ways, the novel shares Absurdism's sense of futility in the wake of mass destruction.

- Many music videos employ the elements of Absurdism, and a number of books are available on music video as a popular art form. Among them are: *Thirty Frames per Second: The Visionary Art of the Music Video* by Steven Reiss, Neil Feineman, and Jeff Ayeroff, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers (2000); *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* by E. Ann Kaplan, Methuen Drama (1987); and *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* by Andrew Goodwin, University of Minnesota Press (1992).

> ... THEATRE OF THE ABSURD AS A FORMAL MOVEMENT BEGAN TO DISSOLVE BY THE EARLY 1960S, BUT ITS EFFECTS ON WESTERN CULTURE, PARTICULARLY POPULAR CULTURE, ENDURED AND ARE STILL BEING FELT TODAY. "

and two characters whose actions resembled slapstick more than theater. It was produced on stage for the first time in 1953, and for the first time in London in 1955 where critics and audiences alike considered it "completely obscure." Nine years later, Esslin reports, *Godot* was revived in London. Although it was generally well received, by this time the work "had one great fault: its meaning and symbolism were a little too obvious." In an age of mass communication, the revolutionary quality of avant-garde art quickly fades. That which shocks the public one minute bores it the next, and this, in part, accounts for the short life-span of Theatre of the Absurd.

Another reason for the movement's demise may be that drama must eventually have a plot. If nothing happens in Absurdist productions, there are only so many times when a theater audience is willing to attend the staging of nothing. What new observations or insights into nothing are available? Once the point has been made that life is meaningless and all effort is futile, what more can be said? If human endeavor amounts to nothing, if as Esslin puts it, "strenuous effort leads to the same result as passive indolence," then what would be the point of bothering to attend a play or, for that matter, bothering to write one?

Many of the practitioners of Theatre of the Absurd apparently felt the same way since, with few exceptions, they turned to dramas grounded in realist conventions, and to works that offered some possibilities for action. Harold Pinter provides one example. Many of his early works, often associated with Theatre of the Absurd, have been called "comedies of menace," but the source of the menace in question is mysterious and unmotivated. In Pinter's later plays, those written in the 1960s and after, the menace often arises from the desire of certain characters to dominate others. While still complex, these later works are more accessible than those he

left the theaters not knowing what to make of these plays that defied all the traditional elements of staged drama. The textbook case, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, had no plot, a setting that consisted of only a bare tree,

wrote in the 1950s because they provide recognizable character development and motivation.

Arthur Adamov is another playwright whose works are often divided into two distinct periods, with 1957 as the year of demarcation. Plays written before that date exhibit the characteristics of Surrealism and Absurdism; those written after 1957 are realistic and politically committed. Adamov himself made a formal break with the past and publicly rejected his earlier work that treated the individual as hopeless and helpless in favor of characters with free will.

For all these reasons, Theatre of the Absurd as a formal movement began to dissolve by the early 1960s, but its effects on Western culture, particularly popular culture, endured and are still being felt today. Since the 1960s individual elements of Absurdism have been incorporated with increasing frequency into film, television shows, and music videos.

An early example is Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1966), a satiric look at the nuclear arms race. The film's premise is that nuclear weapons have been programmed by both the United States and the Soviet Union in ways that render humans helpless to disarm them. Thus, when an insane American general sets off the signal to attack Russia, the U.S. government is powerless to recall the bombers. Russia, meanwhile, has built a doomsday machine that will automatically retaliate with enough force to destroy the world. The only possible purpose of such a device is deterrence, of course, but the Russians have not quite gotten around to telling the world about it—creating an absurd situation that renders human action futile.

The film's dialogue, too, is reminiscent of Absurdism, when Merkin Muffley, the American president, and Dimitri Kissoff, the Soviet premier, discuss the impending end of the world like two petulant children arguing over which of them is more sorry about the situation: "Don't say that you're more sorry, Dimitri, I'm just as capable of being sorry as you are," complains the president. He then has to call Information to get the number for Russia's Air Defense Headquarters in order to provide them with the coordinates to shoot down the B-52s. In yet another absurd situation, when the rogue general has been subdued, the officer who has obtained the code to call off the attack must try to get through to the president on a pay phone. He does not have sufficient change and must call

collect; however, the White House refuses to accept the charges. In *Dr. Strangelove* the fate of the world resides in the hands of ineffectual individuals embroiled in absurd situations.

Theatre of the Absurd often employed elements of farce and black humor, and in this sense, the films of Mel Brooks might also be included in its legacy. *The Producers*, originally a film and later a successful Broadway play, treats the horrors of World War II as farce, involving the production of a musical called "Springtime for Hitler." Similarly, Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) interrupts a brutal torture scene to threaten the victim with an even worse fate, that is, the loss of his credit rating. *Brazil*'s absurdity centers on the meaninglessness of language and the individual's powerlessness against government bureaucracy, much like the plays of Václav Havel. Foolishly optimistic platitudes and double-speak slogans are everywhere in *Brazil*. Individual agencies of the bureaucracy compete rather than cooperate, resulting in the arrest and murder of an innocent citizen.

Although television rarely treats such dark subjects as the Holocaust or government brutality, Matt Groening's long-running animated comedy *The Simpsons* occasionally comes close. Its main character, Homer Simpson, is either ineffectual or farcical, both as a worker and as a family man. Like Beckett's tramps, he spends most of his time doing nothing. When he does act, the results are usually disastrous, suggesting that the consequences of action are even worse than the consequences of passivity. The fact that Homer works with radioactive materials in his job at a nuclear power plant creates the same doomsday scenario as *Dr. Strangelove* with the fate of Springfield in the hands of inept or ineffectual workers in absurd situations.

*The Simpsons* typically features random visual elements, like toasters that become time machines or animals in unusual contexts that possess attributes not usually associated with their species. Reminiscent of Ionesco's rhinoceros traversing the stage, a huge swordfish lands on the hood of Homer's car as he drives down the street. On another occasion, the family dog is replaced by a killer badger who disembowels Homer. In a segment involving Homer's attempt to become a farmer, an elephant is used as a measuring device to determine the height of the corn crop, in an obvious allusion to the musical *Oklahoma*, however, in this case the elephant is carnivorous. *The Simpsons* recalls Esslin's description of

*A scene from the absurdist film* Brazil, *directed by Terry Gilliam* (The Kobal Collection | The Picture Desk, Inc.)

Theatre of the Absurd: "grotesque, frivolous, and irreverent," although the show's more serious fans might argue that the show is never frivolous.

Another television program that evokes the style and themes of Absurdism is the long-running situation comedy *Seinfeld*. The show is set in Manhattan and features four characters: Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer, each of whom lives alone. They are less involved in plots than in situations. In fact, *Seinfeld*'s producers repeatedly described the program as a show about nothing. Little happened to change the characters' lives over the course of several years; much like *Godot*'s tramps, the characters seemed to be hanging out waiting for something to happen to them. The farcical element was provided by Kramer, whose bizarre antics were clownish and slapstick.

The world of popular music adapted many of the features of Absurdism even, or perhaps especially, in the names chosen for groups. In the pop group The Bare-Naked Ladies, there are no ladies, much less bare-naked ones—just as there were no sopranos, much less bald ones, in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*. The same might be said for the Violent Femmes and the Dead Milkmen. Absurd names are often assumed by individual artists, such as Jello Biafra, or given to album names, like Primus's *Pork Soda*.

Music videos have long made use of Absurdist elements, from the bizarre, seemingly unconnected images of 1980s videos, usually featuring so-called "alternative music," to the more recent efforts of Missy Elliot, where the artist calmly removes her head, or the Crystal Method video in which an inflatable doll turns killer (and the witness explaining the situation to the police is another inflatable doll). Many music videos are very conventional. They consist of mini-narratives, concert footage, or vanity pieces featuring the recording artists in a variety of scenes illustrating conspicuous consumption—expensive clothes, expensive cars, and scantily clad members of the opposite sex. In other videos, bizarre elements, such as props, costumes, and images may be featured, but they are usually loaded with sexual symbolism—making them more a part of the Surrealist tradition than the Absurdist movement. The videos of Madonna or The Red-Hot Chili Peppers might fit into this category. But in a great many other, more sophisticated music videos, elements of Absurdism abound, but they no longer carry the same meaning, which in Theatre of the Absurd was to point out that there was no meaning. A half-century after the movement's peak, acknowledging life's absurdity seems to be an accepted part of postmodern life. It is no longer particularly disturbing; it just makes

for some interesting visual moments. And the popular culture is only too willing to mine the art of the past in order to create those moments.

**Source:** Suzanne Dewsbury, Critical Essay on Absurdism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### *Charles A. Carpenter*

*In the following essay, Carpenter discusses the nature of absurdity in Pinter's play, concluding that most critics ignore the work's true power in trying to penetrate the meaning of the playwright's absurdist touches.*

Pinter's *Homecoming* may be the most enigmatic work of art since the Mona Lisa, an image its main character, Ruth, evokes. At the turning point of the play, Ruth's professor-husband, Teddy, watches intently as she lies on the living-room couch with one of his brothers while the other strokes her hair. His father, Max, claiming he is broadminded, calls her "a woman of quality," "a woman of feeling." Shortly after Ruth frees herself she asks Teddy, out of the blue: "Have your family read your critical works?"

This provokes the smug Ph.D. to a slightly manic assertion: "To see, to be able to *see!* I'm the one who can see. That's why I can write my critical works. Might do you good . . . have a look at them . . . see how certain people can view . . . things . . . how certain people can maintain . . . intellectual equilibrium." His reaction to this intensely disconcerting moment parallels that of Pinter critics who, like Teddy, refuse to let themselves be "lost in it." This is, of course, the natural reaction for people whose public image depends upon maintaining their intellectual equilibrium. But it is hardly the appropriate reaction either for Teddy, who restricts his protestations to eating his pimp—brother Lenny's cheese-roll, or for people genuinely experiencing a Pinter play.

Whatever else this response may involve, it must surely involve letting oneself be "lost in it." The jolt to one's intellectual equilibrium—what Bert States has dubbed "the shock of nonrecognition" [see his essay "Pinter's *Homecoming* The Shock of Nonrecognition," *Hudson Review*, Autumn 1968]—must be acknowledged as a validly evoked response. The urge for rational illumination that so often follows–the nose-tickle crying for a sneeze—must be regarded as an integral second stage of that evoked response. In experiencing these repeated "Pinteresque" moments, we are

> " IT SEEMS UNFORTUNATE AS WELL AS SYMPTOMATIC THAT FEW CRITICS IN THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS HAVE TAKEN AN APPROACH THAT ACCEPTS AND EVEN RELISHES THE ABSURDITY OF PINTER'S DEPICTED WORLD."

put precisely in the dilemma of Camus's "absurd man" described in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. We are confronted with bewilderment, disruption, chaos, what Beckett referred to as "this buzzing confusion." In response, we involuntarily reach out for clarity, understanding, Godot: the little explanation that is not there. We become like Ionesco's Detective in *Victims of Duty*, who lays its underpinning bare: "I don't believe in the absurd. Everything hangs together; everything can be comprehended . . . thanks to the achievements of human thought and science." Camus's hero, the true believer in absurdity, acknowledges this recurring double take as a poignant byproduct of the absurd human condition, and in so doing, Camus says, reveals his "lucidity." Moreover, he becomes capable of reveling in the actual impact of the situation: the rich dark comedy of it, if you will. Sisyphus grows happy with his stone.

At these moments, in life or at a Pinter play, bizarre actions and reactions, churning with apparent meaning but inherently unexplainable, trigger the automatic desire for explanation built into us. An earlier pivotal incident in *The Homecoming* put the idea in the form of a graphic enigma. Before her outright defection, Ruth invites her all-male audience to watch her as she moves her leg, but warns them that even though their minds may stray to the underwear that moves with it, all she is doing is moving her leg. She continues: "My lips move. Why don't you restrict . . . your observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant . . . than the words which come through them." What do Ruth's words mean? Be strict phenomenologists! Pay no attention to the inadvertently moving underwear, on which I have taken pains to rivet your attention; consider what I am saying

insignificant—though I have made it surge with significance. Her words are of course absurd, since they cancel themselves out logically. But can we resist taking the lure and, on impulse, groping for the significance so deviously implied? Only the dull or jaded could. What we can try to avoid, however, is blurring the moment by detaching ourselves from the play in a face-saving quest for comprehension.

Glance at a more flagrant example. Soon after Ruth meets Lenny in Act I, he abruptly asks her if he can hold her hand. She asks why, and he says, "I'll tell you why." He then spins an involved story about being approached under an arch by a lady whose chauffeur, a friend of the family, had tracked him down. Deciding she was "falling apart with the pox," he spurned her advances, "clumped her one," and stopped short of killing her only because of the inconvenience. "So I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that." A baffling reason for wanting to hold Ruth's hand! If at this point we care more about recovering our intellectual aplomb than about letting the play carry us along in its inexorable absurd flow, we will wrench ourselves away from its grip on us; assume the pose of the Critic-Detective; and forget that the scene, in spite of its spray of beckoning clues (partly because of them, in fact), will finally defy comprehension, and that the play, by its nature, is chuckling at our knee-jerk response to one of its more transparent brain-teasers. In Camus's terms, the extent to which we avoid the role of public explainer and acknowledge the way the play has "caught" us becomes the genuine measure of our lucidity.

That avoidance and acknowledgement also give us a much better chance to enjoy the play—to relish the delectable, audacious absurdity of such moments. The distinctive power of *The Homecoming* derives largely from the bizarrely disconcerting quality of the things that happen to characters depicted as real people in the real world. Think of what typical first-nighters probably tell their friends about the play: a professor visits his grubby home after several years abroad and brings his wife, about whom he has not even told his family. The repulsive father calls her a whore, and the two repulsive brothers treat her like one. She does not seem to mind, and after a little bargaining accepts a deal to stay on as the family pet. The husband stands by

complacently, smirk on his face, and finally leaves. If these spectators get around to elaborating on the play, they probably recall more and more incidents that involve "absurd" actions and a dazzling variety of reactions: Ruth making Lenny "some kind of proposal" soon after she meets him; Max lurching from extreme to extreme in his treatment of Ruth; Joey emerging after two hours of "not going any hog" with Ruth upstairs; Lenny getting the bright idea of putting her "on the game" in a Greek Street flat and Ruth raising the ante extravagantly before accepting; everyone ignoring uncle Sam's traumatic revelation—and prone body—at the end. Untutored spectators are not apt to lose sight of what makes the play so eccentric and electric; as they reflect rather idly on their experience, they are more than likely to keep focusing on those bizarre moments that amused, shocked, fascinated, and above all puzzled them.

But what can trained literary analysts do that "mere" playgoers cannot? Some will warp and deface this perspective; others will develop and refine it. Those who take the latter path may begin simply by noting more or less covert instances of bizarre behavior which have to be perceived to be appreciated: when Teddy chats with Lenny in scene one, for example, he does not mention the existence of Ruth (who has gone for a 1:00 a.m. stroll), and he goes to bed before Ruth returns, in effect leaving her to Lenny. An especially profitable avenue is open for critics with a penchant for close analysis: focus on details that lend themselves readily to facile interpretation, such as Max's stick or Lenny's comment to Teddy that his cigar has gone out, and demonstrate their immunity to interpretation.

Ruth's enigmatic farewell to her husband, "Eddie . . . Don't become a stranger," is a manageable example. As Bernard Dukore notes, the fact that Ruth calls him Eddie suggests that "Teddy" is meant as a nickname not for Theodore but for Edward—a suggestion which invites comparisons to the similarly cuckolded stuffed shirt named Edward in *A Slight Ache*. But she may also be symbolically withdrawing from him by muffing his name; or she may be knocking the "Theo"—the divinity—out of what is left of him; or she may be hinting he is no longer her teddy bear—or Teddy boy, for that matter. The rest of her statement, "Don't become a stranger," must be easier; the heavy odds are that she means the opposite of what she says. Or, after all, does she

still want to keep a line open to her own children, even though she now has a new set? Or is her pleasantry, as a scholar sitting beside me in the British Museum once assured me, the way a London prostitute says, "So long—come again" to her clients? Surely the play's obtrusive "homecoming" metaphor must be hiding in there somewhere. Or does Ruth mean, Teddy, don't make yourself becoming to a stranger! it must be more sensible to grant the incomprehensibility of such conundrums than to flail for "the solution" and thus flout their essential nature. In a play like this, we know—to a certain extent—that we cannot know.

A full-fledged analysis concentrating on the play's bizarre and disconcerting effects, or at least trying not to dissipate them, might well aim to project what Kelly Morris has deftly termed [in her essay "*The Homecoming*," *Tulane Drama Review*, Winter 1966] "the suction of the absurd." As the play progresses, characters and audience alike get caught up in this suction. Take as a central example Lenny's victimization—or manhandling, if you prefer—by Ruth. In Act I she toys frivolously with him, countering his macho moves with audacities that throw him off kilter. From his lightly mocking "You must be connected with my brother in some way.... You sort of live with him over there, do you?" and his leering offer to relieve her of her drink, he is reduced by a little seductive bullying to shouting: "What was that supposed to be? Some kind of proposal?" No doubt he is conscious to some degree of having been manipulated, and alert spectators will have observed the Venus' flytrap in action, so that both he and the audience have a chance to shake off the disconcerting effect of Ruth's bizarre behavior.

Relief gets harder as the "suction" intensifies in Act II. When Teddy is present, Ruth joins Lenny in ruffling his proud feathers enough to convince him that he had better grab Ruth and flee if he is to avoid being "lost" in the situation. After Lenny prompts him to absurd evasions of a few philosophical basics ("What do you make of all this business of being and not-being?"), Ruth calls attention to the elegant reality of her leg. Then she declares Teddy's adopted land full of rock, sand, space, and insects. Lenny may believe he has gained an ally, or even a potential filly for his stable, since he pretends to leave with Max and Joey but reappears the instant Teddy goes upstairs to pack. In sharp contrast to his first encounter

with Ruth, this time he is low-keyed and conciliatory. Again he digresses about a lady, but he gave this one a flowery hat instead of "a short-arm jab to the belly." When Ruth reminisces dreamily about her life as a nude model (I assume) before she went off to America, Lenny seems to read her behavior as confirmation that she is making him "some kind of proposal."

Whether or not Lenny does, when Teddy comes downstairs to take Ruth home, he steps into the most bizarre auction scene in all domestic drama, and it is engineered by Lenny. The jaunty pimp puts on some jazz, asks Ruth for "just one dance" before she goes, receives full compliance, kisses her a few times, hands her over to Joey for a bit of mauling, parts them with a touch of his foot, and pours drinks for all to celebrate the realignment. Though it is Teddy who visibly strains against the pressure of absurdity at this moment, Lenny has actually set himself up for a subtle comic downfall. Ruth's siege of deep-felt nostalgia—not about "working" as any kind of sex object but about posing for photographers at a genteel country estate—was entirely introspective and self-directed. To put it graphically, Lenny may have gathered that she was showing him her underwear when she was really just moving her leg. By the time she responds to his advances, he is deceived into thinking he has her pegged and will endure no more tremors from her behavior. He is thus a prime candidate for a shake-up.

Ruth administers the shake-up in two salvos, turning Lenny's cockiness as a shrewd exploiter of women into the sullen acquiescence of a man conned by one. It would be misleading to represent this as a conscious plot on her part, however; view it rather as the effect of her disturbing actions, whatever their roots. First, she somehow manages to play mother-beloved instead of whore to Joey, the test case client Lenny has arranged. Lenny covers up his anxiety quite well when he learns this, but is clearly jolted by the realization that Ruth may be a mere tease. Joey snorts that he can be happy "without going any hog," but what will the paying customers say? Second, Ruth responds to the idea of paying her way as a prostitute by making exorbitant demands that Lenny thought he could handle but cannot. he had said to the men: "I know these women. Once they get started they ruin your budget." Ruth reduces him to:

LENNY. We'd supply everything. Everything you need. [Note the qualification—everything you *need*

RUTH. I'd need an awful lot. Otherwise I wouldn't be content.

LENNY. You'd have everything. [Qualification dropped.]

Lenny does not squirm perceptibly during his public humiliation, even when it also becomes clear that Ruth will most probably refuse to "pull her weight" inside the house (no homecoming for Max and Lenny either). But as the final tableau implies, Ruth has effectively thrust him into the background shadow, big bear-enforcer Joey at her side. Whether Lenny becomes a cover-up-at-all-costs stoic or he is rendered catatonic as this barrage of the unmanageable shatters his delusion of firm control, he is certainly caught up in the "suction of the absurd"—no less than Teddy, in fact, and Teddy can at least escape. The audience, caught in the same suction (though with the cushion of aesthetic distance), leaves with heads buzzing: no escape but in the critics' explanations. Why Ruth carries out these strikingly unexpected acts of apparent self-gratification, by the way, is a wide-open question, but her spate of nostalgia for the best moments of the old life may have served vaguely as the impetus. Or perhaps it was simply her way of thanking Teddy for offering her the opportunity to help him with his lectures when they return.

This brief essay does not pretend to be a fully developed interpretive argument about *The Homecoming*. It is meant to exemplify the direction that might be taken by critical analysis which tries to be faithful to the genuine absurd experience of the play as it unfolds. The finely crafted progression of bizarre and disconcerting events might be approached from many other points of view. Mine, for example, completely neglects the two crucial offstage presences, Jessie and MacGregor, and fails to address Sam's important role. Nor does it do justice to one of the most prominent effects on that average first-nighter on whom I stake so much: the raunchy, ugly, gorgeous vulgarity of the piece. "What I mean," Lenny twits Teddy, " . . . you must know lots of professors, head of departments, men like that. They pop over here for a week at the Savoy, they need somewhere they can go to have a nice quiet poke. And of course you'd be in a position to give them inside information . . . . You could be our representative in the States." This excites

Max: "Of course. We're talking in international terms! By the time we've finished Pan American'll give us a discount." There. I haven't neglected that.

It seems unfortunate as well as symptomatic that few critics in the past fifteen years have taken an approach that accepts and even relishes the absurdity of Pinter's depicted world. Precious few have resisted the urge to chase the will-o'-the-wisp of a solution to the mind-bending indeterminacies *The Homecoming* in particular exudes. The gradual drift of criticism away from the reality of the play is marked by the actual titles of three early studies: the earliest, "Puzzling Pinter" [Richard Schechner, *Tulane Drama Review*, Winter 1966]; the others, "A Clue to the Pinter Puzzle" [Arthur Ganz, *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 21, 1969]; and "Not So Puzzling Pinter" [Herbert Goldstone, *Theatre Annual*, Vol. 25, 1969]. Ionesco's Detectives have been at work. What they have accomplished often seems dazzling in its perception and profundity. Some of it even seems inevitable when one is immersed in it. But if it violates the inherent nature of the play by trying to defuse its stunningly absurd time bombs, then what it is doing is busily explaining away the chief source of the play's power and of its richly deserved stature.

**Source:** Charles A. Carpenter, "'Victims of Duty'? The Critics, Absurdity, and *The Homecoming*," in *Modern Drama*, Vol. XXV, No. 4, December 1982, pp. 489–95.

## Enoch Brater

*In the following essay, Brater examines how Thomas Beckett utilizes absurdity to challenge the audience's and actors' preconceived notions of the role of the actor in his theater productions.*

The dislocation man experiences between his expectations of the world surrounding him and the reality he encounters is a convenient point of departure for a discussion of philosophical absurdity. Man is defeated in advance: he wants unity, yet meets diversity everywhere; he longs for happiness and for reason, but confronts the unreasonable silence of the world; he wants to know, but he cannot know; he yearns to communicate, but there are no avenues of communication; he wants truth, but discovers merely a succession of truths; he wants life, but his fate brings him closer every moment to death and dissolution. "The absurd," says Camus in his own existential handbook for ontological

> BECKETT'S THEATRE OF THE ABSURD IS, THEREFORE, NOT ONLY A SERIOUS CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ACTORS AND SPECTATORS, BUT A SPIRITED DISLOCATION BETWEEN ACTORS AND SCRIPT AS WELL."

revolutionaries, "is essentially a divorce: It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation." Since "myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them," Sisyphus is the protean hero of our time: he is the ur-Happy-Man because he has no expectations and therefore no disappointments. He simply rolls a rock up a hill, nonchalantly observes it roll down again, and then, resigned, begins his task anew on succeeding happy days: his is an endless pattern of perpetual certainty. One man's frustration is the absurd man's happiness. As Beckett puts it, "Each man his specialty."

But Beckett is a dramatist, not a philosopher; not a theoretician, but a practical man of the theatre, vitally concerned with the actual presentation of his work on the boards. He describes his initial run-through of a text with actors as a "realization"; it is only when a script is performed publicly that he says it has been "created." The background may be metaphysical, but the foreground is primarily presentational: "I don't like to talk intellectually about a play which has to be played simply in order to be an intellectual play. I would like to talk about how you go to sleep or how you eat the carrots. The words are there. If they have meaning, the meaning will come out." When directing his own work, Beckett guides the players to "concrete, simple, and exact actions"; his interventions are almost always "not on the side of subtlety but of *simplicity*." In Beckett the message, whatever it may be, is specifically shaped to the particular medium, the stage reality of movement in limited time and limited space; there can be no "subtle" overtones without the very "obvious" embodiment of physical action on stage, capable of being perceived by his audience. "The theatrical character," says Robbe-Grillet, "is on stage, this is his primary quality—he is there." The essential

function of the theatrical performance is "to show what this fact of being there consists of." Beckett's plane, therefore, is not one of explanation, but of demonstration; his dimension is not one of abstract theory, but of concrete situation.

*The Myth of Sisyphus* is, on the other hand, remarkable in how frequently it uses the language of Beckett's concrete medium in order to clarify by illustration the essential elements of its philosophical inquiry:

> though I have seen the same actor a hundred times, I shall not for that reason know him any better personally. Yet if I add up the heroes he has personified and if I say that I know him a little better at the hundredth character counted off, this will be felt to contain an element of truth. . . . It teaches that a man defines himself by his make-believe as well as by his sincere impulses.

The absurd man is, for Camus, an actor who, like Sartre's Kean, takes his daily reality for nothing more than a stage set: "It happens that the stage sets collapse. . . . One day the *why* arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement." What Camus calls the process of his own "absurd reasoning" proceeds by "a successive and incoherent illustration in which "there is no scenario." The absurd work of art "embodies an intellectual drama" in which the elements of conflict, tension, anxiety and antagonism are as ripe as they are in the *Oresteia*, but with one notable exception: "what distinguishes modern sensibility from classical sensibility is that the latter thrives on moral problems and the former on metaphysical problems." Indeed, the actor himself is one of Camus' primary examples of the situation confronting the absurd man: along with Don Juan and the Conqueror, "the actor creates his characters for display." Always concerned with better representing, the actor demonstrates to what a degree "appearing creates being":

> The mask and the buskin, the make-up that reduces and accentuates the face in its essential elements, the costume that exaggerates and simplifies—that universe sacrifices everything to appearance and is made solely for the eye. . . . It is the body that . . . brings knowledge. I should never really understand Iago unless I played his part. It is not enough to hear him, for I grasp him only at the moment when I see him. Of the absurd character the actor . . . has the monotony, that single, oppressive silhouette, simultaneously strange and familiar, that he carries about from hero to hero.

For Camus, therefore, the figure of the actor serves a metaphorical function: within three hours he must experience and represent the entire course of "the dead-end path" the man in the audience takes a lifetime to cover: "Off the stage, Sigismundo ceases to count. Two hours later he is seen dining out. Then it is, perhaps, that life is a dream. But after Sigismundo comes another. The hero suffering from uncertainty takes the place of the man roaring for his revenge."

But in Beckett that figure used as a metaphor in Camus is forced to confront directly on stage a level of absurdity never felt by the reader within the lucid pages of Camus' argument—a level of absurdity apprehended not so much metaphysically as it is experienced literally and, often quite painfully, physically. The actor is placed in a garbage can, a mound of earth, an urn; in *All That Fall*, a play for radio, he must "sound" fat or, perhaps even more exasperating, he must "sound" blind; and, in Beckett's most recent play, *Not I*, the actor must be only lips, teeth, and tongue, this time a disembodied mouth "without limits to its stations or hope of crucifixion." Every playwright working within a mode of presentation outside the boundaries of theatrical realism asks his actors to perform rather peculiar "bodily" functions on stage: in *Ubu Roi* Jarry has one actor represent the entire Polish army; in *The Gas Heart* Tristan Tzara has characters who speak as Eye, Mouth, Nose, Ear, Neck and Eyebrow; in *The Measures Taken* Brecht has the same character of the betrayer played in each scene by a different actor; and in *The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower* Cocteau gives the dialogue to two phonographs and a camera as the silent actors perform a vigorous mime. But no playwright before Beckett has made his actors so consistently uncomfortable on the stage: the positions they are asked to assume and the words they are made to recite force them to experience a level of absurdity specifically designed to "dislocate" any conventional notions about stagecraft itself. Just as the metaphysical absurdity Camus discusses springs from man's awareness of the disruption between himself and the stage set he calls reality, so the literal absurdity Beckett has his actors experience makes them directly confront a fatal divorce between their own expectations about what they are supposed to do in their medium and what they are now asked to do on stage. Beckett's theatre of the absurd is, therefore, not only a serious confrontation between actors and spectators, but a spirited dislocation between actors and script as well. It has become a truism to say that the theme of Beckett's plays has something to do with the experience of the absurd: what is fresh and exciting for the actor is that the method of interpretation involves a delightful, albeit frustrating, confrontation between the medium and the message.

In *Not I* this uneasy confrontation is felt quite literally by the actor as a *reductio ad absurdum*. The player presenting Mouth must reach us only through her own mouth—every other part of her anatomy is in total darkness. For this player movement in time and space is limited exclusively to teeth, tongue, and lips. Jessica Tandy, who brought Mouth to life in the world première directed by Alan Schneider at Lincoln Center in December, 1972, remembers her own problem in portraying this character as one in which "you learn how to do more with less." *Not I* is a "tremendous challenge" for the actor "because it's so hard to do. I don't enjoy it—I don't enjoy having so much taken away—I'd like to do a musical next." In the touring company of this production in October–November, 1973, Miss Tandy's eyes were covered by a black crêpe blindfold in order to prevent them from reflecting any glare from the beam of light on her mouth: "There isn't another actor I can respond to—there isn't an audience I can see." The actress, given limited visibility, can speak words and she can hear—that is all. She cannot even move her head or her body, for if she does so, the beam of light will shift its steady stream off her mouth and then upset the consistent visual image for the audience. In the New York production Miss Tandy was therefore placed in a modified pillory, specially designed to hold her head in one place; she was also attached to a metal back brace to prevent any possible shift of position. Her teeth were then brushed with a substance which would exaggerate their brightness and her lips were polished to attract the glare. Beckett specifies that Mouth is "about 8′ above stage level," so it is necessary for the player to be elevated on an invisible box. The box used in the New York production was actually a rather complicated affair; covered with black velour, its proportions were large enough to hold two people in its base: one held the spotlight focused sharply on Miss Tandy's mouth (a necessary contrivance since any spots originating from the rafters would have resulted

in extensive shadowing), while the other held large cue cards from which Miss Tandy could, if necessary, consult the text through her crêpe blindfold (the prompter held a flashlight to the cards, hence the black velour surrounding the box to absorb the light). The "invisible microphone" in Beckett's stage directions calls for amplification of the steady flow of words. For this production Beckett even specified the number of minutes for the whole. He did not see the original New York production, but he did see Billie Whitelaw's Mouth in London the following January in the fifteen-minute production directed by Anthony Page. A major difference between the trans-Atlantic productions was in the visual image exposed to the audience: in London a large sphere of light exposed mouth and nostrils to the audience (reproduced on the cover of the Faber first edition of the script), while in New York the spectators saw mouth alone. Miss Tandy was disturbed when she heard from Beckett that he was revising the manuscript after seeing the London performance. Having heard that his scripts "are carefully annotated, like a musical score," she feared she would be forced to learn the verbal onslaught all over again. He changed "only a word or two," took out most of the exclamation points, and specified eighteen minutes for the piece. The slower pace is significant, for those additional three minutes not only give the audience more time to comprehend the words issuing from Mouth, but they also make the monologue easier to memorize and recite without error. So fast was the original speed of the verbal frenzy that Miss Tandy's understudy could not get through the whole without some help; one night in Miss Tandy's absence she performed the monologue by reading the text through her black crêpe blindfold from a teletape machine invisible to the audience.

"Downstage audience left," the actor presenting Auditor has his own problems. He is "standing on invisible podium about 4′ high," enveloped "from head to foot in a loose black djellaba, with hood." In the New York production the player, elevated on a box, was steadying himself against a specially-constructed railing to maintain a consistently even balance; the djellaba was then draped over these railings to reach the floor of the stage itself. The resulting image for the audience was thus a larger-than-life Auditor, enshrouded like an Arab in the mysterious folds of a loose-fitting djellaba. In this way Auditor is transformed on stage into an embodiment of the race of "wordless giants" who so delighted Beckett's old friend and mentor James Joyce. This Viconian concept of mute Biblical giants is a theme recurrent throughout *Finnegans Wake*. Vico identified the primitive race of wordless giants with the two sons of Noah who had been cursed by their father (consider the two sons of Noah who appear in modern literature: Joyce's Shem in *Finnegans Wake*, Beckett's Hamm in *Endgame*). Although the actor who plays Auditor, unlike the player presenting Mouth, is "fully faintly lit," we see nothing of him; he is "dead still throughout but for the four brief movements" consisting in "simple sideways raising of arms from sides and their falling back." The movement lessens with each recurrence "till scarcely perceptible at third." Only his "attitude" shows us that he is "facing diagonally across stage intent on Mouth." Even the gender of the Auditor is in question. Stage directions indicate that, like Beckett's younger character in *Enough*, the sex is "undeterminable." Auditor seems to be intensely listening to the story Mouth tells about a silent old woman who, one day wandering in a field, suddenly began talking non-stop, with no explanation given for this remarkable change in behavior. Is Mouth the "she" of her own story? We never know for sure. 'Inter-action' between the two stage characters occurs at four moments in the monologue; four times Mouth repeats "what?...who?...no!...she!," and the wordless Auditor responds with its faint gesture. A note in the script informs us that "there is just enough pause to contain it as Mouth recovers from vehement refusal to relinquish third person."

The dilemma for the actors playing Mouth and Auditor on "the empty space" before us is, inevitably, to show us what their "fact of being there consists of"—and their problem is considerably magnified by the severe restrictions placed upon them. How does a player, standing on a box, head in a makeshift pillory, wearing a crêpe blindfold, in total darkness but for a beam of light on her mouth, in a specified time capsule of eighteen minutes, exercise her craft and this time very sullen art in interpreting a dramatic character for us on stage? Although Jessica Tandy readily admits that *Not I* is "unlike anything I'd done before," the *absurd* position in which Beckett places his actors here is only a more intensified version of what he has asked his players to do for him elsewhere. In this respect *Not I* especially resembles *Play*, where three characters involved in a sordid love

triangle are literally "potted" in large urns on a darkened stage set: movement here is given only to the single spotlight, which shifts its beam from one player to the next. The players recite their lines when their privacy is sharply invaded by this herculean source of energy; the invasion is welcomed by the characters, each exhibiting Pozzo-like self-preoccupation: "Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?" One character makes an ironic observation referring to her own physical position on stage as much as to her psychological situation: "Silence and darkness are all I craved. Well, I get a certain amount of both. They being one." Beckett has given careful attention to the 'character' of the spotlight itself; Richard Admussen reports that in the first three manuscripts of *Play*, there is a separate spotlight for each character and a five-second pause after its light falls on him before he begins to respond. The peculiar stage problem of placing his actors in urns (the urns were white boxes in earlier manuscripts of the piece) is also considered by Beckett. In the eighth of ten typescript versions of the play he gives detailed information on ways in which the actors may now fit themselves into the urns (by kneeling or through the use of trap doors). In the French version of this work the players are given the option of repeating the entire action, which is indicated as a must in the English version; the explanation given for the option is that the light, not the actors, may be growing tired. In *Not I* Beckett has taken the physical situation of *Play* one step further: instead of a spotlight discovering a character planted in an urn (a parody of the Miltonic "stationing" made familiar to us in *The Unnamable*), the character discovered by the spotlight is now merely a disembodied mouth.

This peculiar positioning of players on stage, presenting no end of problems for the actor, becomes a dominant stage device throughout Beckett's work. Sighle Kennedy has uncovered two pages from a *Herakles* notebook in Trinity College, Dublin, which reveal Beckett's early preoccupation with this technique. The pages present the beginnings of mathematical computations for a proposed stage piece to be called "J. M. Mime." Two players, representing perhaps a son and father or a son and mother (a dual situation later developed in *Molloy*), begin their progression at a central point on stage. The entire action consists of the greatest number of permutations and combinations within the framework of a

large square blocked on the floor of the stage. Beckett sets his figures "starting from 0" to work out the ways in which they can "return to 0 by the greatest number of paths." The figures are to be naked under their coats, but wearing, like Gogo and Didi, boots and hats; no explanation is given for this original *habillement*. Beckett leaves the question open as to the possibility of one carrying the other. Perhaps only one of the figures can walk, which would bring the early "J. M. Mime" close to Beckett's later work for the stage. In *Endgame*, only Clov can walk; Nell and Nagg are placed in garbage cans and the blind Hamm is in a wheelchair. But, as Winnie would say, "What a curse, mobility!"—Clov has only a "stiff, staggering walk." The heroine of *Happy Days* is the Earth Mother symbol to end all other Earth Mother symbols—she is literally planted in a mound of earth. In Act I she is buried up to her waist and so can move her arms about in preparing her toilette; but in Act II even this mobility is taken away. In Act II the player presenting Winnie must be placed, like the Mouth of *Not I*, in a modified neck brace so that movement of the head is constricted—one shift of the neck to left or right and the illusion is destroyed. We are faced with the situation of a player who must perform an entire act buried up to her neck in a mound of earth with no possibility of moving even her neck. But Beckett has made such stage situations familiar to us. In the second act of *Godot*, after Gogo and Didi have fallen to the ground in a futile attempt to lift Lucky and Pozzo, Beckett has all four characters continue their lines for several minutes of stage time while remaining flat on their backs or on their stomachs. Yet "something remains" for Winnie in Act II even though so much is taken away ("that is what I find so wonderful")—she can still move her eyes to form gestures, and her mouth, to shape words. Of course, Willie can move, but only on his knees. The actress playing Winnie has an additional agony—so repetitive are the cues in her monologue that the danger exists of confusing them and, by so doing, skipping pages of Beckett's text. Lines such as "To speak in the old style" and "Oh this is going to be a happy day" are repeated frequently; each repetition follows closely at the heels of its earlier occurrence. Remembering the cues in their proper order and remaining faithful to the text becomes a frustrating enterprise for the actress. *Happy Days* not only repeats the same line again and again, but its deliberately limited word-horde consists of

permutations and combinations of the same words and phrases. In *Not I* the actress playing Mouth confronts a similar problem, only now considerably magnified—there are no sentences at all, only solitary words or short, inconclusive clauses, the whole monologue beginning and punctuated by ellipses. The danger of missing a cue is an enormous threat in *Not I* because the speed of the verbal onslaught has been rapidly accelerated from the relatively calm pace of Winnie's lines. The player in *Not I* thus has the same problem of missing the cues faced by the actress performing Winnie, but now combined with the increased speed of Lucky's word-salad speech in Act I of *Godot* (agonizingly extended in this case from three pages of script to ten). But *Happy Days* has a special built-in liability of its own: the stage directions connect each word and each phrase with a precise movement in Act I and a particular eye-gesture in Act II, each motion to be executed simultaneously with the recitation of the dialogue. The effect of minimal mobility in *Happy Days* is therefore the result of carefully orchestrated and physically exhausting activity on the part of the actress, accomplished only after she has confronted the absurd obstacles placed in her path.

Buster Keaton encountered the same problem in Beckett's twenty-two-minute "comic and unreal" *Film*. The scenario for this piece has only one "un-word" of dialogue, which occurs in the crucial scene involving the episode of the couple. Keaton, whose face we cannot see, is hurrying along a street near the Brooklyn Bridge; in his blind haste he jostles a couple of "shabby genteel aspect," standing on the sidewalk looking into a newspaper. The woman is holding a pet monkey under her left arm. After they are jostled by Keaton, the woman raises a lorgnon to her eyes and the man removes his pince-nez (fastened to his coat by a ribbon). They look at each other, she lowering her lorgnon, he resuming his pince-nez. The man opens his mouth to say something; she stops him with a gesture and a "sssh!" That is the complete dialogue of *Film*. Keaton was completely baffled by the script; he said not only was it unclear, but it was also not funny—he told the director, Alan Schneider, that it could not possibly play more than four minutes, even if the cat and dog business, "which wasn't too bad," was stretched (the business of the cat, by the way, has been recently used by Truffaut in *Day for Night*). Keaton suggested padding the action with bits taken from earlier movies he had done; Schneider reminded him that one did not normally pad Beckett's material, especially when the author had made a special trip to New York for the filming of his work (the only time Beckett has been in the United States). Keaton could not understand why anyone would want to use Keaton in a film and not show Keaton's face until the final frame. The problem for the actor here is to avoid the camera which is searching all the time for full frontal *facial* exposure, a rather strange inversion of our normal expectation for this medium. In *Film* the camera filming Keaton, like the spotlight in *Play*, becomes a central protagonist: the conflict of the movie is between actor and lens itself, the latter attempting to expose the actor's face, the former consistently avoiding such contact. The result for the audience is a battle royal—the repeated frustration of our getting a glimpse of Keaton's face only whets our appetite for the longed-for exposure. *Film* is not the first Beckett work in which a human actor is sent into battle against a non-human enemy—Krapp's "old antagonist" is the mechanical tape recorder which, in time, makes a folly of his hopes, his aspirations, and his words themselves. The players in Beckett's theatre must face up to an endless series of confrontations with non-human antagonists—boots which will not go on, hats which will not fit, a "memorable equinox" which cannot be remembered, lines of poetry which, like Godot himself, are forever elusive. Maddy Rooney's antagonist is empty space itself—she can fit her own fleshy self into Mr. Slocum's car only with difficulty, and her ascent up the staircase at the railway station is in itself a Johnsonian triumph of hope over experience. Keaton was surprised that the running time of *Film* had actually gone beyond his estimated four minutes: "whatever he may have subsequently said to interviewers or reporters about not understanding a moment of what he was doing or what the film was about, what I remember best of our final farewell on the set was that he smiled and half-admitted those six pages were worth doing after all." Keaton's problems with *Film* resemble Bert Lahr's reaction to his role of Gogo in the American première of *Waiting for Godot*. Asked what the play meant, Lahr admitted, "Damned if I know." But in doing the play night after night he became aware of the "tremendous humor" beneath it, "two men trying to amuse themselves on earth by playing jokes and little games":

> You never laugh at a blind man on stage or people with their legs cut off. But Beckett wrote

in Pozzo and made such a heavy out of him that, by the second act, when he comes back blind, we play games with him. He falls down, he cries for help, Vladimir and Estragon are on the stage. We taunt him. We ask how much he'll give us. We slide. We poke.... The audience screams. If Beckett didn't know what he was doing ... he wouldn't have put the show in that running order. When I read it ... I wasn't sure it would work. When I played it, I realized how brilliantly he had constructed the play.

It is precisely this peculiar blocking of characters called for in Beckett's scripts that adds such theatrical resonance to the very odd words they are asked to recite on stage. Sometimes they say nothing at all; in *Eh Joe* the actor, after searching everywhere in his room, trying to avoid the eye or lens of the camera, is held for the rest of the television film in a continuous close-up. All we hear is the woman's "neutral" voice Joe apparently hears inside his head: "low, distinct, remote, little colour, absolutely steady rhythm, slightly slower than normal." The camera assumes the exclusive movement normally shared in film between actor and camera: the lens holds the player in close-up, gradually moving in four inches at a time, as though further into his skull, as the savage accusations build up ("You know that penny farthing hell you call your mind.... That's where you think this is coming from, don't you?"). In *Eh Joe* the camera becomes a 'character' in the action—we take note of its vitality because it is not doing what we normally expect a camera to be doing, i.e., making us forget that we are seeing an actor through a lens. When Beckett's characters do speak, they often recite words or lines which are as peculiar as the positions they assume. Krapp wonders about "vidua bird" and "viduity," about "being" and "remaining" (which become as he mouths these words stranger by far than any absurdist ever thought they could be), and amuses himself by repeating "box three, spool five ... spo-o-o-o-l." Winnie lingers over "hog's setae" and "formication," and Maddy Rooney is arrested by her own strange way of speaking: "her great moist cleg-tormented eyes," "Is this cretonne so becoming to me that I merge into the masonry?," "I am sorry for all this ram-dam," "You are quivering like a blanc-mange," "No, no, I am agog":

> MR. R: Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language.

> MRS. R: Yes indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling, it is unspeakably excruciating.
> MR. R: I confess I have it myself, when I happen to overhear what I am saying.
> MRS. R: Well, you know, it will be dead in time, just like our own dear Gaelic, there is that to be said.
> *Urgent baa.*

Mrs. Rooney even asks Christy if he does not, too, find something peculiar about her way of speaking: "I do not mean the voice. No, I mean the words. I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very ... bizzarre." Pozzo himself uses a "bizarre" word when he says he took Lucky as his "knook"; when Beckett was asked about the meaning of this, he responded: "Knook: a word invented by me." It is especially this clever conjunction between unexpected words and odd positions that is a central source of Beckett's effectiveness on stage:

> Oh really! (*Pause.*) Have you no handkerchief, darling? Have you no delicacy? (*Pause.*) Oh, Willie, you're not eating it! Spit it out, dear, spit it out! (*Pause. Back front.*) Ah well, I suppose it's only natural. (*Break in voice.*) Human.

Beckett once suggested to his actors in *Godot* that they employ the trick of "contrapuntal immobility"; lines like "I'm going" were to be accompanied by "complete stillness on the part of the speaker." Incongruity, yes—but incongruity especially for the actor on stage who is forced to experience a fractured liaison between his physical position, on the one hand, and the dialogue which keeps him there, on the other.

The most extreme example of the literal absurdity created for the actor is, of course, *Breath,* which Beckett has cavalierly called "a farce in five acts." *Breath,* minus the naked bodies added to it in Kenneth Tynan's revue, *Oh! Calcutta!* had its proper première at the official opening of a new playhouse at respectable Oxford. There are no visible characters at all in *Breath,* only sounds, light, and a stage full of rubbish, "no verticals, all scattered and lying." The lights go up to the sound of a newborn baby's cry; a rapid intake of breath (so much for the "inspiration" mentioned in the script) and gradual exhalation coincide with dimming lights. Then darkness again and the same cry— perhaps now it is no longer a cry of birth, but a terminal death cry. *Breath* lasts thirty-five seconds. It seems that Beckett has finally made an entire play out of Pozzo's speech in Act II of *Godot*:

(*suddenly furious.*) Have you not done torment-ing me with your accursed time! It's abomina-ble! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (*He jerks the rope.*) On!

*Breath* might make one think of Genesis ("And the Lord God formed man . . . and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"), it most certainly does not offer much chance of life for the actor. Yet even here the actor is by no means entirely superfluous: who would, or could, breathe that essential breath of the play if the actor were not situated before us on the stage to do so? Replace the live actor by a mechanical "breather" and the crucial effect is gone. To remove the actor from this confronta-tion is therefore to pass from minimal dramatic art to no art at all. The distinction may sound like an exercise in splitting a hair; one should keep in mind, however, that it is over such a split-end that Beckett's *Breath* is made.

If Beckett, then, seems to be constricting the movement of his players on stage—at times, almost, to reduce them to the elementary dimen-sion of stage props—is the actor really a primary component of his theatre? It might be assumed, for example, that in his next play, Beckett might go one step further and dispense with the actor altogether. But perhaps Camus can provide us with some existential enlightenment: "This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity." For the absurd depends "as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together." Remove man from the confrontation, says Camus, and there can be no sense of the absurd, "of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart." The theatre of Samuel Beckett thus offers a new dimension of absurdity to the entire argument, a level of physical absurdity encountered on stage by the actor. In his process of confrontation with the script, Beckett's actor demonstrates the prob-lem, communicating through this challenge to his craft the uneasy situation which can only then be apprehended by his spectators. The experience of Beckett's playwriting therefore presupposes a new method of interpretation for the actor. Within his familiar medium, now made unfami-liar to him, the actor must undergo physically on stage (not only emotionally) the same spirit of painful dislocation the man in the audience takes a lifetime to travel. The concrete situa-tion the player confronts is, necessarily, much more *portrayable* than *actable*. Beckett's thea-tre may be a profound madness (for the actor it is certainly maddening), but there seems to be a method to it—though the method called for is decidedly not Stanislavsky's.

**Source:** Enoch Brater, "The 'Absurd' Actor in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett," in *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 2, May 1975, pp. 197–207.

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# *Beat Movement*

The roots of the Beat literary movement go back to 1944 when Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs met at Columbia University in New York. It was not until the 1950s that these writers and other "Beats" would be recognized as a *movement* and as a *generation* of post-World War II youths whose attitudes and lifestyles were far removed from typical Americana. Kerouac used the term "beat" to describe both the negatives of his world and the positives of his responses to it. On one hand, "beat" implied weariness and disinterest in social or political activity, and on the other it was reminiscent of the Beatitudes of Jesus—declarations of blessedness and happiness uttered during the Sermon on the Mount. While certain measures of blissfulness—often drug-induced—may have applied to followers of the Beat Movement, so would feelings of disillusionment, bitterness, and an overwhelming desire to be free of social constraints.

The work of Beat writers is characterized by experimental styles and subjects, including spontaneous writing without regard for grammar, sexually explicit language, uninhibited discussion of personal experiences, and themes ranging from a rejection of American values and fear of nuclear war to sexual escapades and road trips. Representative works of the movement are Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, Burroughs's novel *Naked Lunch*, and poems such as Ginsberg's "Howl" and Gregory Corso's "BOMB." None
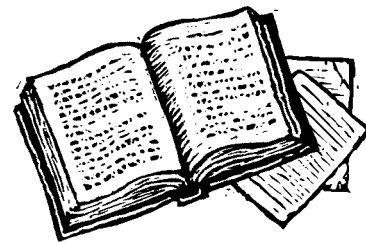
of these works appeared on American book-shelves until nearly a decade after Kerouac first used the word "beat" to signify an outlook on writing and an outlook on life. What had begun as a small cluster of rebellious outcasts in New York City soon grew into a larger group based in San Francisco and eventually spread its influences across the country. Beats appeared everywhere in the 1950s, paving the way for the hippies of the following decade.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### *William Burroughs (1914–1997)*

William Burroughs was born February 5, 1914, in St. Louis, to well-to-do parents with a family history of successful business ventures. But even as a youth, Burroughs did not fit in with his upper-class, Midwestern background, for he was a bookish boy with homosexual tendencies and a fascination with guns and lawlessness. Burroughs was a top student and eventually earned a degree from Harvard, though he never lost his attraction to crime. In 1943, Burroughs moved to New York to become involved in the city's gangster underworld, which led to his experimentation with heroin and several run-ins with the law. There, Burroughs also met Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, two members of a small group of social nonconformists at Columbia University who would become major players in the Beat Movement. Also at Columbia, Burroughs met Joan Vollmer, who became his common-law wife, gave birth to their son, and found herself on the wrong end of one of Burroughs's pistols.

Although he was usually surrounded by literary types, Burroughs did not start writing until 1950 when he decided to write a semi-autobiographical story, *Junkie*. Without finishing the first novel, he began another in 1951, this one also somewhat autobiographical, titled *Queer*. By this time, he had moved his family to Mexico to escape drug charges. It was there that he accidentally killed his wife by attempting to shoot a glass off her head, William Tell-style. Later, Burroughs confessed that it was Joan's death that gave him the incentive to pursue writing seriously.

Throughout the 1950s, Burroughs continued to write, but his material was generally considered too obscene for print. Finally, in 1959, his most famous book, *The Naked Lunch*, was published in Paris. Three years later, it was



*Jack Kerouac* (© Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission)

published in the United States as simply *Naked Lunch*. This book brought celebrity to Burroughs, though mostly among the underground, and he went on to write several more books, plays, and film scripts and to receive an American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award in 1975. Although many do not consider him one of the original Beat writers, he came to be viewed as one of the most popular. Both his writing style and lifestyle were undeniably characteristic of the movement, but his work found an even greater audience in the last decades of the twentieth century. Burroughs died in Lawrence, Kansas, August 2, 1997.

### *Neal Cassady (1926–1968)*

Neal Cassady was born February 8, 1926, in Salt Lake City and grew up in a poor section of Denver with an alcoholic father. Cassady learned quickly how to fight and how to steal, and, perhaps most importantly, how to charm people while he was doing it. After years in and out of reform schools and juvenile prisons, Cassady developed the instincts of a con artist and the rebellion of a free-spirited, fun-loving bum who wanted only to travel, ramble on in stream-of-consciousness conversations, and have sex with whom ever seemed the most beneficial partner at

the moment. Essentially, it was Cassady's personality that was his major contribution to the Beat Movement. Though he published his autobiography in 1971 and eventually some collections of letters, he never produced a single book while the Beat Movement was in full swing.

Cassady wound up in New York in 1946 where, through a friend at Columbia, he met Ginsberg and Kerouac. Ginsberg was promptly captivated by his western ruggedness and cowboy nature, and the two became lovers even while Cassady carried on various affairs with women, whom he claimed to prefer. But it was his relationship with Kerouac that made Cassady one of the most influential instigators of the Beat Generation. In the late 1940s, the two went on a series of car trips across the United States, and these often harrowing, always riotous adventures became the basis for Kerouac's most famous book, *On the Road*. Kerouac captured Cassady's voice in the novel, essentially writing it the way Cassady talked: fast, off the cuff, without any hesitation or self-consciousness. The two travelers eventually parted, but Cassady continued his road adventures, winding up in Mexico in the late 1960s. There, after a night of too much alcohol, Cassady wandered out into the cold and rain and passed out. He slipped into a coma and died the following day, February 4, 1968.

### Gregory Corso (1930–2001)

Gregory Corso was born March 26, 1930, in New York City. Of the writers who became famous among the Beats, Corso had one of the most natural poetic talents: He was capable of producing powerful lyric verse in an expressive, yet genuine voice, as well as bawdy, poetic ramblings, typically uninhibited and sexually explicit—hallmarks of Beat writing. Corso published his first volume of poetry, *The Vestal Lady on Brattle and Other Poems*, in 1955 and his second, *Gasoline*, in 1958. Also in 1958, Corso published a broadside of one of his most famous poems, "BOMB," which is a love poem to the atomic weapon, written in the shape of a mushroom cloud. He became immediately popular with fellow Beat writers and with mainstream readers as well, but the popularity he enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s dwindled over the following decades. Still, he continued to write and publish, and he received the Jean Stein Award for Poetry from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1986. His *Mindfield: New and Selected Poems* was published in 1989 and reprinted in 1998. Corso died from prostate cancer in Minneapolis on January 17, 2001.

### Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919–)

Lawrence Ferlinghetti was born on March 24, 1919, in Yonkers, New York, to French and Italian parents but was raised by his aunt Emily with French as his first language. Ferlinghetti earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1941, and soon after graduation he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. After World War II, he attended Columbia University for graduate school on the GI Bill. Ferlinghetti earned his master's degree in English literature in 1947 and went on to earn his doctorate from the Sorbonne in Paris in 1951. In 1953, Ferlinghetti and his new wife settled in San Francisco and opened a small bookstore called City Lights. City Lights began publishing books in 1954, quickly racking up a number of Beat Movement authors such as Ginsberg, Corso, and Burroughs. Ferlinghetti, as a writer, critic, publisher, and activist, was an important figure within the Beat Movement, although he has never considered himself a Beat poet. Ferlinghetti was the first recipient of the Literarian Award from the National Book Foundation, in 2005, for "outstanding service to the American literary community."

### Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997)

Allen Ginsberg was born June 3, 1926, in Paterson, New Jersey, and grew up a shy, sensitive boy in a highly chaotic household. His father was a poet, teacher, and Jewish socialist, and his mother was a radical Communist and unconstrained nudist with symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. Her bouts with mental illness weighed heavily on the young Ginsberg, as he was often the only one she trusted when the rest of the world was, in her mind, plotting against her. But Ginsberg had another struggle to contend with as well—his sexual orientation to boys.

Ginsberg took his father's advice to study labor law at Columbia. Although he had shown an interest in poetry, it was not until he met fellow student Kerouac and nonstudents Burroughs and Cassady that he turned his attention to literary pursuits. His friendship with these three and others among the rebel crowd had other influences as well: drugs, crime, and opportunities to express his homosexuality freely. Ginsberg was eventually suspended from Columbia, but by then he was writing poetry profusely though not publishing much. His break came in 1955 when he joined other Beat poets for a public reading in San Francisco and delivered a resounding

performance of what became his trademark poem, "Howl." Just as Kerouac's *On the Road* was the quintessential novel of the Beats, "Howl" was—and remained—the quintessential poem. Ginsberg's popularity was almost instantaneous after this reading, and his first collection, *Howl and Other Poems*, was published in 1956. Other books followed in a relatively short period, and Ginsberg's fame and infamy grew. Despite an obscenity trial for "Howl," (which was eventually declared not obscene), he found recognition among the prestigious literary mainstream and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1963. In 1969, he received a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and, in 1974, a National Book Award for *Fall of America*. Ginsberg published poetry collections throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including *Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems, 1986–1992* and *Selected Poems 1947–1995*. Ginsberg died of a heart attack while suffering from liver cancer, April 5, 1997, in New York City.

### Jack Kerouac (1922–1969)

Jack Kerouac was born March 12, 1922, in Lowell, Massachusetts. His father was a successful printer in Lowell, but by the mid-1920s, the economy of the city began to collapse, and the older Kerouac turned to gambling in hopes of supplementing his income. Young Jack was already interested in creating stories, inspired by radio talk shows, but he was also a star player on his high school football team. When Kerouac was awarded a football scholarship to play at Columbia, his family moved to New York with him. But at the university, Kerouac fell in with the renegade crowd, including Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Cassady, and he had a fight with his coach who afterwards refused to let him play. Eventually, Kerouac dropped out of Columbia, bitterly disappointing his family.

As a student, Kerouac had begun writing a novel, and his new friends praised his work. With Ginsberg's promotional help, Kerouac's first book, *The Town and the City*, was published in 1950, gaining him respect as a writer but not bringing him fame. Throughout the 1950s, Kerouac wrote novels that went unpublished for a time, including *Dr. Sax* and *The Subterraneans*, interspersed with his cross-country adventures with Cassady. But one book that resulted from those travels put him on the map as one of the most—if not the most—significant writer of the Beat Movement: *On the Road*, published in 1957,

was an immediate success. It was Kerouac who had coined the term "beat" to reflect both the downtrodden, world-weary attitudes of the post-World War II generation and, at the same time, the optimistic, "beatific" will to live unconstrained by social conventions. His own life certainly reflected these definitions, particularly the former, and he had difficulty tolerating his sudden stardom. He turned to alcohol for consolation and escape but was never able to control the drinking and manage a writing career at the same time. His last somewhat successful novel, *Big Sur*, was published in 1962. His health destroyed by alcohol, Kerouac died of a stomach hemorrhage in St. Petersburg, Florida, October 21, 1969.

### Gary Snyder (1930–)

Gary Snyder was born May 8, 1930, in San Francisco but grew up in rural Washington state and Portland, Oregon. Interested in literature and Native American culture as a child, he went on to earn a bachelor's degree in anthropology and literature from Reed College in Portland. While in college, Snyder published his first poems, eventually meeting Ginsberg and Kerouac and becoming associated with the Beat Movement as part of the San Francisco Renaissance in the mid-1950s. Although Snyder was not part of the original group that formed at Columbia University, his philosophy and style were a natural fit. Ferlinghetti compared Snyder to Thoreau because unlike most Beat writers who came from an urban background, Snyder was closely aligned with the natural world. Snyder and Kerouac spent several months living in a remote cabin in California, which inspired Kerouac to write *The Dharma Bums* and base one of the characters on Snyder.

Snyder had an interest in Asian culture and language and became a practitioner of Zen Buddhism, a religious philosophy which independently attracted many Beat writers. He lived in Japan from 1956 to 1968, studying Zen Buddhism, forestry, and ecology. After returning to the United States, Snyder lived in the San Francisco area and continued to write and lecture. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1975 for his collection *Turtle Island*. Snyder was appointed professor of creative writing at the University of California at Davis in 1985, a post he retired from in 2002. In 2004, *Danger on the Peaks* was published, his first book of poetry in twenty years.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### *"A Berry Feast"*

Snyder and his long poem, "A Berry Feast" (*The Back Country*, 1957), were made famous when he read the piece at the close of the seminal Six Gallery Reading in San Francisco on October 7, 1955. This event marked the beginning of the San Francisco Renaissance, a literary, mostly poetic, movement that paralleled and entangled with the Beat Movement, often involving the same writers. "A Berry Feast" is a poem in four sections that explores the summer imagery of the fecund natural world where animal and human boundaries blur. The final image of the poem is of a dead city grown over with blackberry brambles, an image that undermines humankind's prideful interest in civilization.

### *"BOMB"*

Corso's most famous poem, "BOMB," was originally published as a "broadside," a single large sheet of paper printed on one side, by City Lights Books in 1958. It then appeared in Corso's 1960 collection, *The Happy Birthday of Death*. With its words arranged in the shape of a mushroom cloud, the poem is Corso's ironic attempt to mitigate the destruction of an atomic war by portraying the bomb-drop as a Christ-like second coming. Essentially, the explosion marks the end of human history and the beginning of heavenly eternity. Although the theme is dark and chilling, Corso presents it in typical Beat style with a rush of fragmented images, raw language, and a wry sense of humor. It is primarily the latter attribute that turned off many would-be supporters. With lines such as, "I sing thee Bomb Death's extravagance Death's jubilee / . . . to die by cobra is not to die by bad pork," Corso offended members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament when he read the poem at New College in Oxford in 1958. The crowd heckled him. Some reviewers were kinder, however, expressing appreciation for the extraordinary imagery in "BOMB" and declaring the bizarre humor right on target with the Beat attitude. Critics on either side would have to admit that the poem brought Corso to the front of the Beat literary movement, although his work is probably least remembered.

### A Coney Island of the Mind

*A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958) is one of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's most well-received

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- *The Life and Times of Allen Ginsberg*, directed by Jerry Aronson and released in 1994, is a comprehensive, affectionate documentary on the poet's life. It runs eighty-three minutes and includes accounts of Ginsberg's troubled childhood, his fame as a Beat and, later, as a hippie, and as a compassionate, still active, older poet.

- John Antonelli's documentary *Kerouac* was released in 1995. The film begins and ends with Kerouac reading excerpts from *On the Road* and uses an actor to portray some of the scenes from the Beat writer's life. Actual footage of Kerouac includes TV clips, one showing his appearance on the *William F. Buckley Show*, in which he insults Ferlinghetti and declares himself a Catholic.

- In 1997, writer and director Stephen Kay released *The Last Time I Committed Suicide*, a visual adaptation of actual letters written by Cassady and sent to Kerouac. The movie chronicles Cassady's life as an oversexed young man in Denver and features rich, excellent detail of postwar American culture.

- The four-CD set *Howls, Raps and Roars: Recordings from the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance*, produced by Fantasy Records, was released in 1993. It includes fifty-four minutes of Allen Ginsberg reading "Howl," "Footnote to Howl," and "Supermarket in California," among other poems, as well as readings by Kenneth Rexroth, Ferlinghetti, Corso, and others.

- *Naked Lunch*, read by Burroughs himself, was produced as an audio book on cassette by Time Warner AudioBooks in 1995. This novel is Burroughs's most famous work as well as a significant product of the Beat Generation literary movement.

*William S. Burroughs with some of the props from the film* Naked Lunch*, based on his novel* (The Kobal Collection / The Picture Desk, Inc.)

collections of poems, selling over one million copies. Popular among the Beats as a publisher and owner of City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, Ferlinghetti solidified his recognition as a poet with this book, in which the poems present a kaleidoscopic view of the world as a place with discontinuous images and a carnival-like absurdity. When Ferlinghetti did public readings from this collection, he was usually accompanied by jazz music, and many of the poems themselves have a similarly spontaneous rhythm. *Coney Island* found an audience with both Beat and mainstream readers, as well as critics from both sides. Most cite similar reasons: even though the central theme of the collection may be the meaninglessness of life, individual poems still intrigue readers with poignant, definable thoughts.

### The Dharma Bums

Published in 1958, Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums* is based on his friendship with poet Gary Snyder and a mountain-climbing trip they took to Yosemite in 1955. Snyder, portrayed as Japhy Ryder in the book, is known for both his Beat-style poetry and his serious study of Zen Buddhism. Like Kerouac's *On the Road*, published a

year earlier, *The Dharma Bums* recounts the raucous adventure of two friends with rambling details and spontaneous confessions, but its greatest significance is the search for spiritual enlightenment that the friends' trip represents. While the characters in much of Kerouac's other work go on wild journeys as a means to escape life and to run away from themselves, here Japhy and Ray Smith (Kerouac) set out in search of dharma, or supreme truth, in an effort, essentially, to find themselves. Despite the turnabout in themes, *The Dharma Bums* was well received as an archetype of Beat ideology, heralding a discontent with standard American values and the quest to find something more satisfying for the spirit, as well as for the mind and body.

### "Howl"

The opening lines of Ginsberg's lengthy poem "Howl," published in *Howl and Other Poems* in 1956, are some of the most recognized in twentieth-century poetry: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving / hysterical naked, / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an / angry fix." Dedicated to Carl Solomon, a lifelong friend

whom Ginsberg met at the Columbia University Psychiatric Institute in 1948, "Howl" is a three-part, free verse lamentation on the social and personal woes of post-World War II American society. Part I describes the despair felt by many individuals during this unsettling era; Part II identifies social conformity, big government, and materialism as some of the causes for human discontent and restlessness; and Part III is a series of statements directly addressing Solomon, praising true friendship, and announcing the poet's feeling of victory over social control of his emotional and sexual identity.

As of 2008, "Howl" is widely considered to be the most important poem to come out of the Beat Movement, with some critics claiming it revolutionized American poetry in total. There were those who felt the same way in the 1950s, but there were also many who would have preferred to see Ginsberg's work burned instead of read. The sexually explicit language, mostly homosexual in nature, shocked readers and critics alike. The San Francisco Police Department was not impressed either, and authorities, declaring the work obscene, promptly arrested its publisher, Ferlinghetti. During the obscenity trial, several well-known and well-respected poets testified in support of Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, and the freedom of poetry in general, and they eventually succeeded in persuading the judge. "Howl" was declared not obscene, and the notoriety of the trial greatly enhanced its popularity, as well as sales of the book.

## Naked Lunch

Burroughs's most widely known novel, *Naked Lunch*, was not published in the United States until 1962 when it was finally declared not obscene following three years of legal trials. A publisher in Paris had accepted it in 1959. While thousands of people can claim they have read the book, few may be able to say they know what it is about, for *Naked Lunch* has no consistent story, no running narrative, no uniform point of view, and no readily recognizable theme. Loosely, it tells the tale of junkie William Lee and a hodgepodge of grotesque characters who flail about in a bleak, sadistic world of drug addiction, sexual depravity, and madness. The subject matter, such as it is, is not what made this book one of the hallmarks of the Beat literary movement. Rather, it is the style, or the origins of its style, that piqued readers' curiosity and brought critical attention—negative as much as positive—to Burroughs's creation.

*Naked Lunch* is composed of a series of random sketches and rambling notes. Burroughs wrote hundreds of snippets while living in Tangiers, and, with the help of writer friends Kerouac and Ginsberg, among others, he haphazardly assembled the pieces and presented them to a publisher, claiming however the publisher stacked the pages on his desk would be just as suitable a way to publish them as any. As a result, one can actually read *Naked Lunch* front to back, back to front, or any direction coming and going. It was this seeming lack of true literary endeavor as well as talent that irked many reviewers of Burroughs's work. Some claimed it took no intelligence to create the so-called novel and even less to read it. In spite of the harsh, even insulting criticism, *Naked Lunch* became a national best-seller and sealed its author's literary reputation, for better or for worse.

## On the Road

Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, published in 1957, has been called the quintessential work of the Beat Movement. Like many of his other works, this book draws on the author's own experiences and relationships, and its characters are derived from real people. In this case, the two central players are Sal Paradise, based on Kerouac himself, and Dean Moriarty, based on his free-spirited, rabble-rousing companion, Cassady. *On the Road* chronicles the cross-country road trips of Paradise and Moriarty, symbolizing their fervent search for values greater than those they consider typically American. What results is perhaps most emblematic of the Beat Generation's feelings of detachment and dissatisfaction. Instead of finding the values they seek, Paradise and Moriarty become saturated with drugs, alcohol, sex, and crime—all leading to disjointedness and a scattering of their lives amid the chaos. Many Beats considered this book their anthem because they could so strongly identify with the cycle of hope and disappointment that endlessly revolves in its pages. General readers tended to find the work amusing, if not enjoyable, but critics were divided. Some praised *On the Road* for giving voice to an entire generation of disenchanted, embittered Americans, and others denounced it as an illiterate, incoherent exercise in self-absorption and self-pity. Like other controversial Beat material, Kerouac's work outlasted the worst criticism and wound up in the annals of prominent American literature. *On the Road* was, and remained, an exceptional work, as much for its style as for its message.

## THEMES

### Disillusionment

At the end of World War II, Americans enjoyed a period of blissful relief and charged-up happiness unlike any realized before. Although an odd mixture of pride and sorrow over the dropping of atomic bombs left many people uneasy about the path to victory, it did not waylay the renewed spirit of optimism and drive for prosperity that swept the country at a feverish pace. The latter part of the 1940s and most of the 1950s have been called times of innocent fun, social quietude, and old-fashioned family values. The end of the war turned Rosie the Riveter into June Cleaver, as most women gave up their wartime jobs to raise the first of the baby boomers while dads worked as the sole breadwinners in the family. But not everyone welcomed a neatly prescribed life with the conventional spouse, two kids, and a white picket fence around a well-manicured lawn. Some people were disillusioned with postwar complacency and protested social norms that smelled more like social control than simply a style of living. A faction of those people became self-identified members of the Beat Generation.

Disillusionment may be considered the core theme of the Beat Movement, for it encompasses the basic reason for the split from mainstream society that the original Beats desired. Although the foundations of the movement may be traced to the four kindred personalities of Kerouac, Burroughs, Corso, and Ginsberg, there is little doubt that countless other Americans were experiencing a shift in feelings in the wake of a war with unsurpassed technological destruction. To have the nation responsible then settle into an era of homeland peace, frivolity, and abundance was too much for some to swallow. People attracted to what would become the Beat lifestyle turned in that direction because of an initial distrust of America's renewed sense of pride and accomplishment, many fearing that a gratified society was a vulnerable one, left open to greater governmental and social control. Rather than be mollified by the quaintness of the average happy family in the average happy neighborhood, the disillusioned Beats struck out against such expected contentment in favor of being intentionally discontented.

### Social Nonconformity

If disillusionment is a core theme of the Beat Movement, social nonconformity is another

## TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- In the 1950s, the Beat Movement touted frequent drug use, sexual freedom, disinterest in social and political issues, and disregard for law. How do you think a movement like this one would fare at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Why would American society tolerate a new Beat Movement or why would it not?

- Though few in number, all the original members of the Beat Generation were young, white males, yet women and African Americans were certainly affected by and involved in the movement. Do some research to find out more about the lesser-known Beats and write an essay on how their lives were similar to or different from the prominent ones.

- Of the three main artistic facets of the Beat Movement—writing, visual art, and music— the writings were the most controversial and often least welcomed by mainstream Americans. Why do you think this was the case? What was it about Beat literature that was so different from abstract expressionist art and bebop music?

- Author Gertrude Stein coined the term "Lost Generation" in the 1920s as a label for the intellectuals, poets, artists, and writers who gathered in France after World War I. What did Stein mean by this term and how was the Lost Generation different from or similar to the Beat Generation?

value that directly resulted from it. Looking solely at the four major originators, one may assume that only criminals and drug addicts were true members of the Beat Generation. But as tempting as it seems, that assumption is an unfair generalization of the entire group. Surely, most Beats visibly and vocally pronounced themselves social outsiders, but for some, being different meant wearing a particular style of clothing, listening to jazz music improvisations,

using hip language, and showing complete disinterest in social and political concerns. For others, nonconformity did entail a more reckless lifestyle; from heavy use of alcohol and other drugs to theft, homicide, and gangster involvement, many took life to a steep extreme, and some, of course, fell over the edge.

The most common responses of nonconformity shared by both moderate and extremist Beats were a rejection of materialism, scoffing at traditional American values, and complete indifference toward social activism. At the same time, individual expression and personal enlightenment were highly regarded, and the pursuit of self-awareness often translated into free-spirited, spur-of-the-moment adventures across town or across the country. Obviously, some members of the Beat Generation had to maintain steady jobs, but mobility was key to staying clear of social constraints and circumscribed behavior. Perhaps the strongest statement of nonconformity expressed by this generation was to accept and, indeed, celebrate its description as "beat." The term essentially pointed a finger in society's face and said, "Look what you've done to us."

### Spontaneity

While spontaneity is more an action than an idea, it has been called the primary virtue and a one-word summary of the Beat Movement. This theme, more than any other, speaks to the frenzied, intense emotional state that many Beats found both exhilarating and necessary. Moreover, it embodies the tendency not to think twice about hopping into a car and taking off for unknown destinations just for the thrill of adventure and the prospect of discovering something new about oneself and life in general. To be impulsive was not to be cautious. For the Beats, caution was a symptom of social conformity, and living off the cuff was an openly defiant response to such careful, regimented existence.

While living life as an unbridled, impetuous free spirit may seem harmless enough—even attractive, though most citizens would not admit it—spontaneity often manifested itself in dangerous activities for the Beat Generation that not only changed the rapid-fire lives of many, but also ended some. Indiscriminate sexual encounters with numerous partners, often strangers, were common among Beat followers, and these spontaneous acts occasionally led to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Physical pleasure also came in liquid form; whether whiskey to drink or heroine to inject, drugs flowed freely among the Beats, and the desire for an immediate rush far outweighed any concern about overdosing or even dying. The abuse of cigarettes and marijuana helped maintain a moderate high in between heavier drug trips, and the continuous search for sensory experiences was considered a justifiable reason for remaining open to spontaneous urges.

## STYLE

### The Cut-Up Technique

The cut-up technique of composing prose originated with Burroughs, and it was a spin-off of his unusual method of putting together his most famous novel, *Naked Lunch*, from snippets of notes he wrote and then pieced together. His subsequent novels, *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket that Exploded*, and *Nova Express*, were constructed from chunks of various writings which he had literally cut up and then randomly paired into a new work. In doing so, he came up with such lines as the following: "He rents an amphitheater with marble walls he is a stone painter you can dig can create a frieze while you wait" and "The knife fell—The Clerk in the bunk next to his bled blue silence—Put on a clean shirt and Martin's pants—telling stories and exchanging smiles—dusty motors," both from *Nova Express*. Once Burroughs introduced it, the cut-up style of writing became a hit with the Beats, and others experimented with it in poetry, essays, and even political speeches, just for fun. The typical method is to take a written page, cut it down the middle vertically, then cut each of those two pieces in half horizontally, so that there are four "chunks" of writing. Next, arrange the chunks in different pairs to see what new lines or phrases appear. Burroughs found the results refreshing, even when the pieced-together prose made little or no sense and could not be translated literally. This style protected against what he and other experimental writers considered the confining boundaries of traditional word usage and standard grammar. The cut-up style was as much a rebellion against language control as a quirky creative impulse, and Burroughs claimed rebellion was the more important factor.

### Spontaneous Prose

While the cut-up technique may have been the strangest literary form spawned by the Beat Movement, another just as unusual for its time was what Kerouac called "spontaneous prose," and it became the most prominent and recognizable style of the Beats. As the name suggests, this type of writing is not plotted or preconceived in any way. Instead, it consists of a flow of thoughts, written down as it occurs in a continuous stream of images and movement. There is very little regard for punctuation, which threatens to get in the way of the lines' pulsing rhythm. Kerouac compared writing spontaneous prose to a jazz musician blowing a horn, sometimes with long, drawn-out notes, other times in quick, snappy toots, but always creating rhythm through improvisation. As with proper grammar, a writer's consciousness is seen as a hindrance to spontaneity and should be avoided; that is, writing without consciousness is a must for the Beat writer. Yet another taboo is revision. Once the language has flowed directly from the mind to the paper, the writer should not go back and revise. To do so, of course, is to take the spontaneity out of spontaneous writing, and, for the Beat writer, that means ruining the work.

### Contemporary Idiom

The Beat Generation did not invent writing in contemporary idiom, for novelists and poets throughout history often used a colloquial language with which to tell tales and give voice to characters, though often it was interspersed with more formal language from an objective narrator. The Beats, however, took the idiom of their generation to daring new levels with the inclusion of words and subject matter previously considered too immoral or illegal to print. But Beat writers knew that if one was going to be truly spontaneous, then nothing could be held back. If the mind thought it, the hand should write it, and, obviously, the mind can entertain shocking, illicit, and highly personal thoughts. The use of sexually explicit language, as well as forbidden four-letter words, became the norm in Beat writing, and this characteristic drew most of the negative attention to the movement's poets and novelists. Whereas many critics of the outlandish new writing could overlook, or simply scoff at, odd techniques and their so-called unliterary results, most railed against the description of all kinds of sexual encounters in the language of the street. The protests were enough to keep some novels and poems off American bookshelves for years while publishers and authors endured obscenity trials, but, in the end, the use of contemporary idiom, even at its extreme, was deemed legal. By the twenty-first century, it was deemed literature.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Abstract Expressionism

While Beat writers were having their heyday throughout the 1950s, visual artists were also struggling against social conformity and the restrictions they felt postwar society placed on them with its expectations about art. What arose was a kind of "Beat" painting and sculpture that took the name "Abstract Expressionism," and its techniques and resulting works rocked the art world as much as Beat writing disturbed the literary scene.

A group of painters and sculptors known as the New York School led the Abstract Expressionism revolt by advocating individual emotions and the freedom to present those emotions with as little inhibition as possible. The idea was to make the art of the moment, just as Kerouac's spontaneous prose made literature of the moment. And like the Beat writers, abstract expressionists welcomed confrontation with a complacent society trying to settle into a safe, benign, middle-class life after World War II. There should be no complacency, according to the artists, and they rebelled against the image of the lofty painter standing at his easel overlooking a serene meadow and capturing the pastoral landscape on his canvas. Abstract expressionists often used huge canvases, and many rejected that conventional surface altogether. They used paper-mâché and three-dimensional objects as surfaces, and, in place of common artists' brushes and scrapers, they used spray cans, garden tools, sticks, and a variety of other objects to create their work. Even more outrageous, the abstract expressionists employed whatever material was convenient to incorporate into a piece of art—from broken glass and sand piles to toilet seats and garbage.

One major avant-garde artist of this period, Jackson Pollock, created "drip paintings" by literally holding a can of paint above a surface and letting it drip onto it. Pollock was also known for stepping back from a large canvas with his can in hand, then slinging it so that the paint splashed

in wild streaks all over the surface. Robert Rauschenberg created what he called "combines," or artworks that integrated three-dimensional objects such as umbrellas, stuffed toys, and tires with other material. And in 1959, Claes Oldenburg walked through the streets of New York City wearing a paper-mâché elephant mask, his first one-man art show. Later, he collaborated with Coosje van Bruggen, his wife, to design and build huge public artworks of common objects, such as a giant clothespin in Philadelphia, big shuttlecocks strewn across the museum lawn in Kansas City, and a large spoon with a cherry perched on it in Minneapolis.

## Music

When Cleveland disk jockey Alan Freed started using the term "rock and roll" in 1951, it was in reference to his radio show, "Moondog House Rock and Roll Party"; the music he was playing was rhythm and blues. By the end of the decade, however, those simple yet volatile words were the signature label for a revolution in music that spawned singers as diverse as Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, the Bee Gees, and the Goo Goo Dolls, among others. But the Beat Movement promoted another type of music, almost a combination of rhythm and blues and what eventually became the thumping gyrations of rock and roll. It was a style of jazz called "bebop," and its artists were black musicians who played primarily in big-city nightclubs, some becoming famous recording artists such as Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker.

Bebop is a discordant, unmelodious, and syncopated music that arose from its musicians' desire to separate themselves from typical mainstream jazz and the predictable harmonies and rhythms of 1940s swing music. Like Beat writers and visual artists, bebop musicians were fiercely individualistic, and they proved it with wholly improvised solos and nontraditional rhythms that tended to change from performance to performance. Again, it was the freedom to create the music of the moment, and, while it enjoyed a solid audience that grew tremendously throughout the 1950s—particularly in large cities and bohemian pockets of smaller towns—bebop also offended the more traditional music lovers with its dissonant, if not cacophonous, instrumental sounds. But that, of course, suited bebop musicians just fine. As more and more people, both black and white, joined the ranks of bebop fans, the musicians found themselves having to reach even greater levels of musical dissonance just to maintain that rebellious, outsider edge.

## Film

The Beat Movement in film encompassed a wide variety of forms: documentaries about the Beat Generation, movies based on the lives of the most prominent Beats, and movies based on their novels. Some films featured appearances by Beats who either played themselves or characters based on their own personalities, while other movies, without a direct Beat connection, had themes, characters, and subjects that showed obvious influence by the movement.

*Pull My Daisy*, which came out in 1959, is the only film that well-known Beat writers actually created themselves. As could be expected, it was a spontaneously arranged movie, derived from an unfinished play by Kerouac called *The Beat Generation*. The plot concerns Cassady and his wife Carolyn, who are trying to fit in with typical middle-class suburbanites only to have their Beat friends crash a sedate party and ruin the couple's reputation in the neighborhood. Among the actors are Ginsberg and Corso, and Kerouac provides a voice-over although he is never seen on screen.

Kerouac's novel *The Subterraneans*, made into a film and released in 1960, is based on incidents in the lives of Ginsberg, Corso, and Kerouac himself. Considered by Beats and non-Beats alike to be a bad attempt at making a "real" Hollywood movie, *The Subterraneans* was a box office flop, and in the early 2000s it is hardly remembered, even by movie buffs. A more successful Beat film did not appear until 1991 when *Naked Lunch* made it to the big screen, but it is a common misconception that the movie is based on Burroughs's novel. Instead, it is a semi-fantasy based on Burroughs's life during the time in which he was writing the book. The "plot" refers to Burroughs's job as a pest exterminator, and scenes include people snorting or shooting up bug spray, typewriters coming to life as sexually charged insects, and an escape to Tangiers where the main character endures insect-filled nightmares and tries to write a book. The movie *Drugstore Cowboy*, released in 1989, featured an appearance by Burroughs himself who plays—as one may guess—a drug-addicted priest who knows more about the dope scene in Portland than anyone else in town. Both *Drugstore Cowboy* and *Naked Lunch* enjoyed moderate box office success.

Documentaries about the Beat movement include *The Beat Generation* (1959), *The Beatniks* (1960), and *The Beats: An Existential Comedy* (1980). Films with indirect Beat connections include *American Pop* (1981), an animated film in which a rebellious son hears a reading of "Howl" and takes off on an adventure similar to Kerouac's in *On the Road*; *Hairspray* (1988) in which a Beatnik character reads "Howl" in order to frighten away a group of "squares"; and *Wild at Heart* (1990), which is based on a novel by Barry Gifford, who coauthored *Jack's Book*, an oral biography about Kerouac.

## Hippies

A decade after the Beat Movement was at its height, the counter-culture movement, which began in the United States and spread worldwide, was represented by a loosely associated group of young people who called themselves "hippies." The word "hippie" comes from "hipster," a label given to Beat writers in the 1950s. Hippie culture values pacifism; creative expression through music, writing, film, and other art forms; recreational drug use; environmentalism; sexual liberation; alternative religions; and alternative lifestyles. Writers representative of this movement include Ken Kesey, Abbie Hoffman, and Tom Robbins. Kesey, an early hippie, became heavily involved with psychoactive drugs after participating in a government drug study. This experience influenced his writing of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). Hoffman was an political activist, best known for public protests and non-fiction works that brought attention to the anti-war movement, which opposed U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. He is the author of *Steal This Book*, first published by Pirate Editions in 1971 and later available freely online at http://www.eriswerks.org/steal.html. Robbins, like Kesey, experimented with psychoactive drugs and was inspired by the experience in his writing. His first novel, *Another Roadside Attraction*, was published in 1971; as of 2008, Robbins had published nine books and had a devoted readership to his work.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Beat Movement got its start in the late 1940s and began losing momentum by the early 1960s, but the entire decade in between was a bountiful time for Beats. The members of the movement, keenly aware of the realities of the time, were not lulled into the sentimentality commonly associated with the 1950s. There is a distinct irony about the decade that many Americans old enough to remember those years often overlook. The nostalgia that has become synonymous with it—convertibles and road trips, hula-hoops and Elvis, TV and the technology boom, and "I Like Ike" pins on the lapels of happy suburbanites—tends to blur other events of the period that suggest anything but merriment and complacency. The Cold War with the Soviet Union, back yard bomb shelters, duck-and-cover exercises in grade school classrooms, the Communist revolution in Cuba, McCarthyism at home, and increased racial tensions all tell the story of a United States quite different from the wistful, fond memories that some older Americans still hold.

Although the United States and the Soviet Union had been allies in World War II, the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 resulted in Nikita Khrushchev's rise to power and his eventual strengthening of Soviet political and military control over Eastern Europe. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons capabilities, and as tensions between the two world powers escalated, so did the buildup of arsenals on both sides. In the United States, personal tensions mounted as well, and some families constructed bomb shelters in their back yards while their children learned how to drop to the classroom floor and cover their heads in the event that bomb sirens sounded during school hours. In an attempt to improve relations, President Eisenhower and Khrushchev were to meet at a summit in Paris in 1959, but two weeks prior to the event, a U.S. spy plane was shot down over Russia. The summit still took place, but the Soviet leader stormed out before it was over, and another planned meeting between Khrushchev and Eisenhower in Moscow was canceled. Meanwhile, closer to home, Fidel Castro led a Communist revolution in Cuba and became that country's ruler in 1959.

The Cold War and the threat of real war was a major impetus behind Eisenhower's decision to launch the largest public works program in U.S. history—the construction of the Interstate Highway System, which would connect the nation coast to coast and provide emergency runways for military aircraft, as well as quicker evacuation

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1940s:** The beginnings of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union create an uneasy current of fear and doubt in an otherwise hopeful and complacent post–World War II United States. The conflict involves massive arms buildup by both nations, including nuclear warheads—the most worrisome aspect of the Cold War.

  **Today:** The United States and Russia are allies in the war on terrorism, although President George W. Bush's decision to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which forbids testing and deployment of a ballistic missile defense system, greatly concerns Russian officials.

- **1940s:** In an effort to flee the crime and "unsavory" elements of the big city, many Americans head to the suburbs. In Long Island, New York, builders erect Levittown, a middle-class suburb with prefabricated housing materials, the first of its kind. Over the next decade, land values increase, sometimes up to 3000 percent, in prime suburban neighborhoods, where population increases by 44 percent.

  **Today:** Many inner-city areas are little more than dilapidated slums with high crime rates and widespread drug trafficking. Sociologists largely blame the "white flight" of the 1940s and 1950s for the decline of the cities, although there are current efforts to restore many downtowns and historical areas of cities and to draw people of all races and economic levels back there to live.

- **1950s:** The beginning of what many will call the commercialization of the United States comes in the form of fast food and theme parks. Ray Kroc buys out a hamburger franchise from the McDonald brothers and the golden arches are born. Harland Sanders begins his Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise. In California, Disneyland opens, the first theme park in the U.S. "history of leisure," and the Barbie doll is introduced to delighted children and adult collectors alike.

  **Today:** Fast food chains are the mainstay of many Americans' diets, although the once omnipotent McDonald's has tough competition from other burger restaurants as well as from pizza, taco, and deli sandwich servers. The Disney empire has expanded to include Disney World in Florida and similar theme parks elsewhere in the world. Although the parks in the United States still flourish, Euro-Disney suffered some losses toward the end of the twentieth century.

- **1950s:** Homosexual relationships are common among the Beat Generation but condemned by mainstream Americans as well as by the legal system. Labeled as sexual psychopaths under many states' laws, gays and lesbians are classed together with child molesters and rapists. In one instance in 1954, police in Sioux City, Iowa, arrest twenty suspected homosexual men after two children are brutally murdered. Although authorities never claim the men have anything to do with the crime, they are sentenced to a mental institution until "cured."

  **Today:** Legal recognition of same-sex unions and spousal benefits for long-term domestic partners are important gay-rights issues. While there is some relaxation of social attitudes towards gays and lesbians in current times, the legal system still presents a challenge for gays and lesbians. By the end of the twentieth century, thirty states have explicitly banned same-sex marriages, and, at the national level, the Defense of Marriage Act (1996) restricts the federal definition of marriage to heterosexual couples. However, in May 2008 the California Supreme Court strikes down the state ban on same-sex marriage.

routes. The use of major highways for war purposes never materialized, but the possibility of it was indicative of how threatened both the U.S. government and the American people felt during the 1950s. Worries were not confined to the physical horrors of war, however. They also involved concerns about a possible Communist takeover of the United States. Nothing short of mass hysteria resulted when Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin began holding hearings on the alleged Communist infiltration of the U.S. military. McCarthy and his followers also began identifying as Communists people in other government agencies, as well as well-known people in the movie industry and professors at universities. The senator's accusations were groundless; nonetheless, reputations were ruined and esteemed professionals were blacklisted. McCarthy's frenzied heyday ended when Eisenhower, military officials, and members of the media banded together to prove his "Red Scare" fraudulent. Ultimately, the senator was formally censured by Congress.

Many U.S. citizens feared being overcome by a foreign power. Those fears were not nearly as debilitating as problems Americans caused for themselves with racial intolerance and hatred. The 1950s saw the beginnings of one of the most significant movements of the century—the civil rights movement—sparked by the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954, which made illegal racial segregation in schools. Blacks began openly defying previous separatist rules, including such historical acts as Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat to a white man and move further back in a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. This one act initiated a yearlong bus boycott in Montgomery, organized by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. After Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act in 1957, tensions mounted even further, and, in one instance, Governor George Wallace of Arkansas refused to protect black students entering Central High School in Little Rock. Eisenhower was forced to send federal troops to the site. For the rest of the decade and on into the 1960s, issues of racism and civil rights continued to divide the country, often at the expense of human life.

In spite of the obvious causes of fear and doubt that ran rampant throughout the United States during the 1950s, some Americans still lived and many tried to emulate the Ozzie and Harriet life they viewed on their prized new gadget, the television. Along with a fascination with TV came the new rage in dining—frozen TV dinners, often enjoyed directly in front of the box for which they were named. Americans who preferred even faster food began to experience a new chain of hamburgers called McDonald's, and poultry lovers learned that they could grab a quick meal at Kentucky Fried Chicken. The significant form of entertainment to emerge from the decade was rock and roll, and when Sun Records released Elvis Presley's first record in 1954, the music industry was changed permanently. Perhaps the most significant impact of an innovation on the American way of life was one originally considered a preventive military move. The tens of thousands of miles of highway constructed during this period put the country on the move. People drove. They bought stylish new automobiles and took lengthy family vacations across state or across country. Many moved to recently built suburbs and enjoyed the longer drive to work, and still others began shopping at establishments in places they would once have considered too distant. More than any other American value, mobility was adopted by the Beat Generation as much as it was by the Ozzies and Harriets across the country. Although their reasons, purposes, and destinations may have been quite different, both groups found themselves happily on the road.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Criticism of the Beat Movement was initially almost as divided as the Beats themselves were from mainstream American society. While there was little disagreement that the Beat Generation had indeed caused a stir with its literature, art, and music, supporters and detractors argued mostly about the true artistic value of the methods and the results. The prevalent negative critique claimed, simply, that their writings were not literature. Beat writers were attacked for their disregard for proper grammar and their often incoherent, rambling prose that seemed accessible only to its authors. Supporters, however, found the strange styles and shocking subjects refreshing and justified the creative techniques as valid reactions to a humdrum, conservative mainstream. Decades after their fading away—and after the beatniks and hippies of the 1960s, disco freaks of the 1970s, and "me" generation of the 1980s—a more objective criticism emerged.

*Gaslight Poetry Café, a popular spot for Beat poets* (© Bettmann / Corbis)

Many Beat Movement reviewers have largely put aside the debate over what was real writing talent and what was not in order to concentrate on why the movement began in the first place and what influence it had on its own generation and those that followed. In his 1992 publication of *Understanding the Beats*, author Edward Halsey Foster claims that "writing was for the Beats a means through which the self might be redeemed, or at the very least a place where its redemption might be recorded." Foster goes on to rationalize the unorthodox writing style as "a literature through which the individual could flourish beyond all factionalism, all ideologies." This philosophical contention echoes many critics' hindsight summaries of what the Beat Movement was all about. By the early 2000s many agreed that there was merit after all in its writings and other artistic expressions. Perhaps Steven Watson says it best in his response to Kerouac's historical definition of the Beat Generation as those who "espouse mystical detachment and relaxation of social and sexual tensions," a description the Beat icon provided for *Random House Dictionary*. Haidee Kruger, writing for *Literator*, identifies the Beat

Movement as a bridge between two major literary movements of the twentieth century, Modernism and Postmodernism. In *The Birth of the Beat Generation*, published in 1995, Watson says that "As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Beat Generation has outlived that historical moment, surviving notoriety and media blitz to become classic literature for succeeding generations."

## CRITICISM

### Pamela Steed Hill

*Hill is the author of a poetry collection, has published widely in literary journals, and is an editor for a university publications department. In the following essay, Hill explores how the fractured, volatile lives of the primary Beat writers translated directly into the fractured, volatile works they produced.*

The clearest dividing line between reviewers who praise the volumes of poetry, novels, stories, and essays from the Beat Movement and those who do not is the disagreement over what real literature is and what is not. Beat writers themselves did not make the decision easy, and most probably did not care at the time, nor would they care today. Indifference was "where it was at." Yet, like it or not, the originators of the movement became famous, even sporadically wealthy, but they often had problems handling the popularity, as well as the money. To be "normal" was not an option, and their work needed to reflect that. As a result, the writing was unorthodox, controversial, outlandish, and shocking, at least for that time. But were the styles, themes, and subjects wholly premeditated and cheaply contrived or could they be helped, considering the personal lives of the authors? Probably no other so-called "movement" of writers was as directly related to life experiences as the one coined "Beat," and a discussion of the movement is inseparable from a discussion of its authors. Few in number and relatively short in staying power, the Beat Generation produced the only kind of writing its members could have mustered.

There is little disagreement over the small number of main players who could legitimately call themselves Beats. Corso claimed the movement consisted only of Burroughs, Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Corso himself, and that four

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- In 2000, literary historian Thomas Newhouse published *The Beat Generation and the Popular Novel in the United States, 1945–1970*. Newhouse provides history and criticism on popular American novels in chapters covering "The War at Home: The Novel of Juvenile Delinquency," "Hipsters, Beats, and Supermen," "Breaking the Last Taboo: The Gay Novel," and "Which Way Is Up? The Drug Novel."

- Thomas Owens provides a thorough look at the innovative and controversial style of jazz that came alive in the 1940s and 1950s in *Bebop: The Music and Its Players* (1995). Focusing on the roots of bebop and moving into a study of its major players, including Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, Owens presents a readable, yet studious, account of the music and the techniques of the musicians. Serious jazz lovers will enjoy this work.

- In the 1993 book *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*, author Michael Leja suggests that abstract expressionist artists were part of a culture-wide initiative to "re-imagine the self." Incorporating the works and interests of other personalities of the period, Leja compares such artists as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Willem de Kooning to contemporary essayists, Hollywood filmmakers, journalists, and popular philosophers.

- In 1997, Yale professor John Lewis Gaddis published *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. An expert on this period in history, Gaddis argues that there was indeed an international Communist conspiracy, that Castro and Khrushchev were victorious over Kennedy in the Cuban missile crisis, and that, ultimately, the Cold War was inevitable. This is a thought-provoking look at a volatile time in U.S. history.

> THE BEATS, IT SEEMS, ARE NOW PRAISED FOR THE VERY PRACTICES THAT CONDEMNED THEM FIFTY YEARS AGO. A COMPLACENT, SMUG AMERICA NEEDED A GOOD SHAKING, AND THE BEATS PROVIDED IT. THE QUESTION REMAINS: DID THEY PROVIDE IT THROUGH GOOD WRITING?"

people did not even make up a "generation." In *The Birth of the Beat Generation*, author Steven Watson says that "By the strictest definition, the Beat Generation consists of only William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady, and Herbert Huncke, with the slightly later addition of Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky." Corso may not have appreciated his placement as a "slightly later addition," but Watson's list is still small, no matter how the names are juggled. Moreover, the people behind the names appear to have had life's cards stacked against them from the beginning. Violent childhoods, broken families, bizarre fascinations, and no regard for personal health are the common experiences and common attitudes of the Beats, and their writing was little more than a public explosion of private fireworks. Considering that all survived their beginnings to become internationally known, the volatile foundations of these writers are worth a look.

Without doubt, Burroughs was oddest of them all. Typical, brief biographies neglect to mention that he began investigating methods of forging hard metals for weapons when he was eight years old; that he built homemade bombs as a teenager, one of which blew up in his hands, sending him to the hospital for six months, and another which he tossed through a window of his school principal's house; that, also as a teenager, he ingested a bottle of chloral hydrate and nearly died; that he almost killed a college classmate when he aimed at the fellow's stomach but ended up blowing a hole in his dorm room wall; that he severed the tip of his little finger with a pair of poultry sheers in protest of his first male lover's infidelity. All this by the time he was twenty-five. Burroughs's adulthood in New York and

elsewhere is more documented than his childhood and adolescence, but it too rings of the same macabre fascinations and dangerous activities that enveloped his early years. The writing he did as both a youth and as an adult reflects his morbid obsessions and ghoulish practices, as well as his blatant disregard for laws and social mores. How aptly named is the "cut-up" technique for an author whose own mind and body consistently felt the puncturing and rending of a base, depraved, and fractured existence.

Another prominent Beat writer, Corso, also grew up with violence, although initially he was not the one asking for it, as it seems Burroughs was. After his mother abandoned him at the age of six months, Corso was placed in foster homes, living with three sets of parents in ten years. At twelve, he stole a radio from a neighbor and was sentenced to juvenile detention, the first of many run-ins with the law. In detention, the young Corso endured so many beatings that, in desperation, he rammed his hands through a window and was sent to the children's psychiatric ward at Bellevue hospital. After another stint in a boys' home, he wound up living on the street, where he honed his theft skills. At sixteen, he and two other street kids robbed a finance company of $7,000, and all of them went to prison. Corso was released at age twenty when he headed to New York and met the other members of the Beat Generation.

Ginsberg's childhood was not filled with as much personal violence as was Burroughs's and Corso's, but it was just as torn though in a different direction. Bouts with schizophrenia landed his mother in a sanatorium when Ginsberg was only three years old, and she was in and out of institutions for the rest of her life. Being without his mother for extended periods of time was hard on the boy, but being with her proved even more challenging. When she was home, Naomi Ginsberg went on vocal tirades in support of Communism and insisted on walking around naked. She forced her son to listen to her paranoid fantasies, including her fear that Ginsberg's father was poisoning their food, that she had to cover her ears with kitchen pots to ward off evil, and that there were insects threatening to take over their home. Ginsberg began to console himself with two primary comforts: writing and sexual fantasies. He became consumed with both and often melded the two in his secret diary. His well-publicized work as an adult is proof that he never got over it.

By comparison to his three main cohorts, Kerouac seems to have led an almost normal childhood, but normal is definitely a relative term. At age four, Kerouac endured the death of his nine-year-old brother, and he clung to his Catholic teachings with fanatical adherence, believing in visions of ghosts and statues whose heads could move on their own. A shy loner, Kerouac turned to writing and used the prose process as a means of sexual stimulation. Writing himself into a frenzy, so to speak, remained a habit, if not trademark, throughout his adult writing career. So too did the alcoholism he picked up from his father. Perhaps more so than the others, Kerouac tried to live a valid "literary" life, but there were too many obstacles in the way, many of which he created himself.

These biographical summaries obviously portray the worst of their authors' lives and, admittedly, they lean to the darker side for a purpose. To address Beat writing is to address Beat writers, and, while there are numerous other published Beats, the four mentioned here are considered the core group. There are also numerous other writers of all genres, all decades, all centuries whose lives were surely as violent, despairing, eerie, and dreadful as those described here, so what is the difference? What makes the Beat Movement so intrinsically tied to the similar quirks and experiences of the people involved? First, size. Even if one extends the circle of Beat writers beyond the Columbia group, beyond Greenwich Village, across the country to San Francisco, the number of members is still fewer than that of other well recognized literary movements. Extending the circle, however, is generally artificial, for a discussion of the Beats always returns to the handful of original members. Second, the personalities and resulting behavior of those members play a significant role in shaping the movement, as well as in confining it to a tight space in literary history. Most important, the writers themselves incite the debate on whether the word "literary" should even apply to their works.

Those who fare best in the debate are the poets. Generally given more license to experiment with styles and to ignore rules of syntax and grammar, poets Ginsberg and Corso tended to be criticized more for their subjects than their presentations. Explicit sexual references and anti-American pronouncements overshadowed the often incoherent, rambling lines and forced

*Allen Ginsberg reads poetry in Washington Square Park in New York City* (AP Images)

imagery. The prose writers were measured—and still are—with a different yardstick. Is cutting up pages of someone else's words and randomly splicing them together to create one's own work really "writing"? Even when individuals slice and shuffle their own words, is that literature? Regarding spontaneous writing, does it take real talent to sit at a typewriter and tap out every thought that comes to mind without any regard for plot, cohesion, readability, or an interesting subject? In the 1950s, many people answered no to all these questions. Hindsight, however, has been kinder. Now, critics are tempted to judge the products of the Beats based on nonliterary facets such as cultural restrictions and postwar fears. The Beats, it seems, are now praised for the very practices that condemned them fifty years ago. A complacent, smug America needed a good shaking, and the Beats provided it. The question remains: did they provide it through good writing?

That question will not be answered here or anywhere else. Like any "art" debate, it comes down to personal opinion. Perhaps the more intriguing point to ponder is whether the main writers of the Beat Generation—those who gave

it both voice and a name—were only imitating their broken, scattered, "beat" lives with the works they produced. And further, could they have produced anything else? The contention here is no. The Beats wrote what they wrote because they lived how they lived. Rebels produce rebellious work—the more dissenting the lifestyle, the more defiant the writing. It is hard to imagine a Burroughs or a Ginsberg writing like William Faulkner or Robert Frost, or even like Norman Mailer or Gary Snyder, for that matter. While these writers and poets and countless others could surely be called defiant or even shocking by certain audiences, the Beats wore their pain, anger, criminality, and deviance on their sleeves like well-earned badges. They displayed grim personal lives openly through their actions and even more deeply through the words they put on paper.

**Source:** Pamela Steed Hill, Critical Essay on the Beat Movement, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Haidee Kruger

*In the following essay, Kruger examines the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, a leading member of the Beat Movement, as it relates to other literary movements of the time. Kruger specifically focuses on its critical position between the transition from modernism to postmodernism.*

Much critical writing about the Beat Movement has focused on the strong interrelationship between the literary and social discourses within and around the movement. However, the study of Beat literature also necessitates an awareness of its position within the literary discourse of the twentieth century. Beat writing may be seen as standing in the unstable, shifting territory between two equally unstable, shifting literary movements: modernism and postmodernism. Beat poetry pits itself against high modernism and the New Critical tradition, draws upon some aspects of early avant-garde modernism, and simultaneously remoulds these aspects into what may be regarded as the beginnings of postmodernism in the USA. This article presents a reading of Allen Ginsberg's Beat poetry against this literary-historical background. A brief general overview of some of the key characteristics of Beat poetry is given, followed by a discussion of a number of Beat poems, organised around some salient features of Ginsberg's Beat poetry that may be

**BEAT ETHOS OF THE 1950S AND 1960S AIMED TO BRING POETRY BACK TO THE PEOPLE, TO DE-ACADEMISE IT AND RE-CONNECT IT, AS PERFORMATIVE ART, TO THE COMMUNITY."**

linked to Beat poetry's position in the transition from modernism to postmodernism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Allen Ginsberg's Beat poetry is widely regarded as representative of Beat beliefs and poetics, and over the years he has become the spokesperson and chronicler of the movement. Ginsberg's long publishing career, spanning half a century, suggests the importance of Beat poetics as a continued force in contemporary poetry, also evident in the steady stream of anthologies as well as popular and academic publications about Ginsberg and various aspects of the Beat Movement (see for example Campbell, 1999; Lee, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Peabody, 1997; Raskin, 2005; Sanders, 2000).

Much critical writing on the Beats has focused on the strong interrelationship between the literary and social discourses within and around the movement, with the emphasis often falling on the effects that the Beats' literary discourse had on the social discourse of the USA of the 1950s and the development of countercultural movements (see for example Charters, 1993; George & Starr, 1985). However, the study of Beat literature also necessitates an awareness of its position within the literary discourse of the twentieth century. Beat writing may be seen as standing in the unstable, shifting territory between two equally unstable, shifting literary movements: modernism and postmodernism. Beat poetry pits itself against high modernism, draws upon some aspects of early avant-garde modernism, and simultaneously remoulds these aspects into what may be regarded as the beginnings of postmodernism in the USA (see Russell, 1985:242; Huyssen, 1986:188). Calinescu (1987a:297) summarises these ideas:

> the term postmodernism first came into literary
> use in the United States, where a number of

poets of the later 1940s used it to distance themselves from the symbolist kind of modernism represented by T. S. Eliot. Like the early postmoderns, most of those who subsequently joined the antimodernist reaction were aesthetic radicals and often close to the spirit of the counterculture. The works of these writers constitute the historical nucleus of literary postmodernism. In poetry the corpus of American postmodernist writing would include the Black Mountain poets . . . the Beats . . . and the representatives of the San Francisco Renaissance . . . or those of the New York school . . .

It also needs to be pointed out that the high modernist legacy of formalism, conservatism, erudition, classicism, detachment, intellectualism and impersonality (Charters, 1993:586; Holmes, 1981:5) formed a powerful alliance with the dominant tradition of literary criticism in the post-World War II literary climate in the USA: New Criticism. The New Critics asserted that "the essential property of poetry consists in the reconciliation or harmonization of opposites; that this takes the form of an objective organization of the objective meanings of words" (Robey, 1986:84). This, together with the legacy of high modernism, created expectations of literature centring on impersonality, objectivity, ironic detachment and formal refinement.

Ginsberg's Beat poetry flouted almost every convention institutionalised by the coalition between high modernist poetics and New Criticism. His poetry is aggressively personal, highly emotional, and almost always excessive in style and content. His explicit depiction and celebration of homosexuality, crime and drug use are in conflict with the relatively conservative notions of morality implicitly espoused by New Criticism. As far as style is concerned, Ginsberg's writing is unrestrained, rhapsodic, excessively emotional and declarative, without the delicate intellectual nuances of construction valued by high modernist poetics and New Criticism.

This article presents a reading of Allen Ginsberg's Beat poetry against this background. A brief general overview of some of the key characteristics of Beat poetry is given, followed by a discussion of a number of Beat poems, organised around some salient features of Ginsberg's Beat poetry that may be linked to Beat poetry's position in the transition from modernism to postmodernism.

## 2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF BEAT POETRY

Charters (1993:582) regards the Beats' "rebellious questioning of conventional American cultural values during the cold war" as the single most important thematic characteristic of their writing. The Beats strove to counter social conformity with a belief in the sanctity of the individual experience, repression with spontaneity and freedom of experience and expression, and materialism with spirituality. These general aims and beliefs had particular effects on both the content and the style of Beat writing.

Firstly, in terms of style, one of the most important projects of the Beat writers was to create a spontaneous creative style, an "aesthetic of unguarded, untrammeled expression" (Stephenson, 1990:14). Kerouac was the main influence in this project, the aims of which he set out in two accounts: "Essentials of spontaneous prose" and "Belief and technique of modern prose". In the former he states the basic idea of spontaneous prose as "not 'selectivity' of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement . . . " (Kerouac, 1995:484).

Ginsberg has acknowledged his debt to what he has called Kerouac's "spontaneous bop prosody" (Clark, 1970:131–132). Many of the structural characteristics of Beat writing can be linked to this quality, such as the surreal juxtaposition of chains of images, the use of organic speech rhythms, and the predominance of improvisatory, rambling poetic forms (Holmes, 1981:11).

A second important characteristic of the Beats' writing is their ideal of "making personality the center and subject of their work" (Tytell, 1976:15). In one sense, this may be regarded as a direct reaction against the ideal of impersonality and objectivity established by the modernist legacy of Eliot and Pound. In another, wider sense, this aspect of their writing can be traced back to their conflict with contemporary American civilisation, which they regarded as warped and sterile, partly because of its emphasis on collectivity, conformity, materialism and conservatism. Like Whitman, and the American transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau, the Beats believed that only individual experience and spirituality could possibly give some meaning to existence in a sterile society (Tytell, 1976:4).

The emphasis on individuality gives rise to a poetry that is generally antiformalist, in the sense that it does not see form as an external imposition, "an overlay you scissored the raw edges of content to fit" (Holmes, 1981:7). Instead, the aim is intuitively to find a rhythm and language inherent to the self and its personal expression. Another characteristic linked to the emphasis on subjectivity is the importance attached to the actual voice of the poet and the consequent development of poetry as oral performance.

A third general characteristic of Beat poetry is the emphasis placed on freedom of experience and expression, which resulted primarily from the Beats' reaction against a conformist society. In terms of the content of Beat poetry, this is linked to the Beats' description of the lifestyle of the counterculture, incorporating taboos such as drugs and homosexual relationships. On the formal level, Beat writing displays the writers' insistence on personal freedom in many respects. Essentially, it entails the freedom to break with established conventions of literary form, and to invent and experiment with new forms. Kerouac's rambling picaresque narratives, Burroughs's cut-up and fold-in techniques and Ginsberg's experimentations with free incantatory verse are all ways of breaking with the conventions of literary form (Stephenson, 1990:10).

A final defining trait of Beat poetry is its concern with spirituality. Everson (1981:182) describes the Beat project as an attempt to "incorporate genuine ecstatic and mystical needs" into everyday existence. In doing so, the Beats returned to the shamanistic-prophetic role of the artist in society (Stephenson, 1990:15). They were also particularly attracted to Eastern, "primitive" and mystical religious traditions. In Ginsberg's case, there is a strong link with Judaism, but he also studied, among others, gnosticism, mysticism, native American lore, Hinduism and Buddhism (Prothero, 1991:216; Portugés, 1984:143). In particular, his eclectic appropriation of Buddhist principles and other Eastern systems of belief has been a pervasive influence on both the content and the form of his poetry (George & Starr, 1985:196; Jackson, 1988).

The above broad characteristics of Beat poetry find their precipitation in Ginsberg's Beat poetry in various ways, many of which

may be related to Beat poetry's position as simultaneously anti-high-modernist and early postmodernist. Beat poetry is essentially driven by a counterhegemonic and activist impulse, and is a celebration of difference, heterogeneity and contradiction. On a formal level, this finds its expression in experimentalism, improvisation and innovation. On a social level, Beat poetry's activism links with its social involvement and its keen interest in mass culture, a defining characteristic of postmodernist art. This also ties in with the emphasis that is placed on poetry as popular art form, meant to be performed. Another significant feature of Ginsberg's poetry is the importance attached to delight and play— a feature that may be linked to Beat poetry's rejection of the pessimistic and austere image of poetry associated with high modernism. Beat poetry's celebration of immediacy, intensity and irrationality may also be related to this. A last characteristic of Ginsberg's poetry that warrants attention in terms of its relationship to postmodernism is its intertextuality.

In the following section, the above qualities are discussed in more depth, with particular attention to selected poems.

## 3. BEAT POEMS: READINGS

### 3.1 THE COUNTERHEGEMONIC IMPULSE, ACTIVISM AND ANARCHISM

As a whole, Ginsberg's Beat poetry is a celebration of marginalised culture. Gilmore (1997:36) emphasises the role of Ginsberg's poetry in "the freeing up of people and voices that much of established society wanted kept in the margins". The ultimate purpose of much of Ginsberg's Beat poetry is to expose the fallacy of American culture as homogenously middle-class and heterosexual, by foregrounding variety and difference. At the same time, it undermines the hegemony of various other basic assumptions or beliefs upon which Western society is founded, such as the superiority of the ego, and the authority of order, meaning, control, identity and reason. In postmodernist terms, Ginsberg's Beat poetry may therefore be regarded as reflecting a resistance against totalising metanarratives (see Lyotard, 1984; 1993).

On the level of the individual, Beat poetry resists the traditional definition or metanarrative of the self as ego or fixed point of identity, primarily defined by virtue of its capacity to reason. In "Over Kansas" the traditional concept of self as ego is denied, when the poet unequivocally

states that "I am no ego", a sentiment echoed in line 8 of "Siesta in Xbalba": "let the mind fall down". Instead Ginsberg's Beat poetry plays with the notion of self, arguing that transitory physical and emotional experience, together with mystical and visionary states, might constitute an alternative locus for the self. This idea is articulated in an early poem, "Psalm I":

> These psalms are the workings of the vision
>     haunted mind and
> not that reason which never changes.
> I am flesh and blood but my mind is the focus
>     of much lightning.
> I change with the weather, with the state of my
>     finances, with
> the work I do, with my company.
> But truly none of these is accountable for the
>     majestic flaws of
> mind which have left my brain open to
>     hallucination.

On a social level, the counterhegemonic nature of Beat poetry is apparent from its resistance against social control and the dominance of a particular group and its ideology. It contests any view of society as a monolithic entity and resists totalisation, instead celebrating plurality and diversity. "Howl" is exemplary of this. The poem is an outcry against the stultifying conventional assumptions of middle-class America, embodied in the god Moloch, who dominates the second section of the poem. Moloch may be regarded as a personification of the metanarratives upon which Western society is constructed. Moloch is "the Mind", which destroys "brains and imagination", in which the self is "a consciousness without a body" whose fate is "a cloud of sexless hydrogen." Moloch is also the desire for progress, regardless of the consequences:

> Moloch whose mind is pure machinery!
>     Moloch whose blood is
> running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten
>     armies!
> Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo!
>     Moloch
> whose ear is a smoking tomb!
> Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind win-
>     dows! Moloch
> whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like
>     endless
> Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and
>     croak in
> the fog! Moloch whose smokestacks and
>     antennae
> crown the cities!
> Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone!
>     Moloch whose soul

is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty
 is the
specter of genius!

This second section of "Howl" exposes and questions some of the basic metanarratives on which Western society is based, by drawing their consequences as negative and destructive. It links the primacy of reason with a social ethics based on capitalist exploitation and ruthless progress, and presents the results of these as a terrifying society of "Robot apartments! invisible suburbs! skeleton treasuries! blind capitals! demonic industries! spectral nations! invincible madhouses! granite cocks! monstrous bombs!".

The poem thus rejects the hegemony of these basic metanarratives as numbing, stifling and ultimately destructive. Its counterhegemonic gesture consists of pushing that which has been marginalised and hidden to the foreground. Instead of the dominance of order and reason, the poem celebrates extremities of chaotic and intense experience: physical, emotional and spiritual:

with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and
cock and endless balls,
incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in
the mind leaping towards poles of Canada & Paterson,
illuminating all the
motionless world of Time between,
Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns,
wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs
of teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and
moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of
Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind.

All of these experiences are depicted in terms of an absence of control, since control implies some kind of hierarchical structuring of experience. In this process the poem makes a deconstructionist move by inverting the hierarchy and placing the repressed terms (spirit, emotion, body) in the primary position, celebrating the

angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly
connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of
night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up

smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats
floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,
who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw
Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs
illuminated.

The activist and anarchic tendency of Beat poetry is closely linked to the above, and may be regarded as typical of early postmodernism's "expression of a defensive rage and creative idealism" (Russell, 1985:254). A particularly powerful activist poem written in Ginsberg's Beat phase is "America." In this poem Ginsberg criticises American society on several grounds, using a technique of "one-liners in different voices, sardonic schizophrenic, the tone influenced by Tzara's Dada manifestos" (Ginsberg, 1995). He condemns it for its obsession with technological warfare that destroys human beings, while simultaneously deploring its unwillingness to embrace qualities such as spirituality, honesty and tolerance. He furthermore criticises the fundamental xenophobia of conservative American society, by parodying stereotypical paranoid representations of countries like Russia and China. This paranoia and intolerance are coupled with excessive materialism and emotional barrenness.

The "I" of the poem then (often ironically and humorously) places himself in an oppositional stance. Instead of economic wealth, military power and technologically advanced weaponry, his "national resources" consist of

two joints of marijuana millions of genitals an unpublishable
private literature that jetplanes 1400 miles an hour and
twentyfive-thousand mental institutions.
I say nothing about my prisons nor the millions of
underprivileged who live in my flowerpots under the light
of five hundred suns

Instead of working seriously and responsibly to amass wealth, he smokes marijuana and stays at home, doing nothing but "stare at the roses in the closet." Finally, instead of the emotional and spiritual superficiality of American society, the poet-speaker consistently exhibits a concern for authentic and sincere emotion and spirituality and compassion for all people.

The last three lines of the poem contain an explicit (though self-deprecating and ironic) personal commitment to change this society—not by participating in its institutions, but by a personal (most probably poetic) effort:

> I'd better get right down to the job.
> It's true I don't want to join the Army or turn lathes in precision
> parts factories, I'm nearsighted and psychopathic anyway.
> America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.

This commitment to exposing the wrongs of society and actively trying to create solutions and initiate changes pervades much of Ginsberg's poetry. "Death to Van Gogh's ear" is another example of such a poem. The underlying assumption of poems such as these is that poetry should make social injustice its business, and moreover, that poetry has the power to exert some kind of influence on society. This belief is also apparent in Ginsberg's continual practical and poetic involvement with numerous activist groups, campaigning for human rights, peace, environmental issues and gay rights (see Austin, 1995; Carter, 2001; Moore, 1997).

## 3.2 EXPERIMENTALISM, IMPROVISATION AND INNOVATION

Russell (1985:240) points out that formal experimentalism often originates from a desire to find a new voice by violating the constraints of the patriarchal, bourgeois, dominant culture's language and modes of expression. Whereas the acceptance of metanarratives expresses itself formally in closure, totalisation and unity (as embodied in the New Critical idea of the well-made poem), the postmodernist stance towards metanarratives expresses itself in forms that are discontinuous, improvisatory, open and playful. This is the basis of the formal experimentation of Ginsberg's Beat poetry. In particular, his use of the long line or breath unit (together with cataloguing, litany-like repetition and lavish accumulation of language) is a way of challenging the New Critical convention of the carefully contained poem. This experimental technique is probably the most characteristic and innovative formal aspect of Ginsberg's poetry, and is present in the majority of his important Beat poems, like "Howl", "A supermarket in California" and "Sunflower sutra." In most of these poems it is as if the expansiveness of the vision cannot be contained within the confines of traditional poetic form, but spills over into a profusion of words and images linked in one breath. Ginsberg has explained that this is the result of his dictum of "first thought, best thought", which is a way of capturing the "[s]pontaneous insight—the sequence of thought-forms passing naturally through ordinary mind." In "Howl" this idea is metatextually described as follows:

> who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through
> images juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul
> between 2 visual images and joined the elemental verbs
> and set the noun and dash of consciousness together
> jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens Aeterna
> Deus, to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose
> and stand before you speechless and intelligent and
> shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing out the soul
> to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and
> endless head.

There are many other experimental techniques evident in Ginsberg's poetry, such as making the whole poem one long sentence with little or no punctuation, as in "Europe! Europe!":

> World world world
> I sit in my room
> imagine the future
> sunlight falls on Paris
> I am alone there is no
> one whose love is perfect
> man has been mad man's
> love is not perfect I
> have not wept enough
> my breast will be heavy
> till death the cities
> are specters of cranks
> of war...

In other poems, such as "Laughing gas", long lines, continuous lines and broken lines are mixed in a way that seems completely formless. In some cases, the experimentation becomes extreme, resulting in poems approaching the style of concrete poetry, such as the poem "Funny death."

Ginsberg's use of contemporary informal language and specifically American speech rhythms, constitutes another important experimental technique. In this the influence of William Carlos Williams is crucial, though of course there are

vast differences between Williams's and Ginsberg's styles. Ginsberg has repeatedly acknowledged his debt to Williams in this regard (see Géfin, 1984:274), but has also said that what distinguishes his style from that of Williams is his "Hebraic-Melvillian bardic breath" (Ginsberg, 1984b:81) and his "feeling…for a big long cranky statement" (in Clark, 1970:136). Ginsberg's use of everyday colloquial language, slang and expletives, mixed with the incantatory Jewish tradition and declamatory Biblical style (particularly evident in poems such as "Howl" and "America" was a reaction against the New Critical convention of the contained poem and the elitism and intellectualism of high modernism, and reflects early postmodernism's concern with free, open and eclectic forms of expression.

### 3.3 THE INFLUENCE OF MASS CULTURE

While various critics and groups, such as the New Critics, have viewed twentieth-century popular culture as a threat to refined and enlightened minds, one of the main projects of postmodernism has been to undo this dichotomy between works designed for popular consumption and so-called high art (Calinescu, 1987a:285). The Beat ethos of the 1950s and 1960s aimed to bring poetry back to the people, to de-academise it and re-connect it, as performative art, to the community. Beat poetry played a significant role in the development of the American countercultural movement during the 1950s for the precise reason that it was essentially populist, created to draw and involve listeners/readers. This tendency is also obvious in Ginsberg's collaborations with many popular artists, including Bob Dylan, The Clash, Kim Deal (formerly from cult indie band The Pixies) and U2 (Smith, 1996). The populist, open and accessible aesthetic of Beat poetry is reflected in its informal diction, its speech rhythms, its performative nature, its simultaneous personal and social consciousness, its explicit connections to everyday life, and its mix of criticism, humour and idealism.

Apart from the fact that Beat poetry is essentially popular poetry, its connections with popular culture are multifarious. The Beats and their poetry have always been fascinated by popular culture. In poems such as "The blue angel" and "America" the references to mass culture create a largely negative reflection on the commodification of emotion by popular culture. In "The blue angel" Marlene Dietrich becomes a symbol of "mechanical love", a product of a culture in which people allow their "emotional life [to] be run by *Time Magazine*" ("America"). This negative view of popular or consumer culture becomes even clearer in "Death to Van Gogh's ear!":

> Hollywood will rot on the windmills of Eternity
> Hollywood whose movies stick in the throat of
>    God
> Yes Hollywood will get what it deserves
> Time
> Seepage of nerve-gas over the radio.

However, considering the Beats' own populist impulse, it would seem as if it is not the notion of popular culture as such that is criticised, but rather what contemporary American society has made of popular culture. All in all, Beat seems to stand for a popular, widely dispersed culture that embraces positive spiritual values such as honesty, spirituality, love and sensitivity. Positive references to icons of popular culture are often used to express this idea. In "POEM rocket" the speaker refers to Albert Einstein: "O Einstein I should have sent you my flaming mss. / O Einstein I should have pilgrimaged to your white hair!" The same positive reference to Einstein is found in line 23 of "Death to Van Gogh's ear!", coupled with a reference to "immortal" Charlie Chaplin who was "driven from our shores with the rose in his teeth." In "Ignu" Harpo Marx is classified together with (among others) Walt Whitman, Charles Dickens, William Carlos Williams and William S. Burroughs in the category of ignu—"angel in comical form." Figures such as these appear as representations of the imaginative individual countering the deceitfulness, decay and apathy of contemporary mass culture.

Apart from positive and negative associations with popular culture, there are many poems in which there is no real value judgement attached to elements from popular culture where the popular consciousness merely blends with the personal consciousness. Such a poem is "Laughing gas", where the Loony Tunes and Woody Woodpecker make an appearance, Santa Clauses mingle with Christs and Buddhas, while Mickey Mouse cartoons assume apocalyptic overtones. There are clichéd fragments of popular texts: "'It was a dark and gloomy night…'" and "'You take the high road / and I'll take the low'"(l. 79–80), while the Cheshire Cat appears together with Frank Sinatra, and President Eisenhower. All of these references contribute to integrate an awareness of the social and political environment with the personal consciousness.

### 3.4 DELIGHT, PLAY, PERFORMANCE

One of the main distinctions between modernism and post-modernism is the latter's inclusion, exploration and affirmative revaluation of elements of delight, enjoyment, play, chance and performance (Calinescu, 1987a:284; Fiedler, 1992:35). In a way, this dimension of postmodernism is a reaction against the sober, serious and largely negative perception of high modernism, so that postmodernism comes to regard itself as "a joyous rebirth of diversity after the austere negativity of modernism" (Calinescu, 1987b:7). Ginsberg's Beat poetry certainly reconnects art with enjoyment and often introduces an element of playfulness. Some poems rely on an almost whimsical play with words and sounds together with sexual innuendo for their playfulness. The two poems "Fie my fum" and "Pull my daisy" are exemplary. The last three stanzas of the former poem are typical:

> Whore my door,
> Stone my dream,
> Milk my mind
> And make me cream,
>
> Say my oops,
> Ope my shell,
> Roll my bones,
> Ring my bell,
>
> Pope my parts,
> Pop my pot,
> Poke my pap,
> Pit my plum.

In the last stanza, alliteration, together with the playful associative metamorphoses of words, is particularly important. It accounts for the transformation from "pope" to "pop" to "poke" to "pit", running parallel with the transformation from "parts" to "pot" to "pap" to "plum". The changes seem entirely arbitrary, as if selected on the basis of chance association, but sustain the sexual suggestion. The same processes are at work in the previous stanza, but here they seem to work diagonally as well as vertically. In lines 21–22 the transformative and alliterative process works diagonally, so that "say" becomes "shell" and "oops" becomes "ope". In lines 23–24, vertical alliteration is again more important, with "roll" linking with "ring", and "bones" with "bell". The whole stanza (like all the others) is held together by broken rhyme, with the second and fourth lines of each quatrain rhyming.

In other poems the lightheartedness is based less on form, and more on the humour, irony or absurdity of the content. "The archetype poem" and "A typical affair" both deal with failed relationships in a list-hearted and ironically distanced manner. In "Four haiku" the humour is based on the banal and the absurd:

> Looking over my shoulder
> my behind was covered
> with cherry blossoms

"A supermarket in California" has a kind of wistful lightheartedness created by the absurd images and mischievous references to Whitman's "eyeing the grocery boys."

Ginsberg's Beat poetry displays an awareness of the critical power of humour, irony and parody. This is particularly apparent in "America." The social criticism of this poem has already been discussed, but it is important to note that the poem uses humour, irony and parody to present its irreverence and incisive critique. From the crude humour of "Go f——— yourself with your atom bomb" to the coyness of "When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?"; from the wry irony of "My ambition is to be President despite the fact that I'm a Catholic" to the deliberately shocking parody of "That no good. Ugh. Him make Indians learn read. Him need big black niggers", the poem uses various humorous devices to expose the corruption of American society.

A last point to be made here is that the notions of voice and performance are crucial to the Beat ethos. Beat poetry is intended to be read aloud, as Ginsberg's many performances over the years attest (see Asher, 1997; Moore 1997). There are also some poems that are intended as songs (with music included), like "A Western ballad" and "Green Valentine blues." In late years, Ginsberg also set many of his poems to music, some of which have been recorded.

### 3.5 IMMEDIACY, INTENSITY AND IRRATIONALITY

In content as well as expression, Ginsberg's Beat poetry is an attempt to transmit the immediate, be it physical, emotional or spiritual. It is, as Altieri (1996: 775) points out of postmodernist poetry in general, poetry that is "direct habitation, a directly instrumental rather than contemplative, use of language. And its test of value becomes the mobility and intensity immediately made available to the poet . . . " Linked to this is early postmodernist writing's emphasis on the intuitive rather than the analytic. As Fiedler (1992:33) puts it, early postmodernism is often

"apocalyptic, antirational, blatantly romantic and sentimental... distrustful of self-protective irony and too great self-awareness".

Ginsberg's early poems written in the William Carlos Williams imagist style are attempts to reflect the immediacy of the sensory experience, together with its emotional, intellectual and spiritual connotations (see "The bricklayer's lunch hour"). However, it is in poems such as "Howl" that the emphasis Beat writing places on immediacy, intensity and irrationality comes to the foreground most powerfully. The first part of the poem centres on descriptions of individuals searching for meaning in extremes of physical, emotional and spiritual experience. The intense physicality of experience is suggested by descriptions of "starving hysterical naked" people "dragging themselves through the negro streets... looking for an angry fix" and "ecstatic and insatiate" sex. The high incidence of verbs depicting vigorous, intense action and feeling is a technique used to convey this intensity. Furthermore, the construction of the poem places these verbs in a repetitive configuration which has a cumulative effect, heightening the intensity with each repetition. For example, from line 48–65 the following constructions appear at the beginning of each line:

who wept...
who sat...
who coughed...
who scribbled...
who cooked...
who plunged...
who threw...
who cut...
who were burned...
who jumped...
who sang...
who barrelled...
who drove...
who journeyed...
who fell...
who crashed...
who retired...
who demanded...
who threw...

Emotion is also strongly emphasised as a basic and essential constituent of human experience, as in the following lines:

who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and
trembling before the machinery of other skeletons, who
bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in

policecars for committing no crime but their own wild
cooking pederasty and intoxication,
who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off
the roof waving genitals and manuscripts.

Spirituality similarly receives a very strong emphasis. The poem contains many descriptions of spiritual experience, such as: "incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in the mind", "sun and moon and tree vibrations", "visionary indian angels", "telepathy and bop kabbalah" and "supernatural ecstacy."

The immediacy, intensity and irrationality of physical, emotional and spiritual experience are conveyed not only by the long lines and incantatory structure, but also by the surreal juxtaposition of images, which reflects both the immediacy and irrationality of experience and the immediacy and irrationality of the writing process, reflected in the Beat mantra of "first thought, best thought."

The above examples clearly suggest the sense of physical excess and emotional and spiritual intensity that saturates the poem. These emphases are placed in opposition with the negative appraisal of the intellect. The universities and academies with their "scholars of war" are described as being unable to comprehend the full scope of experience, which includes intense beauty, horror, madness, hallucination, fantasy and creative power. The mind is also linked with the evil, death and destruction associated with Moloch, who annihilates all imagination, sensual pleasure, compassionate emotion and creative and spiritual potential.

Against Moloch is pitted the individual who strives to revive the neglected and suppressed dimensions of experience, of necessity involving extremities and intensities of experience that are in conflict with Moloch's sanitation and regimentation of experience. Consequently these individuals are labelled "mad" by societal constrictions. However, the Beats regarded madness in a positive light, along the lines of Antonin Artaud's definition of a lunatic as "a man who has preferred to become what is socially understood as mad rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honor" (quoted in Watson, 1995:115). "Howl" is a tribute to this idea. It is dedicated to the poet Carl Solomon, whom Ginsberg met when they were both in the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute (Watson, 1995:112), and who became a Beat

icon for his defiance of norms and conventions. The poem describes some of Solomon's exploits:

> who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on
>     Dadaism and
> subsequently presented themselves on the gran-
>     ite steps
> of the madhouse with shaven heads and
>     harlequin
> speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous
>     lobotomy,
> and who were given instead the concrete void
>     of insulin
> Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy
> occupational therapy pingpong and amnesia.

In the last section of "Howl", Solomon is apostrophised, using a repetitive incantatory structure starting with "I'm with you", suggesting the speaker's allegiance to Solomon's anti-establishment commitment to the intensity of experience:

> I'm with you in Rockland
> where we wake up electrified out of the coma
>     by our own
> souls' airplanes roaring over the roof they've
>     come to
> drop angelic bombs the hospital illuminates
>     itself
> imaginary walls collapse O skinny legions run
>     outside
> O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal
>     war is
> here O victory forget your underwear we're
>     free.

The immediacy, intensity and irrationality of Ginsberg's Beat poetry are further reflected in the numerous poems dealing with dreams, visionary experiences, hallucinations and spiritual experiences, such as "Back on Times Square, dreaming of Times Square", "Siesta in Xbalba", "Sunflower sutra", "Sather Gate illumination" and "Laughing gas."

### 3.6 INTERTEXTUALITY

The intertextuality of Ginsberg's Beat poetry is part of its reaction against such ideas as the autonomy of the "well-made poem". Ginsberg's Beat poems deliberately place themselves within the flux of discourse—be it artistic, social, political, or from the present or the past. This involves stretching and dissolving the boundaries of the poem, engaging it in a polylogue with other texts, resulting in poems that are intentionally and often excessively polyphonic.

The most explicit instances of intertextuality in Ginsberg's poetry are those that relate to artistic texts, mostly in the forms of literary and visual art. However, as will become apparent in the following discussion, Ginsberg's typical intertextual technique assumes a very idiosyncratic form. Instead of incorporating fragments of other texts into his own poems, or playing with the material of other texts in the form of comment, parody and pastiche, he uses strategically selected words (often proper nouns) which function as the nodes by which elaborate texts are activated and engaged.

In some poems the intertextual links are quite obvious, as in "On reading William Blake's 'Sick rose'." In others the intertextual dynamic is subtler. "Bop lyrics" contains an oblique reference to the poet Christopher Smart in its refrain of "Smart went crazy / Smart went crazy." This is the only reference in the poem, but the mention of the name activates a conglomerate of texts, which then feed into "Bop lyrics" (which then feeds back into these texts again). Smart was an eighteenth-century poet, whose life and poetry show much similarity to Ginsberg's (see Hunsberger, 1984). Both poets had interludes of what was classified as madness, and like Ginsberg's, Smart's poetry is concerned with the visionary and the spiritual, intermingled with details from everyday life. It is also strikingly alike in form to Ginsberg's, with similar long lines and repetitive structures. Consider the following example, from "Jubilate agno" (in Allison *et al.*, 1983:470–471):

> For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry.
> For he is the servant of the living God, duly and
>     daily serving
> him.
> For at the first glance of the glow of God in the
>     East he
> worships in his way.
> For this is done by wreathing his body seven
>     times round with
> elegant quickness.
> For then he leaps up to catch the musk, which is
>     the blessing of
> God upon his prayer.
> For he rolls upon prank to work it in.
> For having done duty and received blessing he
>     begins to
> consider himself.
> For this he performs in ten degrees.
> For first he looks upon his forepaws to see if
>     they are clean.
> For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away
>     there.
> For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the
>     forepaws extended.

Once the reference to Smart has activated the additional text of his poetry and life, "Bop

lyrics" explicitly becomes part of a dialogue with the older text. This is particularly evident in the last stanza (which also intertextually links with the poem "Fie my fum"):

I'm a pot and God's a potter,
And my head's a piece of putty,
Ark my darkness,
Lark my looks,
I'm so lucky to be nutty.

The same process is followed in a poem like "I have increased power" which explicitly establishes multiple intertextual links, involving references to Hemingway, Shakespeare and Carl Solomon. These three references act like hyperlinks, allowing the poem to branch out in many other directions, following (an infinite number of) links to other texts. This denies the idea of the poem as closed artefact and instead places it within the flux of discourse. The poem then becomes not only Ginsberg's musing on death and time, but a point where several texts with related ideas intersect.

"Death to Van Gogh's ear!" and "At Apollinaire's grave" apply this technique more extensively by incorporating multiple references to other artists, so that the poem becomes a multilayered, polyphonic point of intersection. In the latter poem, Ginsberg places himself and his writing in the company of various artists, making the intertextual relationships between texts very explicit. The focus falls on Apollinaire, but the speaker's thoughts while sitting at Apollinaire's grave leads him to invoke the names of many other artists as well: Jacob, Picasso, Rousseau, Tzara, Breton, Cendrars, Vaché, Cocteau, Rigaut, Gide, Whitman and Mayakovsky. In line 11 the idea of intertextual layering is expressed: the speaker wishes to pay homage to Apollinaire by laying "my temporary American Howl on top of his silent Caligramme".

Ginsberg's poetry clearly expresses an awareness that all texts are related and are continually conversing with one another. However, it needs to be emphasised that Ginsberg's version of intertextuality has a very particular slant, having less to do with a self-conscious attempt to foreground textuality and textual relationships, and more with a need to express the impact of certain texts (be they artistic, social or personal) on his poetic development.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This article has presented a reading of selected Beat poems by Allen Ginsberg, proceeding from the assumption that Beat poetry can be regarded as a reaction against the institutionalised, academicised form of high modernism in the USA of the 1950s. In this anti-modernist reaction the beginnings of postmodernism may be found. However, viewing Beat poetry purely as anti-modernist and early postmodernist is, of course, a reified, convenient construction of Beat, which facilitates a discussion of the poetry in terms of its position and role in twentieth-century literary developments. The relationships between Beat, modernism and postmodernism are complex and heterogeneous. For example, while Beat poetry embodies a definite reaction against the intellectualism, elitism and objective style of high modernist poetry, Beat's indebtedness to modernist poetics is also indisputable. Ginsberg himself has acknowledged this, pointing out the influence of writers like William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. While he acknowledges some of Eliot's innovation and influence in terms of the use of language, he states in an interview with Pivano (2001:117) in 1968 that "Eliot never solved the verse form problem for us . . . he never solved the problem of how do you register American speech?" According to Ginsberg, he and his fellow post-World War II poets "came in . . . on the coattails of the classicists, of Pound and Williams and Marianne Moore" (Pivano, 2001:117), who, in their very different ways, worked towards new forms to express a new reality and a new language. Ginsberg describes the process of pursuing the direction that these writers set out in as follows:

. . . I don't know if we added anything basic, because Pound's was the first great discovery of the change. The only thing I think is, *we learnt the lesson*. We were the first generation after them to learn the lesson and begin applying *to our own conditions*, our own provincial speeches, mouths of Denver and New Jersey, our own personal physiologies and personal breathing rhythms, and to our own police state postwar Buck Rogers Newspeak universal conditions of local ecstasy of god-realization.

*(Pivano, 2001)*

Ginsberg therefore suggests the double-sided relationship of Beat with the modernist inheritance. Despite its rejection of high modernist poetics, Beat is also a continuation of the avant-garde dimension of modernism, as Ginsberg points out in the same interview with Pivano (2001:112):

So actually experimental prosody has been the main tradition in American and English poetry for the better part of this last century. And so one may say that it is the "Tradition" that the younger poets in America are working on, it's the "real tradition". And the paradox is that these younger poets who were working in this tradition have been accused of being aesthetic anarchists, of *not working in any "tradition" at all*. Unfair! Ignorant accusation!

Ginsberg therefore seems to suggest that Beat poetry is best regarded as both a reaction against modernism and a continuation, reclaiming and reinterpretation of the avant-garde ideals of modernism—in which the origins of postmodernism is to be found. In this several other research possibilities are to be found. For example, an investigation of Beat poetry's continuities with the modernist avant-garde (in terms of, for example, imagism and surrealism) would also make a productive and useful contribution to the continuing discourse surrounding the literary-historical dimension of the Beat movement.

There are also several research possibilities relating to the relationship between Beat poetry and South African poetry. There is a direct link between Beat poetry and South African English poetry in the person of Beat poet Sinclair Beiles, who, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, collaborated with William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin in developing the cut-up technique. Beiles published a number of collections of plays and poetry, including *A South African abroad* (Beiles, 1991). While there has been some interest in Beiles's work (see Finlay, 1997), opportunities for research remain largely unexplored. In the broader South African literary context, Beat influences may be seen in a number of contemporary South African poets' writing (especially Afrikaans poets; see Kruger, 2006), which open additional avenues for further research.

**Source:** Haidee Kruger, "'Confessing Out the Soul to Conform to the Rhythm of Thought': A Reading of Allen Ginsberg's Beat Poetry," in *Literator*, Vol. 28, No. 1, April 2007, pp. 23–46.

## Stephen Davenport

*In the following essay, Davenport explores sexuality and gender within the Beat movement.*

On a lovely autumn day in 1987, I walked into the office of an English professor I had taken a course with the year before, one of the

> YET, IF WE WANT TO WRITE A STORY OF CULTURAL LIBERATION IN POSTWAR AMERICA, CULMINATING IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, THE GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT, THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, AS WELL AS THE MEN'S MOVEMENT, WE WOULD DO WELL TO BEGIN WITH THE BEATS."

most influential and widely quoted literary historians in the country, the first woman to be appointed an editor for either of the major Norton anthologies, in her case *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, an Americanist who, despite the title of her contentious essay "The Madwoman and Her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Theory," was at that point doing what she had always been doing: important feminist work. Five years later, much of that work— "The Madwoman" and thirteen of her other most important essays—would be collected and published under the title *Feminism and American Literary History*.

On that lovely autumn day, there in her spacious office—she was then the Director of the School of Humanities—I asked her if she would direct my dissertation. "What's it going to be about?" she asked. "Jack Kerouac," I ventured. She looked at me. I looked at me, too. I don't remember much about the short conversation that ensued except that she insisted upon my dissertation not becoming, as she put it, "some big macho trip."

Fast-forward to a less lovely March afternoon in 1994. Though I had a full-time, albeit non-tenure-track, job at a nearby college, I was driving the same piano truck I had been driving since I had begun my Kerouac project, moving the same pianos with the same guys in the same way for the same few extra dollars. Aware that I had been recently divorced, one of those same guys, the only one not to be completing or defending a dissertation or turning one into a book and whining about each or all of those steps, asked me how things were going. I told him I was looking forward to a road trip north to deliver a paper at a conference. "What's it

about?" he asked. "It's for AMSA, the American Men's Studies Association, and it's called "'Putting My Queer Shoulder to the Wheel'": The Beat Reinscription of Cultural and Literary Diversity.'" "Hey," he cautioned me, "that sounds politically incorrect on two counts." An alumnus of the same university laboratory high school that has produced more than one Nobel Prize winner and exactly one George Will, Ken seized the opportunity. "First," he said, "you're not gay. And, second, that sounds like a deeply reactionary group." He looked at me. I looked at my hands at ten and two on the wheel.

Autobiographical hors d'oeuvres like the two served above are common enough. They entertain; they instruct. They build community; they serve as confession. In the act of baring ourselves—or getting, as Beat poet Allen Ginsberg would say, "naked"—we simultaneously proclaim our differences and reveal our similarities. If Ginsberg were to walk into an AMSA conference session and repeat his celebrated gesture of disrobing in public and those of us attending the session were to follow suit by unsuiting, we would see simple theme and variation at work. If we chose instead to sit fully clothed in a circle and tell our stories, reveal ourselves for good and bad, in all our ugly beauty, we would be practicing the same "nakedness" that Ginsberg practiced and promoted.

Aside from everything else they might bare about me, the two stories that open this essay— the first about an influential mentor who happens to be a woman, the second about a concerned friend who happens to be a man—suggest an uneasiness about the way in which I position myself in relation not just to the Beat movement that Kerouac and Ginsberg served as figureheads, but also to the men's movement. The larger story that this essay builds is a cautionary tale about the liberation of post-WWII America from the constrictions of what Paul Goodman referred to at the time as "the Organized System." As with any American story about the human desire for self-expression in the face of conformity—or, at its most basic, life in the face of death—the identification of a primary liberator or liberating force is as historically reductive as it is culturally familiar.

Yet, if we want to write a story of cultural liberation in postwar America, culminating in the civil rights movement, the gay rights movement, the women's movement, as well as the men's movement, we would do well to begin with the Beats, who "act[ed] out a critique of the organized system that everybody in some sense agree[d] with." The Beat critique provided, according to John Tytell "the confirmation that America was suffering a collective nervous breakdown in the fifties, and that a new nervous system was a prerequisite to perception." The rewiring of America called for, as it usually does, a redefinition of what it means to be American. The Beats, to their credit, were active agents in that rewiring, no matter how sloppy the job in its early stages. This essay describes the job the Beat movement—arguably, postwar America's first men's movement—did and the bits of rewiring it left undone for later movements.

In the Beat aesthetic, the body and the word are inseparable. Among the "best minds" of Ginsberg's generation, as he announced on that most famous of Beat nights, the October 13, 1955, Six Gallery poetry reading of "Howl," were those "who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof waving genitals and manuscripts" (line 35). "'Open form,'" he later said, "meant 'open mind.'" In a short how-to called "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," Jack Kerouac argued for the same kind of openness, a nakedness he associated with birthing imagery:

> [W]rite outwards swimming in sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion...Never afterthink to "improve" or defray impressions, as, the best writing is always the most painful personal wrungout tossed from cradle warm protective mind...always honest,...spontaneous, "confessional" interesting, because not "crafted."

In theory, then, "afterthinking" or "crafting" is a life-denying impulse or act. In closing form, we close minds; in discouraging diversity, we encourage dishonesty; in limiting variation, we impoverish theme; in differentiating between genitals and manuscripts or the body and the word, we weaken our creative and procreative capacity. We kill, in other words, the potential in art, in life, in our individual and communal selves when we separate the body and the word or, put differently, the material and the spiritual.

Autobiography and spontaneity, body and word, genitals and manuscripts—all of these elements are central to the Beat aesthetic. One evening in 1955, as Kerouac waited for him, Ginsberg grabbed a pencil and in twenty minutes turned an experience he had shared with

Kerouac earlier that day into a now often anthologized poem called "Sunflower Sutra." If the story is true, Ginsberg composed the poem at a rate of more than one word every other second for twelve hundred seconds. Even if the story is only partly true, the final line is a powerful example of the Beat aesthetic:

> We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we're all golden sunflowers inside, blessed by our own seed & hairy naked accomplishment-bodies growing into mad black formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening sit-down visions.

Spontaneously composed autobiographical art as material as it is spiritual. In short, body and word.

Perhaps the strongest, clearest expression of our individual and communal need to keep body and word linked lies in our autobiographical impulse, our drive to reinvent ourselves, our "hairy naked accomplishment-bodies," with each story we tell. As both of the recent Jungian best sellers—Robert Bly's (1990) *Iron John: A Book about Men* and Clarissa Pinkola Estés' (1992) *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*—demonstrate, the need to tell such stories crosses gender lines. And as the Murphy Brown episode in which a group of men struggle unsuccessfully to keep Murphy from entering their circle and seizing their talking-stick reminds us, men and women will and do cross artificially imposed gender lines regardless of interference.

Twenty-three years ago, the first hardcover textbook devoted to feminist literary criticism, Susan Koppleman Cornillon's (1972) *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, was published. A collection of essays, it included one by Florence Howe, who had just finished heading up the Modern Language Association's 1969–1971 Commission on Women and would soon become MLA's president. Making one of feminism's most important arguments—that no account, critical or literary, is ever disinterested—Howe called on autobiography as a starting point: "I begin with autobiography because it is there, in our consciousness about our own lives, that the connection between feminism and literature begins." It is also there—in autobiography—that masculinity and literature connect.

Certainly both of the two major publishing events in Beat history, Ginsberg's (1956) *Howl and Other Poems* and Kerouac's (1957) *On the Road*, stressed just that: that the line between life and literature is autobiography. In foregrounding "our consciousness about our own lives," the Beats walked that line, one that led naturally to what is arguably their primary cultural contribution: their interest in and promotion of diversity. Arguably the best summation of the Beats' cultural critique is the close of Ginsberg's (1956) "America":

> I'd better get right down to the job.
> It's true I don't want to join the Army or turn lathes in precision parts factories, I'm near-sighted and psychopathic anyway.
> America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.

Fearing a postwar encroachment of homogeneity, these "naked angels," as John Tytell called them, consistently celebrated heterogeneity. They sent out for instance, an early call for multiculturalism, they decried the loss of regional diversity, and they publicly approved of homosexuality long before Stonewall. Everyone's "hairy naked accomplishment-body" needed to be blessed: everyone's story needed to be reinscribed in the "hairy naked accomplishment-body" of America itself if America was to realize its own "golden sunflower" by living up to its promise as the great social experiment of modern times. The "queer shoulder" of Ginsberg's challenge began autobiographically with Ginsberg himself, a homosexual, Jewish, Russian-American child of a Socialist father and a Communist mother, and if he was not really "psychopathic," he certainly did a turn in the Columbian Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute. The less literal "shoulder" Ginsberg wanted admitted to the "wheel" was the Demonized Other, the Unassimilated American. Kerouac's primary idea of the Other was what he called the "fellaheen" (i.e., Mexicans, Native Americans, and African Americans); William Burroughs' list began with petty thieves and drug addicts.

According to Burroughs, the third of the three major Beat figures, America was in fact ready for a sea change:

> Once started, the Beat movement had a momentum of its own and a world-wide impact. . . . The Beat literary movement came at exactly the right time and said something that millions of people of all nationalities all over the world were waiting to hear. You can't tell anybody anything he doesn't know already. The alienation, the restlessness, the dissatisfaction

were already there waiting when Kerouac pointed out the road.

> Artists to my mind are the real architects of change.... Art exerts a profound influence on the style of life, the mode, range and direction of perception.... Certainly *On the Road* performed that function in 1957 to an extraordinary extent. There's no doubt that we're living in a freer America as a result of the Beat literary movement, which is an important part of the larger picture of cultural and political change in this country during the last forty years, when a four letter word couldn't appear on the printed page, and minority rights were ridiculous.

Women's rights were also "ridiculous," but they get no mention here. That should come as no surprise, considering Burroughs' very public stance as a misogynist. In an interview published in 1974, Burroughs blames Western dualism on the creation of women: "I think they were a basic mistake and the whole dualistic universe evolved from this error." If women are the result of a key creational error, they are also, as Burroughs adds, at the root of a national problem: "America is a matriarchal, white supremacist country. There seems to be a definite link between matriarchy and white supremacy." For Burroughs, then, woman is the Ultimate Other, both Demonized and Demonizing, for she carries with her into the universe the basic concept of difference and perpetuates it in America with her role in race relations. She is, in other words, the Other who (m)others Others, a perfect queer-shoulder machine.

But what of the Beat movement in general? Were women to be included in the roll call of Others who might conceivably put their "queer" shoulders to the wheel? Were their "hairy naked accomplishment-bodies," their stories, their body and word to be included in the rewiring of America that the Beat critique called for?

The issue of voice is a central one in Joyce Johnson's (1983/1984) *Minor Characters: The Romantic Odyssey of a Woman in the Beat Generation*, winner of the 1984 National Book Critics Circle Award. Kerouac's girlfriend at the time *On the Road* was published and a witness to the public clamor that resulted, Johnson closes *Minor Characters* with the image of herself at "twenty-two, with her hair hanging below her shoulders, all in black like Masha in *The Seagull*—black stockings, black skirt, black sweater." Johnson's happy, pleased to be seated "at the table in the exact center of the universe,

that midnight place where so much is converging, the only place . . . that's alive." Johnson sees, however, that

> as a female, she is not quite part of this convergence. A fact she ignores, sitting by in her excitement as the voices of the men, always the men, passionately rise and fall and their beer glasses collect and the smoke of their cigarettes rises toward the ceiling and the dead culture is surely being wakened. Merely being here, she tells herself, is enough.

And at that time, it is.

Aware of the marginalization of women in Beat culture, literary historian Michael Davidson argues that

> The Beats offered a new complex set of possible roles for males that, even if they subordinated women, at least offered an alternative to the consumerist ideology of sexuality projected by the *Playboy* magazine stereotype of heterosexuality and to the *Saturday Evening Post* version of the nuclear family.

The Beats, then, offered men a way out of the organized system, and though they were guilty of replicating "square" culture's subordination of women, they offered women a way out, too. For many women, Beat culture was preferable to a life in the suburbs.

Even so, replication of this sort is especially disheartening when it occurs within a subculture that purports to be egalitarian and liberationist by nature. Consider, for instance, the goals of the bohemian occupants of Greenwich Village thirty to forty years earlier:

1. The idea of salvation by the child . . .
2. The idea of self-expression . . .
3. The idea of paganism . . .
4. The idea of living for the moment . . .
5. The idea of liberty . . .
6. The idea of female equality . . .
7. The idea of psychological adjustment . . .
8. The idea of changing place . . .

That the Beats adhered to all but one of these tenets bespeaks their bohemian roots and aspirations; that their "idea of liberty" did not extend equally to women points to their investment in square, or patriarchal, conventions. Looking back at Beat culture in a June 1989 *Village Voice* article, feminist writer and activist Alix Kates Shulman decries the conspicuous absence of the Emma Goldmans and Isadora Duncans of an earlier generation of bohemians: "[B]y the time the Beats were ascendant, the postwar renewal of mandatory domesticity,

sexual repression, and gender rigidity had so routed feminism that it lapsed even in bohemia."

During the height of public interest in Beats and beatniks, the place of women in Beat culture was publicized by detractors and exponents alike. In 1959, *Life* attacked Beat males on a number of grounds, one of which was their financial dependence on women. The year before, *Playboy* had also attacked the Beats. If Beat women did all the work at home and in the marketplace to support their men, they also, according to *Playboy*, did all the work in bed: "When the hipster makes it with a girl, he avoids admitting that he likes her. He keeps cool. He asks her to do the work, and his ambition is to think about nothing, zero, strictly from nada-ville, while she plays bouncy-bouncy on him." In both versions, the Beat male offends. In the *Life* version, the problem is work; in the *Playboy*, sex. In neither case, the square nor the hip, is the Beat rebel masculine enough.

Even sympathetic accounts like Lawrence Lipton's (1959) *The Holy Barbarians* and Paul Goodman's (1960) *Growing Up Absurd* wondered aloud why women would be interested in a lifestyle that seemed so obviously to subordinate them. Lipton asked, "What are they like, these women of the beat generation pads? Where do they come from, how do they get here? And why?" Goodman suggested that the Beats might be even more exclusionist than their "square" counterparts: "What is in it for the women who accompany the Beats? The characteristic Beat culture, unlike the American standard of living, is essentially for men, indeed for very young men who are 'searching.'"

The typical woman in a Beat narrative, whether a memoir or a novel, lives in the margin of a margin. Consider, for instance, the following description by Joyce Johnson, a woman who, like her famous boyfriend, wanted to be a writer. She knew that margin all too well:

> The whole Beat scene had very little to do with the participation of women as artists themselves. The real communication was going on between the men, and the women were there as onlookers. Their old ladies. You kept your mouth shut, and if you were intelligent and interested in things you might pick up what you could. It was a very masculine aesthetic.

As Beat artists, the men were marginalized figures, their shoulders "queer," their status "other." As "onlookers" of the overlooked, their "old ladies" were doubly marginalized.

Neither ladies nor artists in their own right, they were at that point too wild for some, not wild enough for others. The rewiring of America had begun, though, and the Beat convergence of body and word around a "table in the exact center of the universe" was instrumental in bringing "the dead culture" back to life. If the Joyce Johnsons of Beat culture suffered because they were women, they chose to do so because suburbia offered the same job without the benefits.

Like the American social experiment that can boast of many successes, so can the Beat experiment. Burroughs may be right when he claims, "There's no doubt that we're living in a freer America as a result of the Beat literary movement." Beats like Ginsberg and Kerouac certainly redefined both the wheel and the shoulder that would make it turn. But the embodied manuscripts they imagined waving seditiously from rooftops were certainly genitally male, the pen as phallus as pen, that old inky sword ripping a highly masculine signature across the body and mind of America. At their worst as a cultural agent, they suffered a failure of the imagination, reverting to old patterns. As Catharine R. Stimpson so ably puts it: "The Beats often feminized invective to scorn the fag. Such a practice is but one mark of a cultural boundary they could rarely cross: a traditional construction of the female, and of the feminine." The Beat movement was, in many ways, what Nina Baym, my dissertation director, did not want to have to deal with: "some big macho trip."

At their best, the Beats forced a national dialogue about alternative discourse and community, and, in their unofficial credo that "open form" means "open mind," they helped America realize what it already knew: that there's room at the wheel for everyone's word and hairy naked accomplishment-body, everyone's story and shoulder, regardless of whether everyone's genitals can wave like manuscripts from rooftops. Did the Beats realize that at the time? Apparently not, but the failure of feminism in Beat culture is the failure of feminism in 1950s' America. Twentieth-century bohemian enclaves, regardless of the decade, have always depended on what Davidson calls "elaborate pecking orders and cult loyalties", and gender has always, regardless of the enclave, produced margins into which women have had to write themselves.

In the twentieth-century narrative of bohemian involvement in women's rights, the Beats are not well positioned historically. Without the advantage of the feminist networks and forums that had some say in European and American bohemian communities prior to World War II, the Beat project has come to constitute, for many, a movement of men for men. Though it sought to rewire America through confrontational, confessional art and liberationist politics, its shortsightedness left key bits of the job undone.

Given historical reminders like this one, can today's men's movement avoid what my piano-moving buddy Ken Stratton suspects is a reactionary impulse and remember that no account, whether literary or critical, is ever disinterested is ever free of autobiography, is ever anything but the story of someone's Other as it is simultaneously the story of everyone's shoulder positioning itself at the wheel? The men's movement, like the women's movement out of which and against which it has grown, is a set of competing—and, in some cases, hostile—practices (e.g., profeminist, mythopoetic, men's rights). Thus, it is not so much a movement as it is a narrative of competing stories, of hairy naked accomplishment-bodies born in autobiography and lived in consciousness and reinvention. The degree to which the men's movement moves at all depends upon the wheel and how many competing "queer shoulders," how much diversity, it permits and how much we have learned, or unlearned, from past movements.

**Source:** Stephen Davenport, "Queer Shoulders to the Wheel: Beat Movement as Men's Movement," in *Journal of Men's Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4, May 1995, pp. 297–307.

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This book is regarded as one of the most honest portrayals of both Kerouac and the Beats in general. Here, Charters thoroughly chronicles the life of the man that some consider "king" of the Beats. In the final section of the book, her description of a visit she made to Kerouac's home in 1966 and the condition in which she found Kerouac himself implies anything but royalty.

Evans, Mike, *The Beats: From Kerouac to Kesey, an Illustrated Journey Through the Beat Generation*, Running Press, 2007.
Evans's book includes over 200 photographs and book covers of the writers who defined the Beat Generation. This visual guide to the Beat Generation was published to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Kerouac's *On the Road*.

Knight, Brenda, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution*, Conari Press, 1996.
This book profiles forty members of the Beat Generation who are often overlooked—the women of the movement. Although their

exploits and accomplishments are not as well publicized as those of their male counterparts are, female Beats wrote poetry, took drugs, went on the road, listened to jazz, and lived on the fringe just as the men did. This insightful book includes fascinating biographies, more than fifty rare photos, and excerpts of the original writings of Beat women.

Miles, Barry, *Ginsberg: A Biography*, Simon and Schuster, 1989.
Miles, a friend of Ginsberg, does an excellent job of portraying his subject as both the legendary Beat poet and as an average man in everyday life. This book provides a solid biography of Ginsberg and explores the effect of the Beat Movement on American culture and mindset and how it anticipated the more radical times of the 1960s.

Morgan, Ted, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*, Henry Holt, 1988.
This biography of Burroughs is well written. The biographer's success derives from the thoroughness of his research that provides details on such subtopics, as a history of Los Alamos, Texas, where Burroughs attended school. *Literary Outlaw* provides a fair and provocative look at a Beat icon whose decadent life makes for fascinating reading.

# Bildungsroman

Bildungsroman is the name affixed to those novels that concentrate on the development or education of a central character. German in origin, "bildungs" means formation, and "roman" means novel. Although *The History of Agathon*, written by Christoph Martin Wieland in 1766–1767, may be the first known example, it was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, written in 1795, that took the form from philosophical to personal development and gave celebrity to the genre.

More than any other type of novel, the Bildungsroman intends to lead the reader to greater personal enrichment as the protagonist journeys from youth to psychological or emotional maturity. Traditionally, this growth occurs according to a pattern: the sensitive, intelligent protagonist leaves home, undergoes stages of conflict and growth, is tested by crises and love affairs, then finally finds the best place to use his/her unique talents. Sometimes the protagonist returns home to show how well things turned out. Some Bildungsromans end with the death of the hero, leaving the promise of his life unfulfilled. Traditionally, English novelists complicate the protagonist's battle to establish an individual identity with conflicts from outside the self. German novelists typically concentrate on the internal struggle of the hero. The protagonist's adventures can be seen as a quest for the meaning of life or as a vehicle for the author's social and moral opinions as demonstrated through the protagonist.
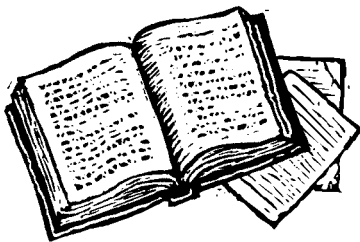
The Bildungsroman was especially popular until 1860. Its German affiliation, however, caused anti-German sentiment during the world wars to contribute to the demise of its influence, along with the emergence of a multitude of modern experiments in novel writing. Nonetheless, James Joyce wrote his Bildungsroman, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, in 1916, and the genre has continued to be adopted, with distinguishing variations, by writers of many nationalities.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855)

Charlotte Brontë was born in Yorkshire, England, on April 21, 1816, the third of six children. Her two older sisters died in childhood, and Brontë became very close to her remaining younger siblings, brother Branwell and sisters Emily and Anne. In 1846, Brontë and her sisters published a collection of poetry under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, and although the collection was not well received by critics and readers, the three women continued to write. By 1849, Brontë had lost her three beloved siblings—Branwell from complications of heavy drinking, and Emily and Anne to tuberculosis. Her writing career, however, was taking off with the success of *Jane Eyre* (1847), an excellent example of the female Bildungsroman. She married Arthur Bell Nichols, her father's curate, in June 1854 and died less than a year later, on March 31, 1855, either from tuberculosis or from complications caused by pregnancy.

### Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

One of the greatest British writers of all time, Charles Dickens was a Victorian novelist who chose the Bildungsroman form for at least two of his most famous works: *David Copperfield* (1849–1850) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861). Born in Portsmouth, England, on February 7, 1812, Dickens grew up in London. His father was a navy clerk who went to debtors' prison when Dickens was twelve. Forced to go to work in a shoe dye factory, Dickens lived alone in fear and shame. These feelings led to the creation of his many orphan characters and his sympathy for the plight of the working class that made him the first great urban novelist. Although he was able to return to school and eventually clerked in a law firm, Dickens found
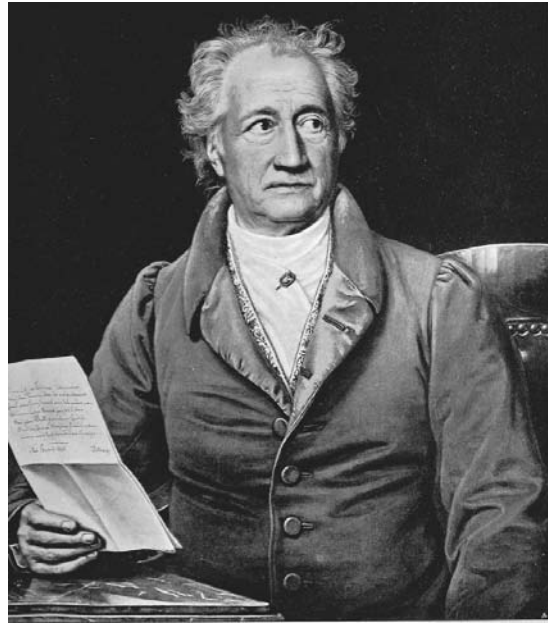


*Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe* (*Time & Life Pictures / Mansell / Getty Images*)

his first success as a journalist and comic writer of the *Pickwick Papers* (1836–1837). However, his deep social concerns found expression in a rich intensity and variety in his later works. By the time of his death from a paralytic stroke at age 58 on June 9, 1870, Dickens had written many novels, including *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

### Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)

Born on August 28, 1749, in Frankfurt, Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe became one of Europe's most well-known and versatile writers. Noted for his lyrical poetry, his influential novels, and his dramatic poem *Faust*, Goethe also made substantial contributions in the fields of biology, music, and philosophy. He wrote the first comprehensive history of science. In 1795, he published *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, a novel that is considered a prime example of the Bildungsroman. In addition, Goethe profoundly affected the growth of literary Romanticism and introduced the novella. He died in Weimar on March 22, 1832, at the age of eighty-two.

### James Joyce (1882–1941)

As a poet and novelist, James Joyce brought marked change to modern literature. Born in

Dublin, Ireland, on February 2, 1882, Joyce moved frequently as a child because of his father's drinking and financial difficulties. Joyce's classic Künstlerroman (novel of an artist's development), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, portrays a hero who is a character blend of Joyce and his father. Despite the Joyce family situation, the novelist received a good education at a Jesuit school. But like his hero in *A Portrait*, Joyce later rejected religion, family, and his home country, living most of his life on the European continent. However, he wrote almost exclusively about Dublin. Joyce felt that being an artist required exile to protect oneself from sentimental involvements and that he could not write about Dublin with integrity and objectivity unless he went away. *A Portrait* established the modern concept of the artist as a bohemian who rejects middle-class values. It also set the example for a number of modern Irish Bildungsromans in which heroes achieve their quest when they come to believe that alienation from society, not finding one's place in the social order, is the mark of maturity. Joyce died in Zurich on January 13, 1941, when he was only 59fifty-nine years old, but his innovations in literary organization and style, particularly his use of stream-of-consciousness technique, secured his unique place in the development of the novel.

### Thomas Mann (1875–1955)

Considered the leading German novelist of the twentieth century, Thomas Mann was born in northern Germany on June 6, 1875. However, after 1933, he lived in either Switzerland or the United States because of his opposition to the Nazis. By then he had already won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929. His masterpiece, *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*), was written in 1924 and is a Bildungsroman, as is a later work, *Doctor Faustus* (1947). The overall theme of Mann's works is the breakdown of civilization. Mann presents this theme in *The Magic Mountain* through a story about the patients in a Swiss sanatorium. *Doctor Faustus* is a Künstlerroman in which the protagonist is an artist who makes a pact with the devil to achieve creative vitality. The story ends tragically and parallels Germany's pact with Hitler to restore national vitality that ends in destruction. Mann died of phlebitis near Zurich on August 12, 1955.

### Sylvia Plath (1932–1963)

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on October 27, 1932. She lost her father shortly after her eighth birthday, an event and a relationship that proved a strong influence in her life and work. Plath showed early interest in writing, keeping a journal beginning at the age of 11. Plath was an ambitious poet but suffered from depression and suicidal tendencies. After graduating from Smith College in 1955, Plath attended Cambridge University on a Fulbright scholarship. At Cambridge, Plath met poet Ted Hughes and the two were married in 1956. Their relationship was tumultuous, as documented in their poetry and letters. They had two children together before separating in late 1962. A few months later, on February 11, 1963, Plath committed suicide. Although she had published only a handful of books during her lifetime, Hughes—who was still legally Plath's husband—edited and posthumously published Plath's large amount of previously unpublished poetry and letters. She is known as a poet of the Confessional generation. Her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* is a Bildungsroman, although it does not closely follow all of the usual Bildungsroman conventions.

### Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Mark Twain is known as one of America's leading realists, native humorists, and local colorists. He was a master in the use of folklore, psychological realism, and dialects. Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835, he died of heart disease in the city he had long made his home, Hartford, Connecticut, on April 21, 1910. Twain produced not one but several classics, including what some believe to be the greatest American novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), a picaresque and satirical Bildungsroman. Probably more than any other writer, Mark Twain provided a uniquely American, and usually comic, portrayal of the Bildungsroman hero. Sadly, Twain's satire became bitter as his personal tragedies and financial reverses led to the disillusionment and depression that cloud his later writings.

### Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813)

Whenever the Bildungsroman is discussed, Christoph Martin Wieland, who was born in Germany on September 5, 1733, is mentioned as the writer of *The History of Agathon*, the precursor novel to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. A translator whose work reflects the Enlightenment, the early eighteenth-century period also known as the Age of Reason, and

whose style shows rococo influences, Wieland translated twenty-two plays by Shakespeare into German (1762–1766) and also translated the classical writings of Horace and Lucian. Many of Wieland's own writings are set in Greece, including his *Die Geschichte des Agathon* (1766–1767, translated into English as *The History of Agathon* [1773]). In an early instance of publishing German literary periodicals, Wieland edited the journal *Der deutsche Merkur* (*The German Mercury*). Wieland died on January 21, 1813.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published in 1884 in England and Canada and in the United States a few months later, in 1885. Like the Bildungsroman hero, Huck leaves home to find an independent life, has a surrogate father in Jim, is in conflict with his society, and reaches maturity when he repents his treatment of Jim and puts fairness and friendship over expected behavior.

Though considered by some to be a masterpiece of American literature, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* initially scandalized reviewers and parents who thought it would corrupt young children with its depiction of a hero who lies, steals, and uses coarse language. In the last half of the twentieth century, the condemnation of the book continued on the grounds that its portrayal of Jim and use of the word "nigger" are racist. While some justify the book as a documentation of the racial notions prevalent at the time of its writing, the novel continues to appear on some lists of books banned in schools across the United States.

### The Bell Jar

Although Sylvia Plath is well known as a poet, her autobiographical Bildungsroman is one of the best-known works in modern American literature. Published in 1963, *The Bell Jar* tells the story of Esther Greenwood, a student editor on an internship at a women's magazine in New York City. It follows the standard Bildungsroman pattern of the young person who goes to the big city to pursue professional aspirations. But there is no traditional happy ending. The psychological anguish of Plath's later poetry is related to the confessional revelations of *The*

*Bell Jar*, in which she describes the events that led to her nervous breakdown. One month after the English publication of this book in 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, Plath committed suicide. The novel was published in England under Plath's name in 1966 and in the United States in 1971.

### Great Expectations

*Great Expectations*, published serially in 1860 and 1861 by Charles Dickens, follows the tradition of the Bildungsroman. The young protagonist, Pip, leaves his rural home to become a gentleman and win the girl of his dreams. While most Bildungsroman heroes have to make their own way, Pip has a mysterious benefactor who provides the wealth that Pip thinks will make him happy. However, in the course of finding his true values, Pip comes to realizes that happiness comes not from money but from the appreciation of good friends, regardless of their social status, and from personal integrity. This novel has become an all-time classic that is still required reading in many high school curricula.

### Invisible Man

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* was published in 1952 and won the 1953 National Book Award. Ellison's first novel, it expresses in metaphorical language the Bildungsroman theme of searching for one's identity. The nameless black protagonist, looking for his identity, comes to the realization that he has been living the roles prescribed for him by white society. But once he steps outside the assigned sphere, he becomes "invisible" to a dominant culture that does not recognize his individuality. Employing symbols of the traditions of the frontier, the black community, and music, *Invisible Man* achieved international fame and remains one of the most important American works of the twentieth century.

### Jane Eyre

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847, is one of the first Bildungsromans with a female protagonist. In this Victorian English novel, the female hero is constrained by social expectations determined by gender-specific beliefs. At age ten, Jane is sent to residential school where she acquires skills she later uses as a governess and a village schoolteacher. In its use of natural elements and the supernatural, the novel is both romantic and Gothic. *Jane Eyre* is a Bildungsroman in that it traces Jane's development

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- Image Entertainment produced James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1979 and released it on video in 2000. It starred Bosco Hogan and Sir John Gielgud.

- *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can also be found on a Blackstone Audiobooks recording made in 1995 and read by Frederick Davidson. It is ten hours long.

- There are several film versions of *Jane Eyre*. A recent A & E Entertainment adaptation of the Charlotte Brontë book, starring Samantha Morton and Ciaran Hinds, was released on video in 1998. The 1944 production from Twentieth Century Fox starred Orson Welles, Joan Fontaine, and Margaret O'Brien and departed significantly from the novel.

- *Jane Eyre* is also available as an audio book from Audiobooks.com. Read by Maureen O'Brien, it is over twenty-one hours long. Another recording, done by Blackstone Audiobooks in 1994, is nineteen hours long and is read by Nadia May.

- Blackstone Audiobooks produced *Jude the Obscure* in 1997. Read by Frederick Davidson, it is sixteen hours long.

- Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* was recorded as an unabridged audio book in 2001 by Audiobooks.com. It is six hours in length and read by Joe Morton.

- One of many versions of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* was produced in 1999 by WGBH Boston Video. It is three hours long on a two-tape set and stars Ioan Gruufudd, Justine Waddell, and Charlotte Rampling.

- *Great Expectations* is also available as an audio book from a several distributors. Audible.com has a 1987 production, narrated by Frank Muller, which runs for sixteen hours and forty minutes. Blackstone Audiobooks carries a nineteen-hour, thirty-minute version read by Frederick Davidson.

- The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) produced a four-part miniseries of Brontës *Jane Eyre* in 2007. Directed by Susanna White, it stars Ruth Wilson as Jane and Toby Stephens as Rochester. This miniseries was released on DVD by Masterpiece Theater in 2007.

- A biographical film about Plath's life, *Sylvia* was released in 2003, starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Daniel Craig and directed by Christine Jeffs. Frieda Hughes, daughter of Plath and Hughes, famously denounced the film and its makers, claiming that they only sought to profit from her mother's death. As of 2008, *Sylvia* was available on DVD from Universal Studios.

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from a dependent child to a mature and independent woman. The novel dramatizes the love affair between Jane and Edward Rochester, who is married at the time they meet. Rochester keeps his insane wife sequestered in his estate, and after she dies, he and Jane marry. Charlotte Brontë was attracted to the married headmaster of the school in Brussels where she went to study French and to teach in 1842–1843. This unhappy experience, along with the author's memories of early school years at Cowan's

Bridge, contributed autobiographical elements to *Jane Eyre*, her first published work of fiction, which was an immediate success.

## Jude the Obscure

Thomas Hardy introduced into Victorian literature the concept of fatalism. This belief assumes that humans are subject to arbitrary and random forces, such as chance and timing, which shape their destinies. *Jude the Obscure*, published in 1895, received widespread criticism because it

*Mark Twain* (*AP Images*)

attacks the Anglican Church, the elitist admissions policies of Oxford University (called Christminster in the novel), and the rigid laws regarding marriage. As a Bildungsroman, the maturation story follows Jude Fawley's route to destruction from what Hardy called in his preface "the tragedy of unfulfilled aims." Fawley, by trade a stonemason, has spiritual and intellectual ambitions that are thwarted by his exclusion from the university and his disastrous involvement with two women, the vulgar Arabella and the intellectual Sue. He marries the first and has one child with her; he does not marry the second, and he has two children by her. Tragedy overwhelms Jude when his oldest child kills the younger ones and hangs himself. Jude himself dies miserably, an alcoholic.

## Of Human Bondage

Like so many autobiographical Bildungsromans, *Of Human Bondage* (1915) draws from the unhappy early years of its author, W. Somerset Maugham. A popular twentieth-century English novelist, Maugham was a physician who abandoned medicine to write plays and novels. The hero in Maugham's most famous novel is a medical student with a clubfoot who falls in love with a promiscuous Cockney

waitress. A still-admired The famous 1935 film version of this obsessive and tragic love affair starred Bette Davis and Leslie Howard.

## A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

James Joyce's masterpiece is *Ulysses*, but his autobiographical Bildungsroman is *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, published in 1916. When Joyce's hero Stephen Dedalus grows up, he says farewell to his home country and to his family and religion as well. The *Norton Anthology of English Literature* describes this novel as portraying "the parallel movement toward art and toward exile." This novel of rebellion insists that the artist is an outcast and that his alienation is a necessary component of his being creative.

## Sons and Lovers

Another autobiographical Bildungsroman, *Sons and Lovers* was D. H. Lawrence's third and most notable novel. Published in 1913, it is the coming-of-age story of Paul Morel, the son of a coal miner father and a controlling and ambitious mother who gives up on finding any fulfillment in her marriage. She turns her possessive attention to her children, especially Paul. The resulting struggle for sexual power and individual identity causes Paul difficulties in finding his professional place and establishing a healthy relationship with a woman his own age. This novel dramatizes some of the psychological points Freud explored under the label Oedipus complex.

## Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship

Published in 1795 by Wolfgang von Goethe as *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, this prototype of the Bildungsroman was translated into English by Thomas Carlyle in 1824. With this book, Goethe established the Bildungsroman as a novel of personal rather than philosophical development for the main character. His hero wanders through a series of love affairs, friendships, and occupations before settling down to marriage and responsible adulthood. Goethe's model was emulated by many notable writers and has had a strong influence on the development of the novel.

## THEMES

### Coming of Age and Apprenticeship

Goethe's Bildungsroman appropriately uses the word "apprenticeship" in its title because one

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Among the books that you have read, is there one that you think would fit in the Bildungsroman classification? Explain why it is a Bildungsroman, citing its characteristic features.

- Research the sociopolitical climate of Germany in 1795 and then describe how this climate may or may not have influenced the birth of the Bildungsroman genre.

- List several German authors and their works that continued the tradition of the Bildungsroman in their country in the nineteenth and/or twentieth centuries.

- Find an example of a Bildungsroman in a culture not traditionally associated with the genre, for example, a Japanese, Indian, or Chinese work, and explain how this work is a version of the Bildungsroman in that culture.

- Explain how the Bildungsroman is similar to a psychological novel or a picaresque. Provide definitions of the genres and give examples of representative works.

distinguishing factor of the genre is the learning process that brings the protagonist from childhood into adulthood. As a coming-of-age novel, the Bildungsroman focuses on the main character's apprenticeship. These experiences place the character near older practitioners whose roles as models the character either emulates or rejects.

### Education

The Bildungsroman is a novel of formation or development. These terms imply that the Bildungsroman is also a novel about education, yet not necessarily in the narrow sense of the Erziehungsroman (novel of educational development). Life is an education, and the process of growing up as chronicled in the Bildungsroman is a series of experiences that teach lessons. The protagonist's education may be academic; it

may also be in other areas, such as learning social graces, conducting business affairs, and gaining integrity in relationships.

### Identity and the Self

The protagonist of the Bildungsroman has a unique talent. Part of the maturation process requires discovering this talent and figuring out how to use it. The journey and experiences of the hero are intended to provide an opportunity to examine the inner self and clarify important goals and how to pursue them. As part of the self-discovery, the hero gets a new perspective on his/her relationships with other people. In other words, facing the complexities of the adult world causes the protagonist to learn about others and about himself. Thus, the Bildungsroman is a psychological novel in which the main character evolves toward mature self-awareness.

### Journey

In Bildungsromans the hero leaves home on a journey or quest. Usually, the protagonist leaves a rural setting to travel into the wider world of the city. In this way, the character encounters a larger society that tests his or her mettle. The physical journey initiates change, and change brings growth.

### Love

Finding the right love is a component of the quest as it is enacted in the Bildungsroman. The movement into adulthood begins with separation and often resolves in maturity with adult connection. In some cases the character must negotiate among potential partners in order to discover the appropriate one. The formalization of that relationship may constitute the final event in the novel.

### Search for the Meaning of Life

In the Bildungsroman, the novel of development, the hero develops through experiences that assist in clarifying the character's mature values. Growing up involves the search for universal truths. For Victorians, the universal truths concerned achieving middle-class values, marrying, and settling down as a responsible citizen. But to writers like Joyce, these truths concerned the artist's alienation and the necessary rejection of middle-class values.

# STYLE

## *Audience*

The Bildungsroman does not just tell a story. It involves the reader in the same process of education and development as the main character. The aim is to affect the reader's personal growth as well. However, at some point in the narrative, the reader may be in disagreement with the protagonist. Realizing that the hero has made a mistake in judgment, the reader, in effect, learns from the situation before the protagonist or otherwise compares his/her own morality against the moral of the story that the hero eventually learns.

## *Character*

In the Bildungsroman, the focus is on one main character. The structure of the Bildungsroman is to follow this one character from youth to adulthood. Other characters exist in the story, of course, but only in roles that have some kind of tie or relationship that contributes to the growth and development of the protagonist. With this concentration, it is then possible for the reader to become engrossed in the maturation process of the hero and learn the same life lessons.

## *Chronicle*

A Bildungsroman is the chronicle, or record of events, of the protagonist from youth to adulthood. However, it is not an unbiased record, but more like a diary recording the life of a young person on the way to self-understanding and maturity. Consequently, the Bildungsroman uses a chronological time period to follow the hero from year to year.

## *Conflict*

Growing up and finding one's purpose in life is difficult. There are many pitfalls, mistakes, and forces beyond one's control along the way. These conflicts between the protagonist and fate, or nature, or others, or self are part of the process of maturation that the Bildungsroman chronicles. Each crisis the hero endures helps to deepen his self-knowledge and strengthen or challenge his moral fortitude. Multiple conflicts are essential to the credibility of the Bildungsroman as a reflection of the real life experience.

## *Dialogue*

Dialogue is the conversational interaction among the characters of a story. Since the Bildungsroman is focused on the main character, plot and narrative are secondary to dialogue. Using dialogue to carry the story makes the reader feel more of a witness to an actual scene. The reader knows little more than the hero has learned from talking with others and thus makes the same discoveries as the protagonist as events happen.

# MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

## *American Novels*

The American style of the Bildungsroman is a combination of the German Bildungsroman and the Spanish picaresque. The American Bildungsroman follows the pattern of moral growth for the protagonist as he discovers his identity in conflict with social norms. Blended into the story is the picaresque element of the hero being as a traveler who has an outsider's perspective on what he encounters. Two American classics exemplify this structure: Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

## *Picaresque*

A picaresque novel, which is Spanish in origin, is a humorous tale about the adventures of a roguish hero. The first known picaresque was the anonymously published novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). The popularity of picaresque novels spread to Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as exemplified by classics such as Daniel Dafoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722).

## *English Novels*

In an English Bildungsroman, the protagonist is often a poor orphaned boy whose goal is to become a cultured gentleman of means. As part of his self-education, he moves from his provincial home to an urban setting. While the German Bildungsroman emphasizes internal conflicts within the main character, the English Bildungsroman uses the outside world to threaten the hero's quest for identity. Many English Bildungsromans draw from the author's own experience.

## *Entwickslungroman*

Another name for Bildungsroman is the general term Entwickslungroman, or novel of development. This name applies to novels constructed to follow the personality development of the protagonist. However, it is sometimes reserved for only those works that describe the hero's physical passage from youth to maturity without

delving into his psychological progress. In other words, Bildungsroman-type novels that pay less attention to the hero's intellect and emotions than more fully developed works fit into the category of Entwickslungroman.

### Erziehungsroman

Meaning "novel of education," this variation is a more pedagogic form of the Bildungsroman. Not only is it more concerned with the formal education and training of the protagonist, but the novel also intends to teach certain lessons about values to the reader as well.

### Female Protagonist

The female protagonist of a Bildungsroman encounters problems specific to growing up female in a male-dominated world. Early female Bildungsromans with female protagonists mostly follow the traditional pattern that the mature female sees marriage as her fulfillment. Intellectual and social development is often achieved through the mentorship of a knowledgeable and sophisticated man. In some early nineteenth-century female Bildungsromans, the female's education occurs through an older and wiser husband. Later novels portray women entering marriage as the culmination of the mutual growth that occurs in a loving relationship.

While a male protagonist in a Bildungsroman may meet his pivotal crisis in the course of his professional career, the female protagonist's turning point may result from a romantic entanglement. Her journey of discovery may be more internal, or psychological, than that of her male counterpart.

### Künstlerroman

This form of the Bildungsroman focuses on the development of the artist. In this case, the protagonist achieves a place and opportunity in which to practice his or her art. Thus, graduating from apprenticeship not only ends the formative stage of life but also establishes the destiny that the hero has sought. Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus* are examples of this type.

### Medical Subgenre

As defined by Anne Hudson Jones for *Lancet*, in this subgenre

> . . . a young physician, often but not always an intern or resident, sets out to find his special

calling and to master his craft. Whether he journeys from city to city or from rotation to rotation within the same hospital, his quest is the same.

Two examples of this subgenre are Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith* and Samuel Shem's *The House of God.*

### Military Subgenre

In this variation of the Bildungsroman, the protagonist enters the military as a young man. His path of discovery causes him to leave home, not necessarily for a city but for wherever the military sends him. Through the rigors of training and combat, the hero is challenged not only to find himself as a person but to find out how good he is as a soldier.

### Social Protest Subgenre

The Bildungsroman may be a work of social protest when its female or male hero is a dispossessed or marginalized person. The female Bildungsroman may concern itself with gender issues in a patriarchal society, as in *Jane Eyre*. In other cases Bildungsromans explore the difficulties of growing up as a member of a minority group and may involve the fight for civil rights. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* belongs to this group. Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* combine female and minority issues interwoven in works of social protest.

### Zeitroman

This variation of the Bildungsroman blends the development of the era in which the hero lives with his or her personal development. The protagonist thus serves as a reflection of his or her times. This type of novel provides an interesting study of the effects of historical context on character. For example, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* dramatizes the effects of being a Civil War soldier on the protagonist.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Development of the Novel

Beginning in the early eighteenth century, long narratives began to be written in prose. The modern novel developed in England with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). These works were followed shortly by Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1700–1800s:** Christoph Martin Wieland and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe develop the Bildungsroman, but the novel is still in its infancy as a literary form until the 1800s, when it begins to be used widely in Germany. The genre also includes some of the finest works of English, French, and American authors such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Hardy, Gustave Flaubert, Mark Twain, and Kate Chopin.

   **1900s–Today:** Continuing as a relevant genre for novelists, Bildungsromans are written by English-speaking authors such as James Joyce, W. Somerset Maugham, D. H. Lawrence, J. D. Salinger, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Philip Roth, and Alice Walker.

- **1700–1800s:** As a sign of maturity, the traditional male protagonist in the Bildungsroman is a person who finds his place in society and takes a responsible role in society.

   **1900s–Today:** As a sign of maturity, the modern protagonist is just as likely to reject society and live in isolation as to accept a role in the mainstream.

- **1700–1800s:** Bildungsromans with female protagonists slowly begin to appear, but the heroine is restricted by the domestic parameters of the times and seeks her education through a knowledgeable man and marriage.

   **1900s–Today:** Female protagonists in the Bildungsroman gain the freedom to explore various paths to self-discovery and may find fulfillment outside the home and marriage.

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Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1747). These novels were highly episodic plot-driven stories. In Germany in 1766–1767, Wieland wrote *The History of Agathon*, the first example of a Bildungsroman. Then in 1795, Goethe produced *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. The term Bildungsroman was coined in 1817 by Karl von Morgenstern but not commonly applied until about 1870. The genre flourished through the middle decades of the nineteenth century, both in England and the United States. The historical novel, developed by Sir Walter Scott, was written also by Dickens and others. The popularity of the Bildungsroman genre waned in the early twentieth century, but variations of the form continued to be written throughout the twentieth century.

## Cultural Climate

In 1789, the French Revolution began, followed by the Reign of Terror from 1793 to 1794 and the Napoleonic period from 1804 until 1815. In 1798 in England, Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads*, the preface to which

marked a literary watershed that came to be known as the beginning of the Romantic period. The Victorian Age spanned the years of Queen Victoria's reign, from 1837 to her death in 1901. The era of greatest popularity for the Bildungsroman, the nineteenth century, thus spanned the Romantic and Victorian periods in literature. This time of economic and political turbulence saw repeated wars in Europe and social and mechanical transformations wrought by the Industrial Revolution. Germany got its first constitution in 1816. At the same time that several European countries strengthened their colonial territories.

According to the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, perceptive Victorians suffered from a sense of "being displaced persons in a world made alien by technological changes which had been exploited too quickly for the adaptive powers of the human psyche." With the Industrial Revolution came the rise of the middle class that gradually took control of the means of production, especially in England and the United States. Many middle-class Victorians

wanted the stability of a set of rules to live by. Readers demanded guidance and edification from literature. The Bildungsroman, noted for exemplifying middle-class standards, met their needs. Often times, its hero went from the lower working class to respectability as a gentleman. Along the way, he reviewed his values and usually concluded that a settled middle-class lifestyle was the best choice.

By the end of the Victorian period, writers were seeking more realism. Victorian values and self-assurance gave way to pessimism and stoicism. The French promoted a bohemian lifestyle that scoffed at notions of respectability. Novelists began experimenting with the time structure of their works, and stream-of-consciousness began to be written. As a genre so tied to convention, German influence, and orderly chronology, the Bildungsroman lost popularity as twentieth-century literary interests and innovations led elsewhere. Still, James Joyce chose the Bildungsroman form for his masterpiece *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1916, and the genre is still popular.



*Illustration by Frederic W. Pailthorpe from* Great Expectations *by Charles Dickens* (*Pailthorpe, Frederic W., illustrator. From* Great Expectations, *by Charles Dickens. Dodd, Mead & Company, 1942*)

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Regarding Bildungsromans, critics discuss whether novels other than the German ones written in the strict tradition of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* qualify as examples of the genre. Purists argue that the Bildungsroman is so intertwined with German philosophical and literary heritage that the form does not occur in other languages. Others find common elements in many novels.

It is commonly held that Goethe's novel had widespread influence. For example, Ehrhard Bahr wrote for the *Reference Guide to World Literature*:

> *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* had a great influence on the Romantics and the history of the German novel. It provided, so to speak, the blueprint for all subsequent German novels. Early commentaries on the novel occur in correspondence between Friedrich Schiller and Goethe, in the letters by Wilhelm von Humboldt and Christian Gottfried Körner, and in Friedrich Schlegel's 1798 essay "On Goethe's *Meister*." Goethe's novel became a prime example of Romanticism.

Thomas Carlyle, a highly influential British historian, writer, and social critic, thought so much of Goethe's Bildungsroman that he translated the work in 1824 and also wrote a parody of it. After Carlyle, other English writers took up the genre. The great twentieth-century German novelist, Thomas Mann, also wrote a Bildungsroman (*The Magic Mountain*) and considered Goethe's novel one of the three greatest events of that era alongside the French Revolution and publication of Fichte's *Theory of Science*. Without doubt, it was a popular form of the novel in the nineteenth century, but when World War I began and critics continued to link the genre to the German tradition, it faded in popularity.

Two studies of the Bildungsroman are Martin Swales's *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* and Jerome Hamilton Buckley's *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. The first book argues that the genre is purely German; the second book finds a number of Bildungsromans in English literature. The contrast between these two important critical works summarizes the debate over the Bildungsroman. Those who believe that the genre is used in other cultures often re-

examine novels classified under other genres to prove the influence of the Bildungsroman on structure. Regarding the genre, critics analyze Scott's *Waverly*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and Plath's *The Bell Jar*. Some critics assign particular books to the genre; others specify subgenre based on certain characteristics—comic, female, black, Chicano, etc. Others debate whether early female bildungsroman can be called feminist. In an 1995 article for *Essays in Literature*, Denise Kohn argues that Jane Austen's novel *Emma* is, in fact, a Bildungsroman because the titular character learns to grow into her role as a lady. *Emma* is also a feminist novel because Austen's notions about what traits define ladyship emphasize intelligence and compassion over passivity.

Bernard Selinger, in a 1999 article for *Modern Fiction Studies*, says that the Bildungsroman continues to interest both authors and critics. In his opinion, critics of the genre tend to move between seeing the genre as concerned with the integration of the hero into society or with regarding the hero as alienated. This kind of criticism reflects the flexibility of the genre in the hands of skilled novelists throughout the literary world who know that each person's development has its own outcome.

## CRITICISM

### Lois Kerschen

*Kerschen is a freelance writer and the director of a charitable foundation for children. In this essay, Kerschen counters the argument that the Bildungsroman is strictly a German form of the novel by citing examples of the genre written in other languages.*

Repeatedly, the Bildungsroman is defined as a "German" form of the novel. Without doubt, the genre originated in Germany and became commonly used in that country. However, for some critics to maintain that the genre is still predominantly, if not exclusively, German defies logic. Martin Swales, an oft-quoted authority on the Bildungsroman, says in his book *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* that "The Bildungsroman, both in theory and in practice, is little known outside Germany." Hans Eichner remarks in his "Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman" that this collection "very strongly suggests that the term 'Bildungsroman'

## WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- The Bildungsroman is popularly used in Science Fiction, especially perhaps in young adult Science Fiction. For example, Orson Scott Card, famous author of juvenile books, wrote the Bildungsroman *Ender's Game*, which is also classified as a military Bildungsroman. The book demonstrates the application of a long-standing genre to futuristic stories.

- Just as there is a category for black Bildungsroman, there are books such as Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* that are classified as Chicano Bildungsromans. Also qualifying as a female Bildungsroman, selections from this book can often be found in high school literature texts. *The House on Mango Street* is worthy of study as another use of the Bildungsroman in a culture other than German or British.

- The picaresque novel is one of the oldest forms of the novel. *Don Quixote*, written by Miguel de Cervantes in 1605, and *Huckleberry Finn* can be classified in both categories, picaresque and Bildungsroman. Study the picaresque to learn about this other quest genre.

- Geta LeSeur's book *Ten Is the Age of Darkness* compares the Bildungsroman as used by African-American authors to that of African West Indian authors. LeSeur finds that African-American Bildungsromans concentrate on protest whereas the West Indies Bildungsromans depict the simplicity and innocence of childhood even under the difficult circumstances of poverty. This book and the novels it describes give insight into the unique experience of children of color even as they establish the commonality of the coming-of-age experience for all people.

is useful only when it is applied to the relatively small number of novels that are clearly in the tradition of *Wilhelm Meister*."

> **AMONG MODERN NOVELS, THE VARIETY THAT CAN BE CLASSIFIED AS BILDUNGSROMANS SEEMS ENDLESS. . . . NO DOUBT EXAMPLES COULD BE FOUND IN NEARLY EVERY CULTURE IN THE WORLD. OF COURSE, THERE WOULD BE DIFFERENCES UNIQUE TO EACH CULTURE AND TIME PERIOD, BUT THE BASIC CONCEPT OF THE BILDUNGSROMAN IS EVERYONE'S STORY."**

In fact, the term Bildungsroman is applied to many novels. While it is not a dominant genre, it has a universal appeal because it deals with the universal experience of growing up. The quest to become a responsible adult and find one's place in the world is so difficult that readers have sustained interest in this topic. Following the difficulties of the protagonist in a Bildungsroman, readers trace the arduous journey toward maturity and learn from the growth process observed in the text.

As every student of literature learns, a well-written story has certain basic elements: plot, character, point of view, setting, tone, and style. Any one of these elements can be emphasized over the others. In the case of the Bildungsroman, character is the primary focus. Furthermore, the structure of the story tends to follow the standard pattern: introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. Along the way, the reader can expect the characters to show some development. If they do, they are dynamic, or round; if they do not, they are static, or flat. What distinguishes the Bildungsroman from other novels is the concentration on the development of the main character from youth to adulthood. This focus makes the genre distinctive yet connected to many variations written in other languages. Despite particular debates on the genre definition, many agree that the term Bildungsroman can be applied to novels of development.

In Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861), the protagonists are self-educated orphans who head to London with the goal of becoming gentlemen. The Victorian middle-class work ethic demanded that the hero learn a trade and earn his way to success. Dickens's Pip is an exception in that he has a benefactor and in that he rejects the expected lifestyle of marriage and success. The English Bildungsroman explores external and internal conflicts. George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1871), and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) dramatize the female quest for development in an oppressive environment.

In Ireland in 1916, James Joyce wrote the quintessential Künstlerroman in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The use of the Bildungsroman form continued among recent Irish writers as a political novel according to Kristen Morrison in "William Trevor," an article for the *Twayne's English Authors* series. Morrison says that William Trevor's *Fools of Fortune* (1983) and *Nights at the Alexandra* (1987), Brian Moore's *The Mangan Inheritance* (1979), and John Banville's *Birchwood* (1973) and *Mefisto* (1986) are all written in this bildungs/political mode. In the typical Bildungsroman, the hero reaches maturity when the character assumes a responsible role in society. However, in these Irish variations of the form which focus on a sociopolitical situation, "alienation, not integration , is the mark of [the protagonist's] hard-won maturity."

In the United States, Dickens's contemporary Mark Twain also made use of the Bildungsroman. James E. Caron, in an article for the *Modern Language Quarterly*, makes the case that three of Twain's works can be classified as comic Bildungsroman: *Old Times on the Mississippi*, *Roughing It*, and *Innocents Abroad*. Twain's masterpiece, *Huckleberry Finn*, is a picaresque Bildungsroman. In 1925, Joyce's contemporary Sinclair Lewis published *Arrowsmith*, a medical Bildungsroman, and won the Pulitzer Prize. Anne Hudson Jones says in "Images of Physicians in Literature: Medical bildungsromane" that "In the best tradition of the Bildungsroman, Arrowsmith's efforts to find his life's work include many false starts and much travel and relocation." Another famous American author, Philip Roth, repeatedly uses elements of the Bildungsroman, most notably in *The Ghost Writer* and in *Zuckerman Bound*. As with Twain works, these works are comic Bildungsromans.

The female Bildungsroman challenges the assumption that the protagonist is a male. After Jane Austen, the woman in a Victorian Bildungsroman faces new objectives and uses different strategies. Like their male counterparts, these protagonists express independent thought and seek to pursue their own talents. They may end up married, but sometimes pursuit of a partner confounds their development, as seems to be the case with Maggie Tulliver in *Mill on the Floss*.

In the hands of nineteenth-century American female novelists, the Bildungsroman continued to work within the bounds of social acceptability but gave the heroine even more liberties. A spinster could have a rewarding life. If marriage comes, it is after the establishment of independence. But the heroine grows up surrounded and protected by women, so reality was purposely skirted to provide a suitable environment for the ideas suggested in *Little Women*, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, and *Five Little Peppers*. Then Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) defied convention and revealed the inner dissatisfaction and feeling of entrapment of a married woman. Among modern female Bildungsromans, all the limits are stretched and challenged. Two American novels, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, are examples of the Bildungsroman format infused with unique feminine and modern questions.

The Bildungsroman is often a work of social protest because it privileges the experience of the outsider, the one who is marginalized and dispossessed. It tends to examine dominant culture from the point of view of one who is excluded or oppressed. Thus, as the protagonist struggles to claim identity and status in the context which denies that status, the reader has the opportunity to reevaluate the tacit assumptions of the majority. This reassessment takes place while the reader is invited by the text to identify with the one the society excludes. So the novel of protest locates the reader on the outside of the context the reader actually inhabits and this new location clarifies questions about social belief and assumption.

In the black Bildungsroman *Invisible Man* (1952), Ellison's protagonist comes to realize that he has no identity outside the white definition of who he is. At the same time, the reader gains insight into slavery and the dehumanizing effect of bigotry. Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) explore both feminist and minority issues.



*A scene from a film production of* The Bell Jar, *based on the novel by Sylvia Plath* (The Kobal Collection | The Picture Desk, Inc.)

Among modern novels, the variety that can be classified as Bildungsromans seems endless. For example, there are a multitude of interesting and popular works in Science Fiction. Other examples include works in the 1950s and 1960s from three French women novelists (Françoise Sagan, Françoise Mallet-Joris, and Claire Etcherelli) and three Francophone African novels (Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* [1961], Camar Laye's *The Dark Child* [1953], and Mongo Beri's *Mission to Kala* [1957]. No doubt examples could be found in nearly every culture in the world. Of course, there would be differences unique to each culture and time period, but the basic concept of the Bildungsroman is everyone's story.

**Source:** Lois Kerschen, Critical Essay on the Bildungsroman, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Denise Kohn

*In this essay, Kohn argues that Jane Austen's novel* Emma *was written to be both entertaining and morally instructive. The article asserts that Emma becomes a lady through the course of the*

> THE DOMESTIC NOVEL HAS BEEN HARD FOR MANY CRITICS TO READ AS A GENUINE NOVEL OF DEVELOPMENT BECAUSE IT OFTEN DOES DEPICT A WORLD WHERE 'VIOLENCE IS RARE AND RELATIONSHIPS APPEAR SAFE.'"

*novel and that this makes the novel a domestic bildungsroman.*

*Emma* can be a problematic novel for the modern reader—especially for the feminist reader. On the one hand, feminist critics have lauded Jane Austen for her critique of the marriage market and exposition of the problems of female independence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Green, Johnson, Kirkham, Poovey). The growing emphasis on creating a canon of women writers has led many feminist readers to latch onto Austen with fervor because she is a woman writer who has long enjoyed a fine critical reputation despite the sentimental and damaging myth of "gentle-Janeism" (Trilling 29). On the other hand, feminist readers have also raised disturbing questions about Austen (Booth, Company 420). While Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar find that her novels are subversive in nature, they also believe that her novels depict "the necessity of female submission for female survival."

Ironically, one way for the modern reader, feminist or not, to deal with the problems of reading *Emma* is to approach the novel as a lesson on manners—more specifically—as a lesson on "ladyhood." Modern readers, of course are not usually interested in instruction on the characteristics of a "lady." But this becomes a problem in reading Austen because she was writing to a population of readers in a time and a place for whom the attributes of a lady were important. Another problem in reading *Emma* is that modern readers often eschew didacticism in literature; Austen, however, expected that a novel could "gratify the cravings of the imagination and provide moral instruction" (Poovey 182). To do justice to Austen, modern readers must be willing to meet her at least halfway on her own territory. If readers are willing to extend

their hands to Austen—white gloves are not necessary—and politely pretend interest in the notion of "ladyhood," then they may develop a fuller understanding of Austen as an artist. One of Austen's greatest achievements in *Emma* is that she writes a novel of education—a bildungsroman—that instructs her readers to deconstruct the pervasive images of "ladyhood" created by her period's conduct-book writers. Austen resists the view of a "lady" as passive and self-less and redefines the highest ideals of "ladyhood" as self-assurance, strength, and compassion through the depiction of her heroine, Emma. Such a reading of the novel, however, not only shows how *Emma* redefines female ideals but also how the novel redefines the bildungsroman within the context of early nineteenth-century domestic values.

In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Mary Poovey defines the ideal lady in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a "demure young woman, with eyes downcast and lips pressed into a faint and silent smile." Both male and female authors of popular conduct books of the period define a lady primarily through what she must lack: personal agency, ambition, desire, and vanity (Poovey 4–36). Indeed, women's self-denial and self-sacrifice were crucial elements in the emerging ideal of the Victorian house angel. While in the early eighteenth century a lady was defined as "a woman of superior position in society," by the nineteenth century the term was used to denote a "woman whose manners, habits, and sentiments have the refinement characteristic of the higher ranks of society" (qtd. in Sangari, 715). In other words, the term "lady" moved from one that described only class to one that described behavior. In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century world of a rising middle class and declining upper class, social status and survival often depended not only on money but also on manners—those culturally constructed markers that define community membership. The problems of shifting social classes exist even in Emma's home of Highbury. The Coles and Mrs. Elton are purchasing prestige while Miss Bates, who as daughter of the former rector was a "fringe" member of the upper class, is losing prestige to poverty. During a period of what seemed like class chaos to many Britons, readers increasingly turned to the rising artistic form of the novel to find narrative guidance for their behavior.

While Emma at the beginning of the novel is a "lady" because her family as rural landowners are part of the upper class, it is not until the final part of the novel that she learns to balance power and propriety in order to better fulfill behavioral ideals of a "lady." Emma, however, fulfills Austen's artistic and social ideals—not the hegemonic ideals of the conduct-book authors. Austen's novels and letters show her critique of a social system that required female subjection; even Wayne Booth believes that Austen "in her everyday life" believed that men and women were equal (Company 430). Indeed, the well-known portrait of Austen drawn by her sister offers visual evidence that Austen and her family did not subscribe to the narrow definitions of a "lady" celebrated by their culture: Austen is drawn with her arms folded assertively across her chest, looking off to the side with a serious look in her eyes and a stern set to her mouth. And as she herself was not portrayed as a "proper lady," Austen in *Emma* never portrays her heroine as reflecting the image of the "lady" as passive and demure. Margaret Kirkham finds that Austen in *Emma* mirrors the Enlightenment feminist stance of Mary Wollstonecraft on male and female equality. Claudia Johnson believes the character of Emma "defies every dictum" about female deference preached by the conduct books. Katherine Sobba Green does not specifically discuss *Emma* but argues that Austen overturns the "tropic commodification" that defined women in the turn-of-the-century ritual of courtship and marriage. And although Poovey also does not discuss *Emma*, she believes that Austen's later works emphasize the conflict between individual desire and social institutions. Austen, Poovey says, shows the danger of "unchecked individualism" and how the individual can both exist within and reform social institutions. So while the character of Emma is a celebration of female individualism and power, Austen also shows how Emma abuses her power by crossing the threshold of propriety and domesticity in her manipulation of Harriet and insensitivity to Miss Bates. By the end of the novel, however, Emma as a character is strengthened by her experience, gaining greater social and self-knowledge. As Austen's portrait of an ideal "lady," she is strong and assertive but is also more caring and sensitive to others.

The comic plot structure of *Emma* would also encourage readers to interpret the novel as a social lesson. Throughout the text, characters are paired and re-paired as teachers and students. The story unfolds in the second paragraph of the novel as we learn about Emma's loss of Miss Taylor, an "excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection." But by the end of the second paragraph, we learn that Miss Taylor had ceased "to hold the nominal office of governess" to Emma long ago, and the two had lived together as "friend and friend." Later in the novel, Knightley suggests that Emma, not Miss Taylor, was the real teacher of the two. The theme of education—and the decentering of authority—continues. Emma teaches Harriet. Harriet repeatedly teaches Emma, who is a slow learner, the dangers of teaching. Jane, who must become a governess, teaches Frank compassion. Frank asks Emma to choose and "educate" a wife for him. Of course, he does not know that Emma has already taken this project upon herself, and she does not know that Frank has already chosen his wife. Knightley and Emma both teach each other about social respect and kindness. She learns to appreciate Miss Bates and Robert Martin; he learns to appreciate Harriet. Mrs. Elton tries to teach Emma the role of the fashionable married woman and the importance of travel and barouche-landaus. And Mr. Woodhouse tries, vainly, to instruct everyone about the goodness of gruel.

The novel's theme of education and development is also signified by *Emma*'s place within the genre of the bildungsroman. In nineteenth-century England, the bildungsroman, also called the novel of development or apprenticeship, was "frequently the equivalent of the Renaissance conduct book, insofar as one of its recurrent themes is the making of a gentleman," writes Jerome Buckley in his influential study *The Season of Youth* (20). But in the case of *Emma*, which has a female protagonist, it is the making of a "lady" that becomes the recurrent theme. And though Buckley has been crucial in the definition of the English bildungsroman, ironically, he declares that *Emma* is not a bildungsroman. Buckley's definition of the novel of development has been criticized as predominantly based upon male perspectives by feminist critics, who have worked to define the tradition of the female bildungsroman. And yet, many of the female paradigms for the genre do not precisely fit *Emma*, either. The main problem in recognizing *Emma* as a bildungsroman is that the genre has always been associated with the theme of the

journey or quest. And *Emma* is the antithesis of the novel of quest: it is a domestic novel.

*Emma,* then, can be considered a domestic bildungsroman, which in turn, makes it another possible paradigm for the female bildungsroman—especially those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For most British and American women in these periods, especially those in the upper and middle classes, the domestic setting was the only one usually open for personal growth and development. The popular courtship novels of the period, which were often also domestic in their concerns, were part of a "social imperative to legitimize women's self-actualization as affective individuals" (Green 14). The belief that women, and thus domestic novels about women, are not associated with development because they are framed by domesticity is part of a cultural hegemony that views male experience as normal and female experience as abnormal or Other. The use of male development as a standard to measure female development culminates in the theories of Freud, who defined women by their anatomical differences from men. Nancy Chodorow's belief, however, that females usually develop through "relation and connection" to other people while males usually develop through separation has reshaped twentieth-century understanding of female development (qtd. in Gilligan, 7).

The psychological studies of Carol Gilligan, which support Chodorow's theories of male and female development, can help to reshape an understanding of the bildungsroman. *In A Different Voice*, Gilligan explores differences in views of morality and the self, and the association of these different views with men and women in her studies of psychological development. While other psychologists, such as Freud, Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg, have also found differences in male and female development that are similar to Gilligan's findings, these psychologists have tended to describe male psychology as "normal" and female psychology as deviant (Gilligan 7–22). In her studies of women, Gilligan reshapes theories of human development by showing that women tend to view the world and their relationships as a web of interdependence, and men are more likely to view the world and relationships as a hierarchy. While men tend to define themselves through independence, women tend to define themselves through relationships (Gilligan 8). Gilligan's comments about the problems of an androcentric psychology in defining female development apply equally to the problems of an androcentric theory of the bildungsroman in defining the domestic novel of female development:

> While the truths of psychological theory have blinded psychologists to the truth of women's experience, that experience illuminates a world which psychologists have found hard to trace, a territory where violence is rare and relationships appear safe. The reason women's experience has been so difficult to decipher or even discern is that a shift in the imagery of relationships [from hierarchy to web] gives rise to a problem of interpretation.

The domestic novel has been hard for many critics to read as a genuine novel of development because it often does depict a world where "violence is rare and relationships appear safe." What seems to be the safety of the world of domesticity—compared to the world of the quest—has caused both male and female readers to dismiss the domestic setting. But heroines such as Emma do have to overcome obstacles in order to become adults, and these obstacles are often domesticated or different versions of those that heroes face on their quest for independence. The domestication of personal obstacles does not, however, make these obstacles any less real or less dangerous for the heroine. The text of the domestic novel simply places personal obstacles in a different context. It is also crucial to realize that the development of the domestic heroine differs from the development of the hero because female development is based upon a definition of self within a web of personal relationships. Although the domestic heroine must achieve intellectual independence and self-understanding to become an adult, she does not want to physically and emotionally sever herself from family and friends. Gilligan's comments about the problems of female development apply as well to the problems of the domestic heroine, who must balance "the wish to be at the center of connection and the consequent fear of being too far out on the edge." And, of course, the domestic setting itself is a web of personal connections in which relationships and the home have great value. As a result, the quest novel and the domestic novel are shaped by radically different codes. The hero of the quest wants to leave home to discover his true self; the heroine of domesticity does not want to leave because she wants to discover her true self within her home.

Gilligan's findings that women are more likely than men to view the world as a web of interdependence restructure the reader's understanding of Emma's devotion to her father and her hatred of travel, which is a domesticated version of the quest. The trip to Boxhill is, not surprisingly, a failure from the point of view of Emma, who as a domestic heroine, has little desire to leave her home or the community of Highbury. Emma also looks with derision at Mrs. Elton, who is associated with travel throughout the novel. Mrs. Elton instigates the trip to Boxhill, defines herself socially by a travelling coach, and suggests that Bath is the place to meet marriageable men. Austen herself is reputed to have disliked Bath intensely (Poovey 209–210, Kirkham 61–65), which increases the significance of her negative portrayal of Mrs. Elton, a Bath bride whose marriage is marked by monetary motives. Mrs. Elton, a woman who talks incessantly of travel, is used as a foil against the more domestic-centered Emma to exemplify silly pride and selfishness. Emma, too, may seem silly and selfish in the first volume of the novel, but Emma's character gains stature in comparison with Mrs. Elton because Emma's interests and values are firmly rooted within her own community.

The fact that Mrs. Elton lives in an ugly house while Emma lives in an attractive one also reflects both women's relationship to the opposition between travel and domesticity in the novel. Mrs. Elton cannot become the heroine of *Emma* because her love of ostentatious travel and her search for a husband outside her own community illustrate her lack of support for the domestic values which shape the novel. Mrs. Elton, though she is female, is an outsider and cannot understand the domestic code of Highbury and Hartfield, which values the home as the place of affection and happiness. The example of the Eltons is important because it illustrates that Austen does not characterize all people as following gender-based behavioral models. Within Highbury, both Knightley and Mr. Woodhouse share the domestic-based values found in Emma, Mrs. Weston, and Miss Bates. The Eltons, however, practice a sham domesticity based upon ostentation. They seek to prove their affection for one another and their home through unrestrained vanity and selfishness, constantly calling attention to themselves and their emotions. Augusta Elton can never fulfill Austen's ideals of a "lady" because she can never overcome her own individual selfishness. And while readers frequently see Emma's devotion to her father as an example of society's restrictions on women and imply that Emma's decision to live at home after her marriage is a sign of her lack of growth, such criticism overlooks the importance of interdependence inherent in female development and the domestic novel. Such criticism is also part of a cultural definition of women that denigrates them because of their differences from men.

Reading *Emma* as a domestic bildungsroman is no longer difficult once cultural definitions of apprenticeship, work, and growth are broadened to include typical female experience as well as male experience. So while Buckley claims that *Emma* is not a bildungsroman, the novel actually fulfills most of his major criteria. *Emma* certainly fits Buckley's first characteristic of a bildungsroman: "A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon a free imagination" (Buckley 17). Emma is bored at the beginning of the novel; she is a "clever" young woman who is "in great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude." And like many characters in a bildungsroman, Emma rebels against authority. In the first chapter, she quietly but openly rejects the meek advice of her father and the stronger authority of Knightley, who warn her not to make any more matches after her successful pairing of Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston. Unlike the protagonists of most bildungsromane, however, Emma, does not leave home to learn in the city because the home is the setting of the domestic novel. But Emma does fit Buckley's next criterion because she experiences two love affairs, "one debasing, one exalting" that demand "the hero[ine] reappraise his [or her] values," as shown through her mistaken, humiliating love for Frank and her true, satisfying love for Knightley. The "search for a vocation" is also an important characteristic of the bildungsroman (Buckley 18) that is evident in Emma's development once readers expand their view of work from the traditional definition as "paid labor outside the home" to "unpaid labor inside the home." Emma's duties as a daughter and as the family manager are her work—and it is work that she refuses to reject or devalue at the end of the novel. Her marriage and her attempts to arrange other marriages are also significant aspects of her work within the community because marriage and motherhood were female careers during this period. While the modern

reader will find Austen's depictions of female work limiting, one must also remember that she was writing within the tradition of domestic realism. To have Emma assume work outside of traditional options for upper-class nineteenth-century women would have violated the qualifications of the domestic and realistic plot.

While *Emma* matches the significant characteristics of Buckley's definition of a bildungsroman, it also matches some crucial aspects of paradigms for the female bildungsroman. Annis Pratt notes that in the novel of development the young woman's tie to nature is important in her psychological growth. Throughout the novel, events and Emma's resulting moods are associated with nature. It suddenly snows, ruining a dinner party, the night Mr. Elton shocks Emma with his money-motivated marriage proposal. On the day Emma learns about Frank and Jane's engagement, the "weather added what it could of gloom" as a "cold stormy rain" destroys the natural beauty of July. The next day, however, "it was summer again"; significantly, this is also the day that Knightley proposes to Emma in the garden. "Never had the exquisite sight, smell, sensation of nature, tranquil, warm and brilliant after a storm, been more attractive to her," the narrator says. And though nature in Emma may sometimes be surprising, it is always the safe, domesticated nature of the English village, never the violent, raging nature of the gothic English moors.

The compound structure of Emma's last name—"Woodhouse"—and the link between "wood" and nature and between "house" and domesticity also mark the novel's link to the tradition of the bildungsroman and the domestic novel. The symbolic link between domesticity and nature in her surname is mirrored in the name of her home—Hartfield—which carries a double connotation as a natural place for deer and as a home of the heart. And as nature is domesticated in Emma, so is the archetypal role of the greenworld lover, who often plays a prominent role in the novel of female development (Pratt 22–29). Knightley, who is associated with farming and orchards, plays the role of Emma's greenworld lover, yet he is a domesticated version of the mythological Pan or Eros who usually endangers the female heroine (Pratt 22–24). Knightley's domesticated ties to nature make Emma's sexual growth safe within the novel. And as typical in many female bildungsromane, Emma's education culminates in a personal epiphany instead of a progressive process of formal schooling. After she learns about Frank and Jane's engagement and Harriet's love for Knightley, Emma realizes that with "unpardonable arrogance" she had "proposed to arrange everybody's destiny." It is at this point in the novel that Emma learns one of the most valuable lessons of "ladyhood"—respect and care for other individuals.

In the beginning of the novel, Emma takes pride in the fact that she had helped to make a match between Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston. Although Knightley discredits her role, Emma explains that she has taken an appropriate middle-ground as matchmaker, "something between the do-nothing and the do-all." Her explanation of her role seems reasonable: she "promoted Mr. Weston's visits," gave many "little encouragements," and "smoothed many little matters." Emma's success as a matchmaker, however, leads her to abuse her power as she exchanges her role as social facilitator to become a social manipulator. She tries to realign Harriet's affections and soon believes she can judge everyone's true emotions. When she tries to be the "do-all" and force others to follow her own plans, Emma crosses the threshold of Austen's depiction of the ideal "lady." Her "kind designs" for Harriet lead her to the grossest unkindness—the belief that she can re-create Harriet on and off the canvas. Emma's desire for social control also causes her snobbery to the Martins and her rudeness to Miss Bates. Her snobbery to the Martins is morally reprehensible to the modern reader, but it was also reprehensible to nineteenth-century readers. Trilling writes that the "yeoman class had always held a strong position in English class feeling, and at this time especially, only stupid or ignorant people felt privileged to look down upon them." And Emma's treatment of Miss Bates at the picnic is made to seem doubly heartless by Miss Bates's quiet acquiescence.

And yet, though Emma sometimes acts in an unconscionable manner, the reader is well aware that she is not without a conscience. It pricks her throughout. For instance, after Harriet meets Robert Martin at Ford's, Emma realizes that she "was not thoroughly comfortable" with her own actions. At the end, though, Emma has changed enough to think that it "would be a great pleasure to know Robert Martin" and happily attends the wedding. She apologizes to Miss Bates and befriends Jane Fairfax. She learns to

treat others with tenderness and to respect their personal privacy and autonomy. She learns to reject both the roles of a "do-nothing" and a "do-all." At the end she considers a future match between Mrs. Weston's daughter and one of Isabella's sons, but her matchmaking is no longer dangerous because she now realizes the problems caused by the abuse of power. She has learned a lesson: a lady is not a bully. But Emma learns an equally important lesson: a lady is not a weakling. Unlike so many nineteenth-century heroines, she does not confuse kindness to others with fear of others and subjection of self. At the end of the novel, she is still able to say to Knightley, "I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other."

Emma's awareness of her own "unpardonable arrogance" allows readers to continue their empathetic construction of her character. Emma has learned to balance power and propriety, reflecting Austen's ideal of a lady as a woman who is strong but not manipulative. Knightley's proposal follows soon after, and at this point in the narrative Austen inserts those well-known lines:

> What did she say?—Just what she ought, of course.—A lady always does.—She said enough to show there need not be despair— and to invite him to say more himself.

In this passage, the narrator mocks readers' expectations for a love scene (Booth, Company 433–34). Such mockery is possible, though, because at this point Austen's portrait of Emma has educated the reader about the attributes of an ideal "lady." Austen creates what Wolfgang Iser calls "a gap in the text," so the "reader's imagination is left free to paint in the scene." This freedom is a test of the reader's learning process. From the text's comparisons and contrasts of Emma with Harriet, Jane, Isabella, and Augusta Elton, we are to have learned what are the best attributes that make up the most admirable type of "lady."

After Knightley's proposal, many modern readers such as Gilbert and Gubar have trouble in their construction of Emma's character. It is as if they continue to see Emma solely through her own self-critical thoughts instead of trying to construct her through the text as a whole. Booth counteracts this reading by stating that readers often "succumb morally to what was simply required formally"—a plot that ends in marriage. And Poovey argues that although Austen's

novels end in marriage, these marriages show the heroine's "achievement of maturity, not the victory of a man." In *Emma*, Austen adds a simple yet crucial twist to the conventional marriage plot: Knightley abdicates his seat in the county, his own place of authority, to live in Emma's home—her own seat of authority. The knight does not carry off the princess. The gentleman does not place the lady within the shrine of his own home.

At this point in the novel, readers should have learned to step back and try to construct characters and reality through a multiplicity of perspectives. Just because Emma sees Knightley as a superior being while she is in the first flush of her self-reproach and awakened desire does not mean that the reader is also supposed to see Knightley as a superior being. Such readings overlook the important fact that Knightley, like Emma, has publicly embarrassed himself through a misreading of the true relationship between Jane and Frank. Knightley pays a great deal of attention to Jane and extols her virtues throughout the novel. After Knightley orders his carriage to take Jane to the Coles' dinner party, Knightley's attention to Jane is put in a new light when Mrs. Weston tells Emma she believes Knightley may marry Jane. Later Knightley, in an uncharacteristic loud and public voice, inquires "particularly" about Jane in a conversation with Miss Bates through a window. No wonder Emma begins to wonder if Knightley is in love with Jane. Of course, even at this point in the novel, the reader is quite aware that Emma is not always a reliable interpreter of reality, but this time Emma's views are corroborated by others and evidence in the text. When she warns Knightley that he "may hardly be aware . . . how highly" he values Jane, the forthright Knightley becomes suddenly engrossed upon buttoning his gaiters. Emma's view is also given credence when Knightley admits that Mr. Cole suggested that his attention to Jane had prompted speculation about the nature of their relationship.

So while the secret of Jane and Frank's engagement plays a joke upon Emma, it also— for a while—becomes a joke upon Knightley. And in an age when "making love" to a woman meant simply calling upon her and praising her publicly, it is hardly surprising that Knightley's attention to Jane has caused rumors. These type of rumors, as nineteenth-century readers clearly understood, could be

especially socially damaging to a single woman like Jane, who is also beautiful and impoverished. Knightley clearly understands Jane's precarious social position and even criticizes Frank for sending her the piano, yet he does not seem aware that his praise of Jane could also cause her social embarrassment. And although Knightley denounces matchmaking, he does play matchmaker by trying to ascertain whether Harriet is a suitable mate for Robert Martin. Knightley's own matchmaking attempts backfire, much like Emma's, because his personal attentions to Harriet make her believe he loves her. In short, Knightley is not, as he has traditionally been portrayed by critics, a paragon of personal judgment. He, like Emma, is deceived by the differences between his own perceptions and reality. In constructing Knightley's character, critics also overlook the fact that he apologizes to Emma for his previous paternal role. He tells Emma, "It was very natural for you to say, what right has he to lecture me? . . . I do not believe I did you any good." Their mutual worship is simply Austen's depiction of the first flush of romantic love, not a sign that Knightley is infallible.

Knightley is the only one to criticize Emma (besides Emma herself) in all of Highbury because he is the only one who is her intellectual equal. Their marriage offers her insurance against the "intellectual solitude" that endangers her at the novel's beginning. But as much as Emma loves Knightley, she will not leave her father, a point that Knightley understands and respects. After they agree to live together at Hartfield, Emma thinks of Knightley as a "companion" and a "partner." This equality is reinforced by Mrs. Weston's reflections, who happily considers the marriage as "all equal" without "sacrifice on any side." Emma's love of her father and her desire to live at Hartfield should not be interpreted as an example of female submission to patriarchy. Mr. Woodhouse has never had any control over Emma; Hartfield has been the site of her independence. The first Mrs. Weston was unhappy because she could not at the same time be "the wife of Captain Weston and Miss Churchill of Enscombe." Yet Emma solves the dilemma of the loss of female identity that was inherent in most nineteenth-century marriages. She will continue to be Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield, to be mistress at her own home [as she] take[s] on the role of Mrs. Knightley.

In the face of Emma's faults, some critics have deemed Jane as the "good" character in the novel. Booth believes that "Jane is superior to Emma in almost every part of the book" (Rhetoric 249). Though the "narrator is noncommittal toward Jane Fairfax," Booth writes, "the author can be inferred as approving of her almost completely" ("Distance" 182). Harold Bloom, who criticizes Booth for giving Jane center stage, still believes that the "splendid Jane Fairfax is easier to admire" than Emma. Adena Rosmarin echoes these ideas when she says that Jane is "too good and too distant to be a good character." While Jane is certainly too distant to be a good character, it seems doubtful that she is actually "too good." Her love for Frank, who lacks personal strength and continually treats her with foolish inconsideration, calls into question her own character. And most notably, she shares the same fault as two of the other female characters: passivity. Like Isabella and Harriet, Jane's passivity allows others to control her. She submits to Frank's thoughtless treatment of her until his public flirtations with Emma force her to capitulate into the "slave-trade" of the governess market. While Jane, like Isabella and Harriet, is undeniably a "lady," she cannot embody Austen's highest ideals of "ladyhood" because she is too passive, too demure, and too much like the "proper lady" of the conduct books.

While reading *Emma* as a lesson on ladyhood might seem at first a superficial approach to the novel, in the end, such a reading increases the complexity of the portrait that Austen has painted of Emma. This reading also depicts Emma in a more favorable light than many traditional analyses. Through the novel's portrayal of Emma, readers learn what Austen considered to be the ideal attributes of a "lady"—and some of those attributes may surprise modern readers. A lady, like Emma, is not "personally vain" and has no "taste for finery." She speaks her own mind. She is strong. She is intelligent. She is artistic. She learns from her own mistakes. She cares about and for her family. She is willing to marry—but marriage must meet her own terms. This is a definition of a "lady" that most modern readers—even feminists—could live with. This is even a definition that some feminists would see as a definition of a feminist.

Like Austen, who was afraid that Emma was a "heroine whom no one but myself will much like", reading *Emma* as a lesson in "ladyhood" is a

> **"** ABOVE ALL ELSE, IT CAN DIFFERENTIATE OUR AWARENESS OF HOW THE NOVEL CAN CONVEY AND EXPLORE THE LIFE OF THE MIND, FOR THE BILDUNGSROMAN IS NOT SIMPLY AN ALLEGORICAL SCENARIO OF PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONS AND VALUES."

critical approach that most modern readers will not like. But such a reading also helps to explain the continuing popularity of Austen inside and outside academia. The dialectic between female power and female propriety continues to act as a divisive force in twentieth-century America just as it was in nineteenth-century England. One of the great strengths of *Emma*, for both nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers, is Austen's portrait of a lady who learns to compromise between power and propriety to live within her community without compromising herself.

**Source:** Denise Kohn, "Reading *Emma* as a Lesson on 'Ladyhood': A Study in the Domestic Bildungsroman," in *Essays in Literature*, Vol. 22, Spring 1995, pp. 45–58.

### Martin Swales

*In the following essay, Swales explores German Bildungsroman to identify inherent problems in "character and selfhood" in the novel.*

At one point in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* the ruler of Japan shares with the audience his vision of a judicial system in which there would be perfect consonance between punishment and crime. The crimes which he chooses as test cases seem mercifully lightweight—which contrasts engagingly with the ghoulishness of the proposed remedies. One criminal who provokes the Mikado's ire is the bore, and it is decreed that he be condemned to listen to

> A series of sermons
> By mystical Germans
> Who preach from ten till four.

As far as I am aware, W. S. Gilbert is not here pillorying any particular tradition within German theology; rather, he exploits the happy coincidence that Germans rhymes with sermons to draw upon English skepticism about German culture generally and to suggest that the German

cast of mind is characterized by prodigious learnedness and long-windedness, by an unrelieved spiritual profundity that transforms anything and everything into a mystical disquisition.

W. S. Gilbert is not alone in his reservations about the German mind. George Henry Lewes, in his pioneering work *Life and Works of Goethe* (1855), at one point defines the German cast of mind by asking his readers to imagine that a Frenchman, an Englishman, and a German have been commissioned to write a treatise about the camel. The Frenchman, after a brief contemplation of the animal in question, writes a feuilleton in blameless French which, however, adds nothing to the general knowledge of the camel. The Englishman spends two years observing camels and produces a bulky volume full of facts and scrupulous observation—but devoid of any overall idea or conceptual framework to hold the dossier together. And the German, despising French frivolity and English empiricism, retires to his study, there "to construct the Idea of a Camel from out of the depths of his Moral Consciousness. And he is still at it."

Now of course Lewes—himself the most persuasive advocate of German culture generally and of Goethe in particular—had no intention of damning the German tradition lock, stock, and barrel. But it is interesting that he raises the notion of the appalling learnedness of the German mind in the prefatory paragraphs of his discussion of Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. In introducing this work, he speaks of the German's fondness for plunging "into the depths." "Of all the horrors known to the German of this school," Lewes continues, "there is no horror like that of the surface—it is more terrible to him than cold water."

I think I had better come clean at the outset and admit that it is my purpose to examine (among other texts) that novel of Goethe's that elicited from Lewes the prefatory apology of the camel parable. Moreover, I shall be looking not at one novel but at several, for I wish to examine that German novel genre—the Bildungsroman—which would seem, alas, to be the perfect corroboration of the Mikado's notion of the German-tradition-as-punishment. The Bildungsroman, the novel of personal growth and development, has traditionally been seen as the German counterpart to the realistic novel of England, France, and Russia. My enterprise—as is appropriate for a German topic—immediately

raises a number of theoretical problems. First—and most obvious—one asks why one needs to bother with literary genres at all. Clearly there is no reason why the critic should not establish any conceivable genre for the purposes of comparison and contrast. We could envisage the novel of adultery, of bankruptcy, of aviation, and so on. Such a model of a genre would, I suspect, have no legitimate pretensions to historical status; it would simply be a heuristic tool, a grid that allows the critic to select a number of texts for analytical and comparative purposes. But this notion of the theoretical—or, as I would prefer to call it, taxonomic—genre should not prevent us from realizing that there is also such a thing as the historical genre.

Tzvetan Todorov outlines the vital issues when he points out that the concept of genre or species is one taken from the natural sciences but that "there is a qualitative difference as to the meanings of the term 'genre' or 'specimen' depending on whether they are applied to natural things or the works of the mind." He continues, "in the former case, the appearance of a new example does not necessarily modify the characteristics of the species . . . the birth of a new tiger does not modify the species in its definition," whereas in art "*every* work modifies the sum of possible works, each new example alters the species."

It is important to recognize that the literary species or genre is, then, a historically evolving thing and that the mechanism of that evolution is the interlocking of—in T. S. Eliot's terms—tradition and the individual talent. In other words, not all genre constructs are simply foisted on the individual works after the event by eager scholars in quest of a taxonomy. Rather, the historical agency of the genre constitutes, in Hans Robert Jauss's term, that "horizon of expectation" with reference to which each individual work is made and in the context of which each individual work is received by its contemporary—and subsequent—audience. The work activates these expectations in order to debate with them, to refashion, to challenge, perhaps even to parody them. Herein resides the clement of newness, the individuality which is at one and the same time the modification *and* the transmission of the literary genre.

What, then, is a Bildungsroman? The word was coined in the second decade of the nineteenth century, but some fifty years elapsed before Wilhelm Dilthey's famous discussion of the genre which, as it were, put the term on the map with a vengeance. The capricious history of the term itself should not, however, blind us to the fact that the genre to which it refers existed as a particularly respected—and respectable—form of novel writing throughout the German nineteenth century. If there is an identifiable *terminus a quo*, it is in my view to be found around 1770 with the publication of the first edition of Wieland's *Agathon* in 1767 and of Friedrich von Blanckenburg's *Versuch über den Roman* (Essay on the Novel) in 1774. Blanckenburgs theoretical work grew out of his enthusiasm for Wieland's novel; for him (as also, incidentally, for Lessing) *Agathon* marked the coming of age of the novel form. Wieland's narrative, in Blanckenburgs eyes, transformed the traditional novel genre by investing it with a new psychological and intellectual seriousness. *Agathon* over and over again engages the reader in debate about novel fictions; in the process it repudiates the romance, which so long-windedly fuses love story and adventure novel, and it repudiates the moral constancy, the interpretative transparency, of traditional novel characters. For Blanckenburg, Wieland's signal achievement resided in his ability to get inside a character, to portray the complex stuff of human potential which, in interaction with the outside world, yields the palpable process of human *Werden*, of growth and change. By this means artistic—and human—dignity and cohesion was conferred on the sequence of episodic adventures which novel heroes, by tradition, underwent.

The Bildungsroman was born, then, in specific historical circumstances, in a demonstrable interlocking of theory and praxis. It is a novel form recognizably animated by the *Humanitätsideal* of late eighteenth-century Germany in that it is concerned with the whole person unfolding in all his complexity and elusiveness. It is a concern shared by Humboldt, Goethe, Schiller, and many others, and the discursive or theoretical formulations of the idea (and ideal) of *Bildung* are legion. But it is important to remember that what concerns us here is a genre of the novel, not a theoretical or cultural tract. And the novel makes certain demands in respect of plot and characterization that prevent the concern for *Bildung* from being articulated at a purely conceptual level. Indeed, this is part of the problem. The serious novel may be born with the advent of the Bildungsroman, but there remains

a certain bad conscience, as it were. For the novel, it seems, retains that questionable legacy of having to do with events, adventures, episodes—all of which militate against human and poetic substance. The need constantly to rehabilitate the novel form is expressed with almost monotonous unanimity by German novel theorists throughout the nineteenth century, and it is nearly always couched in the same terms as a concern for *poetry* within the traditional *prose* of the novel. The danger with the novel is, apparently, that it all too readily backslides into an irredeemably prosaic condition. The paradigmatic statement is to be found in Hegel's *Aesthetics*.

> This novelistic quality is born when the knightly existence is again taken seriously, is filled out with real substance. The contingency of outward, actual existence has been transformed into the firm, secure order of bourgeois society and the state. . . Thereby the chivalrous character of these heroes whose deeds fill recent novels is transformed. They stand as individuals with their subjective goals of love, honor, ambition or with their ideals of improving the world, over against the existing order and prose of reality, which from all sides places obstacles in their path. . . . These struggles are, however, in the modern world nothing but the apprenticeship, the education of the individual at the hands of the given reality. . . . For the conclusion of such an apprenticeship usually amounts to the hero getting the rough spots knocked off him. . . . In the last analysis he usually gets his girl and some kind of job, marries, and becomes a philistine just like all the others.

This is a crucial passage. And it is crucial in its all-pervasive ambivalence. On the one hand, Hegel affirms the seriousness of this kind of fiction, it being synonymous with the novel's ability to anchor the time-honored epic pattern in modern bourgeois reality. In this sense Hegel seems to offer his approval of the process by which a somewhat fastidious, idealistic—in a word, "poetic"—young man is licked into shape by the "prose" of bourgeois society. On the other hand, Hegel also seems to be saying that there is something debased—and debasing—about this process. That the highest wisdom of the novel and of its latter-day knightly adventurer should reside in the acquisition of wife, family, and job security seems a sorry—indeed philistine—reduction of the grand model. What is particularly suggestive for our purposes is the extent to which Hegel perceives the novel as hedging its bets in respect of prosaic, bourgeois

reality. His comments tell us much about the Bildungsroman in that it is precisely this novel form that is animated by the dialectic of poetry and prose. And the uncertainty is nowhere more urgent, as Hegel himself saw, than with regard to the vexed question of the novel's ending. When Hegel formulates the essential theme of the novel as the conflict "between the poetry of the heart and the resisting prose of circumstances," he sets the seal on virtually all German thinking about the novel for the rest of the century. And his specter, or, to be more respectful, his *Geist*, can still be clearly felt in Lukács's *Die Theorie des Romans* of 1912.

I have already stressed that the Bildungsroman is a novel form that is concerned with the complex and diffused *Werden*, or growth, of the hero. How, then, is this process intimated narratively; how does it embody the dialectic of "poetry" and "prose"? In its portrayal of the hero's psychology the Bildungsroman operates with a tension between a concern for the sheer complexity of individual potentiality on the one hand and, on the other, a recognition that practical reality—marriage, family, a career—is a necessary dimension of the hero's self-realization, albeit one that by definition implies a limitation, indeed constriction, of the self. The tension is that between the *Nebeneinander* (the "one-alongside-another") of possible selves within the hero and the *Nacheinander* (the "one-after-another") of linear time, of practical activity, of story, or personal history. In one sense, then, the Bildungsroman undeniably has something of the rarefied epic of inwardness (the "mystical sermon") that has alienated its English readers in particular. It can tend to dissolve the lived chronology of a life into some providential scenario of symbolic patterns and recurrences. It can at times come perilously close to espousing what J. P. Stern has called "a chimerical freedom—as though somehow it were possible *not* to enter the river of experience that flows all one way." It can be less than strenuous in its recognition of the chain of cause and effect within practical living and of the integrity and moral otherness of those characters with whom the protagonist comes into contact. On occasion we can feel that these characters exist, so to speak, not in their own right but for the educative benefit of the hero: that they are significant insofar as they are underwritten by a potentiality slumbering within him. This is as much as to say that these characters are part of a providential

decor whose raison d'être is to be found in their relatedness (in a sense that can vary from the literal to the metaphorical) to the hero. But all this is only part of the truth about the Bildungsroman. For what the major novels of the tradition show is not achieved goals, not comfortable solutions, but at best directions, implications, intimations of the possible, which are shown to be no more than that. Moreover, they do not reach the point of dissolving all relationship to plot, to the *Nacheinander* of story. They may seem to promise just such an obliteration of the flow of resistantly linear experience. But they cannot deliver the goods; they do not break faith with the "prose" of the novel form and write an epistemological or aesthetic treatise. In E. M. Forster's words, "Yes, oh dear yes, the novel tells a story," and the story is made up not simply of beneficent experiences that welcome the "poetry" of the individual's inwardness; hence the tension I have spoken of, a tension which is sustained and narratively enacted—and not resolved. The grasping for clarity and losing it, the alternation of certainty of purpose with a sense of being swept along by the sheer randomness of living—these are seen to be the very stuff of human experience and to be such meaning and distinction as men are able to attain, as the Bildungsroman is able to affirm. The novel, then, is written for the sake of the journey—and not for the sake of the happy ending which that journey seems to promise.

This, then, is a sketch in necessarily broad strokes of the implications inherent in the Bildungsroman as a historical genre. I want now to comment briefly on six major texts from within that tradition. Specialist readers will, I hope, forgive me if these are but somewhat impressionistic interpretative sketches. I have tried elsewhere to provide the detailed argument both on the theory and on the praxis of the genre. I am here concerned with the implications the genre has for an understanding of the European novel as a whole; therefore, the individual text receives less than its due.

Wieland's *Agathon* (1767) operates with a profusion of narrative commentary, which on occasion reaches the proportions of a barrage. Over and over again the narrator reminds us that Agathon is not the usual novel hero; the typical protagonist should be both morally and epistemologically a constant, a known quantity throughout, whereas Agathon changes so frequently that the reader must ask if he will ever know and reliably understand him.

> He seemed by turns [nach und nach] a pious idealist, a Platonist, a republican, a hero, a stoic, a voluptuary; and he was none of these things, although he at various times passed through all these phases and always a little of each robbed off on him. It will probably continue like this for quite some time.

To look back on Agathon's life is to perceive a *Nacheinander*, a chronological sequence. Because the specific circumstances of Agathon's life change, Agathon himself changes. Yet he is always *potentially* the sum total of all these "phases," of all these possible selves—and of many others. In other words, Agathon's true self can only be conceived of as a *Nebeneinander*, as a clustering of manifold possibilities, of which at any given time he can only realize (in both senses of the word) a small proportion. Hence the narrator's irony: in one sense, the significance of the *Nacheinander*, of the plot sequence is relentlessly called into question, but in another sense the hero *does* have a story which is somehow his and nobody else's. And stories need endings. Wieland here has recourse to the fiction of there being an original Greek manuscript on which his account is based. This manuscript ends with a typically novelistic (which is to say, improbable) happy ending, which Wieland both appropriates and undermines. His irony allows him to have his cake and eat it too: to tell a novel and to mount a critique of the expectations inherent in novel convention. Hence the happy ending, that epistemologically simple foreclosure of the process of human growth and self-discovery, is consistently undermined by the narrator's irony.

Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796) operates with a comparable irony. Wilhelm leaves his bourgeois home and seeks experiences that promise an adequate extension of his personality. He is for some time attracted to the theater, a realm which clearly allows him to widen both actively and imaginatively his experience. But gradually he grows out of this phase of his life and finds himself more and more drawn to the Society of the Tower. The Society of the Tower is made up chiefly of aristocrats, and it is a world devoted to human—and humane—wholeness. In many ways the Society of the Tower would appear to be the goal of Wilhelm's quest, for it seems to reconcile individual limitation and human totality, practical

activity and inherent potential, or—in Hegel's terms—the prose of the practical world and the poetry of the individual heart and imagination. In an appropriately dignified ceremony Wilhelm is admitted to the Society of the Tower; he receives a parchment scroll full of wise sayings, he learns that the boy Felix is indeed his son. Finally the words of graduation are pronounced over him: "Hail to thee, young man. Thy apprenticeship is done." We know that all the members of the Society of the Tower have contributed the history of their apprenticeships, their *Lehrjahre*, to its archive. The title of the novel refers to the hero's apprenticeship, and his very name—Meister—promises the attainment to mastery. We should, then, by rights have reached the end of the novel. Indeed, our expectations seem to be speedily confirmed, for our hero approaches life with a new mastery and certainty of purpose. He decides that Therese is the appropriate wife for himself and mother for Felix, and he proposes to her. But this action, alas, turns out to be a complete error, from whose consequences he is shielded by pure good fortune. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that our hero feels cheated; so do we, and so, one suspects, did Goethe's contemporary readers, on whose taste for novels of secret societies *Wilhelm Meister* clearly draws, without, as it were, delivering the goods. Goethe, it seems to me, is, like Wieland before him, mounting a critique of traditional novel expectations precisely in order to set up a narrative irony that both validates and calls into question the epistemological assumptions behind such expectations. We note that there is something strangely discursive and wordy about the Society of the Tower (it displays, for example, a somewhat schoolmasterly fondness for wise sayings and maxims). The Society may be dedicated to the concept of human wholeness, but it is not the embodiment of that wholeness. Nor does it confer inalienable possession of wisdom on the aspiring (but struggling) protagonist. The law of linear experience, the *Nacheinander* of plot, continues out beyond the promised goal. So how does the novel end? Like *Agathon* before it, it closes with a happy ending which is undercut by irony as fairy-tale ease and stage-managed providentiality take over.

At one point toward the end of Adalbert Stifter's *Der Nachsommer* (1857, translated as *Indian Summer*) the hero—we wait a long time before we discover that his name is Heinrich Drendorf—undertakes a world journey.

I went first via Switzerland to Italy; to Venice, Florence, Rome, Naples, Syracuse, Palermo, Malta. From Malta I took a ship to Spain, which I crossed from south to north with many detours. I was in Gibraltar, Granada, Seville, Cordoba, Toledo, Madrid, and many other lesser towns. . . . I had been absent for one and a half months less than two years. It was again spring when I returned.

For the first time in this lengthy novel, experiences are recounted which would commonly be regarded as interesting and exciting. Yet these details are reduced to a mere list, to an empty, cataloging baldness which is never applied to the things and modest activities of the Rose House, the dwelling of Risach, the mentor figure. The description of the world tour exudes an unmistakable inertia. Heinrich tells us, "I had been absent [ich war abwesend gewesen] for one and a half months less than two years," and this explains the deadness of the list. The places visited represent an exile from the centrality of the Rose House, an interlude of inauthenticity, of "being away from being." It is therefore understandable that, after what amounts to a package tour *avant la lettre*, Heinrich returns home with relief. But then he always returns with relief to the Rose House, for it is within that world that everyday objects and modest, recurring human activities can be celebrated with a human (and narrative) affirmation that serves to highlight the emptiness of the world tour. Stifter's art is pitted, therefore, against common expectations of human and narrative interest. It is this which makes *Der Nachsommer* the painstaking yet incandescent litany that it is.

*Der Nachsommer* is a novel written against history in a dual sense: against social and political history, in that no narrative interest is displayed in the changes and frictions within mid-nineteenth-century Austrian society; against personal history, against story and plot, in that Heinrich's experiences ultimately all dissolve into a sublime stasis—hence the relative unimportance attached to the naming of the hero. In Hegel's terms, Stifter's novel does reconcile the poetry of inward values and the prose of outward, practical activity. It is also the one novel in the Bildungsroman tradition that resolves the tension between *Nebeneinander* and *Nacheinander*. But it can do so only by confining the story to a number of simple, practical activities underwritten by an urgent—almost hectoring—sense of human and artistic wholeness. The tone is one of sacramental pedantry; the difficulty attending upon the

attempt to write an unproblematic Bildungsroman in fact serves to intimate the increasing tension to which the genre is prone, a tension which can be exorcised only by converting the novel into a monolithic litany.

Gottfried Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich* (1880, translated as *Green Henry*) is concerned, like so many of the major Bildungsromans with an artist, or more accurately, with someone of artistic potential. Heinrich Lee tries throughout his early years to replace reality with the alternative world of his imaginative and fictive capacities. In the course of the novel, we see how he succumbs increasingly to that dualism which is so much of his own making. What Heinrich is unable to perceive is that reality—even the modest reality of a Swiss peasant community—is sustained not just by pragmatic allegiances and practical accommodations but also by an inward, imaginative assent which rounds out the modest facts and experiences into an all-embracing human totality. Because he cuts himself off from such human fulfillment, Heinrich condemns himself to an increasingly lifeless existence. His art suffers too, in that it is either a dissociated fantasy with no enlivening relationship to the objective world or a painstaking copy of physical details with no overall imaginative conception to sustain it. Heinrich returns to Switzerland at the end of the novel, becoming a "somewhat melancholy and monosyllabic civil servant."

Keller's novel is grounded in the disjunction within the protagonist's experience of the prose of concrete circumstances on the one hand, and of the poetry of the heart's potential on the other. The narrative perspective is all-important here; the second version of the novel is sustained in the first person throughout. The recollecting voice of Heinrich the narrator is able to document precisely the disjunction I have referred to above—and to suggest the alternative (but unrealized) possibility that there need be no such absolute gulf between poetry and prose, between the complex inwardness, the *Nebeneinander* of the inner man and the *Nacheinander* of his actual living in the realm of human society. The tension that is so characteristic of the Bildungsroman becomes here a dualism; moreover, Keller's novel suggests with an urgency rare in the genre the dangers of such unfocused idealism. There is, in this sense, a moral astringency to Keller's debate with the Bildungsroman tradition which so informs his own creation.

Finally, a few brief comments about two twentieth-century Bildungsromans. Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924, *The Magic Mountain*, 1927) chronicles the experiences undergone by a young man in the course of a seven-year stay in a sanatorium. These years, it is suggested, constitute a journey into self-knowledge, a *Bildungsreise*, whose goal, it would seem, is to be found in the chapter entitled "Snow," in which Hans Castorp has a dream vision of the wholeness of man, of a totality which is not only greater than all antinomies but which is also humane, affirmative in its relationship to the living process. No reader can fail to sense the crucial importance of these insights. And yet the goal of Castorp's quest, once glimpsed, once formulated, is forgotten as he stumbles back through the snow to the sanatorium. The vision, the complete perception of human totality, exists outside ordinary time; it can be glimpsed as in a dream; it can be formulated discursively, but it cannot be possessed as an abiding and effective recipe for everyday living. The *Nebeneinander* cannot halt the *Nacheinander* of Castorp's experience; his personal history continues on its wayward path until he is caught up in the events of that other *Nacheinander* to which he has paid such scant attention—world history. For at the end of the novel, the "problem child of life" (*Sorgenkind des Lebens*) finds himself plunged into the holocaust of the First World War.

The rhythm of Mann's novel in many ways recalls that of *Wilhelm Meister;* the seeming Grails of both novels—the Society of the Tower, the snow vision, both of which entail a perception of man as a humane totality—do not come at the end of the novels in which they occur. In both cases the hero emerges on the other side of the goal, feeling not really any the wiser. Both expressions of human totality have in common a certain discursiveness, a limitation to the conceptual postulation of totality, which is relativized by the demands of the hero's ongoing experience. What, then, do we make of Hans Castorp, our mediocre—*mittelmäßig*—protagonist? He is, I would suggest, mediocre in the precise sense of *Mittelmäßig*, "middle way." He is undistinguished by any dominant characteristic or capacity; he is the point at which the other characters in the novel, all of them so much better-known quantities than Hans Castorp, intersect. He is, as it were, overendowed with potentiality. And yet the novel does not allow him to become simply a static cipher for the complexity of man, for he is also

a Person, an ordinary individual who, like all of us, has to live his (and nobody else's) life.

Thomas Mann's employment of the Bildungsroman tradition in this novel is the measure of his urgent need, under the impact of the 1914–18 war, to review his own and his country's intellectual tradition. A similar critical urgency is, in my view, the source of Hermann Hesse's partly skeptical, partly affectionate employment of the genre in his last novel, *Das Glasperlenspiel* (1943, *The Glass Bead Game*)—where the pressure of historical events comes from the turmoil of the 1930s. The novel is narrated by an inhabitant of Castalia, an ivory-tower region dominated by intellect and meditation, who in the first few pages of his account makes derogatory remarks about the bourgeois fondness for biography. Such an interest in the individual and his life story is, he argues, symptomatic of a declining culture. Castalia, on the other hand, is sustained by the principle of suprapersonal service; it has its center of gravity in that model of synchronic universality, the Glass Bead Game, which, in its very abstraction from the specific, the individuated, the particular, creates a scenario for the total play of all human values and experiences. However, the experiences with which the narrator is crucially concerned are those of one man—Josef Knecht (the name, meaning, roughly, servant, is, of course, a contrastive echo of Goethe's Meister). Knecht joins the Castalian province and becomes its supreme exponent and servant as Master of the Glass Bead Game. But he then leaves Castalia, because he can no longer accept the abstraction and bloodlessness of the province's values. In its striving for spiritual totality, Castalia is hostile to the ontological dimension that is history. But Knecht, through his encounters with Pater Jacobus, comes to perceive the truth of history—to perceive that Castalia itself is, like everything else, a historical phenomenon. At the same time he realizes that he too is a historical phenomenon in the sense that he has a personal history, that he lives, not in timeless abstraction, but in the chronological specificity of choice, of cause and effect. In other words, he learns that he has a story, that his experiences are inalienably enshrined in the *Nacheinander* of a lived life. All this is faithfully reported by the narrator—without his ever modifying that Castalian ideology with which he begins his account and which Knecht's life so manifestly calls into question. It is here that we find in my view the narrative and thematic center of Hesse's text; and the conflict between the *Nebeneinander* (the Castalian striving for universality and totality) and the *Nacheinander* (of Knecht's story) is the measure of the novel's engagement with the Bildungsroman tradition.

The foregoing has been a somewhat rapid review of the theory and practice of the German Bildungsroman from about 1770 to 1943. I want in conclusion to inquire into the implications of this novel tradition for the European novel in general. Let me begin by clarifying one or two issues. In quantitative terms the Bildungsroman is by no means the only kind of novel to come out of Germany in the period with which I am concerned. Nevertheless, it must be said that most German novel writing of distinction does in some form or another partake of this genre. I know it is nowadays fashionable within the curiously neopositivistic enthusiasm for *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (the history of the reception of a work) to say that scholarly inquiry should be concerned not with literary quality but with the demonstrable history of reading habits within a given society. But it seems to me difficult to avoid the issue of literary quality—for the simple reason that no amount of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* will alter the feebleness of a novel such as Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855) when compared with, say, *Dombey and Son*. Moreover, as a number of critics have shown recently, the 1830s and 1840s in Germany witnessed a consistent—but ultimately unavailing—attempt to direct the novel away from the Bildungsroman, away from the dominant presence of *Wilhelm Meister* and toward a more socially and historically aware novel (after the manner of Walter Scott). The preeminence of the Bildungsroman can be gauged from the fact that it was not confined simply to serious novels for the adult market. In 1880 there appeared a novel in the German language which must be accounted one of the supreme best-sellers of all time. It has been translated into dozens of foreign languages, it has been filmed and produced in television serializations, and its readership apparently numbers some forty million. If you are still wondering what I am talking about, let me give you the title. It is, of course, *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri. But this, let me hasten to add, is not the correct title of that amazingly successful book; for the first volume of Heidi's adventures is actually entitled *Heidis Lehr-und Wanderjahre*. All of which, I suppose, goes to show that not every

novel in German which partakes of the Bildungsroman tradition has to be a sermon by a mystical German who preaches from ten till four.

Let me add a further word in justification of this novel tradition. W. H. Bruford, in a study of the term *Bildung*, has suggested many of the ways in which it speaks of the characteristic limitation of the German middle classes in the nineteenth century; the inwardness of the values esteemed, the fastidious aversion to practical affairs, to politics, the sacramental pursuit of self-cultivation; all these factors bespeak that well-known phenomenon, the *deutsche Misere*, which has been identified as the lack of bourgeois emancipation in nineteenth-century Germany. The specific social and economic circumstances that obtained and their impact on German cultural and intellectual life have been acutely analyzed by a number of distinguished commentators. Moreover, one should add that the nineteenth-century situation is part of a larger legacy which is bound up with the particularism of the Holy Roman Empire, with its tangle of small principalities. The lack of a unified national arena, of a focus, a metropolis where the spiritual issues of the age could find palpable enactment helped to produce a situation in which the nation existed as an inward—or, if not inward, then at least cultural and linguistic—unit, rather than as a demographic entity. One can register all this as a shortcoming, as something that in linguistic terms militated against there being an energetic language of public (and journalistic) debate. But the lack produced as its corollary a certain gain, a language that could explore inward and elusive experience with an assuredness and differentiation rare in other European languages. Such a language, usually associated with religious or mystical experience, became a potent contribution to the autobiographical and biographical narrative form with the advent of the complex phenomenon of secularization in the second half of the eighteenth century. The pietist, confessional mode is that inward quest for the soul's vindication which so often entails an awareness of sinfulness as a precondition of spiritual distinction. Such concerns (at once thematic and linguistic), in their secularized form, clearly gave the Bildungsroman part of its characteristic impetus. Now all this may be, to English observers, an inauspicious climate for the emergence of the modern novel in Germany. The dangerous historical

consequences of the German reverence for inwardness are indicated in Bruford's book and have been underpinned in a recent article by R. Hinton Thomas, in which it is shown that the notion of *Bildung*—with its central concept of the organic personality—could be, and was, transferred into the sphere of social and political debate in Germany, and became part of the stock vocabulary of German conservatism on which Nazism was later to draw. These are pertinent insights. But neither Bruford nor Thomas are concerned in any thoroughgoing way with the Bildungsroman, which is after all, a vital part of the tradition they explore. And I want to insist that the Bildungsroman is precisely a voice from within the German intellectual tradition which can command our assent and respect—because it does not offer unequivocal certainties, unreflected values, but embodies the difficulties of those aspirations which, in their theoretical and discursive formulation, can prove so forbidding for English readers. In other words, if we want to look for a critique of *Bildung*, the Bildungsroman is an obvious and eloquent starting point. Moreover, it seems to me that many of the features of the Bildungsroman that allowed it in the past to be relegated to the periphery of the European novel tradition—with the familiar sigh of relief that it was yet another example of the pathology of the German mind—are now part of our experience of the twentieth-century novel. I have in mind the self-consciousness of the Bildungsroman, its discursiveness and self-reflectivity, its narrative obliqueness, its concern for the elusiveness of selfhood, its dialectical critique of the role of plot in the novel— all these things are not merely German (that is, provincial) excesses; they are the staple diet of the modern novelist's unease in respect of the form he has inherited. All of this makes it very tempting to engage in some polemical historicism—and to suggest that the Bildungsroman, precisely because it articulates the unease of a society not easily at home in the bourgeois age, speaks particularly forcefully to our age, when that unease is so very apparent.

We are, I suspect, all familiar with the argument that the novel expresses the contradictions of bourgeois society, that it has its roots in, to quote Raymond Williams's phrase, the "creative disturbance" generated by the norms of that society. Or to put the matter another way, the modern novel (and we must remember that, in terms of simple chronology, the Bildungsroman tradition in Germany coincides with the rise of

the novel as a European phenomenon) is born under the astrological sign of irony. Ernst Behler has shown that irony as we know it came into being as the expression of a decisive change in sensibility which occurred in the late eighteenth century. He argues that up until this time irony was a stable rhetorical device (by which a speaker intimated the opposite of what he was saying). But with Friedrich Schlegel irony became enriched by the complex dimension of an author's relationship to his own creation. It was for this kind of irony that Schlegel praised *Wilhelm Meister* (at the same time wondering if Goethe would understand what he meant). And he was referring to irony as a structural principle, irony which issues in a kind of self-reflectivity in the novel. If the ground of that irony is the dialectic of the creative, inward potential of man on the one hand and on the other the necessary *donnée* of finite, palpable experience, then we can see that such irony is the articulation of vital issues inherent not only in the novel form but also in aesthetics, in philosophy, in history. This is perhaps why Hegel, in his comments on the novel, was so ambivalent precisely about the ironic constellation which he was expounding, why, when he incorporated references to a novel into his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, they were to Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau*. For in this work Hegel perceived the situation of a mind unwilling to serve the values of society but unsure of its own integrity, seeking to realize itself in the complex modalities of its estrangement from the objective world. Lionel Trilling has superbly shown how Diderot's novel and Hegel's gloss on it are central to any understanding of the issues of selfhood, sincerity, authenticity in their (and our) time. In the novel's oscillation between potentiality and actuality—and it was that oscillation which Hegel saw as constitutive of *Bildung*—it enacts the deepest spiritual issues of its age. Moreover, we would do well to remember that Hegel was not alone in his admiration of *Le Neveu de Rameau*. It claimed both the interest and the active engagement of the translation process from none other than Goethe himself. This would, at the very least, suggest the improbability that Goethe's own *Wilhelm Mister* is an unproblematic pilgrimage toward human wholeness and fulfillment. But perhaps it might be felt that all this talk about irony is becoming rather heavyweight, not to say teutonically mystical. For Hegel, of course, every aspect of human experience was reducible to that ironic field of force in which mind and facts, idea and actuality intersect.

Let me then turn to less heady versions of the argument about irony and the novel. It has been shown, most cogently by Ian Watt, that the breakthrough in sensibility that makes the novel possible in the eighteenth century has to do with a perception of the *specific* nature of experience, with the individuality and particularity of the vital criteria which determine significance and truthfulness. In other words, in respect of narrative forms, the eighteenth century witnesses the breakdown of a stable, public rhetoric in favor of a private language in which the narrator appeals to the reader's own experience as epistemological authority. Wolfgang Kayser and others have argued that the birth of the modern novel is linked to the emergence of an overtly *personal* narrator. In theoretical terms, this entails a repudiation of the romance in favor of some more truthful (that is, unstable and personal) mode of narrative discourse. Let me take an example from Ian Watt's discussion of *Moll Flanders*. Watt points out the irony which results from a discrepancy between the experiences narrated and the kinds of values which the successful Moll, as recollecting narrator, espouses. He then goes on to ask how far this irony is, as it were, an articulated situation, or how far it is largely unreflected in the sense that the irony is there for us, the readers, but not for the characters. He concludes that the latter is the case, that *Moll Flanders* "is undoubtedly an ironic object, but it is not a work of irony." With this assessment I would agree. And I want to borrow Watt's categories and to risk a somewhat large generalization. If much English novel writing is, as would commonly be argued, realistic in spirit—that is, sustained by the imaginative concern to recreate and thereby to understand society, its pressures, its economic and moral sanctions, its institutions and norms—then it is a fiction that operates with what J. P. Stern has called the "epistemological naivety" of realism. The social context is taken as given—it is so much the *donnée* of the novelist's art that it is not the subject of epistemological scrutiny. Now of course, in documenting the clash between individual values and social norms, between personal aspirations and the actuality of society, the realistic novel does not emerge with stable,

reassuring assessments of the way its characters live, move, and have their being. Indeed, it is one of the hallmarks of the realistic novel as we know it that it reveals the jostling norms of the social and moral situation which it so persuasively evokes. But the realistic novel is concerned to reflect the jostling—rather than to reflect on the norms themselves. The result is the novel as "ironic object." And this I take to be as true of Defoe as it is of Balzac or Dickens. But I want to suggest that the Bildungsroman, although it may display a whole number of naivetés, does not suffer from *epistemological* naiveté. It is highly self-aware in respect of the interplay of values which it so unremittingly explores and articulates within the hero's experience. Hence, its irony is qualitatively different; it is irony as structural principle; it is the novel whose self-awareness generates the "work of irony" (in Watt's sense).

Here we arrive at the central objection to the German novel tradition: its lack of realism. There are two points I wish to make in answer to this charge. First, it seems to me a falsity to assume that the novel has to be wedded to the tenets of literary realism in order to be truly a novel. A number of recent studies of the novel have shown that the genre can appropriately be a self-conscious form in which referentiality of import is anything but the be-all and end-all. Moreover, it has been suggested that the realistic novel is but one, historically circumscribed, possibility within a much more durable and continuous tradition. Second, I want to insist that the concerns of the German Bildungsroman arc recognizably part of the overall situation of the nineteenth-century European novel. The conflict between individual aspirations and the resistant presence of practical limitations is as much a theme within, say, the Victorian novel as it is within the Bildungsroman. But with a difference. Within the framework of literary realism, this conflict finds palpable, outward enactment, and human growth and development is plotted on a graph of moral understanding; whereas in the German novel tradition, the tension between *Nebeneinander* and *Nacheinander* is essentially a debate about the coordinates of human cognition, and the issues raised arc epistemological rather than moral, are embedded in the narrator's (and reader's) capacity for reflectivity. If the German Bildungsroman is a legitimate voice within the European novel as bourgeois

epic, then it has something to tell even English readers about the inherent potentialities of the novel form. Moreover, we should not forget that English novel theory changes in the second half of the nineteenth century, moving away from the unambiguous commitment to realism towards a greater concern for what Arnold called "the application of ideas to life." Stang and Graham have both highlighted the emergence in the 1880s of the so-called novel of ideas or philosophical romance. If the English novel theory of the 1750s (in the famous remarks of Dr. Johnson and Fielding) had repudiated the romance, by the 1880s the wheel had come full circle. And, as Elinor Shaffer has recently shown, a novel such as George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) is vitally informed by a complex indebtedness to Goethe, to *Wilhelm Meister*, to the particular tradition of higher (that is, mythological) criticism in Germany; and thereby the strenuous moral concern of the English novel tradition interlocks with a mythopoeic consciousness, with a density of spiritual and cultural reflectivity which sustains— and is sustained by—the lives which that novel chronicles.

I hope I have said enough to suggest that the Bildungsroman should no longer be dismissed as a narrowly German exercise in the novel mode. For it is, in my view, a narrative genre that raises problems to do with character and selfhood in the novel, to do with plot, to do with the relationship between narrator and reader which can enrich our understanding of the possibilities of the novel form. Above all else, it can differentiate our awareness of how the novel can convey and explore the life of the mind, for the Bildungsroman is not simply an allegorical scenario of philosophical positions and values. No other novel form is so engaged creatively by the play of values and ideas; yet at the same time no other novel form is so tough in its refusal to hypostatize consciousness, thinking, insight as a be-all and end-all. (Hence that insistent presence of the *Nacheinander* on which I have laid such emphasis.) No other novel has been so fascinated by the creative inner potential in man—hence its fondness for artists or cryptoartists as protagonists— yet no other novel has seen the artistic sensibility as one involving a whole set of epistemological problems that are not susceptible of easy, practical solutions.

Now of course, this concern for the life of the mind is not confined only to the novel in German literature. English readers have often felt that German culture generally is heavily philosophical (shades of the Mikado's objections!). There is much truth to this—but it can also gravely mislead. And I want to insist that German literature is philosophical not in the sense that it has a philosophical scheme which it wants to impose but rather in that it asks after the place of philosophizing, of reflectivity, in living. Ultimately its finest products always suggest that consciousness and being are inextricably intertwined; that consciousness is not a realm serenely encapsulated from the stresses and strains of living.

**Source:** Martin Swales, "Irony and the Novel: Reflections on the German Bildungsroman," in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, edited by James Hardin, University of South Carolina Press, 1991, pp. 46–68.

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# *Classicism*

Classicism both as an art style and as the first theory of art was defined by the ancient Greeks, emulated by the Romans, and then continued to appear in various forms across the centuries. Historically, the periods most associated with Classicism are the fifth and fourth centuries BC in Greece with writers such as Aristotle and Sophocles; the first century BC and first century AD in Rome with writers such as Cicero and Vergil; in late seventeenth-century French drama; and in the eighteenth century, especially in France, during a period called the Enlightenment, with such writers as Voltaire and Condorcet. In its varying formulations Classicism affirms the superiority of balance and rationality over impulse and emotion. It aspires to formal precision, affirms order, and eschews ambiguity, flights of imagination, or lack of resolution. Classicism asserts the importance of wholeness and unity; the work of art coheres without extraneous elements or open-ended conclusions.

Both ancient Greek and ancient Roman writers stressed restraint and restricted scope, reason reflected in theme and structure, and a unity of purpose and design. In his *Poetics*, for example, Aristotle stressed the unities of time, place, and action. Perhaps basing his theory of drama on Sophocles's plays, Aristotle asserted that the action of a place must occur within 24 hours, with all the events taking place in one location, and each event causing the next event. Following these restrictions would produce a

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 400 BC

pleasingly cohesive drama. In all, the ancients believed that art was a vehicle for communicating the reason and intelligence that permeate the world and human affairs when people act rationally and according to moral precept.

Classicism in the twentieth century can be seen in the literary works and critical theory of T. S. Eliot, for example, and in the use of mythology in various works, an instance of which is Eugene O'Neill's 1931 trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which is based on the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Cicero (106 BC–43 BC)

Cicero was born January 3, 106 BC to a wealthy family living south of Rome. His extraordinary intellect was recognized while he was a student, and Cicero was sent to Rome to study law under the famous Quintus Mucius Scaevola. As a young man, Cicero also became interested in philosophy, first studying Platonian philosophy and then Stoicism, an austere philosophy adhered to by some Romans. Cicero spent time abroad to avoid retaliation following his win of a controversial court case in 79 BC While in Athens, Greece, he conversed on Platonian philosophy and refined his oratorical style. Cicero's career took off when he returned to Rome: He was a successful lawyer, was known as the best orator in the republic, and he quickly ascended through the political hierarchy, often taking a position at the youngest age allowed by law. These feats were impressive for a man who was not part of the nobility and, therefore, lacking the familial influence that was so integral to Roman governance. Cicero was a strong supporter of the Roman Republic during a time when the republic was unraveling into a series of dictatorships. After Julius Caesar was murdered and Rome was in upheaval, Cicero was a popular leader, but he was eventually labeled an enemy of state by Marc Antony and Caesar Octavian, who had him assassinated by decapitation on December 7, 43 BC Cicero was a prolific author of speeches, philosophical treatises, and rhetorical treatises. His many famous works include *Brutus* (46 BC), *On Fate* (45 BC), and *Cato the Elder, On Old Age* (44 BC).
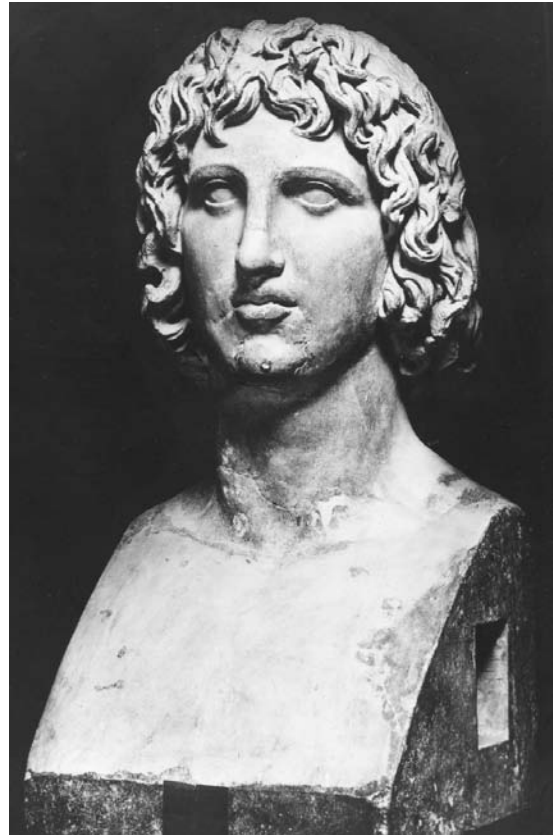


*Virgil* (Hulton Archive | Getty Images)

### Pierre Corneille (1606–1684)

Pierre Corneille was born June 6, 1606, in Rouen, France. The man who would one day be remembered as the Father of French Tragedy, Corneille studied law and worked as a magistrate for the Department of Forests and Rivers in Rouen. In his spare time, Corneille wrote plays. He sold his first comedy, *Mélite,* to a traveling troupe of actors in 1629. The play was successful and Corneille began to write full time. While his comedies were generally contemporary, his tragedies, for which he is most famous, were often historic and followed classic rules of composition and theme. *Médée,* produced in 1635, was his first tragedy. Corneille broke with classic tradition—and his sponsor, the powerful Cardinal de Richelieu—when he produced *Le Cid* (1637), a play that was categorized as a tragicomedy. Despite the wild success of *Le Cid* with audiences, the controversy arising from Richelieu's condemnation caused Corneille to withdraw from public life and writing for several

years. He returned to playwriting with *Horace* (1640), *Cinna* (1643), and *Polyeucte* (1643), all tragedies carefully crafted in the classic tradition. Corneille went on to have a successful and prolific playwriting career, working until his death on October 1, 1684 in Paris.

### T. S. Eliot (1888–1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1888 and was educated at Harvard, the Sorbonne in Paris, and Merton College at Oxford University. He met Ezra Pound in England in 1914 and settled in London in 1915,the same year his famous poem "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock" was published. His collection *Poems* was published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press in 1919. While evolving as a modern poet, Eliot also made his way as a literary critic and editor, first as an editor for *The Egoist* and later as the founder of the quarterly *The Criterion*. In these activities his influence on the modern literary period cannot be overstated. He shaped modern poetry, moving it toward a detached or non-sentimental colloquial idiom as he increasingly affirmed the importance of classical cultural tradition. Eliot converted to Anglicanism during the 1920s and became a British subject in 1927.

T. S. Eliot tried to resurrect the comic drama of Aristophanes in his 1932 poetic play, *Sweeney Agonistes*, and integrate classical tragic elements in his play *Murder in the Cathedral*, about the life and death of Thomas Becket. Eliot's literary criticism is extensive, including *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). In various essays, Eliot praised the poetic drama of the Jacobean stage and the works of Dryden. In his *Poetry and Drama* (1951), he analyzed the difficulties in trying to revive poetic drama for the modern stage. In all, a complex literary critic and poet, Eliot articulated some of the most challenging of modern stylistic developments with an appreciation of Classicism. He received the Nobel Prize in 1948.

### Euripides (c. 485 bc–c. 406 bc)

A writer during the first classical period in Greece, Euripides was a playwright of great import. The decline of the Golden Age in Greece, as a result of the Peloponnesian War, was witnessed by Euripides, and these changes probably account for the overall tone of his tragedies. His works also serve as a chronicle of Athenian thought during a turbulent time in its history and are excellent examples of Athenian drama.

Euripides was born in 485 bc in Athens, where he spent most of his life. Historians believe that he was from a middle-class background, which suggests that he was well educated. Euripides was also a friend of many of the great thinkers, including Anaxagoras, Socrates, and Protagoras. During his childhood and into early adulthood, Euripides enjoyed the splendor of an Athens rich in resources and political allies.

In 455, Euripides wrote his first tetralogy, a composition including three tragedies and a satyr play. Ninety-two plays are known to have been written by the dramatist after the start of the war. Only nineteen of his plays still exist, most of them tragedies in the form of divine myths, marital narratives, and noble family histories.

Euripides's works were often not warmly received by the Greeks of his time, as he did not believe in the triumph of reason over passion, nor did he believe that reason and order regulated the universe. These contrary beliefs are expressed by the gods of his plays, who do not always act in just or compassionate ways, even exhibiting the less desirable characteristics of their mortal counterparts. It has been suggested that, as a result of these differences, Euripides's work was not popular at dramatic festivals, earning him relatively few prizes. Euripides eventually left Athens in response to his critics and at the invitation of the Macedonia king Archelaus. Archelaus requested that Euripides's writings contribute to a new cultural center the king envisioned as a rival to Athens. Unfortunately, Euripides lived less than two years in Macedonia before he died.

Despite his unpopularity, Euripides has been labeled a stylistic innovator for his unconventional beliefs, particularly by contemporary critics who contend that his works contributed to the creation of modern drama. In his own time, Sophocles and others admired his work for its psychological realism and its use of simple, everyday dialogue in favor of the decorative aristocratic language that dominated the genre. The Dionysian festival revived his plays one hundred years after his death in 406 and they enjoyed a much greater reception.

## Homer (c. 750 BC)

It is of interest to note that Homer, whom many consider one of the greatest poets of western civilization, may not have existed. Various critics and historians offer conflicting views as to whether the man actually lived or was a fictional character given credit for the work of many. Some believe he was a bard by profession, a singing poet who composed and recited verses on legends and history. It is difficult to say when exactly the poet would have written. Based on language and style, it can be narrowed down to the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries BC The language of his works, a blend of Ionic and Aeolic, indicates that he was perhaps from the island of Chios, off the western coast of Asia Minor, where one family has actually claimed him as a legitimate ancestor.

In support of this theory, Demokodos, who appears in the *Odyssey*, is believed to be a portrait of Homer, a blind minstrel who sings about the fall of Troy. Until the third century BC, the Greeks insisted that an individual named Homer was responsible for both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, among other various minor works that have been attributed to the author. However, grammarians eventually began to wonder if the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written by two different people.

In direct opposition to the idea of a single author, critics also point out that an anonymous group of bards may have been responsible for the work of Homer. Blind, wandering old bards were referred to as "homros" and may be the creative energy behind a fictional Homer. Scholars have also identified many inconsistencies or stylistic differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, supporting the idea that they are the work of two different authors. Regardless of whether Homer's voice is that of one man or several, the literary greatness of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is unchallenged even today.

## Jean Racine (1639–1699)

Born on December 22, 1639, in La Ferte-Milon, France, Jean Racine was orphaned as an infant and raised by his paternal grandparents. Racine's education was dictated by Jansenist doctrine, a sect within the Roman Catholic Church. Aside from his religious indoctrination, Racine also studied Greek and Latin literature. After studying theology in the south of France, Racine returned to Paris, where he befriended Molière. Molière's troupe performed Racine's first play, *La thébaïde, ou les frères ennemis* (translated as *The Thebaid*), a 1664 play about the rivalry between Oedipus's sons. After Molière agreed to put on his second play, *Alexandre le grand*, a year later, the friendship between Racine and Molière ended over creative differences when Racine pulled the play two weeks into its production.

This would be one of a series of conflicts for Racine. Upon seeing *Alexandre le grand*, Corneille harshly criticized Racine for his work, in turn leading to a bitter rivalry between the two dramatists. Racine incited the anger of the Jansenists for denouncing them publicly, making nasty comments that painted the Catholic sect in a most unfavorable light. Finally, the Duchesse de Bouillona was an enemy of Racine and intentionally engaged in activities calculated to subvert Racine's career as a dramatist. In one instance, the duchess encouraged another dramatist to write a play to rival Racine's production. Additionally, she purposely purchased a group of good seats, only to leave them vacant on the opening nights of Racine's plays.

Racine's enemies took a toll on his career, and ultimately he left the theater and retired to private life. He subsequently held the position of royal historiographer, a high-profile post requiring him to travel with Louis XIV on military campaigns. At the request of the king's wife in 1689, he again put pen to paper writing the biblical story of *Esther* and a biblical drama *Athaliah*. Racine produced a few additional works before his death on April 21, 1699.

Racine's style is representative of several classical (and, by extension, neoclassical) ideals, namely those of simplicity, idealism, and polish. Racine is also noted for the ease with which he conformed to the unities of action, time, and place, especially with plays larger in scope. It was common for the playwright to skillfully compress several years of storyline into the course of two to three hours in an effort to preserve the convention. It has also been pointed out that Racine followed Aristotle's view that a cast of characters was inherently more important than any one figure within a drama.

## Vergil (70 BC–19 BC)

Publius Vergilius Maro was born on October 15, 70 BC, at Andes in northern Italy. He was fairly well educated, which suggests his family was at least from the middle class, and was prepared for

a career in law. However, he abandoned law practice after making one appearance in court. He retired to Naples, where he spent most of his life, to study philosophy. In 41 BC, Vergil was forced to appeal to Octavian Caesar, who later became Augustus, to return his parents' land because it had been confiscated for distribution to war veterans. It was through the intercession of his friends that the land was returned. Vergil's *Eclogues* were partially an expression of his gratitude to his friends and to Octavian.

The *Eclogues*, written sometime between 42 and 37 BC, were a series of pastoral poems, or poems composed on rural themes and involving shepherds as characters. In the case of the ten poems comprising the *Eclogues*, unhappy shepherds unlucky in love are featured in idealized settings (such setting being another convention of the pastoral form). The popularity of the works led to the publication of Vergil's *Georgics* (42–37 B.C.), a treatise on farming.

The final work Vergil undertook was his grandest. The *Aeneid* was commissioned by the emperor Augustus as a way to promote him as Roman emperor by connecting him to the mythic family of Aeneas, the founder of Rome. The epic glorifies the leader's ancestor and prophesies of Rome's Golden Age. Vergil was paid handsomely for his tribute, which he worked on for roughly ten years until he died in 19 BC Discontented with the poem, Vergil ordered his literary executor to burn the *Aeneid* in the event that he died before he completed and revised the work. Augustus denied this request and instead had the work edited and published, though nothing was added to it. The publication of the *Aeneid* ensured Vergil's fame as a poet and classicist.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Aeneid

The *Aeneid* follows the travels of Aeneas, the Trojan prince, after the fall of Troy, during the war with the Greeks described by Homer in the *Iliad*. Aeneas's journey takes him to Italy at the end of the fifth book. In book six it is prophesied by Aeneas's dead father that his descendants will be responsible for Rome's future greatness as an empire.

The *Aeneid* epitomizes Augustan patriotism and imperialism. The epic recites the story of the

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were recorded as books on tape in 1992 by the Highbridge Company. The tapes are English translations by Robert Fagles, as read by Derek Jacobi, and collectively run for nine hours on cassette. They come with an introduction booklet.
- *Troy* (2004) is a major motion picture dramatizing parts of Homer's *Iliad* and Vergil's *Aeneid*. It stars Brad Pitt as Achilles, Eric Bana as Hector, and Orlando Bloom as Paris. Written by David Benioff and directed by Wolfgang Peterson, it was available as of 2008 on DVD from Warner Home Video.
- *Rome* is a 22-episode, two-season television series dramatizing Roman life during the reign of Julius Caesar and his successor, Caesar Octavian. It was produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation, HBO (U.S.), and RAI (Italy) and was broadcast in the United States on HBO from 2005–2007. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from HBO Home Video.

original family, founders of Rome, and it predicts Rome's greatness. In writing his epic, Vergil follows the Homeric models of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In its retelling of the mythic story, it pays tribute to many important political figures of the day.

Vergil's *Aeneid* is equally recognized for its narrative form. In creating a shifting narrative from the objective to the subjective, Vergil is said to have refined narrative conventions. Scholars see this shifting of perspective as an important development in the work because it fosters a sense of psychological realism. In other words, it allows readers to have a greater understanding of the events of the work, due to the insights presented by various characters or voices. Vergil also refined the dactylic hexameter, a traditionally Greek meter, in his work.

*Jean Racine* (The Library of Congress)

## Andromaque

The play *Andromaque* is Jean Racine's first major work, appearing in Paris in 1667. The play served as direct competition to Pierre Corneille's play *El Cid*. Racine believed that Corneille was intent on ruining Racine's reputation as a dramatist. The work draws on classical characters and themes for its substance: Rome, war, heroes, and fallen empires. The play, much like Racine's other works, helped to shape some of the dramatic literary conventions of the Neoclassical period.

The play takes place shortly after the fall of Troy. It centers on the fate of Andromaque, the widow of Hector, whom Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles (a major Greek hero in the Trojan War), is holding captive. The Greeks send Oreste, the son of Agamemnon (the Greek king who led the expedition against Troy), to the court of Pyrrhus with a communication requesting that both Andromaque and her son be returned to them. The fear is that her son will someday attack the Greeks for having destroyed Troy. The political plot is complicated by a series of interlocking love interests.

The world of *Andromaque* is one dominated by passions. The ancients frowned on intense emotion, preferring the dominance of reason over passion, and to that end, the play is didactic, or instructional. Overindulgence in passion can only lead to tragic results for the characters. Pyrrhus is seemingly consumed by the passion he feels for Andromaque, stopping at nothing short of blackmail to win her love. Orestes believes, meanwhile, that his heroic efforts may win over the heart of Hermione, who is already committed to the brooding Pyrrhus. It is passion that leads to the death of Pyrrhus and then to Hermione's suicide. All of the characters in the play, on some level, allow their passions to spiral out of control, and the results are fatal.

## Horace

*Horace* (1640) is the first play in Corneille's classic trilogy, which also includes *Cinna* and *Plyeucte*. *Horace* recounts a traditional Roman story about Horace and his two brothers, the Horatii, who are chosen to represent Rome in a heroic battle with the Curatii, who are three brothers of Alba. The champions will fight to settle a dispute between the two cities and avoid a costly, bloody war; however, there is still a price. Horace is married to Sabine, the sister of the Alban champion Curiace, and Curiace is engaged to Horace's sister, Camille. Horace is fervently patriotic and is unmoved by these circumstances. Sabine pleads with him not to fight her brothers, but Horace ignores her. He duels with and kills his brothers-in-law, also losing his brothers during the fight. When Horace returns to Rome triumphant, Camille curses him and Rome. Enraged, Horace stabs his sister, who dies. By law, he is condemned to death for the murder of his sister, but he appeals to the populace for clemency, which is granted because he is a hero of Rome.

## Iliad

The *Iliad* (c. 9th or 8th century BC) is known as the greatest war epic to grace the history of Western literature. This masterpiece was even read and discussed by important historical figures, such as Alexander the Great, who, as a schoolboy, was said to have memorized all of the passages that refer to his hero, Achilles. Its emphasis on humanistic values, those of honor, truth, compassion, loyalty, and devotion to both family and gods, has earned the work the critical reputation as being a guidebook to moralistic behavior.

The *Iliad* is the story of Achilles' anger and its effects, as expressed in the poet's invocation

to the Muse of Poetry at the epic's opening. In Greek classical works, epic poets often invoke the help of the gods to assist them in their objectives. Structurally, the epic is divided into twenty-four books, accounting for the final months of the Trojan War, which lasted approximately ten years. Throughout the poem, references are made to specific past events that would have been familiar to a Greek audience.

The work is the unchallenged model for the classical epic. It established the genre as one incorporating superhuman heroes whose achievements were accomplished for the benefit of society. Achilles, the work's protagonist, is in fact the product of a union between Thetis, a goddess, and Peleus, a mortal. Homer's poem is written in dactylic hexameter. (A line of dactylic hexameter is seventeen syllables long, which are grouped into five sets of three and an ending set of two with the accents always falling at the beginning of each set.) The *Iliad* begins at the crucial point of the Trojan conflict, utilizing the classical convention "in medias res" in which a work opens in the thick of the plot, often near the climax, and then later recounts the events leading up to it.

The *Iliad*, in addition to being the Classic, epic model, is looked to as a valuable record of the late Bronze Age, as it depicts tribal organization, burial customs, class distinctions, and warfare. Though it has some value as a historical document of ancient events, often other sources of information are looked to; however, this does not seem to tarnish its literary merit in the eyes of scholars.

## Medea

The tragedy *Medea* (431 BC) was one of Euripides' greatest works. Like Sophocles's *Antigone*, *Medea* has a female protagonist, a woman who rebels against her husband and murders their children to punish him for his infidelity. Like other Greek tragedies, the play explores the costs extracted by acts of impulse and passion. It sympathetically portrays the feelings of betrayal and abandonment and shows how these convert into revenge as Medea seeks to retaliate by murdering her children. It depicts the terrible waste that comes when passion is unrestrained.

## Mourning Becomes Electra

In a trilogy of plays based on the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus, Eugene O'Neill explores infidelity and murder within a single family. O'Neill uses the Greek stories pertaining to Agamemnon, his wife Clytemnestra, and their daughter Electra and son Orestes as a model for his story of a New England family. The backdrop is the American Civil War, and like this war that was fought within the United States, the crimes of O'Neill's play initiate within a single family. Ezra Mannon, the returning Union general, represents Agamemnon, the Greek general who returns victorious from the siege of Troy only to be murdered by his wife and her lover. The Greek Clytemnestra is enacted by Ezra's wife, Christine, and her lover, Adam Brant. The New England setting conveys a rigid Puritanism which contrasts sharply with the passions acted upon by the Mannon family. O'Neill's play is one instance of how classical mythology and plotlines have been used by modern writers to serve as a vehicle for contemporary subjects.

## THEMES

### History

M. I. Finley, in *The Ancient Greeks*, speaks of the Greeks' concern with the individual and with isolated incidents of the past as expressed in their historical works. According to Finley, the Greeks were interested in history but did not take the pains that a historiographer would to report the past. He also asserts that the function of Greek history, as it expresses itself in the literature of the time, was often to provide an explanation for a current cult practice or ritual (evidenced by the infusion of gods into these texts). Also, the events of such historical accounts do not offer a context of time or place. Greek historians wanted to tell the stories of a more glorious, heroic past and tended, in general, to view the past as being somehow better than the present. Most of these characteristics also permeate ancient Roman writings, such as Vergil's *Aeneid*.

### Order

Classic Greek and Roman writers also influenced the works of the later classicists in their preference for order over chaos. These writers strove to achieve symmetry, continuity, refinement, harmony, and logic in their works. The principle of the unities illustrates this need for order and logic. Renaissance dramatists subscribed to Aristotle's theories of dramatic

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- The music of German Classicism captures the artistic expression of the movement as a whole. Study the works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or another classical composer. Note the impact this music has had on the works of modern composers and musicians.

- Classicists incorporated Greek myths into their works to enrich their meaning. Investigate the origins of these myths and observe how their imitators have altered them. How can these deviations enhance or diminish the overall impact of a piece? Give specific examples.

- The Greeks and Romans have been looked upon as being part of the glorious past of Western civilization. Influences of this past are evident in contemporary Western society. Investigate the impact of such influences, positive and negative, on contemporary life.

- Works from many cultural periods all over the world have been said to incorporate classical attributes. Choose a piece of literature, art, or music and discuss its classical characteristics. Make a supported argument for what you think the author, artist, or composer was trying to achieve by incorporating these characteristics.

design, as explained in his *Poetics*. Among them are the three unities of action, time, and place. According to these rules, a play first must have a single plot with a beginning, middle, and an ending. Second, the action of a play should be restricted to the events of a single day. Finally, the scene should be restricted to a single location.

## Reason versus Passion

It has been said that the Greeks loved to talk and listen, and they excelled at the art of conversation. The Socratic method was a process of educating by using questions that were designed to lead learners toward insight and understanding.

The assumption was that if dialogue is used strategically, the truth about the subject being discussed could be elicited from the participants.

The Greeks, like classicists who followed, feared the effects of unrestrained emotion; they assumed that passion brought an upset in the balance and right order of social arrangement and reason stabilized human relationships. Racine's *Andromaque*, for example, centers on the aftermath of the fall of Troy. All of the characters in the play are dominated by their passions. The result is insanity or death, with the exception of Andromaque. Euripides's tragedy *Medea* is another fatal tale in which Medea's passion, rather than reason, informs her decisions. Jason's infidelity incites Medea's jealousy and her overruling rage results in the murder of her own innocent children.

## STYLE

### Pastoral

A pastoral is a literary composition on a rural theme. The convention originated with classical Greek poet Theocritus during the third century BC In a pastoral, the characters are shepherds who speak in a courtly manner despite their simple setting. Like the poetry Theocritus, Vergil's *Eclogues* are about the experiences, love affairs, and pastimes of shepherds. Of the ten poems, a few are tragic love stories, a few involve singing contests, and the rest (the majority) recall the seizure of the shepherds' lands by retired Roman soldiers.

### Tragedy

Aristotle explained that a tragedy is a drama in which a respected high-ranking person falls from grace because of some impulsive act or prideful trait. The otherwise noble, courageous hero has a character flaw that brings ruin upon himself or herself. In Racine's tragedy *Andromaque*, all of the characters seem to fall prey to one fatal flaw, passion. It is Pyrrhus's passion for Hector's wife that causes him to cast aside the affections of his betrothed, Hermione. Hermione's disappointment with Pyrrhus causes his death. Finally, Oreste, in his love for Hermione, complies with her passionate request to kill Pyrrhus in an effort to win her affections. All but Andromaque, by the play's end, either die or go mad as a result of their passionate natures.

## Epic

An epic is a long narrative poem dedicated to the adventures of a hero. Usually the hero is a person of great national, historic, or legendary importance. Often times his story tells the origins of a people or a society. Vergil's *Aeneid* is an example of an epic. It is, in some respects, an imitation of Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. The protagonist is the Trojan prince Aeneas. His wanderings, after the destruction of Troy, include a journey to the underworld. There Aeneas encounters his dead father who reveals to him the future greatness of Rome and Aeneas's own role in founding the new civilization.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

It is difficult to discuss Classicism in terms of its movement variations since any classical variation could, by definition, be considered a part of Classicism. The principles of Classicism have been a part of literature from its ancient origins in Greece until today. However, several periods of distinct classical revival have been recognized in the histories of Rome, France, England, and Germany.

## Rome

Historians divide the movement in Rome into two periods, the Age of Cicero, from 80 to 43 BC and the Age of Augustus, from 37 BC to 14 AD The Roman culture is often considered an extension of early Greek civilization, the two often being described as Greco-Roman. The Romans, however, added their own political, military, and legal views to Greek values. Greek literature was the model for Roman writings in prose, poetry, as well as drama, and the works themselves were often composed in both Greek and Latin. Satire formed the basis for Roman social commentary. Vergil (70–19 BC) and Cicero (106–43 BC) have been identified as the significant literary figures of the periods. Cicero was one of the greatest prose writers and orators of the time, and his works include numerous legal and political speeches as well as philosophical letters and essays.

## France

Historians have recognized the movement in France in the 1600s and 1700s for its resurrection of classical values and style. The French classicists wrote with an emphasis on reason and intellect. French intellectual René Descartes, for example, emphasize the process of reasoning from a priori knowledge, that is, knowledge based on hypothesis or theory rather than experiment or experience. The French drama of Racine and others strongly influenced the English Neoclassical period. In addition to drama, the French were also noted for their use of satire. Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) has been identified as one of the best examples of satire. It systematically takes jabs at those in positions of power and privilege. This form of satire has also been identified as being part of a trend towards secularism and criticism of the church.

## England

Although the terms Classicism and Neoclassicism are somewhat interchangeable (and often used as such), Neoclassicism refers specifically to the literary periods in history that produced art inspired by the ancients. It is often defined as the Classicism that dominated English literature during the Restoration Age, which lasted from the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 to 1798. In the early years of the movement, the country enjoyed the reopening of theaters, when both William Wycherley and William Congreve were enlivening the stage with their plays. Heroic drama, written in couplets, developed, as did the comedy of manners. Poetry tended to take the form of the mock epic, the verse essay, and satire, as used by Dryden, Pope, and Swift. John Richardson describes in an essay for *Studies in English Literature 1500–1800* how English success in battle during the Spanish succession of the early eighteenth century inspired many poets to draw on classic sources for their laudatory compositions about warfare. Literature drew on classic virtues such as order, restraint, simplicity, economy, and morality, all of which were guided by the politics of the day. The end of the movement would be greatly influenced by the works of Samuel Johnson. The Age of Johnson, as it was called, represented a transition from a focus on classical study and imitation to an interest in folk literature and popular ballads.

## Germany

The Germans wanted not only to imitate the works of the Greeks and Romans but also to surpass them. In the eighteenth century, classical

culture became a subject of great interest. German schools and colleges began offering courses in classical literature, history, and philosophy. Great intellectuals emerged, inspired by classical ideals. During this time period, classical and romantic literature flourished side by side. An interest in a German past was also evident, as expressed in Goethe's *Faust*, an adaptation of a traditional German/Christian tale. *Faust* symbolized the union of Classicism and Romanticism in the marriage of Faust and Helen of Troy. However, many scholars believe the classicism of this era is best represented in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, George Friedrich Handel, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Franz Joseph Haydn, four of the great classical composers of the eighteenth century.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The origins of Classicism are traceable to ancient Greece. Greek history includes the Golden Age, the fifth and fourth centuries BC, one of the greatest periods of cultural development in Western civilization. Ironically, it was often the negative aspects of that history—the events of war, of plague, and of a Golden Age lost—that became a source of inspiration for Greek classical writers.

### Democracy in Greece
Pericles became the leader of the democratic party in Athens in 461 BC and ruled during Athens's Golden Age. When state pay was instituted for officials in 450 BC, Athens nearly became a full democracy; class was no longer a factor in official appointments. However, women, non-Greeks, and slaves were still completely excluded from politics. A demonstrated lack of respect for and exclusion of these groups were also byproducts of Athenian success.

Historians estimate the population of Attica, the state over which Athens was the capital, to have been approximately 315,000 at the time. Of this population, 172,000 were Athenian citizens; 28,000 were resident aliens; and 115,000 were slaves. All were registered in political and religious units known as demes. The rural population was very small, the land either owned by wealthy nobles or by farmers, whose chief crops were said to be olives and oil. Over half of the grain consumed in Athens was imported. The growing middle class, whose members were chiefly involved in commerce or were artisans and laborers, largely influenced urban life. The metics, or non-Greek resident aliens, were involved in trade and finance, and the state slaves contributed to public works.

### The Peloponnesian War
Athens's prosperity during the Golden Age was no reflection of its foreign relations. Expansionist policies in the outlying areas of Greece, which had been denied access to Athens, helped to form an ever-lengthening list of enemies. The growth of Athenian power also caused fear and suspicion in Sparta, the head of the Peloponnesian league.

The war began in 431 BC, with raids by Athens in Peloponnesus and Spartan attack on Attica. The conflict raged between Athens and Sparta, with no clear victor. While Athens was a dominating force on the seas, it was no match for Sparta's armies. Sparta, however, had no navy. Eventually, when their resources were depleted, Athens and Sparta signed a treaty in 421 BC that temporarily ended the conflict.

Nicias was elected to oversee a more peaceful Athens. But Alcibiades, a disciple of Socrates who was interested in the democratic leadership, had visions of aggressive expansionism. Alcibiades's rhetoric incited Athenians and Spartans to take up swords against one another. The final defeat of the Athenians occurred in 405 BC at Aegospotami when its final fleet was destroyed when taken by surprise. Athens was under a state of siege at the time, until 404 when it surrendered. Though the city of Athens was spared, its walls were torn down and many of its citizens were killed.

### The Plague
Historians estimate that from 430 to 429 BC, a plague from the east decimated Athens. Overcrowding within the city walls caused it to spread rapidly, killing one-third of the population and crippling many others. The horror of the event changed the social and religious values of the culture dramatically. Pericles died of the plague in 429 BC, and historians are quick to point out that his death was a pivotal event with respect to the outcome of the Peloponnesian War.

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **400s BC:** A plague of unknown cause and the Peloponnesian war have a profound effect on the shape of Greek literature.

   **Today:** Cancer and AIDS, both of which have been called the plague of the twentieth century, as well as World War I and World War II, have resulted in entire subgenres of literature and have greatly affected the course of postmodern writing.

- **91–87 BC:** Rome's Italian allies go to war to remove Rome from her predominance in the Italian peninsula. Rome gains the upper hand in the dispute by granting full citizenship to the residents of all Italian cities once they reaffirm their loyalty to Rome.

   **Today:** The civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, led by such renowned figures as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, brings to pass the end of much discriminatory legislation and the implementation of Affirmative Action in the United States. Despite the progress brought about by the movement, hate crime, racial profiling, and discrimination continue to be pertinent and volatile topics.

- **Eighteenth Century:** The excavation of Pompeii and Herculaneum, which were buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, sparks a revival in classical art, thought, and literature in England.

   **Today:** The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, in caves within 15 miles of Jerusalem, vitalizes interest in ancient Hebrew texts and culture while permanently changing the nature of biblical inquiry and deconstruction.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Scholars overwhelmingly acknowledge the debt the Western canon owes to the ancient Greeks and Romans, for their contributions not only to Western literature but to Western culture as a whole. The works of the classical writers were often admired for their restraint, restricted scope, sense of form, unity of design and aim, clarity, simplicity, and balance. They have been described as being models of conservatism and good sense, as demonstrated by the economy of their prose. Classical roots are evident throughout the history of Western literary thought, from the strict imitation of the Romans to the obscure, fragmented, and somewhat obscure poetry of the symbolists.

But not all were champions of the classical convention. Trevor Ross has formulated his own conclusions in his discussion of the anticlassical revolution and its effect on poetry in his work entitled "Pure Poetry: Cultural Capital and the Rejection of Classicism." Ross begins his essay making much of the words of romantic poet Joseph Wharton. Wharton was in favor of ridding poetry of its classical conventions altogether. He was more interested, instead, in promoting a poetry of feeling. Wharton (as recalled by Ross) said of poets and the classical tradition, "We do not, it should seem, sufficiently attend to the difference there is betwixt a man of wit, a man of sense, and a true poet." Wharton was quick to point out that as men of wit and of sense, poets such as Donne and Swift produce no "pure poetry."

Still other criticism surfaced as to the constraining or limiting nature of classical convention. Wharton is also identified for having similar sentiments, as quoted yet again by Ross. Said Wharton, perhaps as the "voice" of the romanticists, classic form "lays genius under restraint, and denies it that free scope, that full elbow room, which is requisite for striking its most masterly strokes."

Finally, Ross himself has commented on what perhaps would be called the "true motives"
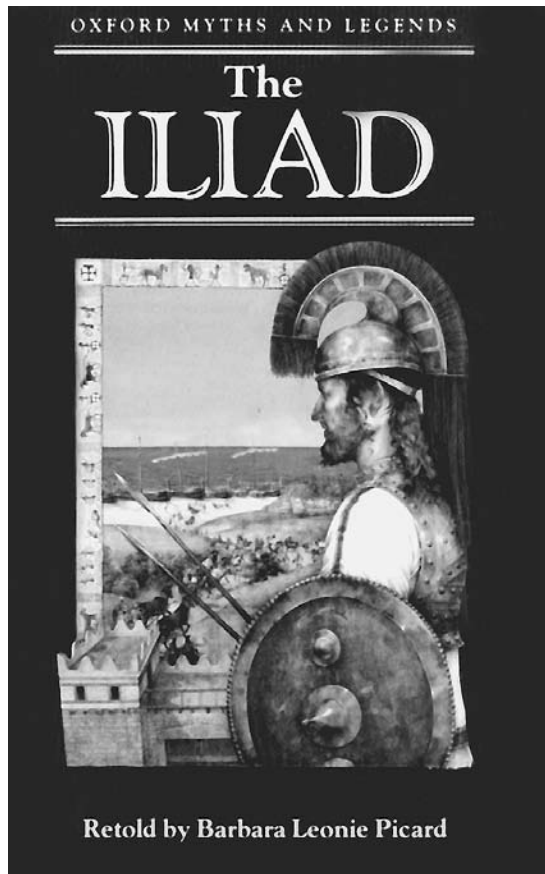
*Cover of* The Iliad *by Homer* (Palin, Nicki, illustrator. *From a cover of* The Iliad, *retold by Barbara Leonie Picard. Oxford, 1992. Copyright © Oxford University Press 1960. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press)*

of some of the classical poets. Although their aims were artistic, in their imitation of form and translation of works resided what has been called a rather "vigorously productive" form. Such literature, Ross points out, could be produced relatively quickly, and at the same time, it could be modified to attract a wealthy patronage. Ross adds that the neoclassical poets were "less anxious to define their autonomy from economic interests than not to compromise their moral and ideological integrity as national poets."

## CRITICISM

### Laura Kryhoski

*Kryhoski is currently employed as a freelance writer. In this essay, Kryhoski considers the*

*influence of classic conventions and thought on the work of the symbolist poets.*

Although most expressive in its Greek and Roman origins and perhaps its manifestations during the French, German, and English revivals, Classicism has still managed to wind its way forward, leaving behind it a trail of "new classics." The works of the symbolist poets in some ways rely on a classical tradition to provide powerful imagery and symbolism in order to evoke a response in the reader, juxtaposing them with more contemporary images. Gilbert Highet, in *The Classical Tradition,* has also given great consideration to the factors that define a classic in order to find some common ground with Classicism. Is the work of T. S. Eliot, among others, classical?

Many examples can be found in the body of symbolist poetry to suggest its reliance on classical conventions. Symbolist poets were interested in the representation of single events and individual persons; they applied Greek values in their realization of such representations. They believed that subjects were not necessarily considered art unless representative of eternal ideals. Although Plato stressed this belief in his own way, his emphasis was the same. Both the philosopher and the symbolist poets held that the key to understanding what was identifiably art were eternal ideals, the disseminators and interpreters of truth. It has been said that the symbolists were not conscious Platonists, despite already adopting symbols from Greek conventions.

Symbolist poets left much to the imagination. Highet is quick to point out that this preference was antithetical to Greek convention. He points out that the Greeks tended to state the essentials, allowing the hearer to supply the details. The symbolist poets, however, did not state essentials but instead described, in vivid detail, related images, the idea being that the central thought is made evident by the existence of such details. To a great degree, then, the matter of interpretation was left strictly to the reader. An Impressionist painting serves as a good example of the genre at work. Standing at an arm's length from Claude Monet's "Water Lilies," all that is perceptible to the viewer is a muddied collection of paint splotches randomly placed on a canvas. But as the viewer moves away from the canvas, the meaningless sea of paint starts to take form, to become ordered,

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
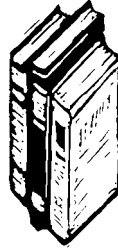
- The second edition of Victor Davis Hanson's *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (2000) describes in great detail what actually took place on the battlefield in ancient Greece, where the Greeks developed the basic tactics for Western warfare. Their brief, violent, decisive head-on battles involve opponents fighting with great resolve to defeat their enemies. The author has been praised not only for his use of technical description but for the imagination he employs, particularly in explaining factors such as the tremendous weight of Greek armor. In this way, Hanson conveys such battle details, describing the immense strength and bravery of Greek soldiers contending with heavy equipment that restricted movement as well as hearing and vision.

- Originally published in 1903, Jane Ellen Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (reprint, Princeton University Press, 1992) is noted for its consideration of how the ancient Greeks perceived the world around them and how these perceptions affected their religious practices. In her focus on both classical archeology and comparative evolutionary anthropology, Harrison challenges the Homeric depiction of religion in the *Iliad*. She rejects the previously accepted view in favor of extensive evidence supporting the views of the Greek masses, who favored "earthly spirits" to Homer's "sky bound" Olympians. Harrison examines Greek ritual with respect to Greek mythology. She is admired for her portrayal of the evolution

of Greek religion, not only as a concise history but as a human endeavor.

- *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments* (1997) is a collection of original essays in which experts in classical studies offer their assessments of gender roles in antiquity. Some of the essays examine a wide variety of topics studied over the past twenty years whereas others explore new areas of research. The roles of women are carefully considered with respect to Greek literature, Roman politics, ancient medicine, and early Christianity. The avenues that this collection opens for research in new directions and its focus on methodology make it a valuable resource.

- In *Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers* (1989), S. E. Frost Jr. explores many of the great philosophical challenges faced by the Western world, calling on the views of the most important Western philosophers, chapter by chapter. The topics covered include the nature of the universe, mankind's place in the universe, a discussion of good and evil, the nature of God, fate versus free will, the soul and immortality, mankind and the state, mankind and education, mind and matter, ideas and thinking, as well as some recent approaches to philosophy. Each chapter offers a discussion moving from the views of the early Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, to contemporary views, such as those of German philosophers Johann Fitche, Friedrich Schelling, and Georg Hegel.

until the viewer is able to see the beautiful image of lilies on a pond.

The works of the Classicists also employed very clear transitions, while In symbolist poetry, transitions between impressions have been characterized as being bewildering, confusing, and

dreamy. Such transitions seem to be the product of a primitive impulse rather a logical sequence. The symbolists avoided symmetry, continuity, smoothness, harmony, and logic in favor of abrupt, unpredictable, random transitions. Essentially, such patterns roughly resemble a

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rambling conversation or monologue rather than a progression of well-balanced ideas. The symbolist form naturally does not lend itself to the kind of creative discipline required of the classical form.

Yet the employment of the Greek myth in the creation of symbolist imagery is of great importance to the integrity of the overall work. The contrast that results from the inclusion of these images from the ancient past is powerful because, by their nature, they are often quite foreign to what has been referred to as a more vulgar, violent, short-lived present. Again, there is a connection to the Platonist idea that symbolic figures become the source of immortal stories. The symbolists were intent on taking a complex personal emotion or state of being and immortalizing it symbolically, thus making it art.

T. S. Eliot uses Greek legend to expose what he sees as a modern life devoid of meaning. His introduction of mythic symbols does not serve to boost the present, i.e., by reflecting a glorious past in an even more glorious present. Instead, he tends to use classical allusions to expose horrible truths about contemporary society. Highet adds that Eliot uses such allusions to "accentuate the sordidness of today with that of the past." Eliot actively sought out weaknesses and exposed them. In one of Eliot's very first poems, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, the poet uses a lyrical, dramatic monologue infused with classical allusions to describe Prufrock, a character plagued by self-doubt. The first classical reference in the work is to Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 27, appearing as an epigraph. It is translated as follows:

> If I thought that I was speaking
> to someone who would go back to the world,

the flame would shake no more.
But since nobody has ever
gone back alive from this place, if what I hear is
  true,
I answer you without fear of infamy.

The quotation sets up the premise or theme of the work. Eliot seems to be stating that existence is a hell and there is no possibility of escaping from it. The poem also elaborates on such sentiments. The work is not simply commenting on the struggles of a man whose insecurities have gotten the best of him and have prevented him from approaching the woman of his dreams. Prufrock is full of self-doubt, assuredly, to this aim, but his doubts run much deeper. He also expresses doubts about society, the world, and even his ability to claim a meaningful existence. To this end, he uses, among others, Christian references from the classical period. At one point in the poem, Prufrock pauses to reflect not only upon what he cannot accomplish but upon what the end result of a union with a woman would mean. He envisions his own demise in the reference "Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter . . . ." The quotation is an allusion to the beheading of John the Baptist by order of King Herod. In this biblical story, the king has the head of the Baptist brought to queen Herodias in an effort to please her. Prufrock is likening himself to John the Baptist, whose fate is dictated by the whims of a woman.

The work is also full of haunting images of the industrial landscape. As Prufrock describes "yellow smoke that slides along the street," there is an allusion made to the classical poem "Works and Days" by Hesiod, an eighth century BC Greek poet: "And time for all the works and days of hands." The poem, which celebrates farm work, perhaps functions as a sigh would, a momentary memory of a more favorable past before returning to the advent of the industrial age. These themes are not new to classical works, particularly the doubts Prufrock expresses about society and the world. The work of Goethe, particularly his *Faust*, also comments on a lack of meaning apparent in contemporary German political and social life. Alexander Pope, in *The Rape of the Lock*, used the tragedy of a woman "victimized" by her boyfriend to also expose a more superficial and trivial English society.

Eliot's *The Waste Land*, perhaps his most important work, has been said to also capture the hypocrisy, disillusionment, skepticism and

*Ruins of the Parthenon* (*Photograph by Susan D. Rock. Reproduced by permission*)

excess of modern life. In this work, Eliot incorporates the rituals of various ancient fertility cults, both Christian and pagan, but heavily relies on those of the Greeks (Adonis, Osiris, or Attis) to capture man's desire for salvation. The end result of such juxtaposition of ancient with modern is an exposure of a contemporary life devoid of spirituality. Highet also refers to *The Waste Land*'s theme as that of "death by water." He states that the work "is an evocation of the many epitaphs on drowned sailors in the Greek Anthology."

While it is certainly true that the symbolists were amateurs, not scholars, of ancient literature, the symbols they borrowed from the tradition have served to fortify their works, giving them not only a basis for meaning but for overall interpretation. They held a firm belief that the problems of life must be examined through a noble lens, i.e., in comparison to a more noble past, in an effort to express the malaise or social sickness prevalent in contemporary society. Does this make the symbolists classicists? Consider Euripides, who, though definitely a classicist, did not adhere to the forms and conventions of his times, and who intentionally bucked Greek tradition in favor of his own more modern

views. In the same spirit, T. S. Eliot may be characterized as a "classicist in literature" if we move beyond traditional definitions.

**Source:** Laura Kryhoski, Critical Essay on Classicism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## John Richardson

*In this essay, Richardson argues that early eighteenth-century poets tried to write poetry in a classical manner drawing on ancient texts but the poems were unsuccessful because ideas about warfare and what constitutes heroism had changed since ancient times.*

The five years between 1704 and 1709 were for the allies the high point of the War of the Spanish Succession, as under the leadership of the Duke of Marlborough they won pitched battles at Blenheim (1704), Ramillies (1706), Oudenarde (1708), and Malplaquet (1709). These successes were greeted in England by a large number of laudatory poems, which though seldom read today are of considerable interest. Often written with great care by accomplished men, they represent a collective effort that may mark an important point in English literary history. Most of the poets seem to have entertained the double ambition of celebrating victory in

> ❝ ONLY IF THE BATTLEFIELD IS QUIET ENOUGH FOR THE HERO TO MAKE SPEECHES AND IF THE MOST DEADLY MISSIVES ARE ARROWS AND DARTS WILL A HEROIC POEM WORK.❞

heroic forms derived from the ancients and of representing modern battle with a degree of accuracy. The two aims proved incompatible. Modern war and the modern understanding of war brought with them new constraints on representation and new ideas about the nature of heroism. These sit uneasily in ancient forms and among ancient codes, creating an incongruity in many of the poems between new and old. To a modern reader the poems do not seem to work, and some evidence exists that contemporaries felt the same. There was a growing discomfort by the end of the war with the way in which poets had written about it and a growing realization that ancient martial models might not fit, or be made to fit, modern experience. The history of eighteenth-century literature is not just a history of the temporary dominance of satire, the (possible) rise of the novel, and the emergence of Romanticism, but also one of the decline of the heroic. The high years of the War of the Spanish Succession are a pivotal moment in that decline.

Most of the war poets tried to write significant and lasting poetry by drawing upon ancient models. The seriousness the poets invested in their writing and the fact that these poems are not meant to be either metrical journalism or ephemeral puffs are evident in the format and length of some of them. In response to Blenheim, for instance, Samuel Cobb, John Philips, and Joseph Addison all published poems of around six hundred lines in large, handsome print, and John Dennis, who seldom did things by halves, brought out a smaller-format poem of seventy-two pages. Scattered through these and other poems are comparisons between modern and ancient heroes, deployed to elevate the modern. Dennis, for instance, likens English names to "*Grecian*, or the Godlike *Roman* Names," and an anonymous poem of 1707 finds quite typically that the mixture of good conduct and good

soldiership in Marlborough is similar to that in Aeneas, called here "the MAN the *Latian* Bard design'd." More generally, Addison begins the most famous war poem of the period, *The Campaign*, by seeing "An Iliad rising out of One campaign," an idea echoed by Cobb: "What Muse, delighted in Wars loud Allarms, / Will pay an *Iliad* to *British* Arms?" Addison's is the more pointed praise since it emphasizes that Marlborough needed only a summer campaign of a few months to provide materials equal to those from a struggle of ten years, but both he and Cobb assume that the ancient Greeks are the measure of the heroic. Even Matthew Prior, whose *Letter to Boileau* is something of an exception among war poems of the time in being witty as well as patriotic, wishes for an English Virgil, or as he puts it, that "The *British* Muse shou'd like the *Mantuan* rise."

The assumption of ancient, heroic preeminence, or an assumption close to that, is often at work even when it is not explicitly stated. The poets consistently use ancient forms, including pastoral, ode, epic, and, perhaps most commonly, a kind of all-purpose heroic. Cobb, for instance, who does not attempt an epic, begins with the hope of inspiration and poetic immortality:

> Should some kind Muse, with a *Pierian* rage,
> Inflame my Breast, and consecrate my Page,
> Or would propitious *CHURCHILL* deign to shine
> On my low Thought, and brighten every Line:
> Not *Egypt*'s Pyramid should mine surpass,
> Like Marble polish'd, and more strong than Brass.

Although it is slightly odd to have Marlborough, so often the subject of these poems, enlisted here as an extra muse as well, Cobb's overriding intention seems to have been to use ancient formulas to animate his poem. Many of the more specifically epic poets imitate the ancients by way of Milton. Philips is the best known, and perhaps the best, of these, but he is not alone. In his preface Dennis eschews rhyme, citing the authority of Milton, and he begins his poem by asking God to inspire him so that he will write "[n]o wretched, low, untun'd, prosaick Song," an echo (however faint) of the intention of Milton's muse to soar "with no middle flight." John Paris, too, refers to Milton from the outset, beginning "Of *Britons* Second Conquest, and the Man," and delaying his main clause, "Sing, Muse, propitious," until the thirteenth line. Milton, of course, was no ancient, and the battles of

*Paradise Lost* are in some respects deliberately different from those in Homer. Nevertheless, by invoking him, poets also invoked traditional ways of thinking and writing about heroism, fighting, and war.

However, if the war poets of 1704–09 relied heavily upon ancient representations of battle, there is also something distinctly and originally modern in many of their descriptions of war. My point is not that they were writing during, or just after, what historians call a military revolution. Although it is true that the disappearance of the pike, the invention of the socket bayonet, and the universal distribution of the flintlock were important developments of the very early years of the eighteenth century, historians are not agreed upon the existence or the date of a revolution. Jeremy Black, for instance, suggests it is most accurate to think of two revolutions, the second occurring between 1660 and 1720, and being in nature less of a real revolution than a cumulative series of gradual but important changes. But debates of this kind are only of tangential interest in a discussion about the martial poetry of the period, since it was all written away from the battlefield. What matters for the poetry is less the reality of war than the home-front awareness of the reality and the desire to use that in poetic representation. In this respect there may have been a kind of revolution. As well as being quaintly old-fashioned in some passages, the poems about Blenheim and later battles are newly detailed and accurate in their accounts of the events of a modern battle. Poems about William III's battles, for instance, are fewer in number, shorter, less poetically ambitious, and generally do not include very exact details of the fighting.

Two factors were important for this change. Firstly, there were the scope and number of the poems. So much was written and at such length that the poets could not simply offer abstract generalities about victory and greatness. Secondly, there was the effect of the victory at Blenheim, a battle Daniel Defoe describes as "a very great Action, the Greatest, most Glorious, and most Compleat Victory that I can find in History for above 200 Years past." So great was the victory that it resulted in what would now be called blanket media coverage and in the establishment of Marlborough's heroic status. Accurate and detailed journalistic accounts of military actions were not in themselves anything

new. Ten years earlier, people in London could have read half-week by half-week in the *London Gazette* or the *Postscripts to the Post-Boy* of the developing siege of Namur, where Tristram Shandy's Uncle Toby received his wound. The new developments were the amount and spread of information and the readiness to use it in poetry. Some of that information came direct from the frontline, such as the letter published in *The Evening Post* after the Battle of Malplaquet from a war-weary Lieutenant Earbery: "Yesterday Morning we began a most bloody Battle with the French, we have totally routed them and cut them in Pieces; we have not two Men in four but what is kill'd or wounded . . . we have lost a vast Number of Men, but the Enemy more; I am very well my self, but few besides me of our Squadron . . . This Battle was worse than Hochstet." The short sentences here and the obsessive returning to the size of the losses have the authentic stamp of terrible firsthand experience. More common are less personal accounts, but even these contain enough detail about the nature and progress of the war to keep the reading Englishman very well informed.

The reporting of the war fed directly into the poetical representation of it. The anonymous doggerel *Le Feu de Joye* makes this explicit by creating a poetic context in which the writer waits anxiously in England until "[w]e'ad News." Once that arrives, he launches into his war poem, enumerating the assaults on the fortress at Schellenberg that preceded Blenheim, giving considerable attention to the effects of cannon at Blenheim itself, and trying to capture the cries made by the French soldiers driven into the Danube there:

> Not Screitching Owls, or Southern Croaking
>     Frogs,
> Howling of Wolves, the Latriant Noise of
>     Dogs;
> Roaring of Lions, *Irish* o're their dead,
> Or Condemn'd Pris'ners, full of Horror dread,
> Not Infants Squeal, poor Wife's Moan, or
>     Eagles squawling,
> Th' Peacock's Schream, Snakes Hiss, or
>     Caterwawling,
> The Sailor Shipwreckt, or lost Trav'llers Cry,
> More dismal were than these in Misery.

Although the poem is in many ways unsuccessful, one must acknowledge the attempt here to render the writer's understanding of battlefield reality as precisely as possible. He was not alone in the attempt. When Edmund Smith suggests of Philips's *Blenheim* that "all the Battle

thunders in his Lines," he is not bestowing meaningless praise on his dead friend. Philips's poem includes smoke, cannon, and even the effects of chain shot:

> on each side they fly
> By Chains connex't, and with destructive
>   Sweep
> Behead whole Troops at once; the hairy Scalps
> Are whirl'd aloof, while numerous Trunks
>   bestrow
> Th'ensanguin'd Field.

There is a relish in Philips's lines, aptly characterized by Richard Blackmore as "hideous Joy," which is peculiar to him, but most other poets also refer to such modern elements of battle as cannon, muskets, and cavalry charges.

The poets of the War of the Spanish Succession, then, tried at once to imitate ancient models and to represent modern war. The incompatibility in these two desires lay in the fact that modern war and the modern understanding of it were different from the ancient form of war. An example of the perception of the gap between ancient and modern can be found in Alexander Pope's preface and notes to his *Iliad.* At times, Pope identifies continuity in military practice, especially with respect to the construction of defensive works. When the Greeks build a wall around their camp in the seventh book, for instance, he argues that the fortification is "as perfect as any in the modern Times." Moreover, the Greek discipline that he and his sources sometimes refer to may be seen as a shadow of modern military discipline, especially when it is praised as a contrast to the disorderliness of "the barbarous Nations." More striking than this, however, are the frequent references to the differences between ancient and modern battlefield behavior, references that suggest broadly that the ancients were courageous but cruel whereas the moderns are humane but unheroic. Pope admires the "wonderful Simplicity of the old heroic Ages" when honor was the reward for victory in single combat, but he condemns "the uncivilized Manners of those Times" that led Agamemnon to kill a young and already defeated enemy. On occasion, he ascribes the differences to changes in military technology: "Another Consideration which will account for many things that may seem uncouth in *Homer,* is the Reflection that before the Use of *Fire-Arms* there was infinitely more Scope for personal Valor than in the modern Battels... There was also more *Leisure* in their Battels before the Knowledge of Fire-Arms; and this in a good Degree accounts for those Harangues his Heroes make to each other in the Time of Combate." Ancient heroism and the loquacity poets associated with it are here directly linked to levels of military technology and to the absence of guns.

The reliance on gunpowder and what Dennis calls "missionary Death," as against that directly delivered by swords, had far-reaching effects. In particular, the modern battlefield came to be seen and represented less as the stage for individual heroism than as the site for massed movements. Pope points out that "in each Battel of the Iliad there is one principal Person, that may properly be call'd the Hero of that Day or Action." Part of the reason for this was an aesthetic principle of subordination and clarity, but it also mirrors a way of thinking about fighting that was no longer possible for modern battles. Abel Boyer, in his *History of the Reign of Queen Anne*, *Digested into Annals. Year the Third*, describes the Battle of Blenheim as a series of troop movements and formations rather than courageous actions by individuals. The early part of the description is characteristic: "the Army advanced to the Plain, and were drawn up in order of Battle. The Left Wing consisted in 48 Battalions and 86 Squadrons, whereof 14 Battalions and 13 Squadrons were *English* Troops; 22 Squadrons *Danish*; 14 Battalions and 19 Squadrons *Dutch*." This understanding of the battle as the disposition and movement of formed groups is reinforced at the beginning of the section in a fold-out plan, which represents battalions and squadrons as squares, and batteries as small firing cannon. The same fundamental conception is given more imaginative treatment when Defoe looks back from 1720 to the English Civil Wars in *Memoirs of a Cavalier*. He describes a skirmish near Gloucester: "We at first despised this way of Clubbing us, and charging through them, laid a great many of them upon the Ground; and in repeating our Charge, trampled more of them under our Horses Feet: And wheeling thus continually, beat them off from our Foot, who were just upon the Point of disbanding." It is the pronouns that are interesting here, since they are all plural. Like Boyer's bird's eye plan of Blenheim, Defoe's worm's eye account of earlier battles registers groups of men moving in unison and displacing or protecting other groups.

The individualism and individual heroism that are so important in Homer's battles have little place in a war of this kind. Indeed, the typically Homeric situation in which the victor is the individual hero and the vanquished the fleeing mass is reversed, since strength lies in organized numbers. This is nicely illustrated in Boyer's plan where the only part that shows separate soldiers is the representation of the flight of the routed French troops toward the Danube. The suggestion that the victorious are groups and the defeated individuals is made explicit and political by Dennis:

> Their Squadrons now confounded, all disband,
> Each for himself takes sordid Care alone,
> Sure Ruin both to Armies and to States.

Although Dennis is in part seizing the opportunity to attack factionalism at home, the understanding of the need for discipline and solidarity on the battlefield is genuine enough and was quite widespread.

Other changes wrought by gunpowder were an increase in noise on the battlefield and a decline in the status of individual weapons. Both have consequences for the representation of war. Pope, as we have seen, ascribes the "Harangues his [Homer's] Heroes make to each other in the Time of Combate" to the comparative leisure of the ancient battlefield, but the comparative noise must have been just as important. Dennis remarks how the sound of the cannon silences trumpets and soldiers alike, by drowning "all dreadful Noises in its own." Most of the other poets seem to have shared this perception. The author of *Le Feu de Joye* has Marlborough urge his troops *"Observe me Fellow-Soldiers what I do*," and Philips represents the British troops as responding to French taunts with surly silence, "No need such Boasts, or Exprobations false / Of Cowardice." But the great majority of poets simply leave speeches out of the busy, noisy, modern battlefield.

As well as banishing speeches from the battlefield, gunpowder and mass production changed the nature of weapons. In Homer, a hero's weapons are important in themselves, the most famous example being the elaborate shield Vulcan makes for Achilles. This is so powerful a work of art that Pope describes Homer's design and description of it as "the noblest Part of the noblest Poet," but it is also a practical weapon of war used to repel javelin throws. In the War of the Spanish Succession there were no weapons as elaborate and beautiful as the shield, and there are none in the poetry inspired by it. Associated with weaponry in Homer is the description of the arming of the hero. Having donned Achilles' armor, Patroclus looks so splendid and metallic that "[h]e flash'd around intolerable Day," and metaphors of refulgence are later applied to Achilles in his new armor. Few poets describe the arming of Marlborough, except, like Philips, in a distant way:

> on thy pow'rful Sword alone
> *Germania*, and the *Belgic* Coast relies,
> Won from th'encroaching Sea: That Sword
>     Great *ANNE*
> Fix'd not in vain on thy puissant Side,
> When Thee Sh'enroll'd Her Garter'd Knights
>     among.

The sword and its fixing, both metonyms for authority, suggest modern generalship rather than excellence in hand-to-hand fighting. Indeed, Philips's lines make Achilles and his armor, even in Pope's translation, seem distinctly out of date.

The nature of war and perceptions of its nature influenced ideas about the heroic. The early years of the eighteenth century saw both the persistence of ancient models of heroism and the emergence of new models. Some descriptions preserve the idea of the warrior chief, such as Cobb's representation of Marlborough at Blenheim:

> Our Left, as far as *England's* Sons could do,
> Copy'd their Great Original in view:
> Who, with his Sword, where thickest Troops
>     ingage,
> Leaves bloody Foot-steps of his manly Rage.

There are three heroic qualities displayed by Marlborough here, and all of them are familiar from the *Iliad*. He has a leader's charisma, he puts himself at risk in the most dangerous part of the battlefield, and he is an efficient, sword-wielding killer. Philips develops this third quality with considerable gusto. When Marlborough sees Eugene repulsed:

> Swift, and Fierce
> As wintry Storm, He flies, to reinforce
> The yielding Wing; in *Gallic* Blood again
> He dews His reeking Sword, and Strows the
>     Ground
> With headless Ranks.

Again there is a characteristic, and somewhat idiosyncratic, relish in Philips's account of blood and beheading.

More common than descriptions like Cobb's and Philips's, however, are those that omit the third quality. The modern hero is usually regarded as a risk-taking leader rather than a life-taking fighter, The *Post Boy* reports that at Malplaquet "the Duke of Marlborough and Count Tilly, were, during the whole Fight, on the Right and Left Wings, continually at the Head of the Troops in the hottest of the Fire." The final phrase is telling since it implies that the generals were endangered by the fire, not that they were personally dispensing it. Similarly, the *Post-Man* cites a battle report affirming that at Blenheim Marlborough "expos'd himself to the greatest danger, as the meanest Souldier," and the *Tatler* writes warmly of General Webb, who at Malplaquet "expos'd himself like a common Soldier." This verb, "to expose oneself," which is to be found quite often in battle reports, suggests that the hero is in danger himself rather than directly a danger to others. The same idea is present in the frequent accounts of Marlborough's near misses. Newspaper reports, repeated in Francis Hare's history, tell how at Blenheim the Duke "narrowly escap'd being kill'd by a Cannon Bullet, which grazed under the Belly of his Horse, and cover'd him with dirt," and Dennis, among others, attempts to turn a similar incident at Ramillies into poetry:

> but Discord while He mounts
> And Death outrageous to be thus repuls'd
> Level a Canon at His Sacred Head,
> But from His Sacred Head the ponderous Ball
> Diverted, *Bringfield* who remounts Him kills.

Dennis's hero here faces mighty adversaries and real danger, but at least insofar as the immediate threat to his life is concerned, he is a rather passive figure. The danger is not averted by his killing an enemy, but by a providential turning aside in which he has no part.

The de-emphasis on the hero's role as a killer is connected with two other developments in the perception of warfare. Firstly, the general was increasingly regarded as the controller of the battlefield rather than a fighter, an understanding that is present in Boyer's account of Blenheim. He describes an enemy movement of troops as "*one of the principal Causes of their Defeat,*" and a later failure to deploy at the right moment as "*this Capital Fault of the* French" to which "*we ought principally to ascribe our Victory.*" Implicit here is the belief that stratagems, not great acts of heroism, win modern battles. William Broome, one of Pope's later collaborators on the Homer translation, shows the same understanding when he compares Marlborough to Mars, complete with "Iron Car" and "Adamantine Shield." He adds: "With delegated Wrath thus *Marlbro'* glows, / In Vengeance rushing on his Country's Foes." It is the phrase "delegated Wrath" that is significant, and it has to be understood in the context of the earlier description of how "The dauntless Hero pours his martial Bands." Marlborough's wrath has been delegated to his soldiers, and his own task is to direct them rather than to fight himself.

This is not to suggest that courage becomes unimportant but that it is important in the context of generalship, not of combat. When the poetry of the period emphasizes Marlborough's valor, it usually does so primarily by showing him giving encouragement to his soldiers. Paris, for instance, writes:

> lo! I behold at length
> The Godlike Heroe all besmear'd with Dust
> Gloriously dreadful, issuing forth Behests
> Sedate, unmov'd, with Succour opportune
> Th'Oppress'd relieving, the prevailing Part
> His animating Looks uphold, in all
> His Sword or Presence vig'rous Thoughts
>    renews
> And wonted Chear.

With the exception of the word "dreadful," the first few lines of the passage quoted here focus exclusively on the beneficial influence Marlborough exerts on his men, and they evoke a saint ministering to the sick as much as a fighter. The last line is also suggestive, as Paris mentions the sword, then offers "[p]resence" as an alternative. It is the general's being in the battle with the men rather than his fighting that counts. Nicholas Rowe implies something similar:

> Like Heat, diffus'd his great Example warms,
> And animates the Social Warriors Arms,
> Inflames each colder Heart.

Rowe uses the same heat and animation metaphors as Paris, and with the telling phrase "Social Warrior" he places those in the context of a modern army, which operates by numbers and groups. One of the general's principal tasks is to encourage those groups.

The second development in the perception of warfare was the growing belief that the hero should be humane and actively in pursuit of good as well as bold and more or less justified in his fight. In the preface to his Blenheim poem, John Oldmixon makes explicit comparisons

between the benevolent and virtuous heroism of Marlborough and the selfish heroism of other conquerors. Many heroes, he suggests, were "animated by a lawless Ambition," and even though "some of the ancient Heroes might make a good use of their Power, yet that does not excuse their seizing it out of the Hands of those to whom it belong'd." In a similar vein, Blackmore urges poets not to make too much of comparisons with a Greek hero such as Achilles, since "too near Brutal is his Martial Rage," and suggests that British soldiers are actually somewhat closer to "Angelic Warriors." Occasionally ideas of this kind shade into almost pacifist Christian sentiments. When Edward Young looks back on the war from the peace of 1713, it is with relief that a moral burden has been lifted from the country:

> Devotion shall run pure, and disengage
> From that strange Fate of mixing Peace with
>    Rage;
> On Heaven without a Sin we now may call,
> And Guiltless to our Maker prostrate fall;
> Be Christians while we Pray, nor in one Breath
> Ask Mercy for ourselves, for others Death.

The suggestion here that all war is morally tainted does not occur very often in writing of the period, but its expression indicates something of a discomfort with mass killing.

Most contemporary writers seem to have wanted generals and soldiers to be brave, virtuous, and merciful. Addison sees "Unbounded courage and compassion join'd" in Marlborough, and although he is honest enough to deal with the ravaging of Bavaria before Blenheim, he is also eager to explain it: "The leader grieves, by gen'rous pity sway'd, / To see his just commands so well obey'd." It is important here that Marlborough's orders are represented both as being justified by the imperatives of war and as causing him private pain. There is a similar conception of the compassionate hero in a set of verses that appeared in the *Female Tatler* in 1709:

> Now *Marlbro'* comes, more like a *Deity*,
> That seeks to set Mankind at Liberty;
> Conquers to give, not with the thirst of Gain,
> Or base Ambition, or Desire of Reign;
> But to make War's Tyrannick Murders cease,
> And force outragious Men to live in Peace.

Pope, too, shares the belief implicit here that "all generous Warriors regret the very Victories they gain," and his main objection to Homer, whom he admires so much in other respects, "is that Spirit of Cruelty which appears too

manifestly in the Iliad." Philips is again the exception, and it is interesting to compare his account of the French troops driven into the Danube with Oldmixon's description of the same incident. Oldmixon, who claims Britons are "by Nature good as they are Brave," has Marlborough recalling his "Impetuous Troops" as their enemies tumble into the river, while Philips says the opposite: "Nor did the *British* Squadrons now surcease / To gall their Foes o'erwhelm'd." Whatever the truth about the pursuit of the French, Oldmixon's account is more typical than Philips's of the beliefs and expectations of the poets of the time.

Mixed perceptions about the nature of warfare and heroism created difficulties of representation. Writers struggled to accommodate, on the one hand, received aesthetic demands alongside admiration of the ancients, and on the other, modern perceptions of war and heroism. This created a number of problems. One of Pope's borrowed notes for the *Iliad* argues that "[i]t is in Poetry as in Painting, the Postures and Attitudes of each Figure ought to be different." But the idea of the modern battlefield with its massed formations does not permit such difference. Moreover, modern notions of courage, heroism, and generalship militate against the representation of the active, killing "Hero of that Day" so prominent in the *Iliad*.

The difficulty of dealing with massed formations can be seen in *The Campaign*, a poem commended by the *Tatler* as "wholly new, and a wonderful Attempt to keep up the ordinary Idea's of a March of an Army, just as they happen'd in so warm and great a Stile, and yet be at once Familiar and Heroick." Although the references to warmth, greatness, and the heroic suggest that the poem was not entirely new in its ambitions or style, Addison does attempt to represent a campaign in which artillery and massed infantry are the key forces. In doing so, he describes the defenses of the Schellenberg fortress and the assault upon them:

> Batt'ries on batt'ries guard each fatal pass,
> Threat'ning destruction; rows of hollow brass,
> Tube behind tube, the dreadful entrance keep,
> Whilst in their wombs ten thousand thunders
>    sleep:
>
> . . .
> High on the works the mingling hosts engage;
> The battel kindled into tenfold rage
> With show'rs of bullets and with storms of fire
> Burns in full fury; heaps on heaps expire,

> Nations with nations mix'd confus'dly die,
> And lost in one promiscuous carnage lye.

Addison faces two connected difficulties here. Firstly, although battlefield crowds are one common epic element, he has virtually nothing to offer except them. Because of the perception of a massed formation battle, he cannot introduce a variety of postures, having to rely instead on repeated plurals and amplification for effect. Secondly, the shooting battle he describes destroys the possibility for extended, stirring contests between individuals.

The only individuals that Addison and other poets single out are the generals, especially Marlborough, but here description is hampered by modern ideas of generalship and the heroic. In a passage from *The Campaign* picked out by the *Tatler* for special commendation, Marlborough is shown in the thick of battle:

> 'Twas then great MARLBRO'S mighty soul was
>    prov'd,
> That, in the shock of charging hosts unmov'd,
> Amidst confusion, horror, and despair,
> Examin'd all the dreadful scenes of war;
> In peaceful thought the field of death survey'd,
> To fainting squadrons sent the timely aid.

These lines describe a thoroughly modern hero, and the diffusion of that image can be seen in its occurrence in other poems. Dennis calls Marlborough "Lord of himself," Oldmixon shows him acting with "Chearful Patience," and Cobb describes him as "collected in himself." This Marlborough does not participate directly in the fighting, he does not kill, and above all, he does not become emotionally entangled in the battle through anger. Addison strives to give effective poetic voice to these negative qualities by creating a striking contrast between the battle's fury and Marlborough's calm. The effect, however, is one of unintended incongruity. The most obvious cause of the incongruity is an idea of poetically heroic behavior that is derived from epic and from which Addison's Marlborough diverges. There may also be an implied coherence in the would-be sublime that leads to an expectation of consistency, so that the main figure in an elevated description of battle should himself be an active fighter. Whatever the causes, however, the peacefully contemplative, modern general seems out of place on a poetic battlefield, as an ancient champion would not.

This incongruity is compounded by the way in which poets go to some length to avoid showing Marlborough and the English engaged in killing. Although grisly descriptions of death are quite common, direct references to the soldierly causes of it are not. The Danube at Blenheim again provides a good example. Defoe's rather curious *Hymn to Victory* includes passages on the fighting qualities of Englishmen, but when the battle is joined he prefers to recount how the French rushed to their own deaths:

> Th' *Inviting Streams* the desp'rate Troops
>    allure,
> There they have room to die secure;
> There they can gratifie their Rage, and die,
> In spight of the insulting Enemy.

Cobb, too, gives the river responsibility for the deaths of the French, developing the idea in a self-consciously literary fashion:

> The *River* then, discharging on his Foes,
> Mud, Sand, and Stones, his whole Artillery
>    throws
> From his vex'd bottom; some with violent
>    strokes
> He head-long bears; some with hurl'd Gravel
>    chokes.

Although this is largely a conceit and an attempt at elevation, it seems also to be grounded in an unwillingness to write too directly of English killing. But like the descriptions of the composed Marlborough, such circumlocutions have the effect of undermining the martial heroic style.

Perhaps more important than this is the way in which the status of the general as the director of the battle also means that his preservation becomes paramount for the success of the battle and the safety of his troops. Addison at one point advises Marlborough to suppress his natural inclination to join the fight:

> Forbear, great man, renown'd in arms, forbear
> To brave the thickest terrors of the war,
> Nor hazard thus, confus'd in crouds of foes,
> *Britannia's* safety, and the world's repose.

The advice is not peculiar to Addison. The anonymous *Poem on the Late Glorious Successes* counsels, "But oh! take heed; great Hero, rush not on," and even Philips warns "O! Beware / Great Warrior, nor too prodigal of Life / Expose the *British* Safety." Old ideas of heroism are alive and well in these examples, since it is a compliment that Marlborough's courage requires restraint, but the new idea of the general who needs to be protected exists alongside them. Pope glances sardonically at this development in a note to the episode in book 10 of the *Iliad*,

in which a number of chiefs volunteer to go on a raid: "It appears from hence, how honourable it was of old to go upon these Parties by Night, or undertake those Offices which are now only the Task of common Soldiers." The sentence works on the contrast between the honor and courage "of old" and the delegation and safety of "now." When the latter qualities are turned into poetry they appear as rather less than heroic. It is hard to imagine Homer shouting to his warriors from the sidelines that they must be careful not to get hurt.

Some of the problems of representation faced by Addison and the other poets were also faced in different forms by visual artists. Probably the most famous painting concerning Marlborough's victories is James Thornhill's ceiling in the Great Hall at Blenheim Palace. This is a lively baroque allegory, which employs perspective to create the illusion of looking upward at a classical arch. At the top of the stairs in front of the arch, and in the middle of the picture, Marlborough, dressed in ancient helmet and armor, kneels before the goddess Britannia who proffers a laurel wreath. Above him, in the fictional space of the painting, various figures climb the air, commemorating his fame by reading, writing, or blowing a trumpet. Below him two of Britannia's handmaids are posed on rocks, a second anciently dressed general sits and talks, presumably of the war, and at the lowest point three muscular, bare-chested men maneuver trophies of battle into place. The grand allegorical manner allows Thornhill to maintain an aura of ancient dignity without offending modern sensibilities by making his heroes too ensanguined. Because the painting does not represent a historical event, Thornhill can place his generals in rather languid poses reminiscent of Addison's tranquil Marlborough. Most of the specifically military references are to ancient warfare. The painting is an oval, and the corners of the rectangular ceiling that the oval does not fill are decorated with bundles of ancient weaponry including spears, shields, and bows. The only modern weapons to be seen are three dark, easily missed sections of cannon among the trophies at the bottom of the picture. There is, however, one modern reference that is not so easily missed. As Marlborough kneels, he gestures back with his left hand to a plan of the Battle of Blenheim, made prominent by its whiteness and its being larger than Marlborough himself. An angel supports the paper from behind and another leans over the top of it to point at the clearly marked lines representing the British formations. The plan is a curious and incongruous element in the painting. The lines, in heavy black and red, belong to a different kind of war from that suggested by the pseudo-ancient surroundings, and the plan itself belongs to a different kind of discourse about war. It recalls Boyer's. *Annals*, newspaper accounts, coffee-shop discussion, political controversy, and modern ideas of generalship. Just as the tranquil Marlborough is an odd figure in Addison's raging battle, the modern plan introduces an awkward, discordant note into Thornhill's picture.

The extent to which contemporaries were conscious of these difficulties is unclear, but there was some recognition of the poor quality of most of the writing prompted by the war. Cobb interprets this as a tendency of all war writing when he suggests that Ramillies produced "*What Battles generally do; bad Poets, and worse Criticks.*" Others regarded the failure as more peculiar to this war. The Duchess of Marlborough included in her will the demand that poetry be omitted from biographies of the Duke, and Oldmixon opined bluntly that "had our Soldiers fought no better than our Poets write upon 'em, we should have had little to rejoyce over but our *Victory* at Sea." A more considered rejection of contemporary war poetry is evinced by Thomas Tickell in the opening lines of the prologue for his successful 1712 poem, *The Prospect of Peace*:

> Contending Kings, and Fields of Death, too
>   long
> *Have been the Subject of the British Song.*
> *Who hath not read of fam'd Ramillia's Plain*,
> Bavaria's *Fall, and* Danube *choak'd with Slain*!
> *Exhausted Themes*!

There were good reasons for Tickell, the protégé of Addison and a firm Whig, to have supported the poetic celebration of the war, but on the eve of the Peace of Utrecht even he seems to have had enough of it.

The most revealing pejorative comments come from Richard Steele and Thomas Parnell. In the third issue of the *Tatler,* Steele ironically develops the format of Blackmore's second long war poem, that is, advice to a tapestry maker on how to represent the war: "I must own to you, I approve extremely this Invention,

and it might be Improv'd for the Benefit of Manufactury: As, suppose an Ingenious Gentleman should write a Poem of Advice to a Calico Printer: Do you think there is a Girl in *England*, that would wear any Thing but *The Taking of* Lisle, or *The Battle of Oudenarde?...* I should fancy small Skirmishes might do for Under Petticoats, provided they had a Siege for the Upper." Although the comments are a joke, they point to the real problem of finding appropriate forms. A petticoat may be a humorously inappropriate canvas for representing a battle, but that leaves open the question of how exactly war can be adequately represented, and more especially, how modern war can be represented. A partial answer is given by Parnell's allegorical *Essay on the Different Stiles of Poetry* in 1713. Having passed bad war poetry on his poetic flight, the poet arrives at the good toward the end of the essay:

> Then Hosts embattel'd stretch their Lines afar,
> Their Leaders Speeches animate the War,
> The Trumpets sound, the feather'd Arrows fly,
> The Sword is drawn, the Lance is toss'd on high.

Parnell's answer to the problem of how to write a successful, modern, and heroic war poem is that it must be out of date in terms of the military technology and behavior it represents. Only if the battlefield is quiet enough for the hero to make speeches and if the most deadly missiles are arrows and darts will a heroic poem work. In short, heroic verse and modern warfare do not belong together.

This is, I think, the impasse that had been reached by the end of the War of the Spanish Succession. A number of poets had tried to use ancient forms to represent modern battles, but they had not succeeded. Wars later in the century would not be greeted by any comparable effort at representation, and one quite elaborate pastoral elegy of 1759 on the death of General Wolfe even has Apollo forbidding the poet to sing of war. Occasionally poets would rise to the occasion of a victorious battle with an ode to the general, but such poems are fewer, shorter, and less elaborate than those of 1704–09. More typical of later productions is a poem like the *Bloody Ballad* about Dettingen, which is printed in red ink throughout and tries to be nothing more than a rousing song of the moment. After the first decade of the century, ambitious heroic poetry is generally placed firmly in the distant past, first in Pope's translations of Homer and

later in the *Ossian* poems. As for modern warfare, literary writers of the middle century were to look for other ways of representing that than the heroic. Tobias Smollett attempted grimly ironic realism in *Roderick Random*, and Laurence Sterne used complex humor in *Tristram Shandy*. It is as if the poetic effort of 1704–09 taught England's writers that a new phenomenon such as modern war and a new understanding of it could not be dressed in the robes of ancient Greece and Rome. The War of the Spanish Succession, then, may not have caused, but it seems to signal, the end of contemporary heroic ambitions in English literature.

**Source:** John Richardson, "Modern Warfare in Early Eighteenth-Century Poetry," in *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, Vol. 45, No. 3, Summer 2005, pp. 557–77.

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> *History of the Peloponnesian War* is a lucid translation of Thucydides' account of a defining period in Greek history and is a valuable resource on the rivalry between Athens and Sparta and the resultant twenty-seven-year conflict.

# *Colonialism*

The boundaries of Colonialism, like those of many literary eras, are difficult to draw. The history of Colonialism as a policy or practice goes back for centuries, and arguably the story of Colonialism is not over yet. Thus literature of several ages reflects concerns about Colonialism in depictions of encounters with native peoples and foreign landscapes and in vague allusions to distant plantations. As colonial activity gained momentum in the late nineteenth century, so the reflection of that activity—as a celebration of European might or as fears of what lay in the wilderness—grew in intensity. Thus rough boundaries for the literary movement of Colonialism would begin in 1875, when historians date the start of a "New Imperialism," through the waning empires of World War I and up to the beginning of World War II, around 1939, although the years after World War I reflect primarily nostalgia for an era that was rapidly coming to a close. Colonialism is primarily a feature of British literature, given that the British dominated the imperial age; even colonial writers of other nationalities often wrote in English or from an English setting. The literature of Colonialism is characterized by a strong sense of ambiguity: uncertainty about the morality of imperialism, about the nature of humanity, and about the continuing viability of European civilization. Perhaps the essential colonial critique is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, though such works as Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African*
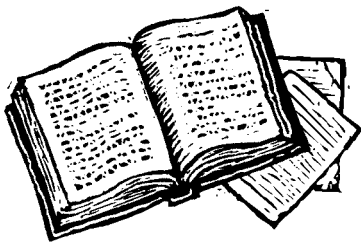
*Farm* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* similarly explore the paradoxes of Colonialism. Colonial literature is also full of high adventure, romance, and excitement, as depicted in Rudyard Kipling's spy thriller *Kim* or the adventure tales of H. Rider Haggard. Isak Dinesen's memoirs, including *Out of Africa*, similarly romanticize the wildness of the colonial landscape and the heroism of adventurous colonizers.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Joseph Conrad (1857–1924)

Though considered one of the masters of modern English literature, Conrad was ethnically Polish. He was born in the Ukraine as Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski on December 3, 1857, but he correctly presumed that Conrad would be a surname more easily pronounced by readers of the English language, in which he wrote. He lost his father at the age of four to Russian authorities, who arrested him for nationalist activities on behalf of Poland. His mother died when he was eight, leaving him in the care of his uncle. He joined the British navy in 1880 and became a British citizen in 1886. In 1890 he traveled to the Belgian Congo, a difficult trip that provided the background for Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, first published in serial form in 1899 and 1900. *Heart of Darkness* is a paradigmatic work not only of colonialist literature but also of modernist literature. Conrad wrote several major novels, including *The Nigger of Narcissus* (1897), *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostromo* (1904), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). Conrad's works are widely believed to be highly critical of the colonizers, especially when they are compared to the works of his contemporary Rudyard Kipling, the only other author who is as representative of colonialist literature as Conrad himself. Scholar William York Tindall, in *Forces in Modern British Literature, 1885–1956*, wrote that Conrad was distinct from Kipling in "producing many novels and stories that without being imperialistic are colonial." The postcolonial African writer Chinua Achebe, however, contended that Conrad was a racist who depicted Africans as "savages." Conrad turned down an offer of knighthood in 1924; he died of a heart attack that same year, on August 3, in England.
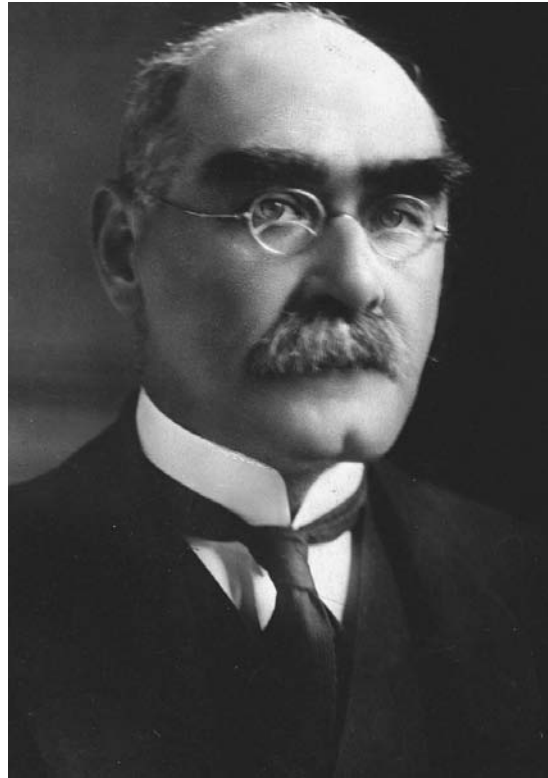


*Rudyard Kipling* *(Popperfoto / Getty Images)*

### Isak Dinesen (1885–1962)

Isak Dinesen is the pen name adopted by Karen Blixen, who was born Karen Christentze Dinesen on April 17, 1885. Dinesen was born in Denmark, fifteen miles north of Copenhagen. Her father, Wilhelm, committed suicide when Dinesen was ten. She nonetheless grew up on her family's comfortable estate as a member of the upper classes. She was schooled in painting and design and began writing stories as a young woman, publishing three ghost stories in Denmark before moving to British East Africa in 1914. That year, she married her cousin Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke of Sweden and moved with him to a coffee farm in Kenya. She was married only seven years before divorcing her husband, who had infected her with syphilis. She kept the coffee farm, preferring the relative freedom of life in Africa. She stayed for ten more years before returning to Denmark in 1931, where she began writing about her life as an early colonist. Her major works about Africa include *Out of Africa* (1937) and *Shadows on the Grass* (1960), which depict in detail her view

of Africa and, in particular, the Africans who worked for her on her coffee farm. One of her short stories on a non-colonial theme, "Babette's Feast" (1958), was made into a major motion picture by Gabriel Axel in 1986 and won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. Sydney Pollack directed a film version of *Out of Africa* in 1985, with Meryl Streep portraying Dinesen. The film won an Academy Award for Best Picture that year along with six other Academy Awards. Dinesen died of malnutrition on September 7, 1962, in Denmark and is remembered by modern readers as either a white colonizer with a patronizing view of Africans or a sympathetic advocate of the colonized. She was twice nominated for a Nobel Prize in Literature.

## E. M. Forster (1879–1970)

Edward Morgan Forster was born January 1, 1879, to Edward Forster, a painter and architect, and Alice (Lily) Whichelo Forster. His father died when he turned two years old; afterwards, he was cared for by his mother and his paternal great-aunt Marianne Thornton, who focused almost solely on his health and development. He attended several prep schools then entered Cambridge in 1897. He was already publishing books while at Cambridge, in addition to studying literature. However, his first real success did not come until 1910, with the publication of *Howard's End*, a critique of both class structure and cultural taste in Edwardian England. Forster first visited India for pleasure in 1912 and began writing about it in 1914. He visited again in 1921, when India was much changed by the rise in nationalism following a 1919 attack by the British military on Indian civilians. There he worked as a personal secretary for a maharajah. *A Passage to India* (1924), Forster's last novel, is often thought to be influenced by the Hindu and nationalist views of India. The novel was such a success that Forster feared he could not live up to it, and though he continued writing for many years, he never again wrote a full-length novel. He was a member of the Bloomsbury Group, an informal collective of writers, artists, and intellectuals, all of whom are associated with Modernism, including Virginia Woolf. He was homosexual but not openly so; his novel *Maurice*, which addressed homosexual themes, was not published until after his death. He died June 7, 1970, in Coventry, England.

## H. Rider Haggard (1856–1925)

Henry Rider Haggard was born on June 22, 1856, in Bradenham, Norfolk, England, and moved to South Africa at the age of nineteen. He worked in the colonial service for at least five years before returning to London and pursuing a career in law. Inspired by the success of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Haggard began writing adventure novels of his own, eventually penning over thirty. Among the most well known is *King Solomon's Mines* (1886), which was an immediate commercial success. Its popularity may have been enhanced by the multiple anonymous reviews Haggard wrote with his friend Andrew Lang to promote the book. *King Solomon's Mines* began a series of South African adventures featuring the white hunter Allan Quatermain. Perhaps Haggard's best-known novel is *She* (1887), which features the character She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, a catch phrase still in use. "She" is a beautiful but deadly Arab goddess who presents an obstacle to a white adventurer sometimes considered a prototype of Indiana Jones of the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* films. Haggard was a friend of Rudyard Kipling and shared many of Kipling's views about native peoples. His books depict white heroes as brave adventurers and black men and women as exotic and mysterious. He died May 14, 1925; his autobiography, *The Days of My Life*, was published in 1926.

## Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)

Rudyard Kipling was born in Bombay, India, on December 30, 1865. His father was the curator of the Lahore Museum, the setting for the first scene of his novel *Kim* (1901). Kipling lived with his parents, British natives, for five years until he went to England for schooling. He came back to India in 1882 as a journalist and worked seven years in the northern part of India. He left India to travel throughout the British colonies, including South Africa, Rhodesia, Australia, and New Zealand. He married an American, Caroline Balestier, and lived for a short time in the United States. During those years, he also began publishing short fiction to great success. Soon he returned to England, where he was already well known as a writer. Two of his major works are generally considered children's literature: *The Jungle Book* (1894–1895) and *Kim*. He also published several collections of stories and an autobiography, *Something of Myself* (1934). Much of his earlier work, including *Kim*, was written

during very difficult times in Kipling's life; he nearly died from influenza, and he lost his seven-year-old daughter Josephine to the disease. Kipling coined the phrase "the white man's burden" as a description of Colonialism in the 1899 poem of the same name. The poem echoes the beliefs about race and imperialism that are reflected in most of Kipling's works, which suggest that it is the obligation of white Westerners to bring the "primitives" of other races into the fold of civilization. Kipling died following an intestinal hemorrhage, January 18, 1936, in London, England, and is buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

### Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923)

Katherine Mansfield is the pseudonym of Kathleen Mansfield Murry, born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp on October 14, 1888, in Wellington, New Zealand. Mansfield's father was a banker and her family was very comfortable, both socially and financially. Mansfield was sent to London, where she studied cello at Queen's College in London from 1902 to 1906. She returned to London in 1908, bored with the quiet life in New Zealand. She became involved in the bohemian artistic community, and her writing began to attract the attention of editors and publishers. Her first collection of short stories, *In a German Pension*, was published in 1911 but was not very successful. She then sent stories to the magazine *Rhythm* and began a correspondence with editor John Middleton Murry. He published "The Woman at the Store," and they soon moved in together; Murry and Mansfield married in 1918. Her writing was highly regarded by contemporaries such as Virginia Woolf. In 1917, Mansfield contracted tuberculosis and nearly died as a result; she was in frail health for the rest of her life and also suffered bouts of depression. In her last years, Mansfield convalesced at many resorts around Europe, writing prolifically. She died of a pulmonary hemorrhage on January 7, 1923, in Fontainebleau, France. Her husband later edited and published her large quantity of unpublished poems and stories.

### Olive Schreiner (1855–1920)

Olive Schreiner was born in South Africa to missionary parents on March 24, 1855, the ninth child out of twelve. Schreiner rejected Christianity, which caused a lot of argument within her religious family. At age 16, she began working as a governess but frequently changed households to avoid the advances of her male employers. When possible, Schreiner returned home to live with her parents or brothers, but her family's poverty meant she had to return to work. In 1874, Schreiner went to work as governess on the Fouchés family farm, an experience which formed the basis of her novel *The Story of an African Farm*. She moved to England in 1881, hoping to train to be a medical doctor; however, her ill health (Schreiner suffered from asthma and angina) kept her from her studies. *The Story of an African Farm,* published in 1883 under the pseudonym Ralph Iron, was a popular and critical success. Troubled by her relationships with several men, Schreiner returned to South Africa in 1889 and became involved in politics. She married a farmer, Samuel Cronwright, in 1894, who shared her religious and political views. As strife built between the British and the Boer (settlers of European origin who lived outside British rule in South Africa), Schreiner and her husband became increasingly isolated for their sympathy with the Boer. Despite ill health and unpopularity, Schreiner worked hard for the rest of her life to dissuade the British and the Boer from going to war. She also argued for women's suffrage and gender equality. Schreiner died in her sleep on December 10, 1920, in Wynberg, South Africa.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Heart of Darkness

*Heart of Darkness*, by Conrad, is, in the eyes of many scholars, an essential literary expression of Colonialism. In his important work on Colonialism, *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said wrote that *Heart of Darkness* "beautifully captured" the "imperial attitude" in its depiction of Europeans dominating Africans and African resources and in its sense that there is no alternative to imperialism and thus to Colonialism. The novella was first published in serial form in 1899–1900 and in book form in 1902, as British imperialism was peaking. The book is generally understood as an important critique of the evil done in the name of empire. The empire challenged in *Heart of Darkness* is not the British Empire specifically; set in the Belgian Congo, the story seems to condemn European oppressors, most notably Leopold II of Belgium. Whether doing so was Conrad's intent, this

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- Sydney Pollack directed the film adaptation of Dinesen's *Out of Africa*, released in 1985. The film starred Meryl Streep as Dinesen and Robert Redford as Denys Finch Hatton and focused on their relationship. In addition to Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Art Direction, the film won the award for best adapted screenplay.

- The film version of Forster's *A Passage to India* was directed by David Lean, who also directed *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Dr. Zhivago*, and was released in 1984. The film was nominated for a host of Academy Awards, including Best Director and Best Picture. Dame Peggy Ashcroft, who played Mrs. Moore, won for Best Supporting Actress. In a review of the film that appeared in the *New Yorker*, noted critic Pauline Kael wrote, "Like the book, the movie is a lament for British sins; the big difference is in tone. The movie is informed by a spirit of magisterial self-hatred. That's its oddity: Lean's grand 'objective' manner . . . seems to have developed out of the values he attacks."

- The epic film *Apocalypse Now* is loosely based on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, though set in Vietnam in the 1960s. The film, released in 1979, is considered one of the masterpieces of director Francis Ford Coppola and was re-released in August 2001. The film starred Laurence Fishburne, Dennis Hopper, Harrison Ford, and Robert Duvall. Marlon Brando played Colonel Walter E. Kurtz, who raises his own army of Cambodian tribesmen and murders Vietnamese intelligence agents. He is pursued by Captain Benjamin Willard, a revision of Marlow, who is played by Martin Sheen. The film was nominated for Best Picture.

- Richard Attenborough's biographical epic *Gandhi* won nine Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Actor for Ben Kingsley, who played Gandhi. Released in 1982, the three-hour film also starred Candace Bergen, the playwright Athol Fugard, Sir John Gielgud, Nigel Hawthorne, and Martin Sheen.

- Allan Quatermain, Haggard's fictional adventurer, is in the twilight of his career when he joins up with a group of other heroes from fiction—Captain Nemo, Mina Harker, the Invisible Man, Dorian Gray, Tom Sawyer, and Dr. Jekyll—in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Released in 2003, this film is directed by Stephen Norrington and stars Sean Connery as Quatermain. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from Twentieth Century Fox.

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interpretation seems to resonate with the popular British belief that British colonization was benevolent and morally superior to European colonization. The story of *Heart of Darkness* is told by Marlow, who is sent into "darkest Africa" to find Kurtz, an exceptional agent and head of the inner station who is reported to have abandoned every pretense of morality or civilization. The "heart of darkness" in the title is thus not strictly Africa, as readers might initially expect, but the heart of a white man, who proves capable of incomparable evil. *Heart of Darkness* is also considered an example of Modernism, with its sometimes unaware narrator, its departure from chronological order, and its questions about the so-called civilized human nature when it remains beyond the constraints of social and civic order.

## Kim

Like *Heart of Darkness*, Kipling's *Kim* was published at the height of the British Empire, in 1901, though it is a very different kind of story. *Kim* is often considered children's literature, a

*H. Rider Haggard* (The Library of Congress)

spy thriller and coming-of-age story about a young Irish orphan known as "Little Friend to All the World." Kim, or Kimball O'Hara, meets and travels with a Buddhist holy man on his spiritual quest, unaware that the British government is using him to obtain important information. The book thus explores one aspect of Indian spirituality (Indian Buddhism is a relative of one of the dominant Indian religions, Hinduism) as well as the political struggles of the Indian colony. Kipling was not particularly critical of imperialism, and *Kim* reflects the belief, widely held particularly prior to World War I, that the colonization of India was a politically sound act for England as well as a moral obligation for a superior race. If *Kim* reveals a more optimistic view of the aims of empire than *Heart of Darkness*, it also belongs to a different type of literature. Though both works are representative of Colonialism, Kipling's *Kim* looks back to the more traditional form of the late-Victorian era, which Modernist writers vigorously rejected.

## Lord Jim

Conrad's *Lord Jim* was published as a serial novel in 1900. Like *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* is largely told from the perspective of the narrator Marlow, who follows the story of a wandering English sailor named Jim, in part to help him, and in part to determine the truth of his life, especially regarding one important event. Jim stands trial for abandoning his ship and leaving the passengers behind to die, an act of moral cowardice he does not deny but also cannot explain. Eventually, he comes to live in the East Indies among the natives in an attempt to redeem himself, but when the native chief's son is murdered by a British looter, Jim feels responsible and accepts a death sentence from the chief, who shoots him in the chest. In Marlow's eyes, Jim's death is a heroic act that serves as his redemption, but the novel itself offers several other possible interpretations, concluding with a moral ambiguity that is a hallmark both of Conrad's work and of Modernist fiction in general. The style of the novel is also modern, characterized by chronological jumps forwards and backwards, shifts in point of view and narrative style, and a lack of closure. Though it came to be considered an exemplary modern novel, early readers did not respond favorably to Conrad's innovations.

## Out of Africa

Dinesen's memoir *Out of Africa* was published in English in 1937. British Colonialism was waning when the book was released, but the stories recalled by Dinesen capture a wide swath of colonial history, from 1914 to 1931, and reflect the ambiguous perspective on British colonial practices that is characteristic of much colonialist literature. Dinesen tells of her failed marriage, her difficulty in making her Kenyan coffee farm economically viable, and her relationships with African natives. As it covers the period that marks the decline of the British Empire, which began with World War I in 1914, the book reflects a sense of nostalgia for a lost time and place that infused much late colonial writing. The book was not an immediate success in England; Dinesen's publisher informed her that the book was popular among intellectuals, if not the general public, though he also stated his belief that *Out of Africa* would "take its place in the permanent great literature of the world," according to Olga A. Pelensky in *Isak Dinesen: The Life and Imagination of a Seducer*. Dinesen cited as one of her inspirations Olive Schreiner, a novelist born in South Africa.

## A Passage to India

Published in 1924, *A Passage to India* hints at the end of the colonial era in British India and the

rise of Indian nationalism. Its author, E. M. Forster, used his experiences in India to depict the tense relationship between the British and Indians, suggesting that even among friends, a truly friendly relationship is difficult to sustain. The title of the novel comes from a Walt Whitman poem of the same name in which Whitman questions the value of the British presence in India but also hopes for unity between East and West. The novel tells a complex story of two English women visiting India in the 1920s, a volatile time after the galvanizing massacre at Amritsar in 1919 that sparked the steady increase of Indian nationalism and inspired the political career of Mohandas Gandhi. One of the women accuses one of her Indian companions of attacking her, fueling the hostility of both local British and Indians, though she later recants. The book is also a story of friendship between an English professor and his Muslim friend, perhaps inspired by Forster's friendship with his Muslim student Syed Ross Masood, to whom he dedicated *A Passage to India*. The book was well received at its publication and was adapted to film in 1984.

## She

*She* is the story of the monstrous goddess Ayesha, known only as She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, and the adventuring hero Leo Vincy. First published by Haggard in 1887, the novel broke sales records with its immense popularity, especially among men, possibly because of the strong sexual overtones and the mysterious heroine. She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed rules over a society where male and female roles have been reversed. Vincy is shipwrecked on the African coast and journeys through a mysterious landscape to the people ruled by She, a journey that critics, including Sandra Gilbert in "Rider Haggard's Heart of Darkness," have said resembles "a symbolic return to the womb." The ruler She is both exotically sexual and darkly threatening, not unlike colonial depictions of Africa itself. *She* also evokes fears of a growing feminist consciousness at the close of the Victorian era; Sigmund Freud wrote that *She* captured some of his fears of "the eternal feminine" as a castrating threat.

## The Story of an African Farm

Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm*, first published in 1883, was among the first major novels of the colonialist era. Schreiner was the daughter of missionaries in South Africa, though after her father was found guilty of violating trading regulations she was largely left to fend for herself. She worked as a governess on African farms, educating herself with the works of Charles Darwin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Thomas Carlyle while working on her novel. She went to England in 1881 and worked two years to find a publisher for *The Story of an African Farm*. The novel was a great success, though it was the last one she published in her lifetime; her later writings were works of political nonfiction. In *The Story of an African Farm*, Schreiner states rather modern views about women's roles in colonial society, a theme that was also common to the writings of women missionaries during the colonial era. Jed Esty argues in a 2007 essay for *Victorian Studies* that Schreiner's novel is also related to the Bildungsroman movement, although the youthful characters, like the colonies themselves, are unable to mature given the unstable position they are in.

## "The White Man's Burden"

Kipling first published his poem "The White Man's Burden" in *McClure's Magazine* in 1899, and throughout that year the poem was republished in several British and U.S. magazines and newspapers. In it, Kipling encourages white people to go out to their colonies and establish civilization there for the benefit of "sullen" natives living in darkness. Kipling repeatedly emphasizes the lack of gratitude white colonizers must accept as part of their burden, claiming that native "sloth and heathen folly" will often counteract European works of civilization and that colonizers can expect to be hated by those they free from the "bondage" of their "loved Egyptian night." The poem was especially influential in the United States, where it appeared as the country was about to enter its own imperialist period by taking control of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and Cuba. Anti-imperialists also latched onto the poem, publishing immediate parodies suggesting the hypocrisy of the notion of a "white man's burden." The phrase became a slogan for those on each side of the imperialist debate.

## "The Woman at the Store"

"The Woman at the Store" is a short story by Katherine Mansfield, a New Zealand native who is considered a master of the genre. Mansfield spent little time in colonial New Zealand, preferring even as a young woman to live in London.

Her stories reflect her wide travels, including her visits to her family's estate in New Zealand. Her New Zealand stories, which include "The Woman at the Store" and "The Garden Party," depict British colonists doing their best to stay connected to their homeland by maintaining their old social practices and pretensions on foreign soil. These standards are in marked contrast to the conditions of native inhabitants and the poverty forced upon them by colonial practices. First published in 1911, "The Woman at the Store" describes the encounter between a party of traveling colonists and a lonely, crude woman with whom they are forced to stay overnight. The hopelessness of the woman and her child and the limited sympathy and understanding of the travelers, one of whom narrates the story, combine to paint a very bleak picture of colonial life.

## THEMES

### Imperialism and Empire

Attention to the aims and ends of imperialism is a repeating theme of colonialist literature. As a political term, *imperialism* refers to the policy of an outside power acquiring colonies—whether settled or not—for its own political and economic advantage. Though Europeans had participated in imperialist activity for centuries, in the late nineteenth century imperial powers, including England, France, Belgium, and Germany, began competing fiercely to increase their colonies, resulting in a high level of aggressiveness and a greater degree of intrusion into previously independent areas. In addition to economic motives, imperialism was fueled by a widely held, self-justifying belief that the "superior" white race of Europe should bring civilization to the "less developed" peoples of color living on other continents. Colonialist literature both affirms and critiques this belief, often at the same time, in keeping with the ambivalence of even the most sympathetic Europeans. Dinesen's *Out of Africa*, for example, has been praised for its positive portrayal of Africans even as it has been condemned as the work of a racist. Such conflicting readings can exist because the book, like many other works of Colonialism, contains both ideas.

### National Identity

Colonial practices redefined national boundaries. As the British Empire grew, it came to draw its boundaries over a larger and larger portion of the globe, and at its greatest it controlled one-fourth of the globe. While this control was a source of English pride, it was also a threat to British national identity: if Indians, Africans, and inhabitants of the West and East Indies were British subjects, were they also British? And if not, what constituted British national identity? Colonial authors sometimes depict British colonists clinging to British mores, as in Mansfield's short fiction or Forster's *A Passage to India*. Others, such as Kipling, appear more confident, using exotic portrayals of "primitives" and their customs to suggest an inherent, unbridgeable difference between the colonizers and the colonized. Some authors also explored the possibility of "going native," which was sometimes considered an abasement, sometimes a mark of increased nobility. This theme is hinted at in *Kim*, *Lord Jim*, and *Heart of Darkness*, among other works.

### Gender and Sexuality

Ideas of the masculine and feminine underlie much of colonialist literature. The very act of colonization is often seen and described as a form of penetration, and such disparate works as *Heart of Darkness* and *She* portray the white male journeys into a feminized dark landscape. Depicting the colonizer as masculine and the colonized as feminine creates an essential difference between the two and implies the latter needs to be mastered and possessed. Yet for white women authors, Colonialism offered a kind of freedom unavailable to women remaining behind in developed countries, especially in Victorian Britain. Dinesen frequently commented on the freedom afforded her by living in Africa. Single women could travel unaccompanied as missionaries, and many women took the opportunity to advance the cause of women's education through missionary work. The daughter of missionaries, Schreiner takes on some of these issues in *The Story of an African Farm*. As she decries the treatment of native women, she makes the argument that all women have inherent human rights and deserve the same advantages men enjoy.

### Race

No white colonial author has escaped the charge of racism, in large part because of the totalizing nature of the imperialist worldview that maintained white European superiority—whether

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Images can be more powerful than words in swaying public opinion. Locate editorial cartoons, book illustrations, or other visual art that depicts colonized peoples. Sources might include illustrated versions of *Kim* or *The Jungle Book*, newspapers in which "The White Man's Burden" appeared, or books about English history. What does the physical appearance of colonized peoples seem to imply about their intelligence or temperament? Which details of the images give you some insight into the political position of the artists? Do any details of the images give you some insight into the date each was published (e.g., published before or after the start of World War I)?

- Economics played an important role in colonization. Choose a colony and describe the production and trade of a commodity it produced (e.g., tea, spice, coffee). Consider whether the resource could have been grown or manufactured in Europe, what kind of labor was required for production (e.g., skilled or unskilled), and who consumed the resource. What insight does this give you into the acquisition of this particular colony?

- The belief that darker races were not as far advanced along the continuum of civilization is sometimes referred to as Social Darwinism. In addition, Darwin's theory of the "survival of the fittest" justified for some Europeans the use of force to take the resources of "weaker" societies. In your own words, summarize the scientific theories of Darwin in regard to evolution and natural selection, which you find in Darwin's own writings. Do these ideas transfer from biology to sociology? What about economics? Support your opinion with examples and analysis.

- Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* attempts to correct the colonialist history of *Jane Eyre* by offering an alternative perspective. Read a colonial work such as *Kim*, *She*, or *Out of Africa* and try to imagine the events from the perspective of one of the native characters, such as the Buddhist holy man Teshoo or the African tribal leader Kinanjui. Choose one event from the novel and write a short story from that character's perspective, using what you are learning about imperialism to illuminate where a native perspective might differ from that of the original novel.

- The charisma and reputation of the British Queen Victoria were central to the symbolism of imperialism, while the actions of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and Lord Lytton were its teeth. Choose one of these individuals—or another government official of your own finding—and research his or her individual role in the history of Colonialism. Summarize your findings, giving an overview of your subject's actions while addressing such topics as public opinion and opposition within the government.

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biological or cultural in nature. Even Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which is widely believed to be highly critical of imperialist policies and practices, cannot envision a worldview outside imperialism, and one of the foundations of imperialism is an abiding belief in racial difference. Kipling provided a straightforward articulation of these beliefs in his poem "The White Man's Burden," which suggests that whites were under a moral obligation to educate, civilize, and Christianize the darker races, or even to care for them as their stronger "protectors." By contrast, Forster's *A Passage to India* depicts Indians as professionals and intellectuals, although the novel closes by suggesting that the differences between Indians and Europeans are too great to be bridged even by the most well-meaning individuals in either culture.

### Human Nature

Questions about racial difference and national identity reflect narrower aspects of larger concerns about the nature of humanity. The benevolent paternalism of some literature relies on an optimistic view of human nature: progress is the natural course of human evolution, the wealth of the imperial powers is evidence of their progress along this course, and the "backward" societies of tribal peoples reflect their need for assistance toward higher evolution. Here again is the attitude of "The White Man's Burden." At the peak of the colonial movement, however, this view became suspect. Conrad's novels perhaps reflect the bleakest view of progress, civilization, and human nature, although Forster's work also expresses grave doubts about civilization's advancement.

### Adventure

Although works such as *She* and *Kim* are the most straightforward celebrations of Colonialism as an exotic adventure, the romantic ideal of the wanderer appears in colonial writing of several varieties. In *Out of Africa*, Dinesen writes of her affair with the pilot Denys Finch Hatton, who is depicted as an exciting, independent adventurer who bravely faces danger on safari. *Lord Jim* is a darker tale of adventure, which casts its wanderers as morally ambiguous at best, ruthless thieves and murderers at worst. Mansfield's story "The Woman at the Store" deflates the romantic image of adventure travelers by contrasting the wealth and privilege that allows Europeans to travel by choice with the poverty and hopelessness that entrap those who inhabit the tourist destinations.

### STYLE

### Setting

Colonialist literature was consistently set in the colonies. From a European point of view, colonial territory was singular: colonized land and people all fell in the category of "other," even for the Europeans living in the colonies. Politically, geographically, and culturally, however, the colonies were widely different. For example, England's relationship with India began with the spice trade in the sixteenth century, but England did not venture into the African interior until the nineteenth century. India built sophisticated cities that would have been unfamiliar to tribal Africans in rural areas, as would the ports of Cape Town. Thus Conrad's view of Colonialism from the Belgian Congo would necessarily be different from that of Kipling or Forster, not only because of their philosophical differences but because of the different geographical backgrounds from which they drew.

### Narration

Though there is not a particular narrative style for colonialist literature, the perspective of the narrator and the mode of narration is an important aspect of style in fiction written during the colonialist movement. To some extent, this feature is relevant to the literary movement of Modernism (see below), which broke up seemingly stable functions of literature such as point of view, narrator, and even plot. Thus the narrators of Conrad's novels are not necessarily reliable sources of information, nor are they the central focus of the novel or a center for interpreting the action of the novel. The fragmented narration of characters such as Marlow highlights the political and ethical morass of European colonization. More broadly, however, the narrative perspective of much colonialist literature gives "subject" status only to white colonizers, as if it were impossible to relate to the colonized as anything but "object." Fundamental to imperialism, this perspective reflects the tacit belief that Europe is central and dominant, and the rest of the world is peripheral and dominated.

### Autobiography

The colonial experience brought forth a flood of memoirs and autobiographies of colonists eager to share their experiences and observations with friends and family at home. In particular, this was a way that many women were able to publish respectably, and several women produced memoirs, journals, and collections of correspondence from their travels or missionary work. Many of these were widely and eagerly read at the time, though modern readers mostly value them as historical documents. *Out of Africa* is a notable exception, though it shares several qualities of travel and missionary writing. With such works, the authority given to the writer's observations and opinions, as part of a "true story," was high; Victorian and Edwardian readers admired missionaries and adventuring colonists and formed their opinions about colonized peoples through these texts. Yet as many

readers of her works have remarked, Dinesen portrayed the African landscape and people in terms of her memory and nostalgia as well as her necessarily limited European perspective. In writing a book of literature, she crafts a story out of events that may or may not have a direct relation to each other. Though not autobiographical works, the same could be said of Mansfield's New Zealand stories, drawn as they were from distant childhood memories.

## Modernism

Literary historians have sometimes maintained that the rise of Modernism as an aesthetic is directly related to a growing European crisis of confidence in imperialist policy. Doubts about the progress of civilization, the benevolent nature of humanity, and even the existence of truth are conveyed artistically not only in the theme and tone of modernist literature but in some cases in the disjointed, ambiguous style of the language itself. Both Conrad and Forster belong as much to the history of Modernism as to the history of Colonialism. Yet Colonialism is not simply a thematic subset of Modernism, in part because it is also represented by more traditionalist authors, such as Kipling and Haggard.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Missionary Writing

The work of Christianizing the "heathens" of the Third World was an important focus of Colonialism; some historians have suggested that the seemingly "compassionate" purpose of "saving" the darker races put a positive face on the aggression of imperialist policy. Some missionaries, however, felt that the blessings of "Christianity and commerce" were necessarily linked; the famous missionary and researcher David Livingstone was an advocate of this position. Missionary writing was very popular with readers back home, since it gave moral support to the work of colonizing and provided supposedly true-life adventure stories and in some instances added substance to discussions about the role of women by depicting the exploitation of native women in non-Christian countries. Some missionaries were also among the earliest ethnographers; they depicted the physical and cultural features of native societies with a semi-scientific tone. This too added weight to the authority of

missionaries' tales, and the writings of missionaries helped shape ideas about biological and social relationships among the races. Particularly after the start of the antislavery movement in Europe, missionaries were inclined to conceive of natives as possessing the potential to evolve into civilized individuals resembling Europeans, which they understood as a natural and desirable progression. Thus, while most missionaries clearly thought of the darker races as "other," they also argued for their common humanity. Publishing a missionary memoir was also a ready way for women to get into print, and the form was generally thought more respectable than fiction.

### Travel Writing

Both men and women wrote travelogues, but as with the literature of missionaries, the greater mobility of women in the late nineteenth century meant an increase in the publication of women's writing, which made women's colonialist travel writing a significant genre in its own right. Many women writing during the era of high imperialism reflect the paradox of the times: They are simultaneously writing against the oppressive strictures of Victorianism and reinforcing the oppressive policies of the colonial powers. Yet, as Sara Mills argues in *Discourses of Difference* (1991), "women travel writers were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease with which male writers did." As a result, Mills claims, "their writing exposes the unsteady foundations on which [imperialism] is based."

### Colonial Themes in Nineteenth-Century Literature

Several works of nineteenth-century literature that might not be classified under Colonialism in a strict definition nonetheless exhibit colonialist concerns. Examples often mentioned by scholars of Colonialism and post-Colonialism include Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). In these novels, the colonial themes recede to the background, though some critics suggest that the marginal nature of the colonial elements is itself indicative of the ethos of imperialism, concealing the extent to which the exploitation of other peoples supports the privilege of the English gentry. In *Mansfield Park*, for example, the Bertram family acquires its wealth in part through its plantations in Antigua and the work of its slaves, though most of the Bertrams

never set foot in the colony. Many readers have seen in the character of Sir Thomas Bertram Austen's conservative defense of British plantation owners. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's first wife Bertha is a white Creole from the West Indies, a secret locked in his attic after she goes mad. In Brontë's novel, Bertha's final act of madness is burning down Rochester's family home; however, apart from three violent acts perpetrated at night (in only one of which is she observed), Bertha is seen only once in the novel. As in *Mansfield Park*, the silence of the colonial presence in *Jane Eyre* is thought by some to speak louder than words. In fact, the imprisonment of Bertha has inspired several groundbreaking books, including Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's central work of feminist criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979, reissued 2000), and Jean Rhys's postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which tells the West Indies story of Bertha and Rochester preceding the action of *Jane Eyre*.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Early History

The history of European expansionism goes back at least as far as the fifteenth century. Much European exploration was related to trade, particularly in tea, spice, silk, and other goods not readily available in Europe. The long relationship between England and India is a good example: In competition with its long-standing enemies the Dutch, the English began trading with India in 1600 and soon formed the East India Company (EIC). Throughout the seventeenth century, the EIC strengthened its presence in India by acquiring territory, and by the eighteenth century, with little organized resistance from Indians, who lacked a centralized government, England controlled most of India through the EIC. As the power and territory of the English increased, the rights of Indians decreased; by the close of the eighteenth century, Indians were not allowed in high government positions and the English had cut Indian wages. The resentment of Indians, reaching a peak with the Mutiny of 1857, demonstrated to Queen Victoria the need for the English government to relieve the EIC of its rule in India in order to protect its trade interests there. She named herself "Viceroy of India" in 1859. It was in part a

public relations move intended to convey England's concern for India, though official and unofficial acts of racial exclusion increased in scope. The domination of Africa did not begin until the mid to late nineteenth century as it moved southward from the full possession of Egypt in 1882 to the military victory in the South African (Boer) War (1899–1902) and the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

### Global Conflicts

Though England was the dominant colonial power in the era, several other countries were aggressively seeking to add to their land holdings, sometimes leading to violent conflict among European nations in addition to force used against the native peoples. Spain, France, and Russia had long been colonizers, and the New Imperialism countries, including Germany, Japan, Belgium, Italy, and the United States, also sought colonies to protect their economic and military interests. The increasing number of colonizers and the limited amount of territory sparked a virtual feeding frenzy, particularly among the newer colonizers. Between 1875 and 1914, the rate of colonization was three times that of the rest of the nineteenth century. That period also saw a flurry of conflicts between colonial powers, including the South African (Boer) War (with the Dutch Afrikaners), the Sino-Japanese War, the Spanish-American War, and the Russo-Japanese War. The race for land in Africa produced a number of confrontations among European forces; France and England nearly went to war for control of territories of the Congo, Ethiopia, and the Sudan. Such conflicts were sometimes resolved through diplomatic means, as competing colonial states bargained for control and defined new boundaries for contested territories. The result, especially in the case of the African continent, was national boundaries drawn with no regard to geography, ethnic groups, or economic relationships. Thus, even after the colonial powers withdrew, the native peoples of Africa were left to struggle with the results of colonial deal-making.

### British Imperialism

The era during which Colonialism as a literary movement peaked coincides with a period historians sometimes call the second British Empire, or, more generally, the New Imperialism, from 1875 to 1914. England's defeat of France in the Seven Years' War compelled

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1900s:** Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are British colonies, though nationalist movements have begun to argue for independence. Australia develops its own constitution in 1901 but is still subject to the laws of England; Canada must send troops to the British war in South Africa.

  **Today:** Australia, Canada, and New Zealand remain members of the fifty-four nation British Commonwealth, headed symbolically by Queen Elizabeth II and officially by the Commonwealth Secretary-General. In 2000, Don McKinnon of New Zealand is installed as the Secretary-General, following the term of Chief Eemeka Anyaoku of Nigeria.

- **1900s:** The British fight the South African War, or Boer War, struggling for control of the South African Boer Republics against the white Afrikaners (early Dutch settlers) who also claim the area. The decade closes with the creation of the Union of South Africa under British rule.

  **Today:** While under the leadership of the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela, its president, the nation of South Africa is represented by its black African majority, though race relations between Africans and Afrikaners remain tense and sometimes violent. After leaving the Commonwealth in 1961, South Africa rejoins in 1994.

- **1900s:** Responding to violence against British officials in Bengal, India, the British partition the province in 1905. The decision is also motivated by a desire to place Indian Muslims and Hindus into separate areas. Indian nationalists use nonviolence and non-cooperation, including strikes and boycotts, to compel the British to rescind the division.

  **Today:** A separate nation exists for the former Muslims of India: Pakistan, created as part of the Indian Independence Act of 1947. Hostility between the nations continues, and in January 2002 United States Secretary of State Colin Powell urges talks between Pakistan and India to ward off a threat of nuclear war. Both India and Pakistan are members of the Commonwealth, though Pakistan withdrew between 1972 and 1989.

- **1900s:** Literature taught in colonial schools emphasizes the greatness of European authors. Native students study Homer, Shakespeare, and Dickens in education systems guided by beliefs such as those of Thomas B. Macaulay: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."

  **Today:** Students in British and U.S. classrooms study diverse authors, including Buchi Emecheta, Jamaica Kincaid, and Chinua Achebe, whose works reflect non-European perspectives on colonization.

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France to give up most of its foreign colonies and granted England free passage throughout the seas. To some extent, the loss of the American colonies also motivated the pursuit of additional territory and the consolidation of power in existing colonies. In England itself, one of the chief crafters of imperialist policy as the second British Empire opened was Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, who was said to be Victoria's favorite prime minister. Disraeli sought to consolidate Britain's colonial holdings, and he was also skilled in swaying public opinion by emphasizing the glory and stature that global expansion brought to the Crown, represented by the figure of Queen Victoria. The death of Victoria in 1901, bringing a sixty-four-year reign to an end, thus shook the imperialist enterprise, and soon so did a worsening economy. As the first decade of the

twentieth century continued, England found the need to align with its former colonial rivals France and Russia to face an increasing threat from Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary. When Germany invaded Belgium on August 4, 1914, England declared war, thus entering the conflict later to be known as World War I. That conflict permanently transformed international politics, marking the decline of the colonial era and England's dominance in international affairs.

### *Rebellion and Independence*

Native people were not unwilling to defend their territory, though for much of the colonial period the lack of an organized leadership in lands previously inhabited by various tribal groups or loosely knit principalities made successful resistance difficult. In some ways, however, defeats could be as powerful as victories. The defeat of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was partly responsible for the growth of Indian nationalism. The arrest of two nationalist leaders in Amritsar in April of 1919 sparked a series of events that culminated in the British army opening fire, without warning, on a public gathering, killing 379 Indians and wounding 1,200. The Amritsar massacre gave new momentum to the nationalist movement in India and inspired protestor Mohandas Gandhi to a career of nonviolent protests, urging "noncooperation" with British policies that eventually led to the withdrawal of Britain from India in 1947.

### *Colonial Education and Patronage*

The role of literature and language in colonial activity was a matter of government regulation. Colonial education systems and colonial literature bureaus sought to increase literacy and develop written communications as part of their "civilizing" process, but in so doing they created a hierarchy of language, making the written European languages and histories superior to the oral languages and histories of many native cultures. Arts such as literature were patronized, while native arts, including weaving and carving, were devalued and considered evidence of unevolved cultures. In countries in which several native languages were spoken, colonial governments often encouraged the dominance of one language, directly or indirectly suppressing languages or verbal traditions that were connected with indigenous religious practices.

### *The Science of Imperialism*

Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) in an effort to describe his theories of evolution by the principle of natural selection. According to this theory, desirable traits for survival dominate in a species whereas undesirable traits recede, by a natural course of progress. Darwin's ideas were adapted from biology to sociology by Benjamin Kidd, whose *Social Evolution* (1894) was published in the United States and England to immediate popular acceptance. He followed this work with *The Control of the Tropics* (1898), in which he depicted colonization as a moral obligation of the "Anglo-Saxon" empires of Britain and the United States, in part to save the "lower races" from the crueler practices of other European colonizers and in part to "elevate" them to a higher level of social evolution. Such arguments played an important part in maintaining public support for imperialist policy.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

A coherent study of the body of the literature of Colonialism arose in the latter half of the twentieth century. A precursor to this work was Susanna Howe's 1949 study *Novels of Empire*, which reviewed a body of literature in colonial settings. Critics from the late 1960s and early 1970s began raising questions about the morality of imperialism and the resistance of the colonized. Scholars began discussing imperialism not merely as a political policy but as a mythology, a system of symbols, narratives, and beliefs supporting imperialist action. But not until the release of Edward Said's landmark work of cultural scholarship *Orientalism* in 1978 was there a theory of Colonialism that encompassed the full range of colonial discourse and its uses in legitimizing and maintaining colonialist practices. Orientalism as a cultural practice entails a web of beliefs about biology, culture, race, and religion that fix the "oriental" as "other," thus necessarily "less than," justifying the West's dominance of the East. It was Said, in fact, who began the common usage of the phrase "colonial discourse" to describe the wide scope of textual practices related to Colonialism. Another of Said's major studies is *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). James Scannell, in a 1996 essay for the journal *Style*, argues that British colonial writers, such as

*Queen Victoria* *(Rischgitz | Hulton Archive | Getty Images)*

Kipling, Conrad, and Graham Greene, supported imperialism and selectively chose their justifications concerning why British imperial expansion was more legitimate than the imperial endeavors of other nations.

After Said, perhaps the other most influential scholar of Colonialism is Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha emphasized the ambiguity of colonial discourse, introducing to colonialist studies the idea of *hybridization*, a theory first developed by the Russian scholar of the novel Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin defined hybridization as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor." Bhabha supported the work of Said but also offered a corrective by stressing the continual presence of those two languages and two consciousnesses, which create the ambivalence that characterizes the body of colonialist literature. Among Bhabha's most influential works are the essay "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism" (1986) and *The Location of Culture* (1994).

Though racial difference was always a central factor in the study of the literature of Colonialism, feminist scholars insisted that gender was a missing term in the equation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak pointed to an apparent feminist blindness to colonial discourse in texts such as *Jane Eyre* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in her widely quoted essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985). Studies that grew out of this argument include Laura Donaldson's *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-Building* (1992) and Jenny Sharpe's *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Women in the Colonial Text* (1993), which further explore the complex relationship between feminism and Colonialism. As Sharpe observed, many nineteenth-century feminists used the ideology of racial difference to advance their own cause. In his 1995 book *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, Robert Young added the term *colonial desire* to the vocabulary of Colonialism. Young wrote that sexuality and commerce were closely bound together in colonial discourse, arguing that "it was therefore wholly appropriate that sexual exchange . . . should become the dominant paradigm through which the passionate economic and political trafficking of Colonialism was conceived."

## CRITICISM

### Shaun Strohmer

*Strohmer holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Michigan and is an independent scholar, freelance writer, and editor. In this essay, Strohmer discusses empowerment and disintegration as central themes in the literature of Colonialism.*

The literature of Colonialism is often unpleasant, or at least challenging, to read. Even after most European countries had abandoned the practice of slavery, which eventually was deemed barbaric by public opinion, the taking of territory and the imposition of new governments were considered jewels in the crown of the second British Empire. Yet the era of "New Imperialism" was short-lived. In practical terms it ended with the start of World War I, but the imperial age also waned as public support for colonization declined. As the literature of Colonialism demonstrates, ambiguity and paradox

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Shakespeare's late play *The Tempest* is thought by many contemporary literary scholars to be a meditation on England's early imperialist activities, particularly in the relationships among Caliban, Miranda, and Prospero.

- Modernist author Henry James wrote during the same years as Conrad but with a different focus. From an American perspective, James wrote novels that critiqued what he saw as the failing aristocracy of Europe, a subject closely related to the rise and fall of imperialism. James had strong sympathies with England, however, and became a British subject in 1914 in order to fight in World War I. Among James's major novels is *The Wings of the Dove*, an aristocratic tragedy set in London and Venice.

- One of the more important figures to emerge from the Indian colonial era is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, later known as Mahatma (meaning "Great Soul") Gandhi. His nonviolent efforts to persuade the British to leave India drew the attention of the rest of the world; he was *Time* magazine's Man of the Year in 1930, and the *Christian Century* proposed his name for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1934—all before his crusade for Indian independence showed a hope of success. Gandhi published his views on nonviolence in several books, including *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and *Nonviolent Resistance*. The well-known monk Thomas Merton published a study of Gandhi's beliefs in *Gandhi on Nonviolence*.

- Chinua Achebe was born in colonial Nigeria and in the postcolonial era became one of its most important writers. Achebe has also become an important novelist and postcolonial critic. Though Achebe has adopted a European form, his works represent an African aesthetic. Among his most widely read works are *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*.

- Another writer of postcolonial significance is Salman Rushdie, who was born in Bombay, India, in the first year of India's independence. Among his classic novels is *Midnight's Children*, which tells the story of India from 1910 through 1976, through the eyes of its young hero Saleem, born like Rushdie in 1947. Rushdie's fiction explores the power of memory as well as history and the lingering impact of colonization.

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characterize colonial discourse. What forces underlie that paradox?

It is perhaps no accident that the increasing momentum in imperialist history is echoed in the rapid developments in the history of psychology and psychiatry during the nineteenth century. Though no historian has proven a connection, it is not much of a stretch to imagine that increased encounters with other peoples would give rise to questions about the nature of humanity. The discipline of anthropology emerged from these questions—the Royal Anthropological Institute was founded in 1871—but the existing sciences of mankind also grew. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, scholars including Alexander Bain, Franz Brentano, William James, and John Dewey began defining their discipline, seeking to describe in scientific terms the relationship between emotion and the will, states of consciousness and unconsciousness, and human mental development. In the field of psychiatry, Freud began developing his theories of the unconscious, where humans are ruled by animal instincts that must be tempered by reason or punishment. Concurrently, Darwin began publishing his series of works on

evolution and natural selection. Indeed, to some extent the notion of the "survival of the fittest" grew out of the travels of his friend Alfred Wallace through Malaysia. Darwin too wrote about the emotions in scientific terms, publishing *The Expression of Emotion* in 1872. In that work he discussed the communication of animals and how their various signals reveal the foundations of the human expression of emotion.

Such discoveries were cause for optimism. As the Industrial Revolution surged forward, it seemed that science and technology held the keys to ever greater wealth and progress. Outmoded superstitions and needless self-repression could be cast aside. The dawn of a new century and the death of Queen Victoria contributed to the sense of a bold new era dominated by the power of man. At the same time, however, the new science of human nature seemed to create as many questions as it purported to answer. Not surprisingly, the notion of *agnosticism*, or the belief that ultimate reality, or God, is unknown and unknowable, sprang from the followers of Darwin. The scientific search for man's origin led only to a clouded mystery, far more ambiguous than traditional notions of humankind's place in the universe. Thought and emotion, even action, appeared to be ruled by forces even more remote than a heavenly deity—at best, the nervous system, at worst, the murky recesses of the unconscious.

An obvious literary response to and reflection of this paradox is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, long celebrated as a mirror for the fragmented modern man. But Conrad's antiheroes are not the only characters of colonialist literature who experience that joint pull toward both power and disintegration. Arguably, that

contradictory movement is an essential part of much of the literature of Colonialism. Haggard's *She* and Kipling's *Kim*, not examples of Conrad's Modernism, nonetheless similarly reveal aspects of the paradoxical modern self. As in *Heart of Darkness*, in these novels contact or confrontation of man's animal nature, represented by untamed wilderness or untamed "primitives," draws the protagonist in conflicting directions.

In *She* both Leo Vincy and the narrator Holly find themselves tempted by the goddess Ayesha even as they loathe her and her highly sensual and barbaric brand of paganism. After receiving a chilling tour of her tombs, Holly readily succumbs to her temptations anyway, though she tells Leo frankly that a kiss from her would undo him forever. Yet somehow Holly senses something that he says "chilled me back to common sense, and a knowledge of propriety and the domestic virtues." In the unconscious of Holly, instinct and civilization struggle mightily. Likewise, Leo confronts Ayesha but staggers back, "as if all the manhood had been taken out of him." When Ayesha successfully seduces Leo after killing his wife before his eyes, Holly reports:

> Leo groaned in shame and misery for though he was overcome and stricken down, he was not so lost as to be unaware of the depth of the degradation to which he had sunk. On the contrary, his better nature rose up in arms against his fallen self, as I saw clearly later on.

In Holly's terms, Leo's struggle is a struggle of those two aspects of his nature: the power of the will and the devolutionary force of instinct and desire. This struggle looks quite different in *Kim*, a novel with a very different tone and audience. Nonetheless, as both a spy novel and a coming-of-age story, *Kim* touches on issues of identity and development. In the closing chapter, Kim's final battle is between the Body and the Soul. In this case, the Body is tied to reason and reality, solid things that are known to exist and be useful. The Soul, particularly as it is described by the lama, is mystical and irrational. Yet it is never made clear how the battle ends. Shortly before the novel ends, Kim cries out, "I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?" Though the overall ethos of the novel appears to privilege Western empiricist knowledge over Eastern mysticism, the answer to Kim's question remains ambiguous.

Though *Kim*, *She*, and *Heart of Darkness* are written from a strongly masculine perspective, the

paradox of human nature is not a question limited to men. The combination of Colonialism and rising early feminism was a potent mixture for women seeking to understand their place in the world. Women did not have the same claim to the sense of power and entitlement with which white male Europeans rang in the twentieth century, yet the symbol of empire was a woman—Victoria—and individual women played major roles in the project of colonization. The writing of many women who ventured into the colonies does not display a fear of losing one's self but a sense of finding one's self. This is perhaps a reductive dichotomy—women move between oppression and integration, while men move between power and disintegration—but if we keep its limitations in mind it can help highlight some interesting aspects of colonialist texts by women. Adjacent to this difference in women's writing is the role the narrator/heroine of women's texts plays. While the men's texts discussed above depict men as dominant heroes (or antiheroes), the heroines of works such as Mansfield's New Zealand stories or even the autobiographical *Out of Africa* stand to the side of such figures. The narrator of "The Woman at the Store" is led by a party of men, and the external action and conflicts of the story take place between the men and the shopkeeper, as the unnamed female narrator stands by. Even in *Out of Africa*, where Dinesen is the subject of her own story, the hero is "played" by Denys Finch Hatton. These women write themselves into the history of Colonialism, yet the force of patriarchy does not allow them to imagine themselves as real subjects.

Such texts thus reflect the workings of colonial discourse. As Mills writes in *Discourses of Difference*, "Females play an important part in the colonial enterprise as signifiers, but not as producers of signification." In other words, women are not actors or subjects, but symbols, or objects. This is a difficult position from which to write, and a difficult position from which to imagine a self. The development of psychology, as discussed above, was not a great help. The normative self was naturally male simply because that was the cultural standard of the time, but in some cases the development of the human sciences rendered this cultural practice as a scientific axiom. Freud's understanding of "the eternal feminine" construed it as part of the dangerous unconscious that needed to be mastered by male will and reason. In her essay on Haggard's *She*, Gilbert quotes Freud's description of the novel,

which he says depicts that eternal feminine as "the immorality of our emotions." Thus as symbols of empire and symbols of irrationality, women were not masters but the embodiment of that which needed to be mastered, doubly so.

Postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak suggests this in her "Three Women's Tests and a Critique of Imperialism," on Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Spivak writes, "Bertha's function in *Jane Eyre* is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law." In the context of our discussion, the Law can be understood as analogous to Freud's "Law of the Father," the masculine control of the illicit instincts of the unconscious. Bertha, as white Creole and female, demonstrates the need to subordinate the feminine. It is this Law, this sense of being mastered, that Schreiner writes about through the character of Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*. After visiting a Boer wedding, Lyndall reflects on her feelings of restriction and freedom and their relationship to imperialism. Her monologue is worth quoting at length:

> I like to feel that strange life beating up against me. I like to realize forms of life utterly unlike mine. . . . When my own life feels small, and I am oppressed with it, I like to crush together, and see it in a picture, in an instant, a multitude of disconnected unlike phases of human life—medieval monk with his string of beads pacing the quiet orchard . . .; little Malay boys playing naked on a shining sea-beach; a Hindoo philosopher alone under his banyan tree, thinking, thinking, thinking, so that in the thought of God he may lose himself . . . a Kaffir witch-doctor seeking for herbs by moonlight, while from the huts on the hillside come the sound of dogs barking, and the voices of women and children; a mother giving bread and milk to her children in little wooden basins and singing the evening song, I like to see it all; I feel it run through me—that life belongs to me; it makes my little life larger; it breaks down the narrow walls that shut me in.

Schreiner describes in detail the wildness that Haggard and Conrad describe as threatening, that Kipling portrays as tamable, and constructs it as liberating. This liberation is not complete—Lyndall is very much a radical whose dreams are unlikely to be realized, as in *Out of Africa* Dinesen's sense of freedom is countered by the force of patriarchy that does not allow her to claim the role of the hero for herself. Moreover, that liberation appears to come at the cost of the continued oppression of the
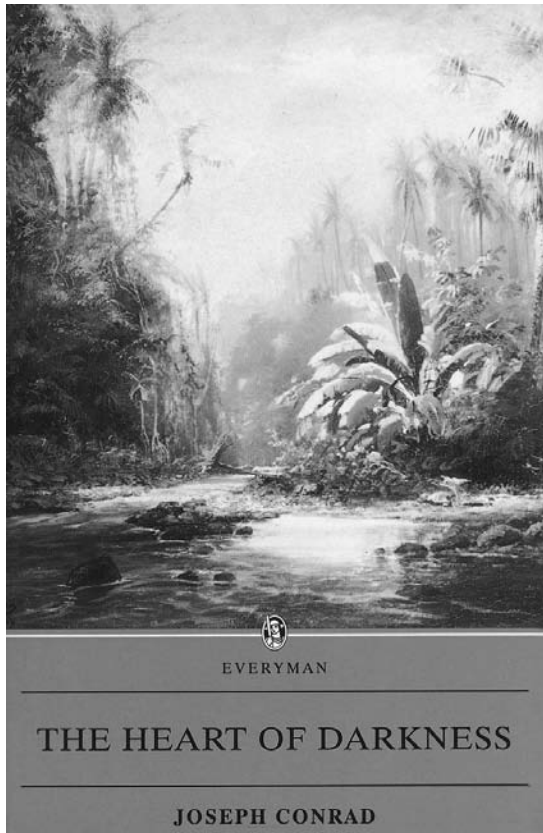
*Cover of Joseph Conrad's* The Heart of Darkness *(Painting by Fritz Klingelhofer. From a cover of* The Heart of Darkness, *by Joseph Conrad. J. M. Dent, 1996. Reproduced by permission of Christie's Images, London)*

colonized. Africa, after all, did not exist solely for the self-realization of white European women. Nonetheless, perhaps what has made works such as Dinesen's and Schreiner's compelling to successive generations of readers is that they can envision that liberation at all. Like Conrad, they do not escape paradox and ambiguity but instead write it out where it can be viewed and acknowledged. In the contemporary climate of neo-Colonialism, where the history of humanity will go from there remains to be seen.

**Source:** Shaun Strohmer, Critical Essay on Colonialism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### James Scannell

*In this essay, Scannell compares the cultural ideologies and aesthetics of three authors who wrote about colonization and explores why these authors accepted British imperialism.*

> LIKE CONRAD DOES WITH KIPLING, GRAHAM GREENE'S *THE HEART OF THE MATTER* BEGINS WHERE CONRAD'S NARRATIVE LEAVES OFF, EMBODYING IN ITS FIRST SECTION HIS MATERIALIST JUSTIFICATION FOR THE COLONIAL ENTERPRISE."

In his 1970 Charles Eliot Norton Lectures published as *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling contends of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

> Today it is scarcely possible to read Marlow's celebration of England without irony; to many, especially among the English themselves, it is bound to seem patently absurd. The present state of opinion does not countenance the making of discriminations among imperialisms, present or past, and the idea that more virtue might be claimed for one nation than another is given scant credence. But this was not always the case. Having the choice to make, Conrad himself elected to become English exactly because he believed England to be a good nation.

Trilling's notion that one can discriminate among imperialisms, claiming virtue for some and not for others, is a perfect starting point for a discussion of the imperial justifications of Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, and Graham Greene, all of whom saw in Britain's empire a justifiable endeavor. In their three fictions, Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, these authors discriminate among possible motivations for the colonial project, critiquing their predecessors' justifications and offering their own. Further, having inherited a fictional tradition from Kipling, Conrad and Greene also link what they consider to be of value in the colonies to what they consider to be of value in their predecessors' texts, believing as well that more virtue might be claimed for some fictional techniques than for others. In this essay, I will present Kipling's, Conrad's, and Greene's valuations, both cultural and aesthetic, as they are presented in these colonial fictions.

*Plain Tales from the Hills*, Kipling's first collection of stories, brought colonial India

home to England: those individuals who went out to India were for the British reading public suddenly endowed with faces, vices, virtues, and love affairs and disappointments, their administrative, military, and patriotic roles constituted as full lives. At one stroke, Kipling created for the English reading public the culture of Anglo-India: what the British in India do for leisure; what they value; where the best and where the worst posts are; how love and friendship differ in Anglo-India as compared to at home. Though introducing a new culture is no small task, for the Victorians it could never be a solitary one. True to his Victorian fellows, Kipling sought, in capturing that culture, to justify its existence as well. Faced with such a task, where better to turn than Matthew Arnold, who had done the same for England itself nearly 20 years earlier. Thus Kipling invokes the famous Arnoldian binary from "Culture and Anarchy":

> We may regard this energy driving at practice, this paramount sense of the obligation of duty, self-control, and work, this earnestness in going manfully with the best light we have, as one force. And we may regard the intelligence driving at those ideas which are, after all, the basis of right practice, the ardent sense for all the new and changing combinations of them which man's development brings with it, the indomitable impulse to know and adjust them perfectly, as another force. And these two forces we may regard as in some sense rivals.

Between the "intelligence driving at... ideas" and "the obligation of duty," Kipling situates Indian colonial culture. Not content with Arnold's pendulum swinging back and forth between the two, however, he adds to the binary a middle term. In the last story of his collection, Kipling brings Arnold's two forces together in the figure of McIntosh Jellaludin. McIntosh is a Hellenist:

> He was, when sober, a scholar and a gentleman. When drunk, he was rather more of the first than the second.... On those occasions the native woman tended him while he raved in all tongues except his own. One day, indeed, he began reciting Atalanta in Calydon, and went through it to the end, beating time to the swing of the verse with a bedstead-leg. But he did most of his ravings in Greek or German. The man's mind was a perfect rag-bag of useless things.

He is also a Hebraist who at one point in his life served society, though in what capacity the reader never learns: "The public are fools and prudish fools. I was their servant once." Most importantly, McIntosh has a knowledge of a middle way, of an alternative that partakes of both opposing qualities:

> I do not refer to your extremely limited classical attainments, or your excruciating quantities, but to your gross ignorance of matters more immediately under your notice. "That, for instance"; he pointed to a woman cleaning a samovar near the well in the centre of the Serai. She was flicking the water our of the spout in regular cadencejerks.
>
> There are ways and ways of cleaning samovars. If you knew why she was doing her work in that particular fashion, you would know what the Spanish Monk meant when he said—
>
> 'I the Trinity illustrate,
> Drinking watered orange-pulp—
> In three sips the Arian frustrate,
> While he drains his at one gulp—'
>
> and many other things which are now hidden from your eyes. However, Mrs. McIntosh has prepared dinner, let us come and eat after the fashion of the people of the country—of whom, by the way, you know nothing.

This passage includes references both to the Hellenism of McIntosh's book learning and to the Hebraism, the "energy driving at practice," about which the narrator knows nothing. We later learn that Strickland, whom we've been brought by the narrator to respect for his awe-inspiring knowledge of the natives he rules, is for McIntosh an "ignorant man." Unlike Strickland, McIntosh does not merely know how the natives will act, but he also understands why they act. McIntosh's understanding of the significance of the cleaning of the samovar and the sipping in Browning's poem represents a marriage of the most esoteric knowledge with the most mundane of daily actions; the rhythmic cleaning is as informed by a theology or cosmology as is the three sips of the Spanish Monk. McIntosh alone sees to the heart of matters, an ability that, far from precluding an attention to ordinary practice, in fact entails a knowledge of the ideal in and through "practice."

Kipling makes much of this ability in the *Plain Tales* collection. Figures who embody one or the other side of the dyad are undercut, just as Strickland in all his practical glory is undercut by McIntosh. Mrs. Hauksbee, the cleverest woman in India, who helps several people stick to the straight and narrow, is herself bested at the beginning of the short story sequence in "Three and—an Extra," when she acts without the backing of an approved ideal. Trejago in "Beyond the Pale"

brings doom upon himself and his lover: the practicality that makes his intrigue possible prevents him from fully acknowledging the cultural laws he has transgressed. On the other hand, those who err on the side of Helenism, who attach too much meaning to everyday events, are equally suspect: the "Boy" of "Thrown Away" who commits suicide over a "cruel little sentence, rapped out before thinking", or Aurelian McCoggin, whose love of "isms" is cured by an attack of aphasia. Only a handful of figures manage to inform their practical doings with the knowledge of a higher sphere. In "His Wedded Wife," the Worm, who joins a "high-caste regiment" in which "you must be able to do things well . . . to get on with them," does nothing well except read, keep to himself, and write home. The members of the regiment refuse to accept him until he inadvertently advertises his acting talents, by dressing as a neglected wife and coming upon the regiment as a fury "rushing out of the dark, unannounced, into our dull lives." The revenge is successful because his play-acting speaks to the regiment's deep feelings of complicity, haunting even those in no way concerned in this particular matter. Janoo in "In the House of Suddhoo" respects the spiritual hold the seal-cutter has on Suddhoo, though she understands it is all a sham, and that respect assures her revenge as well: "Unless something happens to prevent her, I am afraid that the seal-cutter will die of cholera—the white arsenic kind—about the middle of May." Finally, Moriarty in "In Error" is saved by his illusion that Mrs. Reiver is a saint whose respect he must earn: the "error" has no foundation in reality, but his belief in that self-constructed ideal has the amazing practical result of curing his alcoholism.

Yet this ability to get to the heart of the matter, though it involves a knowledge of the ideal, is anchored in an English practicality. In "To Be Filed for Reference," when McIntosh turns scholar during one of his drunken binges, he speaks either Greek or German, the former the language of scholars and the clergy, the latter the language of idealists. At these moments, the narrator tells us, he is not a "gentleman," nor, the reader may add, an "English gentleman." The ability to get to the heart of matters includes both a spiritual astuteness and a practical knowingness, but what these two opposing qualities have in common is a directedness, a doggedness that Kipling identifies with Englishness, an ability to recognize things as they really are. The story "In the House of Suddhoo," a tale of spiritualism, includes an account of the honor of an English gentleman, the narrator, whose principles and kindness have put him at the center of conflicting moral and legal claims:

> Now, the case stands thus. Unthinkingly, I have laid myself open to the charge of aiding and abetting the seal-cutter in obtaining money under false pretenses, which is forbidden by Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code. I am helpless in the matter for these reasons. I cannot inform the Police. What witnesses would support my statements? . . . I dare not again take the law into my own hands, and speak to the sealcutter; for certain am I that, not only would Suddhoo disbelieve me, but this step would end in the poisoning of Janoo, who is bound hand and foot by her debt to the bunnia. . . . And thus I shall be privy to a murder in the House of Suddhoo.

Yet for all his confusion, he nonetheless is able, in his directedness, to appreciate the complexities of his own case. In "Lispeth" the native girl taken from the hills and raised according to British tradition is "killed" not by an English gentleman but by an Englishman whose conduct is ungentlemanly and by a Chaplain's wife who advises lying in preference to a "fuss or scandal." While their actions may be very "English," they are not those of a true English gentleman and lady. Rather, Lispeth is the only one in the story to embody such traits, expecting a forthrightness of which the Chaplain's wife and the Englishman are incapable. In the same way, Moriarty is proud of his "very good reputation" and worries that his alcoholism will "undermine that reputation," but "reputation" is not enough to work his cure: he controls his alcoholism only in order to show himself worthy of the finest of English ladies.

It is the doggedness of the English, allowing them to get to the heart of matters, that qualifies the British for the role of colonial administrators. In "The Bronckhorst Divorce-Case," Strickland, the man with great practical knowledge of native life, is called in to show that Bronckhorst's accusations against Biel, which have been confirmed by native witnesses, are a total fabrication. Strickland manages to scare the natives into recanting their testimony. Thus one Englishman, Strickland, corrects through intimidation the wrongs of another Englishman, Bronckhorst, who has bribed the natives to lie, while a third Englishman, Biel, is provoked by Strickland to thrash Bronckhorst but allows him to go free of charges of "fabricating false evidence": "Biel came out of the Court, and

Strickland dropped a gut trainer's whip in the verandah. Ten minutes later, Biel was cutting Bronckhorst into ribbons behind the old Court cells, quietly and without scandal." But all this occurs outside the courthouse, the place where such claims should be weighed. None of the three is an English gentleman, for they manage to denigrate, sidestep, and tamper with that justice housed in the British courthouse, a justice the narrator cannot report since his story follows Biel: just when "the Judge began to say what he thought," the text cuts away to Biel's punishment of Bronckhorst behind the courthouse. Such merely practical "virtues" are outside the purview of true English justice. English justice is also at stake in one of the stories that perfectly embodies the union of the practical and the ideal, the tale of "The Bisara of Poree," a magic charm in a silver box that brings good only to those who obtain it dishonestly. Churton, the present owner of the charm, is suffering because he bought the object unknowingly; his chief complaint is that "his decisions were being reversed by the upper Courts more than an Assistant Commissioner of eight years' standing has a right to expect." Magic, a spiritual practicality, and English administrative justice are thus closely linked. With the aid of the charm, Churton is able to administer justice against a fellow Englishman named Pack, who steals the charm, a justice well deserved in Churton's eyes since he had not been "brought up to believe that men on the Government House List steal—at least little things." In his practical endeavor to bring about justice, he is aided by another Englishman, who holds the knowledge of the powers of the Bisara of Poree. Together, practical action and the knowledge of esoteric matters ensures justice.

This English trait that Kipling defines and locates at the center of the colonial project in the *Plain Tales* is Conrad's leaping-off point in *Heart of Darkness*: Conrad examines Kipling's justification, finds it lacking, and offers one of his own. The first section of the story heavy-handedly presents itself as an answer to Kipling's *Plain Tales*, taking up as it does the question of the practical colonial endeavor redeemed by the Idea:

> These chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force.... The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it

away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea— something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.

Marlow has enlisted the aid of his aunt in his efforts to secure a position, and his aunt in turn represents Marlow to her influential friend as one of the new "gang of virtue," those who go out to the colonies motivated not by profit but by a commitment to a transcendent idea: "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways." The gang of virtue bring to the practical colonial endeavor an intelligence that supplies "those ideas which are, after all, the basis of right practice." Clearly, Marlow distances himself from the redeeming idea at the outset, but the first section of *Heart of Darkness* is nonetheless ruled by it. Critics rightly emphasize how central the Idea's role in the colonial process is to the story, but they often fail to recognize that Conrad emphasizes the Idea informing practical action. As Hunt Hawkins states, Conrad judges the colonial project on the basis of "two explicit criteria—efficiency and the 'idea.'"

Conrad's initial critique of Kipling is, however, aesthetic: he objects to the way in which Kipling embodies his colonial justification in the *Plain Tales*. Moreover, it appears that the aesthetic shortcomings of the *Plain Tales* lead Conrad to note the potential ethical or moral dangers of the defense of colonialism Kipling offers. Through the reactions of those listening to Marlow's story, Conrad shows that Kipling's "message" in the *Plain Tales* is at odds with the effect they produce in their readers. Those characters in the *Plain Tales* who successfully embody the spiritually informed pragmatism of the English, who are thus ideal colonial administrators, are not the characters who most engage the reader. Even a casual reader of the *Plain Tales* will come away with a memorable impression of Strickland, the adventurous undercover policeman, and of Mrs. Hauksbee, the cleverest woman in India. In terms of effect, the practical characters win the day, though the spiritual characters have a haunting quality that also makes them linger in the reader's mind. "The Gate of Sorrows," an eerie story that is so pervasively depressing it nearly sinks the entire volume with its weight, puncturing a hole in the stories' off-hand

narrative charm, is powerful, as is the sudden and harrowing reassertion of spiritual right and race purity at the end of "Beyond the Pale." But Moriarty or Churton or the narrator of "In the House of Suddhoo" do not leave the same lasting impression on the reader. They are all intriguing characters, but they fade from memory until specifically recalled to one's attention, unlike Mrs. Hauksbee and Strickland. Those characters who embody the English ability to get to the heart of matters, valorized by Kipling and aligned with British justice in its colonies, do not demand the attention their privileged status seems to require.

Conrad conveys this perceived shortcoming of Kipling's collection almost from the start in *Heart of Darkness,* when Marlow's narrative is not met with a warm welcome. The narrator notes of Marlow's jarring first line, tossed into the silence—"'And this also . . . has been one of the dark places of the earth'"—"It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even," suggesting a company that acquiesces to the inevitable: hearing another of Marlow's yarns. Near the end of the first section, the reader again is reminded that Marlow may not have completely captivated his audience: "There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep." While this description may betoken an awed silence or breathless interest, it may just as easily be a straightforward account of the truth: the others present are sleeping and therefore not listening. The reader can be sure only that the narrator is listening to Marlow's tale, and he is interested in Marlow's discourse on the informing idea only because it matches his own sense of Empire as well as his own tendency to see the world in terms of the Spirit moving in the real; two beliefs upon which he expounds in the prologue. As it is with Kipling, however, Conrad's story of pragmatic idealism may not be an engaging one. Marlow chooses initially to tell the story of Moriary and Churton, without regard for the interests of his listeners who might be more engaged by the likes of Strickland or Mrs. Hauksbee. The moral value of Kipling's project aside, Conrad's point here is that the fiction fails aesthetically, and this failure leads Conrad to question the very nature of Kipling's justification. The aesthetic dissonance of Kipling's collection triggers its ethical dissonance.

In the second section of *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad makes it clear that the impression made by such stories of the ideal informing practice is strongly at odds with the set of values those stories are intended to convey. Kipling never makes it possible for his readers to experience his own high regard for those who make ideas the basis of their practice. We share Kipling's regard for an ideal-informed practice only as an idea extracted from the text, not one experienced firsthand inside Kipling's narratives. Twice in the second section of *Heart of Darkness,* the listeners are again brought into the frame of the narrative, and in both instances their responses provide an occasion for Marlow to break the flow of the narrative for a more direct idea-driven form of address:

> "The inner truth is hidden—luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tight-ropes for—what is it? half a crown a tumble"

> "Try to be civil, Marlow," growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.

> "I beg your pardon. I forgot the heartache which makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does the price matter, if the trick be well done? You do your tricks very well."

> "I couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life. . . . Why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody? Absurd? Well, absurd. Good Lord! mustn't a man ever— Here, give me some tobacco. . . . "

> There was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared, and Marlow's lean face appeared, worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention; and as he took vigorous draws at his pipe, it seemed to retreat and advance out of the night in the regular flicker of the tiny flame. The match went out.

> "Absurd!" he cred. "This is the worst of trying to tell. . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperatures normal—you hear—normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be—exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes!"

Indeed, in the second of these two examples, his listener's response leads Marlow on a digression that takes him far ahead of his story. In both

examples, the synthesis of the practical (the dangerous particulars of the uncharted river, the new shoes, the butcher around the corner) with the ideal (the inner truth and the stolen belief) forces Marlow out of the flow of the story itself. This idealistic pragmatism, this attempt to get to the heart of matters, can appeal to readers only as an extra-narrative datum, a disembodied notion beyond the borders of the narrative, as in Kipling's story sequence.

In the third section of his story, Conrad rejects Kurtz and, in doing so, rejects Kipling's justification for such an approach to the colonial enterprise. As Marlow makes clear, Kurtz's exalted ideals have freed him of constraint, opening the way for "forgotten and brutal instincts": "There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air." In fact, the entire third section consists of Conrad's rejection of Kurtz, as one by one he is abandoned by all those who have been waiting so eagerly to meet him. First, the Russian, who had been helping Kurtz at great personal risk to himself, decamps. Then, of course, the manager, looking after his own interests, declares that Kurtz has "done more harm than good to the company." His native worshippers flee at the sound of the steamer's whistle, and even the manager's boy casts him off: "Suddenly the manager's boy put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of scathing contempt: 'Mistah Kurtz he dead.'" Finally, back in Europe, Marlow slowly divests himself of what is left of Kurtz, his report, which he gives to the journalist friend, and "some family letters and memoranda," which he gives to Kurtz's cousin. And in lying to Kurtz's Intended, Marlow, who held to Kurtz longest, is unable to render him "that justice which was his due."

If Kipling's practical idealism provides such unsteady ground for the colonial project, what then redeems it? In the second section of the story, Conrad offers what he sees as the only real justification for empire: the spiritualism of Arnold and Kipling is rejected in favor of the rich wilderness that surrounds Marlow. Portrayed throughout the story as a dark, unknowable force to be reckoned with, the wilderness,

the land and its richness is justification enough for the colonial endeavor:

> "H'm. Just so," grunted the uncle. "Ah! my boy, trust to this—I say, trust to this." I saw him extend his short flipper of an arm for a gesture that took in the forest, the creek, the mud, the river—seemed to beckon with a dishonouring flourish before the sunlit face of the land a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart. It was so startling that I leaped to my feet and looked back at the edge of the forest, as though I had expected an answer of some sort to that black display of confidence.

According to Conrad, the justification for colonialism is the land itself. Its treacherousness requires enormous skill and concentration—the accountant working in the most stressful of climates, Marlow piloting the ship up an unknown river, the native monitoring the boiler—yet such concentration pays great dividends. Kurtz's great material accomplishment, the collection of large amounts of ivory, is belittled by the manager as "mostly fossil," which Marlow glosses as ivory the natives have buried. But his repetition of the phrase transforms ivory into a rich mineral deposit that the land has been made to yield. For Conrad, the colonial endeavor has only one objective: raw material, the natural resources so plentiful in Africa.

Phil Joffe writes that "the disillusioned Conrad, in the last year of his life, wrote of his 'distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration.'" But the target of Conrad's critique in *Heart of Darkness* is not this attempt to tap the richness of the land, but the hypocrisy, the Lie that masks this motivation. As Born writes: "The profit motive for oneself is neatly excluded from this altruistic strand of imperial ethical progress. We can usefully recall here Orwell's telling remark 'that Kipling does not seem to realise, any more than the average soldier or colonial administrator, that an empire is primarily a money-making concern.'" The colonial enterprise becomes morally dangerous when the profit motive is clouded by all sorts of grand ideals; Kurtz is Conrad's object lesson of the "horror" of that sort of colonialism. *Heart of Darkness* does not denigrate a colonial endeavor motivated by the richness of the untapped land. The ethical control in such an enterprise is the work ethic itself: only those who know their jobs and do them efficiently can effectively tap these riches. The

natives left to die on the hillside are the victims of an inefficient and poorly managed colonial enterprise, one that excavates and blasts a hill for no reason: "They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on." Seen in this light, the manager's strictures on Kurtz's behavior, though heartless in their zealous concern only for profit, embody the sort of practical moral safeguard Conrad sees as part of the redeeming nature of work, the ethic of the work ethic: "'Mr. Kurtz has done more harm than good to the Company. He did not see the time was not ripe for vigorous action. Cautiously, cautiously—that's my principle. We must be cautious yet. The district is closed to us for a time. Deplorable! Upon the whole, the trade will suffer.'"

Conrad takes up the issue of materialism and idealism in his discussion of the Russo-Japanese war in "Autocracy and War," where he seems to occupy a position similar to Kipling's ideal-driven pragmatism: "The trouble of the civilised world is the want of a common conservative principle abstract enough to give the impulse, practical enough to form the rallying-point of international action tending toward the restraint of particular ambitions." He also seems vehemently opposed to the rule of material interests: "Germany's attitude proves that no peace for the earth can be found in the expansion of material interests which she seems to have adopted exclusively as her only aim, ideal, and watchword." Yet Conrad's stance in this essay is far more realistic, more expedient, than the two statements just quoted might suggest. Conrad notes that Germany's material interests are dangerous only insomuch as they have been "adopted exclusively as her only . . . ideal." Here is the Conrad of *Heart of Darkness.* Immediately following his rousing endorsement of a Politik driven by the Ideal, he concedes that "the true peace of the world will be a place of refuge much less like a beleaguered fortress and more, let us hope, in the nature of an Inviolable Temple. It will be built on less perishable foundations than those of material interests. But it must be confessed that the architectural aspect of the universal city remains as yet inconceivable—that the very ground for its erection has not been cleared of the jungle." Indeed, Conrad acknowledges that hope for immediate peace may be found in the pursuit of material interests, however distasteful they may be, though not according to the example set by Germany, but according to the one set by the world's democracies:

Democracy, which has elected to pin its faith to the supremacy of material interests, will have to fight their battles to the bitter end, on a mere pittance—unless, indeed, some statesman of exceptional ability and overwhelming prestige succeeds in carrying through an international understanding for the delimitation of spheres of trade all over the earth, on the model of the territorial spheres of influence marked in Africa to keep the competitors of the privilege of improving the nigger (as buying machine) from flying prematurely at each other's throats.

As the tone alone makes clear, this option does not thrill Conrad; as it is in *Heart of Darkness*, here his distaste for the cure is palpable. But it is a cure nonetheless, and the example he cites is none other than colonized Africa. Further, the statesman who will create delimited "spheres of trade all over the earth" has in fact much in common with the manager of *Heart of Darkness.* Despite a lack of stature, ability, or force of personality, the manager holds absolute authority over the region he controls:

He was obeyed, yet he inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust—just uneasiness—nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a . . . a . . . faculty can be. He had no genius for organising, for initiative, or for order even. . . . He originated nothing, he could keep the routine going—that's all. But he was great. He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away.

Further, Conrad aligns this greatness with trade—"'He was a common trader . . . nothing more'"—and presents the manager as a representative of delimited spheres of trade, influence, and action. The manager views the Russian as a threat to ordered spheres of trade: "They approached again, just as the manager was saying, 'No one, as far as I know, unless a species of wandering trader—a pestilential fellow, snapping ivory from the natives'", and "'It must be this miserable trader—this intruder,' exclaimed the manager. . . . 'He must be English,' I said. 'It will not save him from getting into trouble if he is not careful,' muttered the manager darkly." He insists at all times on respecting the boundaries of spheres of action: "'Well, I must defer to your judgment. You are captain,' he said, with marked civility"; "'The district is closed to us for a time'"; and "'It is my duty to point it out in the proper quarter.'" The manager is no paragon, as Marlow's hatred for him makes clear, but in a world in which "the conscience of but

very few men amongst us, and of no single Western nation as yet, will brook the restraint of abstract ideas as against the fascination of a material advantage," his pragmatic, compartmentalized role is the safest option.

Like Conrad does with Kipling, Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* begins where Conrad's narrative leaves off, embodying in its first section his materialist justification for the colonial enterprise. Though reference to it is subtle, set far in the background of Greene's narrative, the land and its allure are at the heart of Scobie's desire to stay in West Africa:

> He said aloud, "You know I like the place."
> "I believe you do. I wonder why."
> "It's pretty in the evening," Scobie said vaguely.

The narrator registers for the reader the inadequacy of Scobie's reply, which seems an odd, insufficient reason for staying, particularly in light of his wife's desire to leave and his overwrought feelings of responsibility for her. But what seems at first like an off-hand comment gets picked up in the narrative, taking on a seriousness that the first comment never even vaguely suggests:

> In the evening the port became beautiful for perhaps five minutes. The laterite roads that were so ugly and clay-heavy by day became a delicate flower-like pink. It was the hour of content. Men who had left the port for ever would sometimes remember on a grey wet London evening the bloom and glow that faded as soon as it was seen: they would wonder why they had hated the coast and for a space of a drink they would long to return.

> Scobie stopped his Morris at one of the great loops of the climbing road and looked back. He was just too late. The flower had withered upwards from the town; the white stones that marked the edge of the precipitous hill shone like candles in the new dusk.

The days in the colony are harsh, and the nights, as Scobie's wearisome duels with Louise suggest, hardly restful. But evening is "the hour of content." Scobie, as he himself acknowledges, is seeking "peace" "content[ment]," and the land at evening provides these for him. Though not exactly Conrad's image of the rich, untapped, colonized land, the land as presented in book 1 nonetheless is the reason for Scobie, representative of British law in the colony not coincidentally, to stay in West Africa: for him it has a value that ensures his continued presence there. Also like Conrad, Greene aligns the value of the

land, in this case its temporary beauty that gives Scobie a brief nightly repose, with work: "He had nearly everything, and all he needed was peace. Everything meant work, the daily regular routine in the little bare office, the change of seasons in a place he loved." The throw-away tag, "a place he loved," emphasizes the connection: the land provides peace, and Scobie longs only to work (in) that land. Further, this notion that the land itself, the very physicality of it, imparts "peace" to Scobie suggests that Greene also recognizes the motivation, as suggested in "Autocracy and War," for Conrad's turn to materialism: that the land, both in what it yields and in its partition, may offer the only viable chance for peace in the context of the present state of the world. Greene rather ingeniously transplants Conrad's justification for the colonial project to the West African world and the life of his British police captain, Scobie, for the purpose of critiquing it, in the same way that Conrad critiqued Kipling.

Just as Conrad first noted the aesthetic discord of Kipling's program in *Heart of Darkness*, so too does Greene identify an aesthetic dissonance in Conrad's colonial justification that reveals its ethical dissonance. A number of critics have concurred with F. R. Leavis's censures of Conrad's style in *The Great Tradition*:

> There are, however, places in *Heart of Darkness* where we become aware of comment as an interposition, and worse, as an intrusion, at times an exasperating one. Hadn't he, we find ourselves asking, overworked "inscrutable," "inconceivable," "unspeakable" and that kind of word already?—yet still they recur. Is anything added to the oppressive mysteriousness of the Congo by such sentences as: "It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention." The same vocabulary, the same adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery, is applied to the evocation of human profundities and spiritual horrors.

At times in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad's attempt to demonstrate the importance of the land to the colonial project is quite heavy-handed. The story begins with the frame narrator's description of the scene before him and his vision of the Roman triremes on the Thames and goes on to include descriptions of the mining operation at the outer station, of the dense jungle surrounding the two-hundred-mile trek inland, of the river itself and the challenge it poses to navigation, and even of the "defensive attack"

launched by the natives loyal to Kurtz, which is presented as a rejection by the jungle itself of the *Nellie* and its crew. Some of the description and evocation serves a distinct scene- and mood-setting purpose, but too often the attempt to present a distinct impression is overwrought. For instance, in the scene quoted earlier, the manager gestures towards the forest, improbably causing Marlow to leap to his feet: "It was so startling that I leaped to my feet and looked back at the edge of the forest, as though I had expected an answer of some sort to that black display of confidence. You know the foolish notions that come to one sometimes." Or the description of the trip upriver, which begins with an effective evocation of the imposing fullness of the jungle:

> Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine.

The heaviness of the air requires such "adjectival insistence," but the description trails off into the passage Leavis singles out for its heavy-handed repetition: "This stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention." This passage may be excused as Marlow's, not Conrad's, rhetoric, but such an excuse fails to account for the strange scene of Marlow's "foolish notion." Conrad's tale falls short only when he continues to detail an impression he's already managed to capture.

Greene's criticism of Conrad in book 1 of *The Heart of the Matter* is later repeated in his African journal. He does not adopt Conrad's method of introducing the question of aesthetic merit by including the responses of an "audience" within the frame of his tale. Instead, within the narrative itself he introduces a motif of aesthetic appreciation, which he then links to excess. Louise's love of poetry, which is shared by the newcomer Wilson, thus becomes a symbol of excess. Wilson is introduced at the beginning of the novel as someone who loves to read poetry but, because he fears it will call undue attention to himself, he hides his interest. And, indeed, Louise's interest in poetry becomes the objective correlative of the club's dislike for her pushy, whining, and patronizing airs: "Literary Louise has got him." This mutual aesthetic appreciation eventually plunges Wilson headlong into excesses of romantic love as he tries to play the avenging, protective lover, a role Louise either ignores or ridicules.

Greene is guilty of some excess himself in his heavy-handed, incremental revelation of Wilson's spying. He punctuates the first book with hints concerning the identity of the new spy who has been sent out to report on the colonial administration:

"You ought to have been a policeman, Father."

"Ah," Father Rank said, "who knows? There are more policemen in this town than meet the eye—or so they say."

"Who says?"

"Been in to see the Commissioner about a pass. There are so many passes one has to have in this town, sir. I wanted one for the wharf. . . ."

When Wilson had gone, Scobie went in to the Commissioner. He said, "I was just coming along to see you, sir, when I ran into Wilson."

"Oh, yes, Wilson," the Commissioner said. "He came in to have a word with me about one of their lightermen."

"I see." The shutters were down in the office to cut out the morning sun. A sergeant passed through carrying with him, as well as his file, a breath of the Zoo behind. The day was heavy with unshed rain: already at 8.30 in the morning the body ran with sweat. Scobie said, "He told me he'd come about a pass."

"Oh yes," the Commissioner said, "that too."

"Then the special man they have sent from London. . . ."

"You must come back when I'm clearer, Yusef. I don't know what the hell you are talking about."

"They have sent a special man from London to investigate the diamonds—they are crazy about diamonds—only the Commissioner must know about him—none of the other officers, not even you."

"What rubbish you talk, Yusef. There's no such man."

"Everybody guesses but you."

"Too absurd. You shouldn't listen to rumour, Yusef."

She said, "Oh, Wilson's been attentive."

"He's a nice boy."

"He's too intelligent for his job. I can't think why he's out here as just a clerk."

"He told me he drifted."

Though several of these passages serve to characterize Scobie's peculiar blindness, neither the episode with Father Rank nor that with Scobie and the commissioner, in which Scobie seems aware that something's amiss, clearly work to that end. Yet, if the passages are meant to tip the reader off to Wilson's true role in the colony, and to some extent they do have that purpose since the reader has no other means of reaching that conclusion, they are hardly notable for their subtlety. Between Wilson's earlier paranoia and the fact that the novel begins with his arrival, the reader takes Father Rank's meaningful comment as the first hint. The following passages at first confirm the reader's suspicions and finally vex the reader. The insistent and repeated hints as to Wilson's "real" role in the colony enact a narrative excess akin to Conrad's. Moreover, the diamonds, which are at the heart of Wilson's spying, connect this excess to the "natural resources" that the colonies yield.

Greene's perception of Conrad's excess, the one source of aesthetic dissonance in *Heart of Darkness,* leads him to note the danger of Conrad's excessively materialistic take on imperialism. In book 3, the natural profuseness of the land is invoked and, in each case, identified with illogic:

> "You must promise. You can't desire the end without desiring the means."

> Ah, but one can, he thought, one can: one can desire the peace of victory without desiring the ravaged towns.

> They kissed as formally now when they met as a brother and sister. When the damage was done, adultery became as unimportant as friendship. The flame had licked them and gone on across the clearing: it had left nothing standing except a sense of responsibility and sense of loneliness. Only if you trod barefooted did you notice the heat in the grass.

> They would imagine, he thought with amazement, that I get something out of it, but it seemed to him that no man had ever got less. Even self-pity was denied him because he knew so exactly the extent of his guilt. He felt as though he had exiled himself so deeply in the desert that his skin had taken on the colour of sand.

> Then he realized what it was—a diamond, a gem stone. He knew nothing about diamonds, but it seemed to him that it was probably worth at least as much as his debt to Yusef. Presumably Yusef had information that the stones he had sent by the Esperança had reached their

destination safely. This was a mark of gratitude—not a bribe, Yusef would explain, the fat hand upon his sincere and shallow heart.

> Oh God, he thought, I've killed you: you've served me all these years and I've killed you at the end of them. God lay there under the petrol drums and Scobie felt the tears in his mouth, salt in the cracks of his lips. You served me and I did this to you. You were faithful to me, and I wouldn't trust you.

The land—the grass, the sand—and its resources—diamonds, petrol—are only referred to in conjunction with a reality that defies logic: Yusef's sincere yet shallow heart, desiring the end without desiring the means, having more than one's share yet left with nothing. All describe situations that are possible and yet, at the same time, wholly illogical. Greene suggests that the colonial project, tied to the land and its natural resources, motivated by the very real desire for mineral/material wealth—in other words, a colonialism based on the real and not on the ideal—creates a situation that lacks rationality because it lacks an Idea, and it exists in an atmosphere of illogic, a world in which cause and effect are out of whack and prediction is an impossibility.

A colonialism based on reality is damned to the perverse and quirky workings of that reality, and the final book of *The Heart of the Matter* is full of thwarted predictions. Scobie attempts to spare his wife suffering when in fact she has known about his affair all along. Although he hoped by his death to help Helen forget him, as it turns out, in death Scobie has more hold over her mind than he did in life: "'You can't love the dead, can you? They don't exist, do they? . . . She put her hand out beside her and touched the other pillow, as though perhaps after all there was one chance in a thousand that she was not alone, and if she were not alone now she would never be alone again." Scobie is certain of his own damnation, but Father Rank insists at novel's end, "'For goodness' sake, Mrs. Scobie, don't imagine you—or I—know a thing about God's mercy.'" Scobie embraces an all too real, meticulously planned, material solution to his problems, which fails to achieve any of its goals. The one aspect of his suicide that seems to go as planned, the material one—the dosage is enough, the climate makes it impossible to perform a post-mortem—betrays Scobie: the "colour of the ink," under Wilson's trained scrutiny, gives him away. For Greene, the colonial project

that is motivated by very realistic material goals is even more unpredictable in its results on all levels than is that motivated by the Idea. The search for smuggled diamonds, as nearly every intelligent person in the colony concedes, is a farce, involving large merchant ships on which a handful of tiny gems could be hidden anywhere. Scobie is appointed commissioner one-half year too late, and would have, in effect, nullified the entire series of tragic events the novel narrates. Scobie's appointment is based on the "good impression" he makes in an interview in which he entirely loses his cool and acts like a man guilty of the worst corruptions. A colonial administration based in reality alone is at the mercy of a myriad of forces, all unguided: natural, psychological, political, economic, and so forth.

Greene himself sees the empire as nothing more than an outlet for those forces that English life and England itself cannot contain: thwarted ambitions, restless longings, boredom. The colonies serve not so much as a safety valve for England or as a dumping ground for undersirables, but as a haven for those whose needs are not met at home. Book 2 of *The Heart of the Matter* is populated with such figures. Perrot imagines himself on the frontiers of the empire, far from the decadence of the "big city," protecting the empire's borders from alien invasion—a hard thing to imagine when home is an island:

> Scobie said, "If they ever joined the Germans, I suppose this is one of the points where they'd attack."
>
> "Don't I know it," Perrot said, "I was moved here in 1939. The Government had a shrewd idea of what was coming. Everything's prepared, ye know ... We're stripped for action here."

Scobie reads to Fisher *A Bishop among the Bantus,* a missionary tale that he transforms into a pirate tale set in the West Indies in order to relieve the boy's boredom. Helen Rolt is intrigued by the story, the first indication that in the wake of her extraordinary ordeal at sea, she too is looking for an adventurous and romantic alternative to her now-safe existence, a desire she repeatedly expresses during her stay in the colonies with Scobie: "'If you knew,' she said, 'how tired I get of all your caution. You come here after dark and you go after dark. It's so—so ignoble.'" The colonies offer Father Rank the opportunity to be "useful": "'They were very generous in Northampton. I only had to ask and they'd give. I wasn't of any use to a

single living soul, Scobie. I thought, in Africa things will be different....I wanted to be of use, that's all.'" Finally, Harris defines the colonies as the fit place for boys who never quite fit in, who were not quite happy at school. He says: "'I wonder if Wilson was happy there....I don't suppose he was ... or why should he have turned up here?'" The colonies exist because they meet a need that home cannot, a restlessness that Greene never particularizes because it varies with different individuals. The need to roam, to confront the unknown, to make a name, to experience adventures, all of which spurred on the late Renaissance explorers, the Victorian expeditions to the poles, the twentieth-century astronauts and kept them from staying at home— such impulses are not limited to a celebrated or noted handful, and the colonies, according to Greene, exist to provide an outlet for those others. Scobie's tremendously strict Catholicism leads him to choose his own damnation in order to save Louise and Helen as well as God himself from the suffering his acts are inflicting on them. Clearly, such an immense project, immense in the assumptions it questions of God and man, requires a breadth, a large playing field, that England cannot provide. Indeed, Patrick McCarthy states that for Scobie "in the context of the West African colony it [Catholicism] acts as a seditious force because it undermines the pretence of law and duty. Scobie likes the colony because 'human nature hasn't had time to disguise itself.' The poverty and misery of the colony present man as God sees him." This then for Greene is the only valid justification for empire: an extensive stage on which to follow and achieve vast aspirations.

Kipling inherited a Victorian mandate: in describing the Anglo-Indian culture, he felt obligated to justify its existence. He found in Arnold a schema with which to represent Anglo-Indian life. But as Conrad recognized, Kipling failed to realize that schematization fully in *Plain Tales from the Hills*. Why? One can only speculate. In adopting another's schema, did Kipling ignore the power of his own first-hand contact with Anglo-Indian life, his lived experience in the colony, which in turn then took on a life of its own in his short story sequence? If such is the case, Greene's response to Conrad can be read as an odd return to Kipling's own view of the matter. Greene, like Kipling and unlike Conrad, believes the colonial endeavor can only be justified with recourse to the Idea. In the face of the

purposelessness of Conrad's hyper-realism, Greene returns to an intellectual construct reminiscent of Kipling's Arnoldian borrowing, though he rejects that specific, as well as imported, schema. In this respect, Greene is closer to Kipling. Yet unlike Kipling, both Conrad and Greene encounter the project of empire as artists first. Conrad's initial response to Kipling in the opening section of *Heart of Darkness* is an aesthetic critique leveled at Kipling's failed fictional embodiment of an idea. Greene's first critique of Conrad is similarly an aesthetic one. In this respect, responding first as artists, Greene is much closer in spirit and approach to Conrad than he is to Kipling.

**Source:** James Scannell, "The Method Is Unsound: The Aesthetic Dissonance of Colonial Justification in Kipling, Conrad, and Greene," in *Style*, Vol. 30, Fall 1996, pp. 409–32.

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# Elizabethan Drama

From the Elizabethan Age come some of the most highly respected plays in Western drama. Although it is generally agreed that the period began at the commencement of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in 1558, the ending date is not as definite. Some consider the age to have ended at the queen's death in 1603, whereas others place the end of Elizabethan Drama at the closing of the theaters in 1642. Elizabeth I was a powerful, resolute monarch who returned England to Protestantism, quelled a great deal of internal turmoil, and unified the nation. She was also a avid supporter of the arts which sparked a surge of activity in the theater. During her reign, some playwrights were able to make a comfortable living by receiving royal patronage. There was a great deal of theatrical activity at Court, and many public theaters were also built on the outskirts of London. Theater was a popular pastime, and people of all walks of life attended. Although women were not allowed onstage, they did attend performances and often made up a substantial part of the audience. The theater also drew many unsavory characters, including pickpockets, cutpurses, and prostitutes. Because of the perceived bad influence of the theaters, the Puritans were vocally opposed to them and succeeded in shutting them down in 1642. Some of the most important playwrights come from the Elizabethan era, including William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Christopher Marlowe. These playwrights wrote plays that were patterned on

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1558
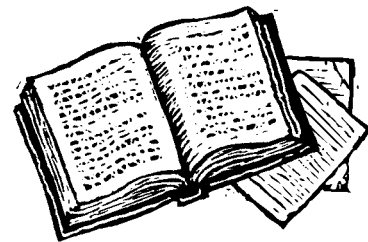
numerous previous sources, including Greek tragedy, Seneca's plays, Attic drama, English miracle plays, morality plays, and interludes. Elizabethan tragedy dealt with heroic themes, usually centering on a great personality who is destroyed by his own passion and ambition. The comedies often satirized the fops and gallants of society.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### George Chapman (c. 1559–1634)

George Chapman was born around 1559 in the town of Hitchin in Hertfordshire, near London. He was the second son of Thomas and Joan Chapman. Little is known of his early life except that he attended Oxford in 1574 but left before completing his degree. From 1583 through 1585, he was in the household of Sir Ralph Sadler, although his exact position there is somewhat unclear. It seems that Chapman served in the military in 1591 and 1592 but returned to London prior to 1594. Chapman's earliest drama, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, was produced in 1596, and he quickly gained a reputation as a talented playwright. Chapman wrote approximately twenty-one plays between 1596 and 1613, but his output was very sporadic. Some years he wrote no plays, instead concentrating his efforts on translating the poetry of Homer. Chapman experienced financial troubles throughout his life and spent some time in debtor's prison. His fortune changed for a brief time in 1603, when he was given a position in the household of the young Prince Henry. Henry undertook sponsorship of the Homer project. During this time, Chapman also wrote plays for the Children of the Chapel, and the company produced Chapman's most famous tragedies: *Bussy D'Ambois* (1604) and two plays on Byron (1608). When Henry died in 1612, Chapman once again found himself in financial trouble. Very little is known about the last twenty years of his life. He died on May 12, 1634.

### Thomas Dekker (c. 1572–1632)

The exact date of Thomas Dekker's birth is unknown. In a document from 1632, he speaks of his "three-score years," and this is the basis for the assumption that he was born in or around the year 1572. He is thought to have been born and raised in London, but little is known about his life prior to January 1598, when his name



*Ben Jonson* *(Hulton Archive / Getty Images)*

begins to appear on the payment books of Philip Henslowe, theater owner and financier of two London theater companies. From 1598 to 1600, Dekker wrote eight plays for the Lord Admiral's Men and collaborated on twenty-four others. In 1600, his most famous play, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, was produced. The play is notable for its realistic depiction of everyday life in seventeenth-century London as well as for Dekker's effective use of romantic fantasy in his depiction of characters. The play was extremely popular with London audiences. Around 1606, Dekker turned to writing pamphlets. His most notable works of this genre are *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606) and *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609). In 1610, he returned to writing plays, but many of his later works were lost. Even though Dekker was a talented playwright, he was never able to make a comfortable living. As Diane Yancey notes in *Life in the Elizabethan Theater*, "Thomas Dekker was a talented and overworked man who spent his life in hopeless poverty." He served several prison terms for debt, with the longest being the six years from 1613 to 1619. Dekker was last heard from in 1632. It is assumed that this was the year of his death, as there is a record of one "Thomas Decker householder" being buried on August 25.

### Thomas Heywood (c. 1573–1641)

Thomas Heywood was a prolific writer who claimed to have written and collaborated on more than two hundred plays. He is most famous for his plays dealing with contemporary English life. Heywood was born in the county of Lincolnshire to Elizabeth Heywood and the Reverend Robert Heywood. His family was fairly well off, and he is believed to have studied at Cambridge University. However, he did not complete his degree. On June 13, 1603, Heywood married Anne Butler. It is uncertain how many children the couple had. There are baptismal records for eight Heywood children, but there is no way to verify if these were all sons and daughters of the dramatist. By 1598, Heywood was gaining recognition as a comic writer, although most of his significant literary activity was done between 1600 and 1620. His best-known play, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, was produced during this period, in 1603. After the death of his first wife, Heywood married Jane Span, on January 18, 1633. In his later years, Heywood served as City Poet and produced several pageants for the Lord Mayor. He was buried on August 16, 1641, in Clerkenwell.

### Ben Jonson (1572–1637)

Ben Jonson was born in 1572 in Westminster, near London. His stepfather was a master bricklayer, and Jonson briefly took up this trade in his youth. He also spent a brief time as a soldier, returning to England and marrying sometime prior to 1592. Upon his return to England, Jonson became an actor and by 1597 was working as a dramatist for the theatrical entrepreneur Phillip Henslowe. Jonson's first play, co-written with Thomas Nashe in 1597, was *The Isle of Dogs*. It was deemed offensive and landed Jonson in jail for a brief time. Then, in 1598, Jonson was arrested for killing a fellow actor in a duel. That same year, however, Jonson also gained his first dramatic success with the play *Every Man in His Humour*. This play was the first instance of a new comic form that came to be known as "the comedy of humours," and it turned him into a celebrity. Jonson became a favorite of King James I and wrote over thirty masques for court performance. In 1616, King James I made him poet laureate, the official poet of the Court. This position also came with an annual pension, allowing Jonson to live out his life comfortably. Jonson suffered a severe stroke in 1628 and died in Westminster on August 6, 1637.

### Thomas Kyd (1558–1594)

Thomas Kyd was born in London in November 3, 1558, the son of Thomas Kyd, a scrivener, and his wife, Anna. Kyd went to Merchant Taylors' school but did not enter a university. From about 1587 to 1593, Kyd was in the service of a lord. He began to write plays, and it was during this time that Kyd had his greatest theatrical success, with the production of *The Spanish Tragedy,* which was wildly popular with Elizabethan audiences and established Kyd as the founder of a new genre of Elizabethan Drama known as "blood tragedy." The exact date of the first production of *The Spanish Tragedy* is unknown. Matters seemed to go along fairly smoothly until 1591, when Kyd ran into some very serious trouble due to his earlier acquaintance with the dramatist Christopher Marlowe. During a government search, some antireligious papers were seized in Kyd's home, and he was accused of atheism. He was arrested and tortured but was freed after maintaining that the papers belonged to Marlowe and had become inadvertently mixed with his own belongings when the two shared a room for a brief time. Kyd was eventually freed, but the lord he served was not convinced of his innocence. He released Kyd from service in 1593. Kyd was unable to obtain other financial assistance and died in July 1594 in extreme poverty.

### John Lyly (c. 1553–1606)

John Lyly was born in Kent, England, around 1553 or 1554 and grew up in Canterbury. He attended Magdalen College at Oxford University, earning his bachelor's degree in 1573 and his master's in 1575. He applied for a fellowship but was turned down and so left the university and moved to London where he pursued writing. Known at university as a wit, he was an immediate success with the publication of a novel in two parts, *Euphanes, or the Anatomy of Wit* (1579) and *Euphanes and His England* (1580). Through these works, Lyly introduced the euphemism, or indirect expression, to the English language. Having lost a bid for Master of the Revels in 1579, which would have elevated his standing at royal court, Lyly turned to playwriting and also served as a member of Parliament between 1580 and 1601. He married Beatrice Browne in 1583 and later that year took control of the first Blackfriars Theatre. Lyly's comedies were very popular, with eight of them being performed between 1584 and 1591 by children

in children's theaters. These plays included *Campaspe* (1584), *Endymion, the Man in the Moon* (1588), and *Midas* (1590), and were later noteworthy for being the first prose comedies. *The Woman in the Moon* (1594) is his only play in verse. Lyly petitioned Queen Elizabeth I for the post of Master of the Revels again in 1589 and 1593 but did not meet with success. Thereafter, his popularity declined, and Lyly died in poverty in London in November 1606.

### Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury on February 26, 1564, the eldest son of master shoemaker John Marlowe and Katherine Arthur. Marlowe attended Cambridge University, quickly distinguishing himself as a brilliant student. During his time at Cambridge, Marlowe became part of Queen Elizabeth's secret service and carried out several secret missions for the Crown. After receiving his degree in July 1587, he went to London, where he became an actor and dramatist for the Lord Admiral's Company. During that same year, both parts of *Tamburlaine the Great* were performed on the London stages, catapulting Marlowe into celebrity status. Marlowe lived a reckless life and had several scrapes with the law. In 1591, Marlowe's former roommate, playwright Thomas Kyd, was imprisoned and tortured after authorities found heretical writings in Kyd's room. Kyd insisted, perhaps while being tortured, that the writings belonged to Marlowe, who was known by some to be an atheist. Marlowe was also brought in for questioning and then released. Marlowe's life ended when he was only twenty-nine years old. On the night of May 30, 1593, he was stabbed in the head and probably died instantly. The circumstances of his death remained unclear, but the story that it occurred in a barroom fight was later discredited. Some scholars speculate that his death was arranged by secret service men and may have been ordered because he was reported to be a heretic. He was buried in an unmarked grave.

### William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was the third of eight children. At age eighteen, Shakespeare married the already-pregnant Anne Hathaway. They would eventually have three children. Very little is known about Shakespeare's life from 1583 to 1592. By 1594, however, he had joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, serving as both an actor and a playwright. By the end of that year, six of his plays had already been performed. In 1599, Shakespeare and other members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men financed the building of the Globe Theatre, and the Lord Admiral's Men continued to mount popular performances there, including many of Shakespeare's plays. The Lord Admiral's Men became the foremost London company, performing at Court on 32 occasions between 1594 and 1603. After his ascension to the throne, James I granted the Lord Chamberlain's Men a royal patent, and the company's name was changed to the King's Men. Shakespeare's talent as a playwright was widely recognized. He became one of the wealthiest dramatists of his day and lived a comfortable life. He retired to Stratford in 1610 and died on April 23, 1616. (That he is reported to have died on his birth date, which happens to be the date of the Feast of St. George, patron saint of England, has suggested to some that his dates are fictional.) In 1623, actors Henry Condell and John Heminge published his plays as a collection known as the First Folio.

### John Webster (c. 1580–c. 1634)

John Webster was born in the late 1570s or early 1580s to a coachmaker and the daughter of a blacksmith near London. Perhaps because of his low station, not much was recorded about Webster's life. Webster married Sara Peniall in March 1606, and they had several children. Beginning in 1602, he worked with teams of playwrights on comedies and history plays for the popular theater, but his lasting fame was made by his writing two tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, both of which derive from Italian stories. *The White Devil*, first performed in 1612, was a failure with audiences because it was so unusual. *The Duchess of Malfi* was more successful with its first staging two years later. Some scholars have argued that Webster's work is Gothic in nature, predating that movement by more than a hundred years. Webster continued to write through the 1620s but by 1634, as recorded by his contemporary Thomas Heywood, he was dead. His plays, especially the two tragedies, continued to be staged throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries to audiences that can appreciate Webster's grim vision and complex, intellectual writing.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The Duchess of Malfi

*The Duchess of Malfi* is a tragedy by John Webster, first performed at the Globe Theatre in London in 1614 and published in 1623. The play is based on a true story, which took place around 1508. In Webster's retelling, the widowed Duchess falls in love with a steward named Antonio, whom her brothers forbid her from marrying. She secretly marries Antonio anyway. When discovered by her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, the Duchess concocts a plan by which she and Antonio will escape Malfi with their children. They are betrayed; Antonio and their eldest son escape while the Duchess and the two younger children are captured and executed by Bosola, a servant of the Cardinal. Bosola is affected by her death and decides to avenge her. In his attempt to kill the Cardinal, he accidentally murders Antonio, and, in the ensuing brawl, Bosola, the Cardinal, and Ferdinand all kill each other. The eldest son of the Duchess and Antonio then inherit all of the wealth of Malfi. *The Duchess of Malfi* was an unusually dark and intellectual piece for Elizabethan audiences but was well-received. In the twenty-first century, Webster's tragedies are considered to be quite modern and continue to be popular with actors and audiences alike.

### Everyman in His Humour

Ben Jonson's *Everyman in His Humour* was first produced in 1598 by Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. It is Jonson's first important play and is also the first play to be labeled a "comedy of humours." The belief was that humours were bodily fluids, which controlled a person's temperament. If an individual had too much of any one humour, he would exhibit that characteristic to excess. In the play, Jonson emphasizes these humours and achieves his comic effect by exaggerating each character's quirks, almost to the point of caricature. The play was extremely popular and made Jonson a celebrity. Because of its popularity, other playwrights also began to copy the play's style. *Everyman in His Humour* was originally published in 1601, and a revised version appeared as one of the plays in Jonson's folio of 1616.
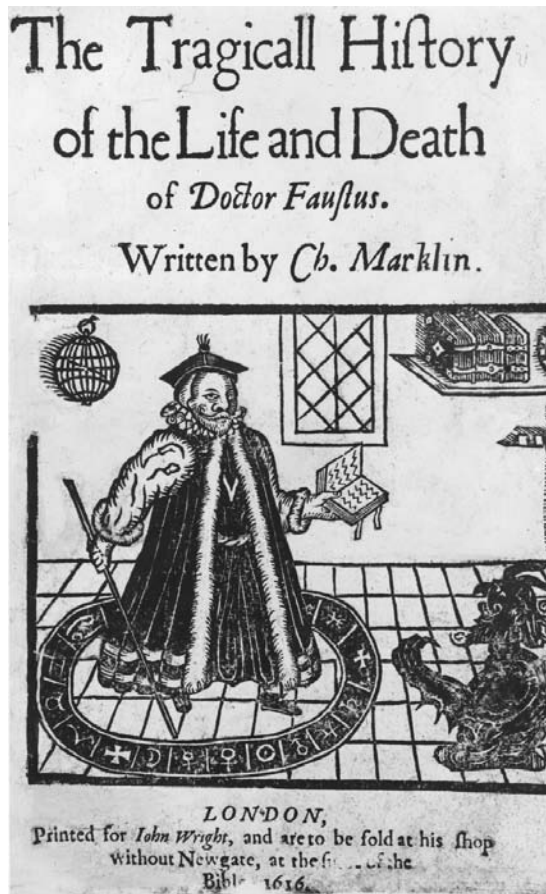
### Hamlet

Perhaps Shakespeare's most well-loved play, *Hamlet* was first produced around 1600 with

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- *Hamlet* was adapted to film by Laurence Olivier in 1948. Many still consider this the best version of the play ever recorded. Olivier gives a stunning performance in the title role. The film was released by Universal-International and in 2000 became available on a DVD.

- The British Broadcasting Company has produced several excellent audio book versions of Shakespearean plays. Their version of *Hamlet* is performed by Kenneth Branagh and features Derek Jacobi. It is published by Bantam Doubleday Dell. This audio book contains the unabridged reading of the play.

- Christopher Marlowe's epic work *Tamburlaine the Great* has been recorded on audio cassette by the Center for Cassette Studies.

- The Marlowe Society maintains a website on Christopher Marlowe at http://www.marlowe-society.org with comprehensive information on Marlowe's life, a newsletter, and links to other interesting information.

- *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) is a fictional representation of Shakespeare when his playwriting career was just beginning. Contemporary dramatists Marlowe and Webster are also represented in the movie. Directed by John Maddon, the movie stars Joseph Fiennes as Will Shakespeare, Gwyneth Paltrow as Shakespeare's love interest, Viola de Lesseps, and Dame Judi Dench as Queen Elizabeth I. It is available on DVD from Walt Disney Video.

Richard Burbage, the leading actor of Shakespeare's company, in the title role. It is believed that Shakespeare himself played the ghost of Hamlet's father. *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy that tells the story of the melancholy Prince of Denmark, who vows to avenge his father's murder by killing his uncle, the king. It was well received by Elizabethan audiences who were

*Cover of the 1616 edition of* The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus *by Christopher Marlowe* (Hulton Archive / Getty Images)

probably already somewhat familiar with the story. *Hamlet* was first published in the 1603 quarto. *Hamlet* has been the subject of much discussion and literary criticism and is still considered by many to be the finest of Shakespeare's plays.

## The Jew of Malta

*The Jew of Malta*, first produced in 1592, is Christopher Marlowe's play of Machiavellian policy. Though it is described on the title page of the 1633 edition as a tragedy, it is really a dark, satirical comedy. The play recounts how Barabas, a rich Jew, is deprived of his wealth by Farnese, the Christian governor of Malta, in order that some long-overdue tribute money is paid. Farnese justifies this extortion by saying

that Malta is accursed for harboring Jews at all, and he gives Barabas the choice of becoming a Christian and giving up only half his wealth or remaining a Jew and losing it all. Barabas chooses the latter. This was a very important play for Marlowe. As Robert E. Knoll notes in his article presented in *Christopher Marlowe* of the *Twayne's Authors Series*, "Written in the chronological middle of his career, *The Jew of Malta* is a benchmark in Marlowe's development and is an important play for several reasons; it exhibits the direction of his growth, and, in addition, it had a notable influence on Marlowe's greatest contemporaries." Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is said to have been directly influenced by this play. Arata Ide argues that Marlowe imbued his characters with theatrical behavior in *The Jew of Malta*, which the antitheatrical Protestants found very threatening because it makes it difficult to discern what is artificial and what is genuine. While the play was popular with audiences from the beginning, the success of *The Jew of Malta* was increased in 1594 when Queen Elizabeth's Jewish doctor was executed on the charge of trying to poison her. This inflamed anti-Semitism among the Elizabethan people, and they flocked to the theater to see the evil Barabas get his due. The play was first published in the 1633 quarto.

## The Shoemaker's Holiday

Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is based upon three tales about shoemakers from Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* (1598). This delightful domestic comedy depicts the pleasant, simple lives of apprentices and tradesmen. In it, a young nobleman disguised as a Dutch shoemaker courts the daughter of the Lord Mayor of London. Elizabethan audiences were delighted by the depiction of the everyday lives of contemporary Londoners. Dekker's best play, it remained a favorite among Londoners for many years. The first published edition appeared in 1600, but the play was so popular that it was republished in 1610, 1618, 1624, 1637, and 1657.

## The Spanish Tragedy

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* was wildly successful and propelled Kyd to fame. The story concerns a father's desire to avenge his son's death. Although this was not a new story in Elizabethan Drama, the style of *The Spanish Tragedy* was relatively new to London. Instead of having the violence narrated as was the

convention, Kyd moves it onstage; most of the carnage and brutality take place right in front of the audience. This innovation sparked an entirely new genre in England that came to be known as "blood tragedy." As William Green notes in his essay "Elizabethan Drama," Kyd "set a pattern for playwrights who invigorated the drama with their 'unclassical' shows of violence on the stage." It was not only the violence, however, that made Kyd's play unique and popular. The piece contains skillful rhetoric that serves to sustain the tension. The rhetoric actually functions as action within the play and is an example of Kyd's great skill with language and poetry. References by other playwrights and parodies of *The Spanish Tragedy* indicate that the play was popular from its first staged edition in 1586 through about 1615. The earliest published edition is from 1592. It claims, however, to be a corrected edition of an earlier published version.

## Tamburlaine the Great

Part one of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* was produced about 1587. The play was so successful that Marlowe immediately wrote a sequel. Both parts were published in 1590. These were the only published works of Marlowe during his brief life. The story is based upon the career of the Mongolian conqueror Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane, who overthrew the Turkish Empire in 1402. Marlowe's Tamburlaine is an ambitious character who overcomes all resistance through the use of both arms and rhetoric. Throughout the course of the play, he gains allies, conquers kings, and succeeds in winning the affection of the woman of his dreams. While the Elizabethan audiences appreciated the story of *Tamburlaine*, it was the poetry that really set this play apart from other plays. Previous drama had often been halting and didactic in its speech, but with this production, Marlowe took Elizabethan Drama to a higher level of eloquence and sophistication. As R. C. Bald notes in his introduction to *Six Elizabethan Plays*, "Before his time dramatic verse had usually been rhymed, but Marlowe's sense of style gave the new measure a strength and dignity previously lacking in dramatic verse."

## The Woman in the Moon

*The Woman in the Moon* is a comedic play in blank verse written by John Lyly. When this play was written and first produced on stage is not known, but its use of blank verse dates its composition to the early 1590s. It was published in 1597. Except for this piece, Lyly wrote all of his plays in prose and these were performed by and for children. The sudden change in style with *The Woman in the Moon* was probably meant to appeal to adult audiences. The subject matter—Greek mythology—would have appealed to a fashionable interest in astronomy and astrology. *The Woman in the Moon* is about the first human woman, named Pandora according to Greek mythology. She is gifted with the best attributes of each of the seven planets, or major deities, which makes them jealous. The gods each take a turn exerting their powers to make her unhappy, until Pandora is forced to flee earth. She chooses to live on the Moon, the realm of the goddess Luna.

## A Woman Killed with Kindness

Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* was first produced in 1603. The play dealt with contemporary English life and is recognized as one of the finest examples of domestic tragedy in English drama. English audiences appreciated stories that depicted elements of their everyday lives and thus were charmed by Heywood's play. In it, a devout husband, Frankford, is betrayed by his wife who surrenders her honor to a houseguest. She repents, however, and confesses her evil deed. Instead of seeking vengeance and retribution, Frankford continues to treat her with kindness. She is eventually so overcome by guilt and sorrow that she punishes herself and dies of remorse. Therefore, instead of being killed by her husband's wrath, she is ultimately killed by his kindness. The play is considered Heywood's masterpiece, due to his skillful handling of a story that has a unique twist. Heywood preserves sympathy for his heroine throughout the play while still delivering the proper moral message. The first known printed edition of the play appeared in 1607.

## THEMES

### *Anti-Semitism*

Hatred of Jews prevailed in Elizabethan society and is reflected in plays of the period. Two examples of anti-Semitic plays are Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. In Marlowe's play, Barabas, the Jew of Malta, is a cruel, egotistic, and greedy

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Research various aspects of Elizabethan costume. If you were a nobleman or noblewoman of the time, how would your costume be different than those of the lower classes? What are some of the elements of your dress that would indicate your social status?

- What do you think a typical day was like for members of an Elizabethan acting troupe? What were some of the difficulties they might encounter in trying to prepare for a performance?

- Elizabethan Drama gives some clues into the remedies, medicines, and herbs used to cure ailments during that time period. What were some of these treatments? Do people still use any of them today?

man. In Elizabethan times, he was played in a confrontational and somewhat comic manner, with the actor wearing a red wig and a long hooked nose. Shylock, the Jewish merchant in *The Merchant of Venice*, is also presented as a greedy, vindictive man. Shakespeare tempers his character, however, with a bit more humanity than is found in Barabas. Elizabethan anti-Semitism was fueled in 1594 when Queen Elizabeth's Jewish doctor was executed on the charge of trying to poison her.

## Disguise

Disguise is a device that is used frequently by characters in Elizabethan plays. It is a way in which characters gain information that would be otherwise withheld from them. For example, in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Rosalind discovers that her true love, Orlando, is indeed in love with her while she is disguised as a boy. Some critics also believe that disguising female characters in male garb allowed men and boys who were playing these roles to spend part of the play in costumes that were more comfortable and familiar.

## Humours

Elizabethan psychology was based on the theory of four bodily humours—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Proper physical and mental health supposedly depended upon a proper balance among these fluids. A particular emotion or mood was associated with each, and it was believed that if a person had too much of one humour in his body, that particular emotion would be emphasized. With the production of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, a new species of comedy devoted solely to the interplay of these elements was created, known as the "comedy of humours." The humours were prevalent forces in the tragedies as well. Hamlet is described as the "melancholy Dane," thus implying that he has too much black bile, which would make him tend to be depressed.

## Revenge

Revenge is one of the most prevalent themes in Elizabethan drama. In the plays, it is often motivated by the visitation of a ghost who delivers the story of his murder to the character who must now become the avenger. Such is the case in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, as the Ghost of Don Andrea recounts his death, calls for revenge, and then sits onstage to watch his enemies meet their fate. Revenge is also the motivator in *Hamlet*, as the Prince of Denmark vows to avenge his father's murder. In her article "Common Plots in Elizabethan Drama," Madeleine Doran reflects upon why the subject of revenge was so popular:

> Why the motive of revenge should enjoy such popularity from the early days of Elizabethan down to Caroline times naturally provokes speculation. That it had deeply sympathetic affinities with the conditions of actual life we must suppose. Yet its very endurance, even after it had lost its vitality, as the commonest counter-motive in tragedy, suggests something besides imitative Realism. Its persistence may have been to some extent owing to its great usefulness for play construction in furnishing so practicable a method of counteraction.

## The Supernatural

In Elizabethan times, people were very superstitious, and many people believed in the supernatural. Queen Elizabeth I had a personal astrologer whom she would consult regularly, and, as Diane Yancey notes, "Almost every village had an old woman who could be persuaded to cast a spell to protect cattle from illness or

keep one's lover faithful and true." Given this context, it is not surprising that supernatural elements are found in many Elizabethan plays. Fairies, ghosts, and witches often figure prominently in the action. Ghosts are very important in revenge tragedies and are often used as a catalyst for the action. Several Elizabethan plays contain a ghost who recounts his own murder, thus beginning a cycle of revenge. Such is the case in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Sprites and fairies were also popular characters of the time. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is populated with fantastical creatures.

## STYLE

### Asides

Asides are brief comments spoken privately to another character or directly to the audience. They are not heard or noticed by the rest of the characters onstage. Typically, the character turns toward the audience and delivers the aside from behind his hand, thus hiding it from the rest of the players. This technique is used often by Elizabethan dramatists as a device to let the audience in on the character's thoughts.

### Blank Verse

Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter, the primary form used by Elizabethan playwrights, although prose and many other forms of poetry are also found throughout their plays. Serious characters of high stature and nobility often speak in blank verse, especially when discussing important issues, while comic and lower class characters are less likely to do so.

### Iambic Pentameter

Iambic pentameter is the rhythm used in Elizabethan blank verse. Each line has five two-syllable units, or "feet," with the second syllable of each unit receiving the heaviest stress. Iambic pentameter is relatively close to spoken English. For example, "She WENT to SEE a PLAY a-BOUT a KING" is a line of iambic pentameter.

### Insults

Name-calling was an art form during the Elizabethan Age, and this is reflected in the plays from that period. Characters often engage in "verbal dueling," hurling creative slurs at one another, hoping to get the upper hand or have the last word by delivering the best insult. Shakespeare was a master at creating these insults. Insults such as, "You ungrateful fox!" "You overweening slave!" and "Thou art a boil! A plague-sore!" are sprinkled liberally throughout his plays. He was not the only playwright to use this technique, however. The art of creating insults permeated Elizabethan plays.

### Wordplay

Elizabethans were fond of wordplay, and they especially appreciated puns, which employ different words that sound alike or the same word, which has several definitions or functions in a sentence. One of the most skilled in the use of puns and wordplay was Shakespeare. One famous example occurs in *Romeo and Juliet*. As Mercutio lies dying from a sword wound, he says to his friend, Romeo, "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man."

### Rhymed Couplets

Rhymed couplets are two lines of poetry that rhyme as in "Well, I will in, and do the best I can; To match my daughter to this gentleman" from Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Rhymed couplets often signal the end of a scene or act.

### Scenery and Settings

Most Elizabethan plays were performed on a bare stage with no scenery and no sets. Therefore, to let the audience know where and when the action was taking place, playwrights would begin scenes with lines that establish place and time. For example, the opening line of Act IV, Scene I of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* lets the audience know right away where they are: "Yonder's the shop, and there my fair love sits." Sometimes settings were conveyed by the use of placards that would be hung onstage immediately prior to the scene. These would tell the audience in what town or village the action was taking place.

### Soliloquy

A soliloquy is a speech that reveals a character's thoughts, rather like thinking aloud. The soliloquy tells the audience what is going on in a character's mind. The most famous soliloquy in all of drama is the "To be or not to be" speech from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. In it, Hamlet ponders whether to kill himself and considers the

consequences of living or dying. The soliloquy is sometimes confused with monologue. In both speeches, only one person speaks. In soliloquy the character reveals his inner thoughts to the audience; no one in the play hears the speech. In a monologue, one character speaks all the words but he may be overheard by other characters in the play.

### Violence

In most Elizabethan plays, the violent acts occur offstage. These acts are then reported onstage by one character to other characters, and thus the audience learns of action that does not need to be enacted directly. This convention allowed Elizabethan dramatists to include huge battles as part of the "action" of their plays without the theaters having to hire hundreds of actors to perform the plays. Also, horrific acts of brutality that are difficult to execute onstage are often more effective when described than when actually shown. Members of the audience must use their imaginations to visualize the carnage, often creating a scene in their minds, much worse than ever could be created on the stage. The Elizabethan dramatists borrowed this tradition from Greek tragedy. The tradition changed, however, with the development of the "blood tragedy" (also known as "revenge tragedy"). In these plays, acts of violence are performed onstage, in full view of the audience. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is one of the best-known plays of this genre. Webster's tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, were also noted in their time for graphic violence, which required staging in a controlled environment.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Boys' Companies

Boys' companies were performing troupes that were made up entirely of young boys. The practice of using boys in the English theater dates back to the early 1500s, when choirboys sang and performed at court for the king, and during Elizabethan times, these acting companies were still usually under the training and direction of a choirmaster. During the latter part of the 1500s, boys' companies were very popular. Their popularity faded around the turn of the century, however, due to several scandals that took place. In 1597, Nathaniel Giles, manager of the

Chapel Children, was charged with kidnapping boys and forcing them into servitude as actors, and in 1600, Henry Evans, another manager of the Chapel Children, involved the boys in several politically controversial plays. Public support for the troupes waned, and boys' companies dissolved around 1608.

### Court Masques

Masques were short entertainments that were held at Court as one part of a royal evening of entertainment. They were much shorter than regular plays. Masques usually contained romantic and mythological themes and consisted of elaborate settings in which players posed, danced, and recited poetic lines of dialogue. Nobles and guests of the Court would often take part, and although women were banned from appearing on the public stage, they were allowed to participate in Court masques. Queen Elizabeth I held very few court masques, but when James I took the throne, masques were revived with increasing grandeur. Ben Jonson was the primary writer of masques during the reign of James I, but other playwrights also tried their hand at the form.

### Inn Courtyards

Many acting troupes performed in the courtyards of English inns both before and after permanent theaters were built. The inns were usually multi-storied, U-shaped buildings, and they prefigured the design of the public playhouses. Players constructed a rough stage made of boards on trestles at one end of the courtyard, and audience members would stand in the yard to watch the performance. Well-to-do patrons brought their own chairs and watched from the balconies overlooking the courtyard. Playing inn courtyards was sometimes difficult for acting troupes because their performances could be interrupted or even cancelled if the business at the inn was brisk.

### Interludes

Interludes are short plays that were often performed during a break in a royal or noble banquet. They were typically a small scene or conversation between two or more persons. Diane Yancey sees interludes as an important link to English secular drama: "By shying away from religious themes, the interludes made it acceptable for the later Elizabethan dramatists

to write plays that had little, if anything, to do with the Bible."

### Miracle Plays

Miracle plays were also known as "mysteries," from the Latin word *ministerium*, which means "act." They were performed on Corpus Christi and other feast days, and they depicted biblical history. Residents of English towns would gather along the streets to watch the plays, which were performed on moveable stages known as pageant wagons. Several miracle plays would make up an entire cycle; the first play was presented, and then its wagon would move along to the next stop on the street while another wagon moved in to take its place. The second part of the play was performed on this pageant wagon, and then it would move along, and so on. This procession would continue until the entire history of the Bible had been told. Because of this convention of staging, these productions were also known as cycle plays. The structure of miracle plays had an important influence on English history plays. As Diane Yancey notes, "Histories borrow medieval techniques found in miracle plays, including rearranging historical events, using anachronisms, and writing a subplot that parallels the main plot."

### Morality Plays

Morality plays were religious plays that first appeared in the fourteenth century. They most likely had their beginnings when popular outdoor preachers began telling stories that applied biblical teachings to the problems of daily living. They began as biblical allegories but gradually became more and more secularized. They were one of the major links between the religious and professional stages. Oscar Brockett observes in "Theatre and Drama in the Late Middle Ages" that "Elements of the morality play persisted into Shakespeare's time. But as the morality play was increasingly secularized during the sixteenth century, the distinctions vanished between it and the type of play commonly labeled 'interlude.'"

### Private Theaters

Indoor, roofed theaters were known as "private theaters" during Elizabethan times, even though the public could attend the performances. These playhouses catered to a more aristocratic audience and were different from the public theaters in many ways: they accommodated less than one-half as many spectators; they charged considerably higher admission prices; seats were provided for all spectators; and, candles were used for illumination. The Blackfriars, the first private theater, opened its doors in 1576. Coincidentally, this same year the first public theater opened. It was built as part of a former monastery. Until 1610, private theaters were used exclusively by boys' companies. After that time, the popularity of the children faded, and the private theaters passed into the hands of adult troupes.

### Public Playhouses

The first permanent theater in England opened in 1576. It was called The Theatre and was built by James Burbage, who based its design upon the English inn courtyards. It formed a model for numerous English playhouses that were to follow. It is not known exactly what Elizabethan playhouses looked like because no detailed drawings have been discovered as of 2008, but some extant sketches from audience members in attendance do remain. From these drawings, along with some written reports and other documents, historians have concluded that most of the Elizabethan playhouses were similar in structure. They were many-sided, open-air structures, made of a timber frame covered with clay plaster or mortar. They had three tiers of galleries with a thatched roof covering only the gallery seating area and the rear, housed-in part of the stage. This stage-house was also called a tiring house because it was the area in which the actors *attired* themselves for the plays. The playing area was an open-air platform that protruded into the middle of the yard, and the lower-class patrons would stand on the ground surrounding the stage; thus they were called groundlings. Aristocratic patrons would pay more to sit in the tiered galleries, and very wealthy patrons could pay to actually be seated onstage.

### Jacobean Age

Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603 and was succeeded by James I, who ruled England, Scotland, and Ireland until his death in 1625. The flourishing of the arts, which began in the Elizabethan Age, continued into the Jacobean Age. King James I was himself a scholar and a writer. The literature of this generation is characterized by a darker, more cynical view of the world. The literature of the Jacobean Age includes Shakespeare's tragedies, tragi-comedies, and sonnets; Webster's tragedies; Jonson's dramas and verse; Sir Francis Bacon's essays; and the metaphysical poetry of

John Donne. The Jacobean Age came to an end with the co-occurrence of an economic depression, the death of King James I, and the outbreak of the bubonic plague in London, a serious infestation that killed over 30,000 people in 1625.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Master of Revels and Censorship

Every play had to be submitted to the Master of Revels for licensing before performance. He acted as the official censor and would often force the deletion of passages or references that were deemed offensive. Gerald Eades Bentley, in "Regulation and Censorship" from *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590–1642*, observes:

> most of the censoring activities were intended to eliminate from the stage five general types of lines or scenes: 1. Critical comments on the policies or conduct of government. 2. Unfavorable presentations of *friendly* foreign powers or their sovereigns, great nobles or subjects. 3. Comment of religious controversy. 4. Profanity (after 1606). 5. Personal satire of *influential* people.

The Office of Revels was originally established to select and supervise all entertainment of the sovereign, but as time progressed, its power grew. In 1581, a patent was issued that centralized the regulation of all plays and players with the Master of Revels. The man holding this position became powerful and prestigious, for he could significantly change the tone and intent of any production through censorship or could prevent the production from occurring altogether. The position was also lucrative, as the Master of Revels received a tidy sum for each play that was licensed.

### Puritans

The Puritans were extremely zealous Protestants who held strict views on matters of religion and morality. They shunned all forms of entertainment, including music and dancing, because they believed that these diversions turned a person's thoughts from concentration upon the Bible and spiritual matters. Puritans considered the theater to be an ungodly institution and denounced it as wicked and profane. Throughout the Elizabethan era, they actively campaigned against the public playhouses because they felt that such institutions threatened England's morality. Numerous Puritan writers produced pamphlets warning against the dangers of attending the theater and attacked the actors as sinners and heretics. As John Addington Symonds notes in his essay "Theatres, Playwrights, Actors, and Playgoers," "The voices of preachers and Puritan pamphleteers were daily raised against playhouses." The Puritan mindset eventually prevailed, and the Puritans succeeded in closing all of the public theaters in 1642.

### Plague

The bubonic plague, or Black Death, which had begun in southern Europe, originally made its way to England around 1348. Although this was well before the Elizabethan era, the effects of the plague continued to be felt for centuries. Plague broke out frequently, and London was visited by the dreaded disease in 1563, 1578–1579, 1582, 1592–1593, and 1603. During the outbreak of 1603, over 30,000 people died. The plague was so deadly because of the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in the city of London. Fleas carried by rats spread the plague, and the overcrowded conditions provided ample breeding grounds and hosts for the disease-carrying insects. These conditions also caused the disease to spread quickly once someone had been infected. The term "plague-sore," an insult that can be found in the drama of the time, is a reference to the visible sores that would cover people's bodies once they had contracted bubonic plague.

### Royal Patronage

Actors were subject to the same laws as vagrants and were in danger of arrest if they could not prove that they had a permanent residence. In order to avoid persecution, they sought a noble patron to support and promote them. They became servants of the nobleman, thus providing him more prestige. In return, the nobleman would protect them if they got into trouble. He did not pay them regular wages or allowances, however. In 1572, noble patronage became very significant because of a law that allowed only registered servants of a nobleman to go on tour. Since touring was one of the main sources of income for theater troupes, it was necessary for the actors to gain patronage to survive financially.

### Machiavelli

Niccolo Machiavelli, a sixteenth-century Italian philosopher, was famous for the political theories put forth in his book, *The Prince*. Machiavelli believed in man's capacity for determining his

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **1600s:** Women are not allowed to perform in plays, and all the female roles are played by boys or men.

  **Today:** Some of the most notable and highly respected performers are women.

- **1600s:** Names do not have a standard spelling. Shakespeare's name appears in several variations, including Shakespeare, Shaksper, and Shakespere.

  **Today:** Names are spelled consistently, and, for legal purposes, each person's signature is consistent as well.

- **1600s:** Most plays are performed outdoors during the day to take advantage of the natural light. Plays performed indoors must be lit by candlelight.

  **Today:** Most plays are performed indoors in the evening. They are illuminated by electric lighting.

- **1600s:** One of the most common surgical procedures is bloodletting, done through an incision in a vein or the application of leeches.

  **Today:** Thousands of sophisticated surgical techniques are available that have been proven safe and effective.

- **1600s:** There are no sewers or drains, except for the gutter which runs down the middle of the street. Garbage is dumped into the gutters and accumulates there until the rain washes it to lower ground or into a canal or river.

  **Today:** There are sophisticated urban sanitation systems that handle waste and purify water. These systems maintain the cleanliness of cities and help to prevent the spread of disease.

own destiny, and in his book, he describes how it is possible for one to usurp power through treachery. *The Prince* is considered by some to be a manual of tyrants, whereas others claim that Machiavelli was just describing the world as it is rather than teaching people how the world should be. Machiavelli's work was known throughout England, and his ideas inspired several Elizabethan playwrights. Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* has been described as a work of Machiavellian policy, and the ghost of Machiavelli actually appears at the opening of the play.

## *Protestantism*

Queen Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary, daughter of Katherine of Aragon and King Henry VII, was queen from 1553 to 1558, immediately prior to Elizabeth. She was a devout Catholic and gained the nickname "Bloody Mary" for her attempts to suppress Protestantism by executing many of its leading adherents. During Mary's reign, Elizabeth concealed the fact that she was Protestant, but when she ascended the throne, Elizabeth restored Protestantism to England. She was not so vicious a queen as her half-sister had been, however. As Dick Riley and Pam McAllister relate in *The Bedside, Bathtub and Armchair Companion to Shakespeare*, "As queen, Elizabeth fined Catholics who refused to attend services of the official church, but there was no widespread persecution of those who clung to the old faith, and Elizabeth tried to ensure that services and prayers were conducted in a way that both Catholics and Protestants could in good conscience attend." Her moderate policies brought a stronger unity than England had enjoyed for several years.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Attending the theater was an extremely popular pastime during the Elizabethan era. The theater was able to flourish during the sixteenth century

*1647 illustration of Greater London showing the location of the Globe Theatre* (Illustration by Wenceslaus Hollar (1647). © The Folger Shakespeare Library. Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library)

partly because Queen Elizabeth herself was a supporter of the arts. She enjoyed attending theatrical entertainments and that legitimized the activity for the rest of the citizens. Most of the populace loved going to the theater, and as Jeffrey L. Singman notes in his book *Daily Life in Elizabethan England*, "There was a constant and insatiable demand for plays, and actors became very popular figures—the first 'stars.'" But not everyone was thrilled with the theater's popularity. There were some who shunned it and others who actively campaigned against it. The Puritans were particularly vocal in their opposition to the English playhouses, and numerous treatises and pamphlets were written, warning citizens of the evil and immorality that could be found festering in these amusements. The first major assault came in 1577, in John Northbrooke's *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays and Interludes*. This was followed by Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse* in 1579. As Oscar Brockett comments, "Both works railed in the harshest terms against the theater as an instrument used by the Devil to encourage vice and to take people away from honest work and other useful pursuits." These attacks were answered by

theater supporters, with the most famous response being Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poetry* in 1595. Martha Kurtz, in examination of the history plays that were popular with audiences in the late Elizabethan Age, argues that the strong anti-feminist pattern of exclusion is only on the surface. Beneath the obvious is a strong feminine, domestic foundation, to which the men will return when and if they survive their political intrigues. While Elizabethan audiences continued to enjoy theater, the philosophical battle continued to rage, and the Puritans finally succeeded in closing the theaters in 1642.

Elizabethan drama did not disappear, however; the theaters were reopened in 1660, and the works of these fine playwrights were once again brought to the stage. The reputation of the great works of Elizabethan Drama grew steadily in England and throughout the rest of the world. They have consistently been performed and appreciated up to modern times; people in the twenty-first century look to this era as one that produced some of the finest drama in all of theater history. In attesting to the significance of Elizabethan drama, John Gassner writes, "No one with even the slightest interest in English

literature needs to be told that its greatest period is the Elizabethan Age, and no one familiar with that period is likely to depart from the consensus that its major literary achievement is the drama." R. C. Bald also weighs in with this superlative praise of the Elizabethan playwrights: "Even if Shakespeare had never lived, the last fifteen years of Queen Elizabeth's reign and the reign of King James I would still be the greatest period in the history of English drama." Plays from this period are still produced all over the world, and Shakespeare is recognized by many as the greatest playwright of all time. His works are considered timeless and universal, and they continue to resonate, more than four hundred years after his death. In her 1997 book *Life in the Elizabethan Theater*, Diane Yancey notes, "The number of Shakespearean acting companies and theater productions that exist today also bears witness to the continuing importance of Elizabethan drama." The Elizabethan playwrights created a body of work that has withstood the test of time. Their work has influenced all succeeding generations of theater artists and audiences.

# CRITICISM

## Beth Kattelman

*Kattelman holds a Ph.D. in theater from Ohio State University. In this essay, Kattelman discusses how Elizabethan plays can provide insight into that historical time period.*

Works of theater are always a reflection of the society in which they are created. By studying plays, one can learn a wealth of information about the beliefs, lifestyle, and politics of the time in which they were written and produced. Such is the case with Elizabethan Drama. If one looks carefully at the works of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and their fellow playwrights, many interesting and topical details come to light. Because the theater shows human interaction, thus revealing manners and thoughts, it can provide insight into the nuances of a time that may not come to light by just studying names, dates, and facts. It can also shed light upon the important issues and topics of the day. It is a "barometer" of the times. Just as citizens of today might stand around the water cooler discussing last night's episode of a popular television show, so the Elizabethans would discuss the latest "hot" play by Heywood or Dekker. Just as

future generations may learn something of the present day from current films and television programs, so too can historians learn a great deal about a time period by studying popular entertainments.

One of the things that can be learned by studying Elizabethan Drama is the way people celebrated holidays and special occasions. In Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, for example, the following lines reveal that the day before Lent [Shrove-Tuesday] was a holiday that was celebrated with feasts featuring pancakes: "Besides, I have procur'd that upon every Shrove-Tuesday, at the sound of the pancake bell, my fine dapper Assyrian lads shall clap up their shop window and away." Here, the phrase "pancake bell" provides a clue into the holiday celebration. While it may take some further study to completely understand this reference, it is an interesting bit of information that can lead to a deeper understanding of this particular holiday. Plays also reveal a great deal about what took place at common ceremonies. Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* opens with a wedding celebration where the guests, "With nosegays and bride-laces in their hats, dance all their country measures, rounds, and jigs." This line reveals a bit about the wedding guests' apparel and tells what kind of dances were popular at wedding receptions; thus, from just one line of dialogue, one can get a glimpse of the activities that took place at an Elizabethan wedding. Of course, seeing the play staged with historical accuracy would provide even more insight into the occasion. References in theatrical dialogue also point to other plays and entertainments that were popular at the time. The following lines from *The Shoemaker's Holiday* indicate that *Tamburlaine* was a recognizable name for Elizabethan audiences, probably due to the popularity of Christopher Marlowe's tragedy *Tamburlaine the Great* a few years prior: "Sim Eyre knows how to speak to a Pope, to Sultan Soliman, to Tamburlaine, an he were here, and shall I melt, shall I droop before my sovereign."

In addition to details about ceremonies and entertainments, an enormous amount of information about societal protocol can be gleaned from the dialogue of Elizabethan plays. Take, for example, another line from *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Here, the Lord Mayor discusses his daughter's possible betrothal with a man of the

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
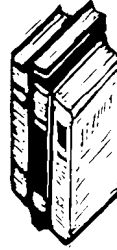
- The bubonic plague, or Black Death, was one of the worst natural disasters in history. Between 1347 and 1352, the plague swept through Europe causing widespread hysteria and death. One-third of the population of Europe died from the outbreak. It affected many aspects of daily life and was also reflected in the art and literature of the time. Philip Ziegler's *The Black Death* (1969) provides an in-depth look at this catastrophe.

- The Globe Theatre has been rebuilt in Bankside, London, just a few yards from the site where the original playhouse stood. Theatrical entrepreneur Sam Wanamaker did extensive research in order to be as authentic as possible to the original. The story of the theater's reconstruction and the research that went into this ambitious project makes for fascinating reading and also provides a great deal of information about the Elizabethan theater in general. One book on the subject is *Shakespeare's Globe Rebuilt* (1997), edited by J. R. Mulryne, Margaret Shewring, Andrew Gurr, and Ronnie Mulryne.

- Will Kempe was one of the principal actors of Shakespeare's company. He was famous for his comic roles, and Shakespeare wrote many of the clown characters in his early plays specifically for Kempe. He originated the roles of Bottom and Falstaff. The other members of Shakespeare's company were interesting characters in their own right. There have also been many intriguing Shakespearean actors down through the ages, and their lives make for fascinating reading. Bernard D. N. Grebanier's *Then Came Each Actor: Shakespearean Actors, Great and Otherwise, Including Players and Princes, Rogues, Vagabonds, and Actors Motley, from Will Kempe to Olivier and Gielgud and After* (1975) provides a look at what went on behind the scenes during Shakespeare's time and also contains some insightful information about Shakespearean actors that were to follow.

- In the latter part of the sixteenth century, Spain was the major international power. Spain's leader, King Phillip II, was very disturbed that Elizabeth had converted England to Protestantism, and he pledged to conquer the heretics in England and convert them to Roman Catholicism. To accomplish this aim, he sent his so-called Invincible Armada of 125 ships sailing toward the English Channel in May of 1588. His fleet was met by English ships and soundly defeated. John Tincey's *The Spanish Armada* (2000) is a thoroughly researched look at this battle.

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Court. He comments that it is not a good idea because his daughter is not of the same class as her would-be husband, "Too mean is my poor girl for his high birth; poor citizens must not with courtiers wed." This brief line points to the strong class system that was present in England. The Lord Mayor's comment shows that it was improper for one to marry someone who was not his or her social equal. This was a common theme in Elizabethan Drama. Another example occurs in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* when Sir Charles notes what a good match Anne and Sir Francis are due to their equal positioning on the social ladder: "You both adorn each other, and your hands methinks are matches. There's equality in this fair combination; You are both scholars, both young, both being descended nobly." In fact, many Elizabethan comedies are based upon the predicament of youngsters falling in love with someone who is above or below their own station in life. People could relate to this topic and enjoyed the humorous complications that resulted from characters trying to overcome this hurdle.

> IT SEEMS THAT AUDIENCES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED BY ACCOUNTS OF MACABRE ACTS THAT THEY HAVE HEARD ABOUT FROM THEIR DAILY NEWS SOURCES, AND ELIZABETHANS WERE NO DIFFERENT. THEY LOVED TO SEE THESE CASES ACTED OUT, OFTEN WITH MUCH BLOOD AND GORE."

Crime was also a popular topic with Elizabethan audiences, who loved to see plays based upon well-known criminal cases of the day. It seems that audiences have always been fascinated by accounts of macabre acts that they have heard about from their daily news sources, and Elizabethans were no different. They loved to see these cases acted out, often with much blood and gore. One of the most famous of this genre is a domestic tragedy published in 1592 by an anonymous author. Its full title is *The lamentable and true tragedy of Master Arden of Feversham in Kent, who was most wickedly murdered by the means of his disloyal and wanton wife, who for the love she bare to one Mosbie, hired two desperate ruffians, Black Will and Shakebag, to kill him*. For the sake of simplicity, this title is usually shortened to *Arden of Feversham*; the full title, however, gives a clue as to the draw these true crime stories had for an Elizabethan audience. By describing the story in a lengthy title, the author let Elizabethans know that they were going to see something exciting, sordid, and possibly somewhat gory. Because the story was based on an actual incident, the audience would not only see the events dramatized but would also find out what eventually happened to the criminals. For example, in the epilogue to *Arden of Feversham*, the fate of each perpetrator is recounted:

> Thus have you seen the truth of Arden's death.
> As for the ruffians, Shakebag and Black Will,
> The one took sanctuary, and, being sent for out,
> Was murdered in Southwark as he passed
> To Greenwich, where the Lord Protector lay.
> Black Will was burned in Flushing on a stage;
> Greene was hanged at Osbridge in Kent;
> The painter fled and how he died we know not.

Evidence suggests that plays based on actual crimes were common throughout the Elizabethan period. Many of the play texts are lost to us, but their titles are still available. As John Addington Symonds notes, "Plays founded on these subjects of contemporary crime were popular throughout the flourishing age of the Drama, is abundantly proved by their dates and titles, and preserved in several records." Filmgoers of today, in fact, are not very different from Elizabethan audiences in regards to their enjoyment of the reenactment of famous crimes. Some of our most popular and enduring films and characters are based upon books inspired by real criminals and their heinous deeds. For example, both Norman Bates of *Psycho* and Buffalo Bill of *Silence of the Lambs* were inspired by the serial killer Ed Gein and the gruesome acts he committed in a Wisconsin farmhouse in 1957.

Plays can also illuminate the morality present during a particular time period. Ethics and religious beliefs have always been an important part of society, and thus, they are also an important part of that society's entertainments. Morality is a very strong factor in Elizabethan Drama because theater was expected to teach the citizens a lesson in addition to entertaining them. The theaters became an important "school" for the Elizabethan people because citizens of all walks of life attended. It was one of the few activities that the nobility and the lower classes had in common. In his book, Symonds describes the wide array of people that could be found at the theater: "the public to which these playwrights appealed was the English people from Elizabeth upon the throne down to the lowest ragamuffin of the streets; in the same wooden theaters met lords and ladies, citizens and prentices, common porters and working men, soldiers, sailors, pickpockets and country folk." He calls the Elizabethan theater a "school of popular instruction." Since a large part of the populace attended the theater, it was a great place to disseminate information and to teach moral lessons to a large cross-section of people. Sometimes these lessons were taught in a subtle manner, by the outcome of the action; at other times they were delivered to the audience in a very direct manner. An excellent example of this direct address occurs in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. In the play, Anne has had an adulterous affair with one of her husband's friends. She has repented, however, and now deeply regrets her actions. She confesses her disgrace and shame and also warns the women in the audience with the following, very pointed lines:

*Greenwich Palace, where William Shakespeare presented plays to Queen Elizabeth I* (Hulton Archive / Getty Images)

(*To the audience*) O women, women, you that
   have yet kept
Your holy matrimonial vow unstained,
Make me your instance. When you tread awry,
Your sins like mine will on your conscience lie.

The lesson here is clear: women stay faithful to your husbands! It is not surprising that the theater was expected to instruct as well as entertain during Elizabethan times. The drama had descended from religious mystery and morality plays, so playwrights had a long history of including moral lessons in their texts. Tragedies were particularly blatant in putting forth a moral message. In fact, historian D. J. Palmer conjectures, in "Elizabethan Tragic Heroes," that this is one of the reasons Elizabethan tragedies are so complex and contain so many characters:

> All Elizabethan tragedies in fact try to illustrate several lessons at once, by incorporating within their actions a whole series of tragic catastrophes, each with its own significance. From this point of view, therefore, the most appropriate

kind of tragic hero for the Elizabethan dramatist was the figure whose progress through the play would involve as many other characters as possible, so providing opportunities for emphasizing a maximum number of moral lessons.

Tragedies also delivered some very pointed political messages as well. They were sometimes a rallying point for patriotism and served to remind the public that it was important to be loyal to the sovereign, as the following passage from Marlowe's *Edward II* indicates:

> Strike off their heads, and let them preach on
>    poles!
> No doubt, such lessons they will teach the rest,
> As by their preachments they will profit much
> And learn obedience to their lawful king.

Here, heads that "preach on poles" refers to the common practice of placing traitors' severed heads on pikes around the city, after their beheading. They served as gruesome reminders of what might happen if one angered the monarch.

These are just a few examples of how dialogue in Elizabethan Drama can provide insight into that historical time. The plays educated the Elizabethan audience on proper morals, behavior, and customs, and they can also educate the modern reader. Plays are particularly fruitful places to find information about bygone eras because they recreate how people actually lived. As Symonds observes,

> At all periods of history the stage has been a mirror of the age and race in which it has arisen. Dramatic poets more than any other artists reproduce the life of men around them; exhibiting their aims, hopes, wishes, aspirations, passions, in an abstract more intensely coloured than the diffuse facts of daily experience.

Elizabethan Drama provides a window into a wide spectrum of that society because it appealed to all walks of life, and the plays dealt with citizens of all walks of life. They were part of the essential fabric of the times. Perhaps Laura K. Egendorf best sums it up in her introduction to *Elizabethan Drama* when she states, "Unlike modern times, when Shakespeare's plays are often considered high culture, the Elizabethans considered the theater to be essentially pop culture—the plays were the movies and television of the sixteenth century."

**Source:** Beth Kattelman, Critical Essay on Elizabethan Drama, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## Molly Smith

*In the following essay excerpt, Smith explores links between public punishment and drama in Elizabethan England.*

The famous Triple Tree, the first permanent structure for public hangings, was erected at Tyburn in 1571 during the same decade which saw the construction of the first permanent structure for the performance of plays. At Tyburn seats were available for those who could pay and rooms could be hired in houses overlooking the scene; the majority of spectators stood in a semicircle around the event while hawkers sold fruits and pies and ballads and pamphlets detailing the various crimes committed by the man being hanged. Other kinds of peripheral entertainment also occurred simultaneously. In short, hangings functioned as spectacles not unlike tragedies staged in the public theaters. The organization of spectators in these two arenas and the official localization of these

> **PRESUMABLY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEATRE AND THE SCAFFOLD WORKED BOTH WAYS: IF DRAMATIC DEATHS COULD SUGGEST PUBLIC MAIMINGS AND EXECUTIONS, THE LATTER COULD AS EASILY AND AS VIVIDLY EVOKE THEIR THEATRICAL COUNTERPARTS."**

entertainments, despite their long and hitherto divergent histories, through the erection of permanent structures during Elizabeth's reign suggests the close alliance between these communal worlds in early modern England. Evidence also suggests that theatre and public punishment provided entertainment to upper and lower classes and that both events were generally well attended. Contemporary letters abound in accounts of executions and hangings, details of which are interspersed amid court gossip and descriptions of Parliament sessions. In a letter to Dudley Carleton, for example, John Chamberlain describes the hanging of four priests on Whitsun eve in 1612, noting with mild surprise the large number of people, among them 'divers ladies and gentlemen' who had gathered to witness the event which took place early in the morning between six and seven.

I am not alone in suggesting links between these modes of popular public spectacle. Greenblatt argues for the implicit presence of the scaffold in certain kinds of theatre when he writes

> the ratio between the theatre and the world even at its most stable and unchallenged moments, was never *perfectly* taken for granted, that is, experienced as something wholly natural and self-evident . . . similarly, the playwrights themselves frequently called attention in the midst of their plays to alternate theatrical practices. Thus, for example, the denouement of Massinger's *Roman Actor* (like that in *The Spanish Tragedy*) turns upon the staging as a mode of theatre in which princes and nobles take part in plays in which the killing turns out to be real. It required no major act of imagination for a Renaissance audience to conceive of either of these alternatives to the conventions of the public playhouse: both were fully operative in the period itself, in the form

of masques and courtly entertainments, on the one hand, and public maimings and executions on the other.

Presumably the relationship between theatre and the scaffold worked both ways: if dramatic deaths could suggest public maimings and executions, the latter could as easily and as vividly evoke their theatrical counterparts.

Indeed contemporary narratives about public hangings and executions, whether fictional or documentary, frequently insist on the analogy. I would like to consider two such narratives, Dudley Carleton's documentary letter to John Chamberlain describing the near hangings of Cobham, Markham and Grey in 1604 and Thomas Nashe's fictional narrative about the execution of Cutwolf witnessed by Jack Wilton.

Carleton details in vividly theatrical terms the trial, hangings and near executions of several conspirators, including two priests, implicated in a plot to harm King James I shortly after his ascension to the throne in 1603. The letter moves from a casual narrative to a concentrated exposition of the drama as it unfolded. Carleton begins his account with the hangings of two papist priests: 'The two priests that led the way to the execution were very bloodily handled; for they were cut down alive; and Clark to whom more favour was intended, had the worse luck; for he both strove to help himself, and spake after he was cut down...Their quarters were set on Winchester gates, and their heads on the first tower of the castle.' This was followed by the execution of George Brooke whose death, Carleton points out, was 'witnessed by no greater an assembly than at ordinary executions', the only men of quality present being the Lord of Arundel and Lord Somerset. Three others, Markham, Grey and Cobham, were scheduled to be executed on Friday; Carleton narrates the sequence of events as they occurred retaining information about their narrow escape from the gallows until the very end:

> A fouler day could hardly have been picked out, or fitter for such a tragedy. Markham being brought to the scaffold, was much dismayed, and complained much of his hard hap, to be deluded with hopes, and brought to that place unprepared... The sheriff in the mean time was secretly withdrawn by one John Gill, Scotch groom of the bedchamber...The sheriff, at his return, told him [Markham] that since he was so ill prepared, he should have two hours respite, so led him from the scaffold, without giving him any more comfort...

Lord Grey's turn followed and he spent considerable time repenting for his crimes and praying to be forgiven, all of which, Carleton wryly remarks, 'held us in the rain more than half an hour'. As in the case of Markham, the execution was halted, the prisoner being told only that the sequence of executions had been altered by express orders from the King and that Cobham would die before him. Grey was also led to Prince Arthur's Hall and asked to await his turn with Markham. Lord Cobham then arrived on the scaffold but unlike the other two, came 'with good assurance and contempt of death'. The sheriff halted this execution as well, telling Cobham only that he had to first face a few other prisoners. Carleton then describes the arrival of Grey and Markham and the bewildered looks on the three prisoners who 'nothing acquainted with what had passed, no more than the lookers on with what should follow looked strange one upon another, like men beheaded, and met again in the other world'. 'Now' Carleton continues, 'all the actors being together on the stage, as use is at the end of the play', the sheriff announced that the King had pardoned all three. The last-minute pardon, always a possibility in executions, arrive in time to save at least three of the conspirators. Carleton concludes his account by noting that this happy play had very nearly been marred 'for the letter was closed, and delivered him unsigned; which the King remembered, and called for him back again. And at Winchester there was another cross adventure: for John Gill could not go so near the scaffold that he could speak to the sheriff, ... but was fain to call out to Sir James Hayes, or else Markham might have lost his neck.'

The initial hangings of the priests and George Brooke and the last-minute pardons to Cobham, Markham and Grey are invoked by the sheriff as examples of the 'justice and mercy' of the monarch. But Carleton's narrative, despite its support of this view, hints at the possibility of reading the King's final sentence as indecision rather than a calculated balancing of justice and mercy. The King resolved this issue 'without man's help, and no man can rob him of the praise of yesterday's action', Carleton tells us, but goes on to explain that

> ... the Lords knew no other but that execution was to go forward, till the very hour it should be performed: and then calling them before him, he [the King] told them how much he had been troubled to resolve in this business;

for to execute Grey, who was a noble, young, spirited fellow, and save Cobham, who was as base and unworthy, were a manner o injustice. To save Grey, who was of a proud, insolent nature, and execute Cobham, who had shown great tokens of humility and repentance, were as great a solecism; and so went on with Plutarch's comparisons in the rest, till travelling in contrarieties, but holding the conclusion in so indifferent balance that the lords knew not what to look for till the end came out, 'and therefore I have saved them all.'

Strikingly absent from the King's reasoning is any consideration of Markham, who we remember 'almost lost his neck' and who we have been told earlier was expressly ordered to go first to his death by the King. Did the manner of the last-minute pardon deliberately arrange for the possibility that if any hanging took place, Markham, who seemed in the king's disfavour, would be the only one to lose his neck? Remarkably Carleton himself mimics the power of abeyance in his method of narration, retaining the surprise of the outcome until the very end and keeping his reader confused even as the court had been.

The extended theatrical metaphor used by Carleton emerges also in Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller, or the Life of Jack Wilton* (1987) which concludes with Jack Wilton's narration of his experiences in Bologna where he witnesses the execution of Cutwolf, a notorious murderer. The promised account of Cutwolf's wrack upon the wheel proves to be tortuous and we are led to it through yet another narrative, this time by Cutwolf himself who, before he dies, provides an 'authentic' account of the villainy that has led him to the wheel. Jack reproduces Cutwolf's 'insulting narration' as he terms it because of its punitive value:

> Prepare your ears and your tears, for never, till this thrust I any tragical matter upon you. Strange and wonderful are God's judgements; here shine they in their glory. . . Murder is wide-mouthed, and will not let God rest till he grant revenge. . . Guiltless souls that live every hour subject to violence, and with your despairing fears do much impair God's providence, fasten your eyes on this spectacle that will add to your faith.

Several points in this exhortation are worth noting. Not by accident, this dramatic narrative has been reserved for the conclusion of the work. Jack here invites the reader to witness the spectacle of the execution, and as we shall see, the reader's role, initially analogous to Jack's,

gradually merges with that of the crowd; that is, his role as witness gradually transforms into a more ambiguous one, somewhere between spectator of and participant in the torture. The incident, we are told, exemplifies God's glory and though we know that Jack refers here to the idea of divine retribution, the words suggest that he might be referring also to the nature of the execution itself as it dwells on torture rather than quick death. Jack insists that 'guiltless souls' who have not yet experienced violence but who live in constant fear of it can hope to strengthen their faith in the Almighty from this vision. In other words, this spectacle of torture should produce effects such as might follow a divine vision. Most importantly, the event on which we are expected to 'fasten' our eyes provides, according to Jack, a supreme example of the enactment of divine revenge. Like Carleton's narrative which purported to illustrate monarchical power even while it exposed its arbitrariness, Jack's account, despite its claim about illustrating divine authority, emphasizes instead its precarious similarity to mortal vengeance.

Cutwolf follows this dense exhortation with a long-winded narrative of the murder of Esdras of Granado. He prefaces his story with a strange assertion of his dignity: 'My body is little but my mind is as great as a giant's. The soul which is in me is the very soul of Julius Caesar by reversion. My name is Cutwolf, neither better nor worse by occupation than a poor cobbler of Verona—cobblers are men, and kings are no more.' The analogies between body and mind and body and soul seek to offset the ugliness of the speaker, 'a wearish, dwarfish, writhen-fac'd cobbler' as Jack describes him. But while they serve to dignify the speaker, they work in reverse as well: Cutwolf's insistence on the manhood of kings and his reminder about the public death of Julius Caesar suggest not a fantastic and unreal substitution of important figures for common villains, but a very *possible* replacement, whose reality would have been apparent to the spectators and to contemporary readers of this narrative (indeed, only some years earlier in 1587, Mary Queen of Scots had been beheaded on English soil). And as visitors to London such as Thomas Platter note, the heads of several traitors from noble families graced London Bridge and provided a constant source of tourist attraction. The thirty to thirty-five heads on display at any given time intended to provide a grim warning to those entering the city but descendants of the 'traitors'

frequently regarded the heads of their forbears as trophies of past glories. The thin line that divided royalty from traitors who nearly managed to seize the throne was evident daily to travellers and residents in the city and Cutwolf's highly suggestive substitution of royal bodies for criminal ones was, as I hope to show, implicit in all executions, especially narrated or dramatized ones like that being described here by Nashe.

Cutwolf's mesmerizing narrative follows this bold preface detailing similarities between his death and that of royal traitors. Cutwolf tells the crowd that to revenge the murder of his elder brother he had hunted Esdras for twenty months across Europe. He describes his joy at finally chancing upon him on the streets of Bologna: 'O, so I was tickled in the spleen with that word; my heart hopped and danced, my elbows itched, my fingers frisked, I wist not what should become of my feet nor knew what I did for joy.' His emotions parallel the mirth of the crowds who have also 'made holiday' to view Cutwolf's torture. Cutwolf then describes how he visited Esdras at his lodgings the next morning and confronted him with the murder of his brother. Faced with Cutwolf's determination to bury a bullet in his breast, Esdras eloquently tries several arguments to stay Cutwolf's revenge. He first promises money, then eternal service, and proceeds to request that his arms and legs be cut off and he himself left to live a year in prayer and repentance. When this fails, he requests that he might be tortured: 'To dispatch me presently is no revenge; it will soon be forgotten. Let me die a lingering death—it will be remembered a great deal longer.' Is the narrator, himself to be tortured and allowed to die slowly, perhaps taunting his spectators into revising their sentence on him through this ambiguous request spoken by a similar murderer? Or is he suggesting his inevitable power as a lingering example for the future, as one who through this double narration will remain forever in memory and in print? After all, pamphlets and ballads enumerating various atrocities committed by criminals circulated during such executions and popularized the figures thus condemned. The ambiguous nature of the condemned man, both powerful and powerless, both mesmerizing the crowds and used by them as part of their festivity, seems to have been an inherent element of execution rituals. A similar ambivalence becomes a central ingredient also in Charles's execution performed more than half a century later, an event treated in detail in Chapter 6.

Esdras continues to reason with Cutwolf, alternating between promises and pleas, but his murderer remains undeterred. Cutwolf relishes the moment to the fullest and seems to be offering Esdras what he asked for earlier, a lingering mental torture. He even presents himself as a divine avenger:

> There is no heaven but revenge…Divine revenge, of which (as of the joys above) there is no fullness or satiety! Look how my feet are blistered with following thee from place to place. I have riven my throat with overstraining it to curse thee. I have ground my teeth to powder with grating and grinding them together for anger when any hath named thee. My tongue with vain threats is bollen and waxen too big for my mouth. My eyes have broken their strings with staring and looking ghastly as I stood devising how to frame or set my countenance when I met thee. I have near spent my strength in imaginary acting on stone walls what I determined to execute on thee.

Cutwolf thus presents himself as the frightening figure of death himself, one who has rehearsed the drama of this encounter again and again. Esdras continues to plead for time, claiming that bodily torture would delay his death and provide him with an opportunity to save his soul. His assailant, however, determines to extend his power beyond the grave: 'My thoughts travel'd in quest of some notable new Italianism whose murderous platform might not only extend on his body, but his soul also.' In a spectacular *coup de theatre* he asks Esdras to renounce God and swear allegiance to the devil. The reader thus perceives a seemingly bewildering set of relationships: Esdras has requested that he be tortured rather than killed in order that he might have time to save his soul; Cutwolf, as if in response to this request, orders Esdras to give his soul to the devil and forswear all hope of salvation; and Esdras, in direct opposition to his earlier request and hoping to be saved from death, seizes the opportunity and gives Cutwolf more than he had hoped for by renouncing God and salvation completely. Does Cutwolf's request function as a test of the victim's authenticity in professing a desire to save his soul? At any rate Esdras's response actually takes Cutwolf by surprise:

> Scarce had I propounded these articles unto him but he was beginning his blasphemous abjurations. I wonder the earth opened not and swallowed us both, hearing the bold terms he blasted forth in contempt of Christianity…My joints trembled and quaked with

attending them; my hair stood upright, and my heart was turned wholly to fire . . . The vein in his left hand that is derived from the heart, with no faint blow he pierced, and with the full blood that flowed from it writ a full obligation of his soul to the Devil.

Having thus forsworn salvation, Esdras expects to be spared. Thus when his assailant asks him to open his mouth and gape wide, he does so without demur. The entire event, described by Cutwolf as the enactment of a ceremony, parodies Catholic communion rites and Esdras seems to regard Cutwolf's request as another stage in this enactment. Cutwolf's description of what follows, Edsdras's murder, is significant in its choice of words: 'therewith made I no more ado, but shot him full into the throat with my pistol. No more spake he, *so did I shoot him that he might never speak after*, or repent him' (emphasis added). The revenge directs itself specifically against the spoken word for it alone, as the narrative strives to show throughout, retains the supreme power to create reality. To Cutwolf at least, not Esdras's actions but his sworn allegiance to the devil, which he has no time to retract, damns him to hell. His murderer in a final paean to revenge allies himself clearly with God and heaven: 'Revenge is whatsoever we call law or justice. The farther we wade in revenge the nearer come we to the throne of the Almighty. To His scepter it is properly ascribed, His scepter he lends unto man when He lets one man scourge another.' This appropriation of godly powers incenses the crowd who apparently reserve the honour for themselves: 'Herewith, all the people (outrageously incensed) with one conjoined outcry yelled mainly: "Away with him, away with him! Executioner, torture him, tear him, or we will tear thee in pieces if thou spare him."' Their desire to torture Cutwolf parallels Cutwolf's earlier treatment of Esdras and both actions mimic the Almighty's ever-vigilant vengeance invoked throughout this narrative.

We arrive thus to the centrepiece of Jack's story, the torture of Cutwolf, a festive communal celebration which both fascinates and unsettles Jack; presumably the reader too would find the culinary metaphors used to describe the occasion both fascinating and horrifying. I quote the passage in full:

> At the first chop with his wood-knife would he fish for a man's heart and fetch it out as easily as a plum from the bottom of a porridge pot.

He would crack necks as fast as a cook cracks eggs. A fiddler cannot turn his pin so soon as he would turn a man off the ladder. Bravely did he drum on this Cutwolf's bones, not breaking them outright but, like a saddler knocking in of tacks, jarring on them quaveringly with his hammer a great while together. No joint about him but with a hatchet he had for the bones he disjointed half, and then with boiling lead soldered up the wounds from bleeding. His tongue he pulled out, lest he should blaspheme in his torment. Venomous stinging worms he thrust into his ears to keep his head ravingly occupied. With cankers scruzed to pieces he rubbed his mouth and his gums. No limb of his but was lingeringly splinter'd in shivers.

The analogies comparing the executioner to a fisherman, a cook, a fiddler, a drummer and a saddler present Jack's fascination with the scene, shared also by the crowd who have instigated the tortures. 'This truculent tragedy of Cutwolf and Esdras' produces its desired effect on Jack who, sobered by the scene, marries his courtesan and leaves 'the Sodom of Italy' to live an honest life thereafter in England.

Contrary to being a sharp contrast to England, the Italy of Jack's narrative provides an exaggerated version of events such as public executions witnessed around London. This 'truculent tragedy' might easily provide a narrative of staged public punishments in England, and the reaction of the crowds, though it disgusts Jack, differs hardly at all from similar reactions by English crowds to the deaths of personalities such as the Earl of Strafford and Archbishop Laud in the seventeenth century. Jack's disgust does, nevertheless, underscore the stance of many literary figures as they both exploit and criticize London's fascination with the spectacle of death. The author's ambivalent stance combining horror and fascination may be treated as typical of many Elizabethan depictions of punishment whether in popular narratives of travel or on the public stage. These accounts of public punishment exploit the reader's fascination with the spectacle of death but, by evoking horror and revulsion, they mock his reliance on spectacles of torment for entertainment. As Jonathan Bate describes it, the 'structure of the [Nashe's] story leaves the reader with more than a sneaking sympathy for what has been said on the scaffold, especially as the act of execution has a clinical cruelty which makes it in effect no different from the act for which it is a punishment. The narrative has made us discover the Italian within all of us.'

A series of questions may be raised about these documents, especially Nashe's detailed narrative. Is Cutwolf the devil's emissary who deceives Esdras into damning himself or a divine agent avenging an unjust murder? Is the executioner a victim of the people's desire to see some sport or an agent of vengeance? Does the text negate or authorize the power of the word? Do the events constitute 'a truculent tragedy' as Jack claims or do they enact a festive communal ritual? Some of these ambiguities and paradoxes, especially the ambivalent positions of the victim, the crowd and the executioner, so clearly dramatized in Nashe's fictional account, were inherent to the ritual of execution itself and occurred also at actual executions in the Elizabethan and Stuart periods.

Nashe's account also provides a prose analogy to numerous tragedies of revenge enacted on the Elizabethan and early Stuart stage; it incorporates many ingredients that have been identified with this dramatic genre: obsessive revenge pursued by a melancholy revenger who physically and mentally degenerates through his pursuit of the victim, inordinate delay characteristic of this pursuit, the ambivalent tension between revenge and justice that remains unresolved, the viciously circular nature of revenge that destroys many in its course, and the public death of the revenger himself often performed in the midst of communal celebration and festivity. Nashe's theatrical account incorporates all the major ingredients of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy.

This alliance between theatre and public punishment evident in Carleton's and Nashe's narratives and throughout the early modern period could be extended even farther: the masked and hooded dramatist, both present and absent from his production, invites comparison with the hangman. Like the hangman, the dramatist created spectacles and functioned as an entertainer whose efficiency was subject to the strictest scrutiny and criticism. Even his precarious position, as servant both to the Crown which sanctioned his activity and the populace who viewed his spectacle, compares with the hangman's. The hangman functioned as the most important instrument of the law; dramatists also repeatedly envisaged themselves as holding an analogous position. Thomas Heywood, for example, in *The Apology for Actors* (1612) insists on the moral efficacy of stage plays which could incite confessions from villains by the mere spectacle of horror and villainy. He cites three instances where spectators, moved by the dramatic events they witnessed, confessed to previous crimes and were thus brought to justice. One of his examples, a woman who at the end of a performance confessed to having poisoned her husband seven years earlier, also provides a remarkable instance of what Hamlet seems to expect from Claudius (and less directly from Gertrude) after the staging of *The Murder of Gonzago* when he tells us

> I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play
> Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
> Been struck so to the soul that presently
> They have proclaimed their malefactions.
> For murder, though it have no tongue, will
> speak
> With most miraculous organ.

The power of theatre to provoke transformation had become commonplace in the period and receives ironic treatment in a later tragedy, *The Roman Actor*, where Caesar tries to cure avarice in Philargus by staging a play. The comic resolution of the staged play in which a miser repents of his earlier folly finds little satisfaction in Philargus who would prefer a tragedy: 'had he died / As I resolue to doe, not to be alter'd, / It had gone off twanging.' Philargus thus resolves to guard himself against the possibility of transformation, only to contend with the frustration of Caesar who demands that he 'make good vse of what was now presented? / And imitate in thy suddaine change of life, / The miserable rich man, that expres'd / What thou art to the life?; when thwarted in this desire to see Philargus transformed by theatre, Caesar orders that he be hanged instead. Renaissance familiarity with the concept that theatre could provoke transformation may be gauged by the recurrence of this idea on the stage, whether it is invoked seriously as in *Hamlet* or treated ironically as in *The Roman Actor*.

Depictions of evil and tragedy on the stage, as Heywood argues, performed both punitive and psychological functions. And like tragedies in general, public executions and hangings served both as a negative example and a reminder that past villainies would not remain undiscovered or unpunished forever. The sentiment expressed by Samuel Johnson in the late eighteenth century, that there was no point in hanging a man if it was not going to be done in public, certainly prevailed in the earlier period

and provided philosophical justification for the staging of both real and spectacle dismemberment, actual and theatrical tragedy, in early modern England. 'Cruelty,' Colin Burrow argues, 'is part of Shakespeare's world, and it generates a high proportion of the energy of his drama'; the attitude applies to Renaissance drama in general and perhaps even to the public execution of Charles I by Parliament in 1649, a theatrical spectacle which historically demarcates a boundary for this period.

I do not intend to collapse these modes of spectacle completely but to suggest that the close connection between these forms of popular public entertainment may be worth exploring in detail. The theatre and the scaffold provided occasions for communal festivities whose format and ends emerge as remarkably similar. More specifically, I would like to use the erection of the Triple Tree and the public execution of Charles I as events which frame a period remarkable for its vibrant, intense and highly competitive dramatic creativity. Both forms of festivity underwent radical scrutiny in later years, though the removal of hangings and executions from the public arena occurred only considerably later. Despite their divergent histories in later years, theatre and the scaffold merged in January 1649 to provide an unique and unprecedented spectacle of public tragedy and apparent political liberation. I trace the influence of the scaffold on the development of theatre in the late sixteenth century and the contribution of theatre to the staged political drama of the mid-seventeenth century.

The close alliance between these popular entertainments emerges most vividly in plays of the late sixteenth century such as Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. But even plays such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, Jonson's *Sejanus* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* which do not stage hangings and executions invoke the format of public punishments, frequently to undermine the state's efficacy in staging deaths as a deterrent to further crimes and sometimes to mock the audience's reliance on the value of death as entertainment. Kyd's tragedy, which simultaneously invokes the spectacle of death and threatens to destroy the frame that separates theatre from the scaffold, more than any other early play insists on the precarious distance that separates staged dramas of death from public punitive events such as hangings.

Traditional criticism regards Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* as important primarily for its historical position at the head of the revenge tradition. Its violence has frequently been attributed to Senecan models and its dramatic deaths, including the spectacular *coup de theatre* in the closing scene, analysed primarily for their influence on Shakespeare's dramaturgy. And yet, though the Senecan influence has been well documented, critics have only recently drawn attention to contemporary cultural practices such as public hangings at Tyburn to explain the play's particular fascination with the hanged man and the mutilated and dismembered corpse. No other play of the Renaissance stage dwells on the spectacle of hanging as Kyd's does and the Senecan influence will not in itself account for the spectacular on-stage hangings and near-hangings in the play.

During Elizabeth's reign 6160 victims were hanged at Tyburn and though this represents a somewhat smaller figure than those hanged during Henry VIII's reign, Elizabethans were certainly quite familiar with the spectacle of the hanged body and the disembowelled and quartered corpse. In Kyd's treatment of the body as spectacle, we witness most vividly the earliest coalescence of the theatrical and punitive modes in Elizabethan England. Kyd also heightens the ambivalence inherent in the public hanging as spectacle and deliberately weakens the frames that separated spectators from the spectacle.

**Source:** Molly Smith, "Theatre and Punishment: Spectacles of Death and Dying on the Stage," in *Breaking Boundaries: Politics and Play in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, Ashgate Publishing, 1998, pp. 17–40.

## G. K. Hunter

*In the following essay excerpt, Hunter explores the roots of Elizabethan drama, arguing that "it was the perception of the individual voice as justified" that had the most impact on the fledgling movement.*

A standard assumption of literary history is that a group of young men, born of "middle-class" parentage in the 1550s and 1560s and graduating from Oxford or Cambridge between 1575 (Lyly) and 1588 (Nashe) created between them the normal forms of Elizabethan Drama, casting behind them the primitive techniques

and attitudes of preceding generations, designated "Tudor Drama," "Late Medieval Drama," or whatever other diminishing title distaste elects to supply. I call this assumption "standard" not because I seek to denigrate it (in the recurrent modern mode); there is much evidence that these young men perceived themselves, and were perceived by contemporaries, as constituting what would nowadays be called a radical movement and that the movement marked the beginning of something genuinely new. But the very obviousness of the general point leaves a number of supplementary questions unanswered because not asked. In particular I wish to ask the question *how* this group came to achieve their effect on drama. The question is a purely instrumental one that does not seek to go beyond the evidence generally available in the words they wrote. This leaves, of course, the further issue of the status we give to these words. If we are to understand what the "University Wits" say as a simple description of the facts of the case, then we must suppose that it was expertise in classical culture that led to the creation of the new drama. But this connection seems to be part of the rhetoric of their social situation rather than expressive of any vital link that joins university culture to popular drama. I shall argue that the link can be seen more clearly in terms of the central issue of Elizabethan intellectual life—the theological debate about the relation of individual conscience to the established hierarchies of the world. I shall argue that it was the perception of the individual voice as justified (in all senses of that word), even when socially isolated, that released the more obvious formal and literary powers we easily recognize. That the University Wits despised the popular theatre they found when they came to London can hardly be disputed. The university milieu which had given them their claim to importance had anchored their sense of identity in the Humanist learning they had acquired there, their fluent command of a battery of Greco-Roman names, historical and fictional stories, self-conscious logical and rhetorical devices, tags and quotations, which provided the lingua franca of Humanist-educated Europe. In social terms these were, of course, means of defining an elite status, and they seem at first to offer only resistance to a demeaning function in popular entertainment, where (as Shakespeare was to point out) "nature is subdued / To what it works in, like the dyer's hand." Robert Greene more than once tells us

> THAT THE UNIVERSITY WITS DESPISED THE POPULAR THEATRE THEY FOUND WHEN THEY CAME TO LONDON CAN HARDLY BE DISPUTED. THE UNIVERSITY MILIEU WHICH HAD GIVEN THEM THEIR CLAIM TO IMPORTANCE HAD ANCHORED THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY IN THE HUMANIST LEARNING THEY HAD ACQUIRED THERE...."

how he suffered a sad decline into playwriting; and even though his narrative is more interesting as myth than as history it is worth pausing on. In *Francesco's Fortunes* (1590) we hear that Francesco (the Greene alternate) "fell in amongst a company of players, who persuaded him to try his wit in writing of comedies, tragedies, or pastorals, and if he could perform anything worthy of the stage, then they would largely reward him for his pains." And so Francesco "writ a comedy which so generally pleased all the audience that happy were those actors in short time that could get any of his works, he grew so exquisite in that faculty." In Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) the story has become even more slanted. Roberto (the same hero, with another name) has come to an impasse in the Bohemian life he had thought to lead. He has been out-smarted and made penniless by the prostitute he planned to control. He is thrust out of doors, and sitting against a hedge he vents his wrath in English and Latin verses. On the other side of the hedge there happens to be a player, who now approaches Roberto:

> Gentleman, quoth he (for so you seem), I have by chance heard you discourse some part of your grief . . . if you vouchsafe such simple comfort as my ability will yield, assure yourself that I will endeavour to do the best that either may procure your profit or bring you pleasure; the rather for that I suppose you are a scholar, and pity it is men of learning should live in lack.

> Roberto, wondering to hear such good words . . . uttered his present grief, beseeching his advice how he might be employed. Why easily, quoth he, and greatly to your benefit; for men of my profession get by scholars their whole living.

What is your profession, said Roberto. Truly sir, said he, I am a player. A player, quoth Roberto, I took you rather for a gentleman of great living, for if by outward habit men should be censured, I tell you you would be taken for a substantial man. So am I where I dwell (quoth the player) reputed able at my proper cost to build a windmill.

The player goes on to indicate that he has greatly prospered by penning and playing folktales and moralities. "But now my almanac is out of date." He now needs a graduate, like Roberto, to catch the more sophisticated tastes of the present "in making plays...for which you shall be well payed if you will take the pains."

Roberto, perceiving no remedy, thought best in respect of his present necessity to try his wit and went with him willingly; who lodged him at the town's end [in a brothel].... Roberto, now famoused for an arch-playmaking poet, his purse like the sea sometime swelled, anon like the same sea fell to a low ebb; yet seldom he wanted, his labors were so well esteemed.

His new profession earns him the much-needed money, but money earned under these circumstances is seen to be incapable of securing moral stability. Roberto so despises those from whom he earns his money that he can only define his difference from them by cheating them: "It becomes me, saith he, to be contrary to the world, for commonly when vulgar men receive earnest they do perform; when I am paid anything aforehand I break my promise". His money is spent among criminals and debauchees to support a way of life which produces execution for some and repentance before death for Roberto. It is at this point that Greene can proceed to warn "those gentlemen his quondam acquaintance that spend their wits in making plays" (Marlowe, Peele, [?Lodge/Nashe] and "two more that both have writ against these buckram gentlemen") to "never more acquaint them [the players] with your admired inventions".

The story as thus told is a powerful one. But as far as the history of Elizabethan drama is concerned, the details leave much to be desired. There is no evidence that Greene's dramatic talents had the electrifying effect he describes. And we should note that he tells much the same story about his prose romances of love. In *The Repentance of Robert Greene* (1592) we hear not only that the "penning of plays" turned him into a swearer and a blasphemer, but that

These vanities [plays] and other trifling pamphlets I penned of love and vain fantasies were

my chiefest stay of living, and for those my vain discourses I was beloved of the vainer sort of people who, being my continual companions, came still to my lodgings, and there would continue quaffing, carousing and surfeiting with me all the day long.

Greene is much clearer about the status he is losing than about the skills he is acquiring. He implies that all he has to do to succeed is to turn his university-trained cleverness toward the writing of popular literature and lo! he will grow "exquisite in that faculty." The extant popular plays of Greene, Peele, and Lodge, however, do not at all support this idea; they are quite unlike any model the university could have provided from the works of Seneca, Plautus, or Terence. In their multitudes of characters, their wide range across space and time, their carelessness of plot consistency, their interest in romantic love, their reluctance to stay inside the boundaries of genre, their tendency to heavy moralizing, such plays fit almost exactly the terms of neoclassical scorn with which Sir Philip Sidney had greeted the English plays of the early 1580s. *James IV The Edward I*, *Battle of Alcazar*, *Alphonsus of Aragon*, and *A Looking Glass for London and England* all fall easily under Sir Philip's rubric of "mongrel tragicomedy [with] some extreme show of doltishness" and are in fact much more like those warhorses of the popular stage, *Clyomon and Clamydes* or *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, than they are like anything in classical drama.

What, then, did the university contribute toward a new theatrical creation that was not provided by a professional knowledge of the stage? The evidence that contemporary comment provides is extraordinarily evasive. In the second part of the Cambridge play *The Return from Parnassus* (1601–03) the graduates Philomusus and Studioso seek to follow along the Greene path and try to secure employment as actors and scriptwriters from the leading actors of Shakespeare's company, Burbage and Kemp. The brush-off they receive indicates some of the impediments that still lay, even in the next decade, in the path of those who sought to travel from a Humanist education to a career in the popular theatre. Kemp tells the graduates: "Few of the university men plays well; they smell too much of that writer Ovid and that writer Metamorphosis and talk too much of Proserpina and Jupiter."

Kemp's entirely plausible expression of what we can recognize as the recurrent tension

between the stage and the academy seems to be confirmed on the other side of the same coin by the rhetoric of self-definition that the Wits themselves indulge in. Nashe, for example, relies entirely on attainments in the classical languages to make his distinction between authentic and merely imitative playwrights. In his preface to Greene's *Menaphon* (1589) entitled "To the gentlemen students of both universities" Nashe tries to draw an impassible line between authentically learned men and those hangers-on or pretenders that he refers to ironically as "deep read schoolmen or grammarians," students, that is, who have never passed from the grammar school to the university. These will, he assumes, display the superficialities of a classical education; but it will be easy to detect them as outsiders masquerading as insiders, for they are "at the mercy of their mother tongue, that feed on naught but the crumbs that fall from the translator's trencher." These are essentially lower-class persons whose incapacities betray them as existing only at the intellectual level of the "serving man" or of the dealer in "commodities" (that is, the merchant).

Nashe's attack on lower-class pretenders to learning becomes more specific in the famous following passage in which he deals with the kinds of plays that such grammar-school authors are capable of writing. Again, the central issue is ignorance of Latin: such men can "scarcely Latinize their neck-verse if they should have need"; they are the "famished followers" of "English Seneca" (often thought to refer to Thomas Newton's 1581 collection of Seneca's plays), because they are incapable of reading the original; and yet they "busy themselves with the endeavors of art"—where "art" has the sense of specialized knowledge that is found in such phrases as "Master of Arts." It looks, from much of the reference in this passage, as if Thomas Kyd is the playwright most particularly aimed at. And indeed if *The Spanish Tragedy* came out in 1588 (as is often supposed) then Kyd must have provided in 1588/89 an obvious example of a nonuniversity playwright with a great theatrical success on his hands. The obvious objection to such identification is that *The Spanish Tragedy* has few if any of the characteristics specified; indeed it is unusually full of Latin verse, some of it, apparently, of Kyd's own composition, and if the play within the play was actually performed in "sundry languages" then it also contained considerable dialogue in French,

Italian, and Greek as well. Such evidence, however, tells us little about the intention that prompted Nashe's words. "Grub Street hacks," "outsiders" are clearly necessary to the self-definition of any group seeking to lay claim to the "inside" position, and Nashe is no more likely to have been in search of accuracy and justice, when he attached names to labels, than Pope was in *The Dunciad*. If a Kyd had not existed, Nashe would have had to invent him (as, in the passage in question he very nearly did).

If Thomas Kyd was in fact merely a famished follower of authentic graduate playwrights, then it is a great gap in nature that we do not know who these men were or what they wrote; there are not even plausible candidates. It seems more rational to suppose that there were no such model playwrights; and this probability is reinforced by the parallel case of Shakespeare. Greene's famous 1592 attack on Shakespeare as yet another despicable outsider, jumped-up actor, and jack-of-all-trades ("Johannes fac totum"), pranking himself in the "feathers" he has stolen from the graduates, has no more detail of evidence to support it than appears in the case of *The Spanish Tragedy*. *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III* are indeed plays that draw on a considerable, even if only grammar-school, acquaintance with the classics. If this derived from new work in drama by the University Wits, then once again one must note that the lines of filiation have disappeared. But it is more probable that the whole issue of "authentic" and "imitative" dramaturgy is only the fantasy of a socially insecure group of graduates, anxious to destabilize the opposition.

To deny the accuracy of such polemical rhetoric is not, however, to deny altogether the creative importance of this generation of University Wits in the history of Elizabethan drama, though it is certainly to deny their claim to tell the whole story in their own terms. One fact remains, which must not be underplayed or denied: the success of Marlowe's First Part of *Tamburlaine* (usually dated 1587) completely fulfilled the self-confidence of the group of graduates to which he belonged. Here at last we have a work of popular entertainment which openly claims classic status, whose presence visibly altered the landscape in which it appeared and charged its environment with new meanings. Of course, given the general lack of information, it is impossible to say that there were no popular

plays like *Tamburlaine* written before *Tamburlaine;* but the self-consciousness of innovation which pervades its language, the comments of contemporaries, the immediate appearance of imitations, all combine to tell us that this was seen as an originating event, even if it was so only because it was so seen. The originality of *Tamburlaine* was not noted primarily, however, in terms of dramaturgy. His contemporaries spoke of Marlowe as above all a poet, and the Prologue to *Tamburlaine* shows that Marlowe agreed with them. But the point being made is not only about versification, narrowly conceived; it is rather a point about the spirit that speaks through a poetry which is (as Michael Drayton was later to remark) "all air and fire" or (to quote Marlowe himself) "Like his desire, lift upward and divine." And this is, it will be noticed, a return to dramaturgy by the back door. For the theatrical function of a poetry as distinctive and powerful as that of *Tamburlaine* is to require of the auditor that he follow the action inside a particular given focus. In crude terms one can say that in *Tamburlaine* Marlowe presented the history of the outsider, the man of talents rather than of background, not in the traditional terms of social marginality but locked into a system of values where energy and desire are everything and need the great outside only to secure the greatest resonance "like the fa-burden of Bow bell," as Greene remarked. Set against the hero's unfettered expression of individual will, the "insiders" of *Tamburlaine* are seen as passive, conformist, hesitant, as if only waiting to be taken over or destroyed by the individual whose force comes from believing in himself more than in anything outside.

It is time to ask the question how far the Marlovian vision and the Marlovian verse that conveys it are the product of a particular kind of education or representative of what we understand to have been the aspirations of the group of University Wits. Certainly there is little, if anything, in it that can be charged against imitation of classical authors read at university. But it is a mistake (as I have suggested above) to think that the focus of university education in this period was literary. The excitement of intellectual life in the sixteenth century came less from classical poetry than from the controversies of theology and from the techniques by which these could be conducted (see Kearney). From today's point of view the whole interest of such

activities looks merely technical; but if we are to understand the excitement roused in the spirit of the times we can hardly afford to stop there. Clearly in such matters as the acceptance or rejection of sacraments, the belief or disbelief in the efficacy of works, the view taken on the mediation of the saints, the status of Purgatory, the function of vestments, we are dealing with the interlocking parts of total systems, where one false move can betray a whole understanding of the life of man, not only in eternity but in the daily life of earth as well. If the excitement of *Tamburlaine* can be seen to grow out of the intellectual energies generated in such disputes, then it becomes possible to argue that the play reflects its graduate generation at a deeper level than those we have so far considered.

Writing in 1588, Robert Greene spoke of the self-confident energy of Marlowe's verse as the expression of atheism: "daring God out of his heaven with that atheist Tamburlaine". Perhaps it is improper to make too much of the vocabulary used here. The context of the comment (Greene's jealousy of Marlowe's success) is not one likely to guarantee accuracy in the critical remark made. And "atheist" was in this period only a term of general abuse, with little necessary connection to specifc doctrine. On the other hand Marlowe was soon to acquire, and perhaps already had acquired, a considerable reputation as a freethinker. The idea that the power of *Tamburlaine* is directly connected to "atheism" may indeed point us toward more complex issues than are usually attached to Greene's scandals, for there are a number of interesting connections, which are largely obscured by the archaic vocabulary.

The more modern image of Marlowe is often presented in terms of that largely fictional genus "the Renaissance man"—Burckhardt's creatively amoral egotist, whether seen as artist (Aretino, Michelangelo, Cellini) or as prince (Cesare Borgia, Julius II, Bernabo Visconti). But "Renaissance individualism," at least as it reached England, had rather different sources. And these take us back to the question of atheism once again. The key figures in such general growth of individualism as one can observe in England are neither artists nor the sacred monsters of royalty (egotism in the powerful is a characteristic so constant that it is hard to imagine it as having a history); they are rather the purveyors of reformed theology, Luther and

Zwingli and Calvin and their native disseminators. The "Renaissance man" type of egotist who defines his individuality *against* orthodoxy is necessarily limited in the range of imitation he can inspire, for it is integral to his stance that he remain exceptional. Luther, however, and the other reformers, embodied individualism not against but inside orthodoxy, and indeed declared the sense of self to be the necessary basis of "true" orthodoxy. In this form the sense of the unique centrality of individual consciousness could penetrate throughout the culture of Europe to a degree not possible for the tyrants and exploiters of an older mode. And this was, as I say, the form in which "the Renaissance" pervaded England, so that, in England at any rate, the New Learning or Humanism inevitably explored classical forms and attitudes inside a world filled with the noise of challenge to intellectual conformity. In his search for justification by faith alone the individual could no longer hope to discover his identity by finding his place in any external system, for faith can only be felt and known inwardly. The doctrine of the slavery of the will (the *servum arbitrium*) required, paradoxically, that the individual remain in continued personal contact with the sources of God's Grace if he was to hope for eventual escape from the chains of Satan's power. The Reformed individual was thus continually caught up as protagonist in the largest and most terrifying drama that can be imagined, required to struggle and ask and decide and achieve, in a Satanic world, and without any external mediation. It would be surprising if this raw demand for extraordinary human capacity, marking the eventual irrelevance of external restraint, could be kept out of other areas of life, most significantly those where individual destiny must mean something more like secular fulfillment than loss of self in the Grace of God. Of course, even the states which endorsed the Reformation struggled continuously against its antinomian tendencies, especially as these manifested themselves in political contexts. In England the hundred years or so between the 1530s and the 1640s saw a continuous effort to maintain system, order, consensus, in loyalty to the nation, the sovereign, the church, the tradition (as reinterpreted). Not all the weapons available to the state were equally effective, however. Nationalist fervor, suspicion of and contempt for foreigners, was a powerful means of securing consensus against the Pope,

the Spaniards, and the Jesuits, but these positions were most powerfully argued by radical believers in the unmediated presence of Christ in the individual life. The corrosive solution that dissolved the foreign threat also ate into the English hierarchy.

The political argument against individualism was weakened on yet another front. The language of intellectual argument for loyalty inherited, inevitably, the language of Erasmian Humanism, of persuasion to civil order by the civilized consent of an educated elite (such as is addressed in the ironic mode of More's *Utopia*, for example) of finely disputable interpretations of uncertain texts (as in Erasmus's New Testament), of specialized and technical knowledge allowed to develop its own pragmatic justification ("arts" of war, health, navigation, algebra were all published in English in the fifties and sixties). The English "Renaissance" book with probably the widest influence, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* ("Foxe's Book of Martyrs") of 1563, was not only an epic of nationalism but also an epic of humble individualism (of widows, cooks, fishermen, brewers, and bricklayers, as well as scholars and clergymen) divinely justified in their rejection of the institutions of social control. The conflict depicted is not in the high romantic mode of *The Golden Legend*, set in exotic regions and the remote past. Foxe presents his readers with the recent and the local, describing lives rooted in the commonplaces of the ordinary and inculcating truth more by the evidence of shared experience than by any doctrinal argument. In all these cases, I would argue, a sense of the potential power of the unmediated individual, though disseminated primarily in religious terms, is bound to have created, in imagination at least, an idea that every self is capable of fulfillment and definition by resistance to conformity or convention. This is certainly the note in Elizabethan drama that we hear sounded clearly, for the first time, in *Tamburlaine*. The energetic individualism that appears in *Tamburlaine* has little or nothing to do with the "Renaissance individualism" of the late Quattrocento princes. Tamburlaine starts from nowhere and his dizzying rise to power is entirely self-generated out of assumptions that have nothing to support them in the world outside. He is totally free of the complacency of power, turning his eyes, as soon as he has achieved any one thing, to further horizons where he can test himself still further. The

attitude of mind that is depicted here seems to be one that it is not inappropriate to consider as an atheistic version of the Lutheran soul in its search for justification through faith—atheistic because in this case the believer has simply excluded God from the equation and concentrated his faith on himself, at once justifier and justified.

**Source:** G. K. Hunter, "The Beginnings of Elizabethan Drama: Revolution and Continuity," in *Renaissance Drama: Renaissance Drama and Cultural Change*, edited by Mary Beth Rose, Northwestern University Press, 1986, pp. 29–52.

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# *Enlightenment*

During the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment emerged as a social, philosophical, political, and literary movement that espoused rational thought and methodical observation of the world. The term "Enlightenment" refers to the belief by the movement's contributors that they were leaving behind the dark ignorance and blind belief that characterized the past. The freethinking writers of the period sought to evaluate and understand life by way of scientific observation and critical reasoning rather than through uncritically accepting religion, tradition, and social conventions. At the center of the Enlightenment were the *philosophes*, a group of intellectual deists who lived in Paris. Deists believe in the existence of a creative but uninvolved God, and they believed in the basic goodness, rather than sinfulness, of humankind. Because this view of God contradicted the tenets of the established Roman Catholic Church, the *philosophes* were considered very dangerous. The Church wielded considerable power, so the *philosophes* were subjected to censorship and restrictive decrees carrying harsh punishments. Yet the *philosophes* continued to spread their views, and as the Church's political power was challenged in the decades leading up to the French Revolution, the Enlightenment gained momentum. In fact, by the 1770s, many *philosophes* collected government pensions and held important academic positions.

Scholars do not agree on the exact dates of the Enlightenment. Most literary historians

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1660

support the claim that it ended with the onset of the French Revolution in 1789, and they place the beginning somewhere between 1660 and 1685. Although it was centered in France, the Enlightenment had adherents in other European countries and in North America. Contributors to the movement include France's Denis Diderot (who edited *Encyclopédie*), Voltaire (*Candide*), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*The Social Contract*), Germany's Immanuel Kant (who is also associated with Transcendentalism), England's David Hume, Italy's Cesare Beccaria, and Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in the North American colonies. Most of the major contributors knew one another and were in contact despite great distances. The Enlightenment's influence extended both geographically and chronologically, as reactions to it became evident in subsequent literary movements such as *Sturm und Drang* and Romanticism.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Denis Diderot (1713–1784)

Denis Diderot was born on October 5, 1713, in Langres, France. His father was an artist and had a great influence on the technical craftsmanship of Diderot's masterpiece, the *Encyclopédie*, a compendium of knowledge on a wide variety of subjects of which he was the editor and a major contributor. Diderot distinguished himself as a student at the University of Paris, from which he graduated in 1732. As an adult, his personal life was often tumultuous and mysterious. He secretly married an uneducated woman named Antoinette, and their relationship was difficult. In 1755, he carried on a secret love affair with Sophie Volland, and his love letters to her are ranked among the best ever written.

Diderot was able to establish himself professionally while in his twenties and enjoyed a fruitful career as a translator and encyclopedist. His greatest accomplishment is his contribution to the *Encyclopédie*, a multiple-volume (the number of volumes ranges from eleven to thirty-five in varying editions) work that took Diderot and the other contributors more than twenty years to complete (1750–1772). The success of this work earned Diderot fame and the respect of such high-profile figures as Catherine II of Russia.

Diderot's other work includes fiction (most notably *The Nun*, 1782, and *Jacques the Fatalist*,



*Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (AP Images)

1784), drama, dialogues (simple theatrical presentations involving two characters discussing or debating issues and ideas), philosophical treatises, literary criticism, and essays. His particular concern was the rightful place of the artist in society, with attention to the difference between the appreciation for the artist by his contemporaries and by future generations. Diderot saw how the artist in eighteenth-century Europe endured the scrutiny of religious and political leaders and faced limitations imposed by censors. Despite a career subjected to such pressures, Diderot was respected by his peers because of his imagination, cleverness, and conversational ability.

Diderot often withheld his writing from publication to protect it from censorship and for fear that his contemporaries would not understand it. He preferred that it be preserved for posterity, and, in fact, much of his work has been more fully appreciated in the generations since his death. Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex theory was influenced by one of Diderot's dialogues. Diderot himself offered early theories of psychology and evolution, and he predicted the inventions of Braille, the typewriter, and the cinema. Many scholars conclude that Diderot was far ahead of his time.

Diderot died after a long illness in Paris on July 31, 1784. His work had a major impact on future writers, especially the German writers of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

### David Hume (1711–1776)

David Hume was born on April 26, 1711, at his family's estate near Edinburgh, Scotland. His interest in philosophy began at an early age, and when he was eighteen, he abandoned his plans to study law in favor of pursuing philosophy. His first work, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739), was poorly received, but his next effort, *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741), was praised by critics and readers alike. *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) is among his most respected works. He wrote numerous philosophical and political treatises and enjoyed a varied career as a tutor, political secretary, and librarian. During the years he spent in Paris (1763–1766), he was acclaimed and invited to the most elite salons. Although Hume attracted his share of critics, his work was largely admired. When he left Paris to go to London, he took along French author Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but after a series of public quarrels, the two parted ways. He returned to Scotland in 1769, where he occupied a grand house in Edinburgh. It was there that he died peacefully on August 25, 1776.

Considered one of the most important philosophers of modern thought, Hume advocated a form of philosophical skepticism that claimed that all knowledge attained by experience is uncertain. His writings about perception and cause-and-effect extend to various areas, including religion, politics, and ethics. Hume was particularly interested in the processes people use to secure knowledge and to deem it reliable.

### G. E. Lessing (1729–1781)

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born in Kamenz, Saxony (part of present-day Germany) on January 22, 1729. As a young man, he studied medicine and theology, expected to follow in the footsteps of his clergyman father. Lessing was more interested, however, in theater and became an important critic and playwright. His tragedy *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755) and his comedy *Nathan the Wise* (1779) are considered classic examples of German Enlightenment playwriting. As a critic, he urged playwrights to stop imitating the French and to create a German national theater. Lessing himself wrote many philosophical treatises arguing for religious tolerance and freedom of thought over religious dogma. In 1776, he married Eva Krönig; she died two years later in childbirth. Lessing died on February 15, 1781, in Braunschweig, Germany.

### Thomas Paine (1737–1809)

Thomas Paine was born in Thetford, Norfolk, England, on January 29, 1737. Paine received an education as a child, which was not common and proved him to be an exceptional student, but he had trouble keeping his jobs as an adult. After the death of his first wife, Paine worked as a customs officer and became involved in politics. Falling into trouble, Paine was forced to sell his possessions and was also separated from his second wife. Paine met Benjamin Franklin in September 1774, and Franklin advised him to move to colonial North America, which Paine did two months later. He became deeply involved in the revolutionary movement for freedom from British rule. His pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) convinced many colonists that independence was necessary. Paine was a fanatical supporter of the French Revolution, to the extant that he became involved in French politics despite not speaking the language. He was arrested in France in 1793 and narrowly avoided execution the following year, just before he finally won release. Paine wrote *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (1794, 1795, and 1807), a critique of organized religion, while in France. He returned to what was by then the United States in 1802, as a friend to President Thomas Jefferson. He died in New York City on June 8, 1809.

### Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)

Born in Geneva, Switzerland, on June 8, 1712, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a writer, botanist, social theorist, and musician. When his mother died a few days after his birth, an aunt and uncle agreed to rear him. Although Rousseau was an engraver's apprentice, he ran away at the age of sixteen to be the secretary and companion of a wealthy woman named Madame Louise de Warens, who was enormously influential in the young man's life. At the age of thirty, he left for Paris, where he was a music instructor and political secretary. His friend Diderot commissioned him to contribute music articles to *Encyclopédie*, and Rousseau's writing career began. He wrote social commentary and essays espousing the

belief that science and rationalism offer the way to truth. Rousseau's social commentary drew fire from Voltaire, and the two became rivals.

In 1756, Rousseau left Paris and went to Montmorency, France, where he wrote *The Social Contract* and *Émile*, both published in 1762. *The Social Contract* is considered one of the formative documents of the ideology of the French Revolution. Rousseau believed that the will of the people should guide government and that individuals should be free of pressures from church and state. The novel *Émile* presents an unorthodox view of educational theory, couched in a fictional work about a tutored student. Rousseau's views made him unpopular with authorities in France and Switzerland, so he went first to Prussia (a kingdom comprising parts of present-day Germany and Poland; it ceased to exist after World War II) and then to England with Hume. A series of disagreements, however, led them to publicly denounce each other, and Rousseau returned to France in 1768. He died on July 2, 1778, in Ermenonville.

Rousseau's major contributions to the Enlightenment were *The Social Contract*, *Émile* (both 1762), and the autobiographical *Confessions* (published posthumously in 1782). These works are regarded as some of the most inspired and original of the Enlightenment, and they had far-reaching effects on political theory and education. While early Enlightenment thinkers championed rationalism above all else, Rousseau introduced a note of emotion. His work represented the merging of the two approaches without weakening the Enlightenment stance that truth is revealed through individual inquiry rather than through blind adherence to tradition and authority.

### Voltaire (1694–1778)

Born in Paris on November 21, 1694, François Marie Arouet wrote extensively using the name Voltaire. As a young man, he gravitated toward writing and was soon considered one of the most intelligent and witty Parisians to frequent the salons, gatherings of distinguished guests, artists, and writers held in private homes. Voltaire's sarcasm and irreverence toward authority earned him two jail sentences, after which he spent two years in London. In the ensuing years, he moved from one patron to another in France and Germany, as his critical and sarcastic writings alternately intrigued and enraged members of the ruling class. He finally settled in Ferney, France, in 1758, where he lived for the remaining twenty years of his life. There, he continued his literary career, completing such masterpieces as the novel *Candide*. His mature work criticized religion, politics, economics, and philosophy, broadening and strengthening the Enlightenment spirit. He died in Paris on May 30, 1778.

Voltaire is considered one of the most influential of the Enlightenment writers, and most scholars writing on the Enlightenment include references to *Candide* (1759). A prolific writer, Voltaire wrote fiction, nonfiction, drama, poetry, history, satire, essays, and philosophical treatises. In these diverse genres, Voltaire explored science, philosophy, and the emerging consciousness of his day. Critics often cite the elegance, wit, and thoughtfulness of his work, but Voltaire is also criticized for being overly concerned with historical detail and philosophical persuasion.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The Age of Reason

Paine's treatise against organized religion, *The Age of Reason*, was published in three parts in 1794, 1795, and 1807. Paine advocated deism, or belief in a supreme being that does not intervene in the universe it created. In his book, Paine disparages miracles and revelations, preferring reason to divine inspiration. He also criticizes the Church for corruption. Deism and Paine's criticisms were not new; however, his writing style was particularly accessible and the book was sold at an affordable price, making ideas accessible to almost anyone that were once available only to the elite who could afford to attend school.

### Candide

Voltaire's novel *Candide* (1759) is a satire attacking the philosophical leanings of his day. In the story, Candide and his traveling companions (Pangloss, an optimist; Cunégonde, his love; Martin the Pessimist; and Cacambo, his valet) endure hardships and witness the worst of humankind's cruelty and folly. In the end, Candide concludes that it is best to end the philosophical debates and simply cultivate one's own garden.

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- *Candide* was adapted to film in 1961 by the French companies Courts et Longs Métrages and Société Nouvelle Pathé Cinéma. It was then given English subtitles and distributed in the United States by Union Films.

- Television adaptations of *Candide* were made in 1973 by the British Broadcasting Corporation and in 1986 by Public Broadcasting Service.

- In 1989, a musical version of *Candide* was produced by the German company Deutsche Grammophon and the American company Video Music Production, featuring compositions by Leonard Bernstein.

- The original text of *The Age of Reason* is available for free on many Web sites, including the highly esteemed Project Gutenberg. Paine's book can be read or downloaded from Project Gutenberg at http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3743.

- The United States government maintains a Web site with high-resolution scans of the original *Declaration of Independence*. The Web site, accessible at http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html, also has several articles which examine the history and meaning of this historic document and a feature whereby one can add his or her name to the *Declaration of Independence* and print it out.

The winding, episodic plot of *Candide* includes incidents that Voltaire's contemporaries readily recognized as paralleling events of their time. Voltaire takes aim at philosophical optimism and pessimism, nobility, war, and religion. He reveals hypocrisy and abuse of power by the Church and the state. Supporters of Enlightenment thinking praised Voltaire for his bold depictions of these social realities, while more conservative thinkers condemned him. In the early 2000s, students of the Enlightenment

*David Hume* *(Hulton Archive | Getty Images)*

look to *Candide* as an example of the type of fiction favored by the *philosophes* and for its presentation of Enlightenment ideology.

## Declaration of Independence

With the signing of the *Declaration of Independence* in July 1776, the thirteen North American colonies officially separated from England. The purpose of the *Declaration of Independence* was to establish a government separate from England's, to declare war against England (with whom North Americans were already fighting), and to solicit foreign aid for the war effort. In addition, the document outlines the colonists' grievances in light of the treatment they had received from England's monarchy. When the Continental Congress decided to pursue independence, it formed a committee to create a draft of the document declaring this intention. Thomas Jefferson, who loved France and was impressed by Enlightenment thinkers, undertook the job of composing this important document. With the *Declaration of Independence*, Enlightenment ideas were put into political action. The concepts of self-rule, civil liberties, and a social contract that benefits both the ruled and the rulers are all embodied in the *Declaration of*

*Independence*. Although his draft was edited by the Second Continental Congress, Jefferson is still considered the architect of the document.

The *Declaration of Independence* opens with the Preamble, which states the purpose of the document and lists the goals of the emerging government. The Preamble asserts that citizens are entitled to basic rights, which the government has no authority to violate. Twenty-seven grievances against England's King George III are listed. These serve to demonstrate the type of government the future United States set out to avoid, while explaining why the Americans feel compelled to create their own government system. The federal government of the new United States asserts its right to wage war, collect taxes, carry on trade, be involved in international affairs, and otherwise function as an independent nation.

## Émile

Rousseau's didactic *Émile* (1762) was published the same year as his political treatise *The Social Contract*. In *Émile*, Rousseau presents his innovative ideas about education. He follows the fictional title character from infancy to adolescence, demonstrating the ideal education for him as a tutor teaches him privately. Rousseau believed that the purpose of education is not to provide information in an attempt to increase the student's knowledge but rather to approach each child individually with the goal of drawing out the abilities that child possesses. Rousseau's student-centered approach is more focused on talent and innate intelligence than on uniform standards and requirements.

The year 1762 was a turning point for Rousseau. With his radical ideas on politics and education reaching the public, he was considered a scandalous figure. The controversy over *The Social Contract* was more heated, but some of the religious content of *Émile* caused it to be banned in France and Switzerland. In the early 2000s, however, the book is considered a classic work on educational theory, and Rousseau is regarded as a man ahead of his time. Although his theories are not carried out intact, the ideas introduced in the novel do influence teaching methods. Some scholars go so far as to claim that Rousseau was a crucial figure in the development of child psychology.

## Encyclopédie

The *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772) is regarded as the embodiment of the spirit of the Enlightenment. Diderot and the other contributors spent more than twenty years working on it, and it is a masterpiece of compiled information in accessible but thought-provoking language. Although it was originally meant to be a translation of another work, Diderot envisioned a greater undertaking that would summarize the most important knowledge of the day. Its content ranges from technological and craft processes to the history of and topics associated with philosophy. Diderot's articles on the latter are among his most inspired. While encyclopedias in modern times are objective, the *Encyclopédie* included point-of-view articles about science, politics, world cultures, religion, and philosophy. The *philosophes* spoke through these volumes to challenge existing theology and philosophy, while explaining Enlightenment ideals. Diderot shaped the *Encyclopédie* to be a source of information available to people who wanted to look beyond the traditional resource, the Church.

## Nathan the Wise

The Lessing tragedy *Nathan the Wise* (1779) is set in Jerusalem during the Third Crusade (1189–1192). In this play, a German Templar falls in love with Recha, the foundling daughter of a rich Jewish merchant named Nathan. Nathan has raised Recha to be spiritual without reference to a particular religion. The Templar initially spurns Nathan because he is Jewish but is brought around by his love of Recha. Nathan's servant reveals to the Templar that Recha was born a Christian. The play resolves when it is revealed that the Templar and Recha are not only sister and brother, but also niece and nephew to the Sultan Saladin, so they are not Christian, but Muslim.

The character of Nathan was based upon Lessing's good friend, Moses Mendelssohn, a German Jew. This play and an earlier one, *The Jews* (1749) were controversial in their day for their positive portrayals of Jewish people.

## The Social Contract

Rousseau's 1762 political treatise *The Social Contract* asserts that a government has a set of moral responsibilities to the people it governs. As Rousseau saw it, most governments violate these responsibilities: "Man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains." Real authority arises

from a just agreement between the government and the governed, and Rousseau terms this agreement "the social contract."

Diverse theorists and philosophers influenced *The Social Contract*, including John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and certain Ancient Greek philosophers. When it was published, *The Social Contract* was received with indignation and outrage. Rousseau was hated throughout France, and efforts were made to suppress *The Social Contract*. Although Rousseau died in 1778 and therefore did not see the French Revolution (1789–1799), his theories supported its ideology. In 1794 (during the French Revolution), Rousseau's body was exhumed and transported to Paris for a hero's burial in the Pantheon.

## THEMES

### *Superiority of the Intellect*

The *philosophes* claimed that humans have the ability to perfect themselves and society and that the state has the potential to be an instrument of that progress. Part of their criticism of the existing government was that it impeded such progress in its refusal to surrender power or resources to the people so that they could take control of their lives. The *philosophes* lamented the social conditions of contemporary France, but they remained confident that its people could attain happiness and improve living standards. Armed with these concepts and fortified by science and reason, the *philosophes* attacked Christian tradition and dogma, denouncing religious persecution and championing the idea of religious tolerance.

At the center of the belief in the superiority of the intellect was the Enlightenment reaction against traditional authority, namely the Church and the ruling class. The *philosophes* claimed that rather than depend on these authorities for physical, spiritual, and intellectual needs, individuals could provide for themselves. By using their minds and demanding morality of themselves and others, people could actually change their realities for the better. This idea is evident in Rousseau's *The Social Contract* and in the *Declaration of*

## TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- A central tenet of Enlightenment thinkers was that humankind is innately good. Research the idea of the "noble savage" and see how it relates to Enlightenment thought. Prepare a well-organized essay explaining your findings, complete with examples from literature and/or history. Be sure to include any aspects of the "noble savage" that contradict the Enlightenment point of view.

- *Sturm und Drang* and Romanticism are two literary movements that are viewed, in part, as reactions against the Enlightenment. Choose one of these movements and prepare a web page that summarizes it and the Enlightenment, compares and contrasts the two, and explains why scholars interpret your movement as a reaction against the Enlightenment.

- During the latter part of the eighteenth century—when literature promoted and reflected Enlightenment ideas—Neoclassicism dominated the art world, and Romanticism followed in the early nineteenth century. Read about these art movements and examine their representative works. Consider the paintings of Jacques-Louis David (Neoclassicism) and see how they relate in style and/or subject to the work of Romantic artist Eugene Delacroix, whose *Liberty Leading the People* is a famous painting that champions freedom.

- Read Victor Hugo's classic story of the French Revolution, *Les Misérables*, or watch a stage or screen adaptation of the novel. Select one of the main characters and compose a character sketch explaining how the Enlightenment did or did not affect the character's personality, emotional presence, and decision making.

*Independence.* It is expressed more subtly in *Émile* wherein a child's education is designed to draw upon his unique capabilities and to

teach the child to be his own person in adulthood.

## Basic Goodness of Humankind

The *philosophes* maintained that people were innately good and that society and civilization were to blame for their corruption. Because people are good, they are fully capable of ruling themselves and collectively working toward the welfare of all. Rousseau asserts this in *The Social Contract*, as he explains that despite individual differences and priorities, people as a whole will make decisions for the common good. In *Émile*, Rousseau applies this idea to the education of a child, demonstrating that the purpose of education is not to correct a child or mold the child to exhibit a certain set of characteristics but rather to draw out the child's unique gifts and goodness. Not all Enlightenment writers emphasized man's inherent goodness, however; in *Candide*, Voltaire provides numerous examples of humanity's cruelty and abuse of power. Once the characters are living peacefully on a farm (outside of civilization), they seem to be less violent, but the theme of humankind's goodness is diminished here.

## Deism

Deism is a religious belief system that emphasizes morality, virtuous living, and the perception of a creative but uninvolved God. Deists believe in f God but reject the supernatural, including the New Testament miracles and resurrection of Christ. They reject the idea that God is active in people's daily lives, instead claiming that God created the world but is now distant. This view of God directly contradicts the view of Catholic and Protestant religions. The *philosophes* were particularly incensed by the Roman Catholic Church, which they perceived as too restrictive and dominant.

As deists, the *philosophes* were uninterested in life after death. They maintained that people should spend their time and energy improving this life, and they advocated pursuing worldly happiness and contentment. Diderot addresses these ideas in the *Encyclopédie*, and they are implied in the Preamble to the *Declaration of Independence*, which states that among a person's unalienable rights are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

## STYLE

### Rhetoric

Over the course of the Enlightenment, there existed two clearly opposing schools of thought concerning rhetoric. The traditions of the Renaissance, largely influenced by the works of Peter Ramus, held over into the early part of the movement. Ramus attacked Aristotle's view that rhetoric and dialect should be integrated, indicating that, though they may have been used in conjunction in the past, they should be disengaged. Ramus advocated a linear style, bereft of embellishment, so that scientific and philosophical writings might be better representations of truth. This straightforward approach adhered naturally to the rational thought and methodical observation promoted by the Enlightenment. However, while this rhetorical convention was becoming less popular, another was quickly gaining ground.

Near the end of the Enlightenment, the Belletristic Movement was in full swing. Works such as *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), by Hugh Blair, and *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), by George Campbell, were published. Both authors embraced the idea of using eloquence, beauty, and emotion to allow one to communicate, with the most advantage, to his or her audience. The word belletristic comes from *belles-lettres* (French for literature), which is literature that is appreciated not just for its content but for its beauty as well.

### Satire

Although there are few stylistic consistencies among Enlightenment works, the fiction of the period is almost always satirical. Satire is an indirect way of commenting on social or political issues. Satire reveals how people and things are not what they seem on the surface, and readers can often identify what aspect of society is being ridiculed. Satire allowed the *philosophes* to get some of their writing past government censors despite its harsh criticism of the status quo. The number of censors increased in France during the Enlightenment because of the radical new ideas being put forth. When writers used satire, however, censors either missed the point of the writing or were unable to make a convincing case for suppressing it.

Satire also served as a witty way to criticize. Enlightenment writers were often clever and

sarcastic, and their work tended to attract an intelligent readership. A common satirical technique was to create a character that was a stranger to France. Because the character is naive and unfamiliar with the local society, the character may be confused by French society or find fault with it. These characters were generally ignorant or silly, making their faultfinding seem equally ignorant or silly. The satiric irony, however, is that the character is the author's mouthpiece for pointing out the absurd and unjust in French society.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### United States

The Enlightenment had an important impact on the formative years of the United States as an independent nation. Although little Enlightenment literature came out of North America, the *Declaration of Independence* and the American Revolution embodied the principles espoused by the *philosophes*. Some of the central figures of the North American colonies (such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin) were admirers of Enlightenment writers, which influenced their decision making and their political writing. In drafting the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson drew on some of the fundamental ideas of the Enlightenment, such as the basic goodness of humans and their innate ability for self-rule, the injustices of corrupt governments, and the belief that all individuals should be free to pursue happiness. The Constitution, which lays out the system of government for the new United States, was drafted in 1787 and contains many ideas inspired by Enlightenment writers and theorists.

### Scotland

Hume's philosophical writings about human rational processes and Adam Smith's revolutionary economic views added important dimensions to the Enlightenment. The philosopher Hume lived in Great Britain, while most of the *philosophes* were in Paris. His ideologies supported Enlightenment claims of rationalism, although his work claimed that knowledge—especially knowledge gained through the senses—is not as reliable as many philosophers had suggested. Hume was also unique in his generally widespread acceptance. While the works of most

*philosophes* endured censorship and outrage, Hume's work was published and deemed acceptable, mostly due to the fact that his work did not address volatile issues such as politics and religion but instead focused on explaining human thought processes and rational approaches to philosophical questions.

Hume was well known both at home and in France. When he spent two years in Paris, he was welcomed into the most distinguished salons and embraced by the public. When he left, he took Rousseau with him, although the two fell out of favor with each other once they arrived in London. Hume was not only influential with the *philosophes*, but he also played an important role in Transcendentalism. Kant, whose philosophical doctrines are major parts of the foundation of Transcendentalism, said that reading Hume was an experience of philosophical awakening.

Adam Smith's 1776 economic treatise *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (often referred to as *The Wealth of Nations*) was the first attempt to analyze systems of trade, production, and commerce in Europe. Smith's friendship with Hume helped shape his innovative theories. Besides providing an in-depth look at economic scenarios, Smith included material addressing social ramifications of various aspects of economics. *The Wealth of Nations* demonstrated that Enlightenment ideals had applications in virtually every area of life, and its principles were put into action in North America.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Seventeenth-Century Advances

Among the important influences of Enlightenment thinkers were seventeenth-century scientists and thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke. Locke's theory of sensationalism (the belief that knowledge is solely derived through sensation and perception) was especially important to Voltaire and Rousseau, and Locke's views on the relationship between the individual and society laid the groundwork for the social contract theories of Rousseau.

Along with the writings of these influential figures, the seventeenth century provided other

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **Late Eighteenth Century:** By the 1770s, significant growth in the printing industry means wider distribution of newspapers and books. This enables Enlightenment writers to reach a greater audience. Censorship is also waning, enabling Enlightenment thinkers to write more plainly about their views and theories.

  **Today:** The Internet enables anyone to reach a worldwide audience. Any information, theory, or ideology can be read by millions of people. Such communications are virtually unpoliced.

- **Late Eighteenth Century:** In 1762, Rousseau's *Émile* is published. In this world-famous novel presenting a new approach to education, the author expresses the typical view of the day that limited education is acceptable for women but that ultimately they should be prepared for domestic life.

  **Today:** Women are given the same access to higher education as men. Some well-educated women choose to stay home and rear their children, but this is a choice rather than an expectation.

- **Late Eighteenth Century:** World exploration and colonization by European nations affects the Enlightenment in two ways. First, exposure to new cultures brings about the *philosophes*' view that culture is relative and that tolerance is necessary. Second, colonization often leads to oppression (because governing bodies do not share the *philosophes*' appreciation for other cultures). In the case of the United States, this oppression leads to the application of many Enlightenment ideals. Americans, seeking self-rule and an improved society, take up arms against their oppressors.

  **Today:** The world has been explored and colonized. There are no new lands or peoples to conquer. As well, the ideas of the Enlightenment—most notably the principle of political freedom—have been successful many places in the world, and conquests and colonization of past centuries are repugnant to many modern people.

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inspirational advances for the Enlightenment. Discoveries and inventions made by scientists supported the Enlightenment belief in the superiority of the intellect, and world exploration led to a sense of relativism with regard to non-European cultures. These advances served to reveal new realities, and thus Enlightenment writers encouraged open-mindedness and tolerance. Unfortunately, these opinions did not influence most leaders in European governments, who continued their mission to discover and conquer new lands and peoples at almost any cost. Isaac Newton's discovery of the law of gravity suggested that God's laws were accessible to the human mind. Enlightenment thinkers extended this notion and claimed that all of the laws and structures of nature and society could be discovered and known by applying reason. Locke had taught that knowledge comes from experience, which further supported the belief that the mind was the portal to all knowledge, both scientific and moral. The Enlightenment encouraged people to seek knowledge by observation rather than by reading what past authorities (such as the Bible or the Greek philosophers) taught.

## Censorship

Open expression of thought in eighteenth-century France was regularly curtailed by a stringent but often arbitrary censorship. Literary works were published only with the permission of the Director of Publications. Even when the censor granted permission, books could be suppressed by the clergy, the Parliament of Paris (the main

judicial authority), the royal decree, or by other political and religious authorities. In 1754, a royal decree ordered the death penalty for "all those who shall be convicted of having composed, or caused to be composed and printed, writings intended to attack religion, to assail our authority, or to disturb the ordered tranquility of our realm." Despite its threatening tone, enforcement of the measure was often arbitrary. The *Encyclopédie*, for example, was published with royal sanction yet championed nearly all the radical doctrines of the century.

### Salons

As a result of censorship, salons played an important role in the spread and discussion of Enlightenment thought. Salons were gatherings of distinguished and intellectual people and took place in the homes of society's elite. The women of the salons of the eighteenth century dictated the standards of taste and exerted considerable influence in matters of fame and fortune. Both men and women hosted Paris's renowned salons. Nearly all of the *philosophes* depended on the salons for the success of their literary endeavors. Many books of the day were subject to the receptions they received in salons, where guests would discuss and debate the books before applauding or condemning them. Intrigue and intense rivalry characterized the restrictive, elitist society of the salons. In such an atmosphere of a highly developed sense of wit, both in conversation and in writing, being clever was one's sole saving grace and commonly ensured one's success.

### American Revolution

The American Revolution (1775–1783) exemplified the ideals of Enlightenment thinkers, who, in the 1770s, began exploring political and social realms. Extolling the virtues of freedom and a government intent on better lives for all people, Enlightenment writers such as Rousseau claimed that there should be a fair agreement between government and the governed. When the Americans took up arms against their British rulers, they were putting Enlightenment ideas into action. Early American leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were adherents of Enlightenment ideologies, and their influence was important in the formative years of the country.

### French Revolution

The onset of the French Revolution is considered the culmination of the Enlightenment. Among the revolution's causes were the incompetence of the ruling class, the dreadful living conditions and harsh taxation of the poor, and the ideology of the Enlightenment (especially Rousseau's doctrine of popular sovereignty). The American Revolution catalyzed the French Revolution in two ways: it was a real example of people fighting for self-rule, and France's financial backing of the Americans worsened the nation's own crumbling finances. Overwhelming economic and public pressure led King Louis XVI to authorize national elections in 1788. This enabled French citizens to vote for representatives in the Estates-General, a legislative assembly that had been adjourned since 1614.

With censorship temporarily suspended, political tracts were abundant. Many of these tracts expressed Enlightenment views. Shortly after the elections, the assembly convened to address France's finances, but numerous other grievances demanded attention. The divisive atmosphere and lack of progress exacerbated an already heated atmosphere, and on July 12, 1789, the French people began rioting. Two days later, they stormed and overtook the Bastille, a royal prison that symbolized the rule of the Bourbons, the ruling family from which Louis XVI came.

In 1791, a constitution was finally approved that created a legislature to work with a limited monarchy. Suspicion, unrest, and frustration continued to swell, however, and in 1792, distrust of the king led to his suspension and a new constitutional convention. After royalist sympathizers were arrested, angry mobs stormed jails and massacred thousands of prisoners. The convention installed a war dictatorship with Maximilien Robespierre at the helm. Known as the Reign of Terror, this period was marked by extreme economic and political injustice. Thousands of suspected insurgents were arrested, and many (including the former queen, Marie Antoinette) were executed. Robespierre's harsh actions forced the convention to have him and many of his staunch supporters arrested and guillotined. A short-lived system of government consisting of a five-man board and a legislature fell victim to a coup, and the military hero

Napoleon Bonaparte took control of France in 1799. This ended the French Revolution.

Ironically, the Revolution was partially inspired by Enlightenment thought, yet the violence that came out of this decade of fighting only tarnished its credibility among many Europeans.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Literary historians describe the Enlightenment as a movement that profoundly affected not only literature but also science, philosophy, politics, and religion. Because it lasted for over one hundred years, it evolved and came to have many manifestations. In *The Enlightenment*, author Norman Hampson comments, "Within limits, the Enlightenment was what one thinks it was." He adds that "the Enlightenment was an attitude of mind rather than a course in science and philosophy." Critics almost universally applaud the Enlightenment for its insistence that the world should be analyzed and that authorities should be subject to questioning. In *The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment*, Peter Gay remarks:

> The *philosophes* were the enemies of myth. . . . Their rationalism was, one might say, programmatic: it called for debate of all issues, examination of all propositions, and penetration of all sacred precincts. But I cannot repeat often enough that this critical, scientific view of life was anything but frigid. The *philosophes* . . . laid the foundation for a philosophy that would attempt to reconcile man's highest thinking with his deepest feeling.

During the Enlightenment women were permitted more latitude in developing outside marriage and motherhood. Rachel L. Mesch holds up novelist Francoise de Graffigny and her feminist epistolary work *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, published in 1749, as an example of what the Enlightenment did for women. Graffigny, who had escaped her abusive husband and moved to Paris to write, provides a clear but satirical view of Parisian life through the eyes of an Incan princess.

The influence of the Enlightenment on the French Revolution is without question. Critics and historians agree that the revolution was built on the intellectual advances made by Enlightenment writers, especially Rousseau. Ross Hamilton argues the Rousseau was uniquely placed in
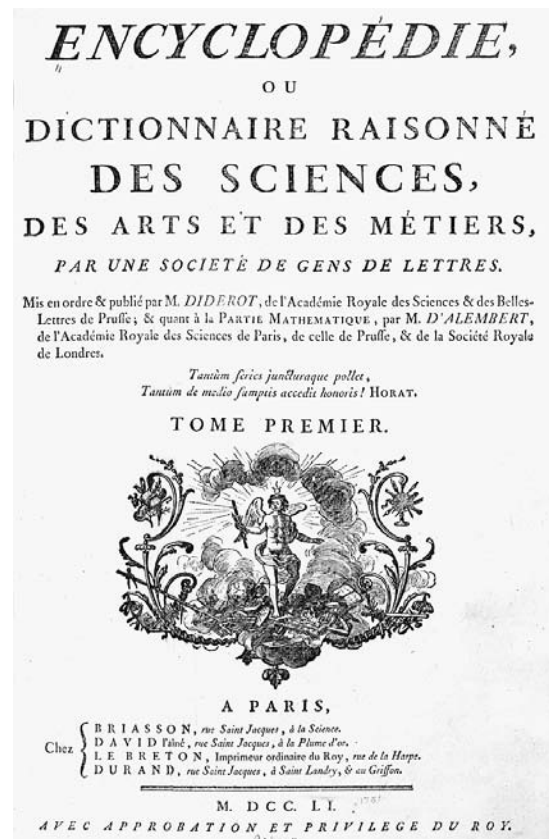


*Title page of* Encyclopédie *by Denis Diderot* (The Library of Congress)

time and history to witness and articulate a shift in human perception from the established conventions of classical tradition to the inquisitive and mutable in eighteenth-century Europe. Further, scholars often credit the Enlightenment with bolstering the resolve of the Americans in the American Revolution and with shaping both the *Declaration of Independence* and the Constitution. In an essay entitled "The Age of Enlightenment," Whittaker Chambers sheds light on the spirit of freedom and rebellion that arose from the Enlightenment to inspire some of history's most passionate conflicts:

> The vision of the Enlightenment was freedom— freedom from superstition, freedom from intolerance, freedom to know (for knowledge was held to be the ultimate power), freedom from the arbitrary authority of church or state, freedom to trade or work without vestigial feudal restriction. . . . [The] Enlightenment finally reversed the whole trend of European culture.

## CRITICISM

### Jennifer Bussey

*Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, Bussey compares the Grand Inquisitor in Voltaire's* Candide *to literature's most famous Grand Inquisitor, who appears in Fyodor Dostoevsky's* The Brothers Karamazov. *By comparing these parallel characters from different literary movements, she sheds light on the Enlightenment as a whole.*

Among the many characters who wander in and out of the pages of Voltaire's *Candide* is the Grand Inquisitor, a character with historical roots in the Spanish Inquisition. In 1478, Ferdinand V and Isabella I of Spain secured the reluctant approval of the pope to initiate what has come to be known as the Spanish Inquisition. Its original intent was to seek out and punish Jews who had been coerced into converting to Christianity but whose conversion was insincere. Next, the inquisitors began seeking out Muslims who had insincerely converted. In 1520, Protestants became targets of the inquisitors. Soon, everyone feared the Inquisition authorities and the dreaded *auto-da-fé*. An *auto-da-fé* (which means "act of faith") was the ceremony at which a person's sentence (usually death) was handed down and then performed. The Spanish Inquisition finally came to an official close in 1834.

During the infamous Inquisition, Grand Inquisitors were members of clergy who were appointed to assume the highest positions in the effort. They were terrifying men who were responsible for thousands of deaths. The most famous Grand Inquisitor in literature appears in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. The similarities between Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor and Voltaire's Grand Inquisitor are based on the history of the Spanish Inquisition and its players, but the differences reveal a great deal about their respective literary movements. Voltaire's Grand Inquisitor directly and indirectly reflects Enlightenment ideas and attitudes, but Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor reflects existential ones. By comparing the two, students can learn more about the Enlightenment than might be expected given the Grand Inquisitor's brief appearance in *Candide*.

In *Candide*, the Grand Inquisitor is a man of impulse who pursues worldly satisfaction, not

## WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Written by Jean Le Rond D'Alembert and translated by Richard N. Schwab, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot* (1995) presents the original preface to the *Encyclopédie*. In addition, this book contains an excerpt of Diderot's writing in the *Encyclopédie* along with a list of other contributors to it. It is considered an excellent introduction to the ideas of the Enlightenment.

- Edited by Isaac Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (1995) is an anthology containing the most important writings to come out of the Enlightenment. To cast light on the movement as a whole, this book also contains historical, religious, and philosophical context.

- *The Portable Voltaire*, edited by Ben Ray Redman and originally published in 1949, is an excellent starting place for the student of Voltaire's work. Redman includes biographical information, philosophical overviews, and Voltaire's writings to demonstrate his importance to eighteenth-century thought.

- In *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* (2001), editor Patrick Riley compiles background and biographical information about Jean-Jacques Rousseau to illuminate the selected writing also presented in this volume. Riley includes chapters about Rousseau's best-known works, essays about his relationship to other Enlightenment writers, and commentary on his significance to literary history.

- Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782) is the autobiographical account of the Enlightenment writer's life and his experiences all over Europe. Besides its value as a firsthand account by a major figure in the Enlightenment, critics consider this an important work to come out of the period. There are numerous translations available.

religious purity. Answering only to himself, he is either blind or apathetic to his own immorality. He uses his power to force a man to share his mistress with him, he thinks nothing of having people killed for any reason, and he indulges superstition by ordering that several people be burned to ward off additional earthquakes.

In many ways, the Grand Inquisitor in *Candide* is as much a philosophical figure as a religious one. He uses the power given to him by the Catholic Church to get what he wants. For example, the Grand Inquisitor desires Cunégonde, the mistress of the captain, and offers to buy her from him. When the captain refuses the offer, the Grand Inquisitor threatens him with an *auto-da-fé*, forcing the captain to bow to the Grand Inquisitor's will, and ends up sharing the woman. The captain fears the Inquisitor because he has the power to accuse him of an arbitrary charge and sentence him to death. In another example, Dr. Pangloss expresses philosophical optimism, so the Grand Inquisitor has him hanged for being a heretic. Pangloss's philosophical optimism is heretical because it implies that people—without God or the church—have the power to shape their own perceptions and destinies. Ultimately, however, the Grand Inquisitor is killed when he discovers Cunégonde and Candide plotting an escape. Candide kills the Grand Inquisitor, making him a victim of the same cruelty and impulse that defined his life. The irony is that if he had controlled his lust, he would not have put himself in a position to be killed.

Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor is presented very differently. He is deliberate and unemotional and exudes a powerful presence that is intimidating. He is also well educated and intelligent and is able to bend philosophy and theology to support his own wildly twisted ideas. Seeing Christ performing miracles during the Spanish Inquisition, he has him arrested and then chides him for returning to Earth. The Grand Inquisitor claims that Christ has no right to return and add anything to existing doctrine—once he left the Earth, the Church took over his work. The Grand Inquisitor sentences Christ to be burned the next day, and Christ's only response throughout the lengthy scene is a silent kiss at the end.

There are similarities between the two Grand Inquisitors. Both represent the belief that the intellect is superior to the emotions or the spirit. Voltaire's Inquisitor represents the belief ironically because his decisions are reactionary, not thoughtful. Dostoevsky's Inquisitor, however, states directly that in the conflict between intellect and faith, intellect is superior.

Another important similarity is that both Inquisitors cling to their power and use it immorally, and they have no tolerance for anyone who challenges them in any way. Voltaire's Inquisitor has Pangloss hanged for declaring philosophical views the Inquisitor finds ridiculous. He justifies the hanging by labeling the philosophical claims heretical, but Pangloss is not a religious figure at all. Although his charge is to eradicate challenges to the church's authority, Voltaire's Inquisitor does not allow his personal authority to be challenged. He readily invokes his power to subject the captain to an *auto-da-fé* when the captain refuses to share his woman. Similarly, Dostoevsky's Inquisitor refuses to be challenged and is so arrogant that he exerts his authority over Christ. Dostoevsky's Inquisitor is a high-ranking person in the Catholic Church—a Cardinal—and his authority should rightly come from the Christ that the church worships. Yet when Christ appears, the Inquisitor responds with indignation. Without hesitation, he sentences Christ to be burned. Both Grand Inquisitors are powerful men. Because they often abuse their power, they also become extremely dangerous.

The differences between the two Grand Inquisitors reveal a great deal about the literary movements with which they are associated. Voltaire's Inquisitor is cartoonish and ridiculous. This characterization is in keeping with the Enlightenment's low estimation of the church and its clergy. He is a hypocrite who expects everyone else to follow the teachings of the Bible, while he thinks nothing of forcefully taking a mistress. His victims are foolish (like Dr. Pangloss), implying that the church has no real

authority over anyone with intelligence. In contrast, Dostoevsky's Inquisitor is a fully formed character who seems real to the reader. He exudes an air of cruelty and dispassion. This is typical of Dostoevsky's writing, in which characters are realistic, and the reader is often given insight into the souls of his characters. Dostoevsky's Inquisitor has a sharp mind, while Voltaire's Inquisitor flippantly orders people to be killed. Dostoevsky's Inquisitor engages in lengthy, profound philosophical and theological commentary, which gives him the power to persuade others to buy into his twisted perspective. His arrogance is so great that facing Christ, he condemns him with no concern for his own salvation. This scene is representative of Existentialism because it demonstrates the emphasis of existence over meaning. Christ exists to the Inquisitor, but because the Inquisitor strips away the meaning of Christ's existence and appearance at this particular moment, Christ's sovereignty means nothing to the Inquisitor.

The Enlightenment writers denounced the church for its restrictions and hypocrisy. Voltaire's Grand Inquisitor personifies what the Enlightenment thinkers perceived as the worst of organized religion. Existential thinkers emphasized existence over meaning, and their belief that reason is ultimately inadequate to explain the great mysteries of life is depicted in Dostoevsky's character of the Grand Inquisitor. The reader can see that his arguments and logic appear to be sound, but at the same time, it is clear that the Inquisitor has missed the mark. Both Inquisitors are creatures of the material world, but Voltaire suggests that the world can be better because his Inquisitor, for all his power and ability to frighten, is conquerable. He is ultimately defeated when Candide kills him. Voltaire's presentation of him as foolish also allows the reader to see through him and realize that he is destructible. Dostoevsky's existentialist Inquisitor, however, offers little hope to the reader. He has the power to kill divinity itself. This is where the existential view of possibilities in faith is relevant. If the reader believes that there is a world beyond the material one in which the Inquisitor is so powerful, then there is hope. This is very different from the Enlightenment emphasis on worldly happiness. To Enlightenment thinkers, if there is no hope in this world, there is no hope at all. These fundamental philosophical differences between the Enlightenment and Existentialism are



*Voltaire enjoyed holding literary and scientific discussions* (© Bettmann / Corbis)

represented in the parallel characters of the Grand Inquisitors. By comparing the brief appearance of Voltaire's Inquisitor in *Candide* with the lengthy appearance of Dostoevsky's Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the reader can easily distinguish the fundamental differences between Enlightenment and Existentialist ideas.

**Source:** Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on the Enlightenment, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Margaret Anne Doody

*In the following essay, Doody examines the exploration and treatment of sensuousness, including that of the natural world, in poetry by women in the eighteenth century.*

Women's poetry in the eighteenth century has been dealt with in terms of its political statement and its moral and social awareness. Much good work has been done in tracing themes and looking at social perspectives. Above all, some essential work has been done—the spadework—of locating poets, finding their publications and manuscripts, and giving a coherent account of their individual lives. I can rest on

**"** WHEN WOMEN POETS ARE BEING MOST SERIOUS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ANIMAL NATURE, THEY OFTEN DISGUISE THE SERIOUSNESS IN SOME FORM OF COMEDY . . . **"**

the assurance that predecessors such as Roger Lonsdale and Donna Landry have given us a vision and knowledge that we didn't have before, so I can take a slightly different tack.

In recent years also there has been much concern about 'the Body'—it is still a fashionable topic. The Body has been poked and inspected, hung up for examination, and dissected by modern anatomists. Under all this treatment, 'the Body' has dwined and pined into an abstract conceptual framework, a notional entity. The Body, in short, has been done to death. I want to examine, but I need a better word than 'examine'. I want to accompany, to go with, the sensuousness of poetry by women in the mid and late eighteenth century—from, and including, the work of Mary or Molly Leapor (b. 1722, d. 1746) to that of Ann Yearsley (b. 1752, d. 1806).

It is probably no accident that my 'bookends' as it were, the two poets who act as temporal poles in this project, are both working-class female poets. Doubly disadvantaged, they were unlikely candidates for publication, and it speaks for some of the best aspects of the eighteenth century that they were able to be published at all. With all their obvious disadvantages, including the sensation-seeking and condescension combined that promoted the work of 'The Bristol Milkwoman', Ann Yearsley, or *'Lactilla'*, these particular poets perhaps had some advantages. They had reason not to write an abstract 'Poetry' but to connect their own experiences with the common literary language, even while remodelling that language. We feel the immediacy in lines such as Leapor's

> —but now the dish-kettle began
> The boil and bubble with the foaming bran.
> The greasy apron round her hip she ties
> And to each plate the scalding clout applies.

> *('Crumble Hall')*

The comedy is fulfilled not only with an exact observation, but with a respect for the process described. This might be taken to be mere reportage, but the same qualities are found in poets who are imagining new scenes—such as the transformations satirically imagined by Yearsley, in a Pythagorean world where the famous ancients turn up in vulgar urban roles of the present day:

> Fair Julia sees Ovid, but passes him near,
> An old broom o'er her shoulder is thrown:

> *('Addressed to Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman's desiring the Author never to assume a Knowledge of the Ancients')*

Objects are treated with clarity, and the senses are explicit. So, too, are the activities not only of daily working life, but of bodily life, the impulses and receptions that make for sense-experience, as well as the realm of movement. The women poets present us with a clearly sensuous world. The mind cannot divorce itself from the senses. This is a matter somewhat difficult of discussion because of our present disdain for the word 'Sensibility'. And indeed 'Sensibility' will not serve my meaning here. The women poets are participants in that pan-European philosophical movement which both outlined modes of bodily response to external stimuli (discovering 'nerves' in the process), and delineated forms of social relations and psychosocial interaction. As writers such as Barker-Benfield (1992) have shown, the anxiety about the newly 'feminized' and nervous human entity could lead to a desire for greater control. Woman as the excessively sensitive person is *too* responsive—in contrast to the brutishly uncivil who are not sensible or sensitive enough. The novelists argue about these issues with some openness (culminating in *Sense and Sensibility*), but the poets of the eighteenth century—men as well as women—were trying to set up their own terms for discussing human experience and relationships to the world without getting altogether caught up in what some philosophers wanted to make of 'Sensibility'.

The eighteenth century's confident interest in sense impressions, fortified by the first part of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, was balanced by some unease. After all, Locke's concluding position is surprisingly close to that of Descartes. We have no *contact* with the real world out there, we are merely recipients of sense *impressions* always mediated by our own sensorium. The world is all in our

minds. We look at snow, we think, but there's a sense in which we do not see it—we only 'see' the impression in our mental equipment. This sense of being locked into a cell of the self can be particularly disturbing. English poets of the eighteenth century thus went out of their way to counteract such a potential isolation in writing a poetry that is far more concrete and sensuous, less abstract, than that of either their predecessors (the Metaphysical and Baroque writers) or their successors (the Romantics). It is arguable—I would certainly argue it—that eighteenth-century poetry is the most directly sensuous poetry England has ever had. The reference to the impact of self and object, the re-creation of the fascinating and insistent world of particulars, can be found in the poetry of Swift of course, and over and over again, as in 'A Description of the Morning':

> Now *Moll* had whirl'd her Mop with dext'rous Airs,
> Prepar'd to Scrub the Entry and the Stairs.
> The Youth with Broomy Stumps began to trace
> The Kennel-Edge, where Wheels had worn the Place.
> The Smallcoal-Man was heard with Cadence deep,
> Till drown'd in Shriller Notes of *Chimney-Sweep*.

We are made to observe what the refined reader usually overlooks, or finds boring. We are participants momentarily in the activity of the working people, and close enough to observe the 'Broomy Stumps' and the traces of wheels.

I think Pope was partly inspired by Swift to amplify the observation of common things in his own poetry; although, unlike Swift, Pope is a poet with pretensions to the 'grand style', he does keep a close watch on diurnal realities. He too can cause the snort of disgust at confronting us with the evocation of the sensation of disgust:

> To where Fleet-ditch with disemboguing streams
> Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames
>
> *(*Dunciad*)*

Pope is more hierarchical than Swift in his fine evocations of sensory experiences. Swift, arguably the strongest satirist, strikes one is curiously more broad-minded, that is, less inclined towards hierarchical arrangements of experience. I have written elsewhere of Swift's relation to the women poets, but I have been freshly struck by it, when, for instance, coming upon an open imitation of Swift's 'Morning' in Mary Robinson's

'London's Summer Morning' (written *c.* 1794, published 1804, according to Lonsdale):

> Who has not waked to list the busy sounds
> Of summer's morning, in the sultry smoke
> Of noisy London? On the pavement hot
> The sooty chimney-boy, with dingy face
> And tattered covering, shrilly bawls his trade,
> Rousing the sleepy housemaid. At the door
> The milk-pail rattles, and the tinkling bell
> Proclaims the dustman's office; while the street
> Is lost in clouds impervious. Now begins
> The din of hackney-coaches, waggons, carts;
> While tinmen's shops, and noisy trunk-makers,
> Knife-grinders, coopers, squeaking cork-cutters,
> Fruit-barrows, and the hunger-giving cries
> Of vegetable-vendors, fill the air.
> . . . At the private door
> The ruddy housemaid twirls the busy mop,
> Annoying the smart 'prentice, or neat girl,
> Tripping with band-box lightly. Now the sun
> Darts burning splendour on the glittering pane,
> Save where the canvas awning throws a shade
> On the gay merchandise. Now, spruce and trim,
> In shops
> (where beauty smiles with industry)
> Sits the smart damsel; while the passenger
> Peeps through the window, watching every charm.
> Now pastry dainties catch the eye minute
> Of humming insects, while the limy snare
> Waits to enthrall them. . .

Pope's excuse for regarding low-life objects and describing—or evoking—sense reactions to them is largely satiric. This is by no means always the case with Swift, and seldom truly the case with women poets. Mary Robinson ('Perdita'), once mistress of the prince Regent, gives as it were a townscape secularized, a new *paysage non moralisé*. We feel the fullness of life, the cacophony, without being called on to register some hierarchical forms of disapproval or desire to reorder. There is such a superabundance of detail that we may miss the subtle connection between 'merchandise' and the 'smart damsel', the milliner or seamstress seated in the shop window, and between 'damsel' and 'pastry dainties'. Shop-owners (including female milliners) did put the prettiest girls to work in the window with the design of attracting customers, especially males—a matter gone into in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*. The displayed pastries are displayed for appetite, like the girls. But the sly observation is not followed into overt moralizing.

Acknowledged throughout Robinson's poem is the multiple connectedness, the omnipresence

of consumerism. The speaker poet, in the *persona* of the woman who awakens to the growing noise and activity of the day, is not given a position of peculiar privilege from which to look down and moralize. For one thing, she is part of the consuming need and the need to consume. This is what differentiates Robinson's narrator—persona from Swift's in his 'Morning'. Swift's speaker just sees all these phenomena. Robinson draws us in further into reaction and response. The mop is not only *twirled*, again, its whirling drops affect others unpleasantly. One of the most startling touches is her invented compound adjective 'hunger-giving'. Other writers (not to mention graphic artists and musicians) had illustrated the 'Cries of London', a minor motif in entertainment since at least the time of Purcell.

But the customary description invites us to look on in amusement, to hear with detachment, the criers and their cries. Robinson's participle adjective participates in an immediate response which is not immune to the activity of the advertisement. 'The hunger-giving cries/Of vegetable vendors'—the phrase acknowledges that hunger is roused, and is there to be roused, in all—including the speaker herself. We are not free to withdraw from the cycle of consuming. That gut reaction, that urgent sensory need, linked with the pleasure of taste, connects us with the flies, who are also gazers with the 'eye minute' upon the pastry 'dainties'—which become all the stickier in their immediate connection with the fly-paper, the 'limy snare' waiting to *enthrall* the little bugs. 'Enthrall' is usually a grand word, a romantic and literary word—this use returns it to its origins in ideas of enslavement, entrapment, imprisonment and power.

Robinson shows here an acute awareness of the effects and nature of heat; a surrounding atmosphere of urban warmth lessens our dependence on vision as primary sense. The female poets of the eighteenth century customarily show an awareness of graduations of heat and of cold—and of what might be called the pressure of environmental temperature or atmosphere. So it is with Mary Leapor as 'Mira', describing her birthday under the sign of Pisces:

> 'Twas when the flocks on slabby hillocks lie,
> And the cold Fishes rule the wat'ry sky:
>
> *('An Epistle to a Lady')*

The 'slabby hillocks' are cool, damp and muddy—a sense of discomfort is, as it were, transferred to, and also acknowledged in, the wordless sheep, the flocks who are waiting out the less than pleasing late winter—early spring of an ungracious countryside. Sky and earth, unhierarchically, are alike damp and cool. Such lines draw on a sense of feeling not usually on our minds when we talk about the 'sense of touch'—a phrase that serves us well when, for instance, dealing with a poet's description of the down of a peach. We do not have only the particular pointed sensation of voluntary touch where we poke or stroke another object, but general senses of 'touch', as with our skin's relation to the circumambient atmosphere. Our sensual circumstances are known to be shared with other creatures—like the flocks in Leapor's birthday description, or the cow and the flocks in Yearsley's invocation of harsh winter:

> The nymph, indifferent, mourns the freezing
>   sky;
> Alike insensible to soft desire,
> She asks no warmth but from the kitchen fire.
> Love seeks a milder zone; half sunk in snow,
> LACTILLA, shivering, tends her fav'rite cow;
> The bleating flocks now ask the bounteous
>   hand,
> And crystal streams in frozen fetters stand.
>
> *('Clifton Hill')*

The cold can quell sexual desire in woman—an astonishing observation in Yearsley's piece, as with it comes the assumption that a woman *should* naturally have a libido, and that this is a temporary *dis*-location of sexual energy, transferred to the cause of survival. Yet love of a kind does survive, because shivering Lactilla tends her 'fav'rite cow', and the cow remains a recipient of particular and individual favour even in the numbing cold. Human agency is of importance in helping the domestic animals in a crisis of sensation that still asks for activity—the 'bounteous hand' must move towards the 'bleating flocks' even while the streams are fettered and stand still, truly transformed into the conventional crystal. Sky, earth, and water share the cold, and there is no release into hierarchy of elements. The hierarchy subtly dismissed in an equation of sky and earth is also overthrown in the repeated emphasis in Yearsley's poem on the fellow-suffering of animals, and their importance. Here I think I have a new motif to discuss with you—and this is something that I have only

just discovered myself in women's poetry of the eighteenth century.

I had intended to deal at large with sensuousness in general, and in particular with instances of sensuous evocation in women's poetry. I would have rambled through the jumble of Crumble Hall with Mary Leapor, alluded to champagne and chicken in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. I should have pointed to instances of the ability to use an unusual image, as Anna Seward does with her green star in 'The Anniversary':

> O! hast thou seen the star of eve on high,
> Through the soft dusk of summer's balmy sky
> Shed its green light, and in the glassy stream
> Eye the mild reflex of its trembling beam?

I would also have dwelt on the use of unusual images of taste and smell, and comic pungent images like Anna Seward's description of the Boston Tea Party:

> When Boston, with indignant thought,
> Saw poison in the perfum'd draught,
> And caus'd her troubled bay to be
> But one vast bowl of bitter Tea;
>
> ('Verses inviting Mrs. C—to Tea on a public Fast-Day, during the American War')

I should have done all this and more. . . But my attention was forcibly caught by something I had not fully seen, and certainly had not explored before, in dealing with women's writing and with eighteenth-century poetry. My topic is largely the relation of human to animal in poetic works by eighteenth-century women. These poets' exploration of sensuousness rests on a rediscovery and a reassertion of human relation to animal, bird, insect. The senses are validated in a new way through what I shall call (for short) the 'Pythagorean theme'. It has many important implications, and an understanding of it will illuminate women's poetry of the eighteenth century and later.

### THE PYTHAGOREAN THEME

In *The Daring Muse* I have already discussed Ann Yearsley's poem 'Addressed to Ignorance', which uses the conceit of Pythagorean metampsychosis to invent a comic world where ancient characters of history and legend turn up in vulgar and prosaic modern guises. The significance of this comic reversal lies in its rebuke to the 'Gentleman' who told Yearsley that as a poor woman she had no right 'to assume a knowledge of the Ancients'. Yearsley rebukes him, borrowing a set of ideas from the 'ancients': she shows that she can envisage a cosmos without stable hierarchies, in which the class differences (along with national and other differences) that seem so solid to 'the Gentleman' don't count for much:

> Here's Trojan, Athenian, Greek, Frenchman and I,
> Heav'n knows what I was long ago:
> No matter, thus shielded, this age I defy,
> And the next cannot hurt me, I know.

As I noted then, 'Her poem is a declaration of human equality.' What I did not realize then is the fact that there is a tradition (if we can call it by so grand a word), a history, of women's use of the Pythagorean idea that Yearsley uses in 'To Ignorance' to deal with human equality. But the women poets more often evoke the Pythagorean idea in relating human life to animal life. Yearsley herself does this in 'Clifton Hill'. She describes, as we have noted above, the effects of extreme cold on the nymph, Lactilla, the cow, the flocks. She goes from human to animal to birds in noting reactions to the cold, and kinship among those who suffer from it. But her ensuing description of the robin moves into the description of the murderous male with the gun, whose response to other creatures is a delight in the powers of destruction:

> The beauteous red-breast, tender in her frame
> Whose murder marks the fool with treble shame,
> Near the low cottage door, in pensive mood,
> Complains and mourns her brothers of the wood
> Her song oft waked the soul to tender joys,
> All but his restless soul whose gun destroys;

Yearsley imagines a fitting vengeance:

> For this, rough down, long pains on thee shall wait,
> And freezing want avenge their hapless fate;
> For these fell murders mayst thou change thy kind,
> In outward form as savage as in mind;
> Go be a bear of Pythagorean name,
> From man distinguished by thy hideous frame.
>
> ('Clifton Hill (Written in January 1785)')

An earlier female poet had used the Pythagorean idea. Anna Seward treats the motif several times, and it may be that Yearsley had come upon some of the poems that circulated in manuscript long before Seward's works were posthumously published, edited (at her request) by Walter Scott.

Like the other female poets in my discussion, Seward counts herself a Christian, but a Christian often vexed at what man made

pronouncements and social structures and controls have made of religion. Most of these writers would have warmly assented to Anna Laetitia Barbauld's statement in her poem 'To the Poor', which declares that the rich and powerful not only make the present life of the poor painfully wretched, but seek to extend their own controlling image to God and the hereafter. The threats that the rich extend to the poor in the name of religion are something the poor have the God-given right to dismiss:

> Safe in the bosom of that love repose
> By whom the sun gives light, the ocean flows,
> Prepare to meet a father undismayed,
> Nor fear the God whom priests and kings have
>     made.
>
> *('To the Poor')*

Man-made laws and concepts not only set up great barriers between human beings, but also create an impassable divide between the human and the other living creatures of this earth—a divide that is used to justify those other intra-human divisions, in terms like 'brutish', and so on. To turn the human into animal, or relate a man strongly to animal or insect life, is a terrific insult, as it is repeatedly in Pope's *Dunciad*:

> Maggots half-form'd in rhyme exactly meet
> And learn to crawl upon poetic feet.
>
> How here he sipp'd, how there he plunder'd
>     snug
> And suck'd all o'er, like an industrious Bug.
>
> As when a dab-chick waddles thro' the copse
> On feet and wings, and flies, and wades, and
>     hops;
> So lab'ring on . . .
> . . . Bernard rows his state.

To connect man and animal (or bird or insect) is to breed *monsters*, as bad poets do. Fear of the monstrous curdles much Augustan thought and literature. The reign of Reason seemed to depend on getting rid of 'monsters' of all kinds, but the notion was there at the philosophical centre. Locke in the *Essay* admits that Nature is not interested in clear lines between species, which are, like the 'species' themselves, an invention of the human mind. This subversion of Aristotle is a scandal that the eighteenth century partly succeeds in hushing up, but fear of the *monstrous* may be found everywhere, including a sense of horror at the approach of categories of species to each other.

I would argue that the women writers do not share this fear or horror, and that they approach the matter differently. Theologically, they are anti-gnostic in defence of creation and of matter. They are not reluctant to explore the activities of sensing and the sensed world as much more immediate (both as activity and object) than Locke allows. Locke emphasizes '*Human* Understanding': the women want to see what we have in common with other life in a created world. There is a vindication of the senses and of that which actively senses. The Pythagorean theme, along with the strong interest in animals, birds and insects generally found in women's poetry, especially in this period, permits investigations and statements counter to a dangerously prevalent reduction of everything to the life of Mind—the proud Mind. The Pythagorean idea offers a philosophical theme opposed to much contemporary philosophy, but its stance is officially seen as so unquestionably out of the question as to arouse no very indignant reaction. The 'Pythagoreanism' we encounter in the women's writing is not, indeed, the classic Pythagorean ladder of progress towards purification. The women do not in the least want to emphasize a teleological objection of purity, freedom from the senses. Rather, they are fascinated by the imaginative idea that a conscious entity might have been a bird in the last incarnation and may be a beast in the next. A relatively early poem by Anna Seward, 'Ode on the Pythagorean System', picks up the theme in grand style, if a trifle gingerly. Seward is aware that the Pythagorean system of reincarnation conflicts with the Christian scheme, but she argues that there is a 'sacred sense' in the Pythagorean system, and a certain justice to the 'Spirit warm' has its appeal. Let persons express their moral nature by taking animal form in a new birth:

> Then while revenge meets his congenial lot,
> And howls the tiger of the desert plain;
> While sensual Love burns in the odious Goat,
> And in the Hog the Glutton feasts again;

For her part, Seward says, choosing the vegetable role, she would like to come back as a myrtle tended by her friend Laura. Except for its ending, this 'Ode' is conventional in its treatment of Pythagoreanism—faulty human beings become imprisoned in *bestial* expressive forms as punishment. But Seward won't leave it at that. She has a more unorthodox poem later which wrestles with the Biblical statement regarding 'The beasts that perish'; Seward attributes complacent judgement to 'proud Man . . . as he were doom'd alone/To meet, for guiltless pains, supreme reward'. If, she argues, animals are

not to have a life after death, that would meet the terms of Divine Justice *only* if their lives on earth had been happy, and they had been allowed to fulfil their animal nature while alive. But this often does not happen, because of man's cruelty:

> Alas! the dumb defenceless numbers, found
> The wretched subjects of a tyrant's sway,
> Who hourly feel his unresisted wound,
> And hungry pine through many a weary day;
>
> Or those, of lot more *barbarously* severe,
> Who strain their weak, lame limbs beneath the
>   load
> Their fainting strength is basely doom'd to
>   bear,
> While smites the lash, the steely torments goad;

Here we feel the eighteenth-century's sensory identification with pain, as the speaker moves towards close identification with a suffering sentient creature.

> Has GOD decreed this helpless, suffering train
> Shall groaning yield the vital breath he gave,
> Unrecompensed for years of want, and pain,
> And close on them the portals of the grave?

*('On the Future Existence of Brutes')*

No, Seward argues, God will surely do better than that. There must be some 'Expiatory Plan', or God is not just. The tenor of this poem is almost entirely to close the gap between Human and Brute. The Dog, she says, illustrates the animal power of emotional refinement, intelligence, susceptibility to education, and moral virtue. Why imagine that the Dog has no afterlife?

> Ah, wretch ingrate, to liberal hope unknown!
> Does pride encrust thee with so dark a leaven,
> To deem this spirit, purer than thine own,
> Sinks, while thou soarest to the light of
>   Heaven!

Thinking about the fate of animals after death occupies a fair amount of Seward's time. In 'An Old Cat's Dying Soliloquy' she combines the comic with her questioning of human notions of the afterlife. The old cat knows she is near her end:

> Fate of eight lives the forfeit gasp obtains,
> And e'en the ninth creeps languid through my
>   veins.

But the cat is piously sure she has much to which to look forward:

> Much sure of good the future has in store,
> When on my master's hearth I bask no more,
> In those blest climes, where fishes oft forsake
> The winding and the glassy lake;
> There, as our silent-footed race behold

> The crimson spots and fins of lucid gold,
> Venturing without the shielding waves to play,
> They gasp on shelving banks, our easy prey;
> While birds unwinged hop careless o'er the
>   ground,
> And the plump mouse incessant trots around,
> Near wells of cream that mortals never skim,
> Warm marum creeping round their shallow
>   brim;
> Where green valerian tufts, luxuriant spread,
> Cleanse the sleek hide and form the fragrant
>   bed.

*('An Old Cat's Dying Soliloquy')*

Now, it was certainly a truism that women poets think about pet birds and animals. Satire on women's involvement with their pets is fairly easy to find in this period. Richardson had a crack at women poets in his *Sir Charles Grandison*. Early in her sojourn in London, the heroine Harriet Byron meets a young lady, Miss Darlington, with 'a pretty taste in poetry', who is prevailed upon to show three of her performances.

> The third was on the death of a favourite Linet [*sic*]; a little too pathetic for the occasion; since were Miss Darlington to have lost her best and dearest friend, I imagine that she had in this piece, which is pretty long, exhausted the subject; and must borrow from it some of the images which she introduces to heighten her distress from the loss of the little songster.

Richardson indicates that women in general waste their emotion upon their pets, and that women poets may be expected to waste adjectives and images upon such a trite subject as well. As women have so little to occupy their minds, they will treat the mere death of a pet linnet as a major event. Richardson restores the hierarchies that female poets tend to rumple. Human beings must be kept distinct from birds. One should be able to distinguish with absolute clarity the distress caused by the death of a human friend from the feeling of loss relating to a mere animal.

The tendency of women to identify self and emotion with animal or bird is clearly marked, certainly from the time of Ann Finch. Perhaps partly inspired by her married surname, Finch identifies herself with a bird, most powerfully in one of her best poems 'The Bird in the Arras', where the bird exhibits panic, bewilderment, wild desire. In her best-known poem, 'A Nocturnal Reverie', Finch notices the relaxation and freedom of both vegetable and animal life as the sun sets:

> When freshen'd Grass now bears itself upright,
> And makes cool Banks to pleasing Rest invite.

Vision ceases to be so important, and creatures are known and know each other in darkness through various senses:

> When the loos'd *Horse*, now as his pasture leads,
> Comes slowly grazing through th'adjoining Meads,
> Whose stealing Pace, and lengthened Shade we fear,
> Till torn-up Forage in his Teeth we hear;

The horse is identified not by vision (which creates an illusory monster) but by sound. The change in emphasis of sense reliance and sense instruction creates a connection between the human hearer's sense of the horse chomping on grass, and the horse's own touch-and-taste sense of the grass between its teeth. This is a time of pleasure, a sense-holiday from the ruling power of sunlight and the obsession with sight.

> Their shortlived Jubilee the Creatures keep,
> Which but endures while Tyrant-*Man* do's sleep:
> When a sedate Content the Spirit feels
> And no fierce Light disturbs, while it reveals

The sunlight of Enlightenment, of reason, is associated with the oppression of man's rule and the social order. While 'Tyrant-*Man*' here *may* be read as the tyrant *human*, the phrase obviously refers to the tyrant *male*. In the night season, in their ramble together, Ann Finch and the Lady Salusbury are at one with the plants and animals. In this highly sensuous poem, sense life comes to full life in the presence of animals who are briefly allowed to have their full sensory life not restricted, censured, surveyed or used. The female companions also have a 'shortliv'd Jubilee' of sense pleasure, and expansion, so that all the senses (touch, smell, hearing) may be used harmoniously, not governed hierarchically by vision nor held in place by convention.

Women have been traditionally held to be the larger partaker in the animal nature. Man is spirit, man is mind. Woman is animal, if a higher animal. Richardson's hero Sir Charles Grandison explains it all, as Enlightenment philosopher. Nature clearly makes a difference in qualities such as courage between male and female in the animal kingdom: 'The surly bull, the meek, the beneficent cow, for one instance?'. And, allowing that human souls may be equal, 'yet the very design of the different machines in which they are inclosed, is to superinduce a temporary difference on their original equality; a difference adapted to the different purposes for which they are designed by Providence in the present transitory state.' Women have to bear children and give suck—so *obviously* that makes them inferior in this life. Such an assumption rests on the assumption that the 'animal' functions, like those of the meek cow, take over the greater portion of a woman's personality and her life. And that further rests on the assumption that the 'animal' functions and attributes can be clearly distinguished from the 'human'. Eighteenth-century women poets, it is clear, look upon animals in a manner very different from the way Richardson and his Sir Charles look upon them. Sir Charles's world is one of clear boundaries, strong divisions, clear designs. There should not be effeminate men and masculine women. The line between man and woman, as between human and animal, must be held. Within Richardson's novels, the female characters do maintain something of the women's dialogue, as their view of animal life differs in part from that of Sir Charles'—Charlotte compares herself and her husband to blackbirds with eggs to hatch. But that sort of play is not appropriate to Sir Charles, who as governing man must hold the line clearly.

It can be seen that the women poets enjoy playing with those boundaries that Sir Charles is at such pains to delineate. They defiantly adopt the sensibility of animals, team up, as it were, with animals against 'Tyrant-Man'. Seward's insight into the cruelty to 'the wretched subjects of a tyrant's sway' rests partly on that of Finch before her. She too is willing to assume (for play, for seriousness) the sensations of the animal creature. This might be called 'poetic Pythagoreanism'—the poet assumes the senses of an animal, thus transforming herself into the creature in a temporary transmogrification. The entrance into animal sensation is a kind of licence to give the sensory life its full due; that sensory life often denied in the cultural life of regulations and ideas.

Men are sometimes imagined (as in Yearsley's 'Clifton Hill') as being punished in a 'Pythagorean' manner by being made perforce to enter that animal nature that they have disdained. That would be a punishment because men think it so; they have this hectic urge to insist on their totally mental mode of being, their totally spiritual destiny. But the women poets show themselves as the true Pythagoreans, able to enter into the sensual life of animals—or even

plants, as when Seward wishes to be a myrtle; to be a plant loved by a woman would be better than honour done her having her brows bound with myrtle. In 'An Old Cat's Dying Soliloquy' Seward makes us take comic pleasure in imagining the Elysium or Paradise of a cat—sharing sensations with the cat, in an access of new sensuousness. We are free to indulge it because it is partly parodic, but once we do indulge it, we cannot maintain the aloofness of parody. The poem is 'parodic' of human serious descriptions of forms of heaven seriously desired. It is thus an Enlightenment poem in that it implicitly questions the religious conventions, and shows how they are related to cultural expectations. But in this case the cultural difference (between cats and ourselves) is so extreme, and so hitherto unthought-of, that we can enjoy the play upon the idea of heaven without serious religious or moral twinges. What seems most striking to me about the 'Old Cat' poem is its immediacy. The poem obviously and overtly owes something to Gray's *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes* (published in 1748). It owes *something*—not too much. Gray's poem is a mock-heroic fable. The cat is just an object; we are to laugh at the beast and her fate, even while we may reject the too-placid moral on vanity and avarice. Gray's Selima is almost entirely an object of sight. 'Her coat, that with the tortoise vies / Her ears of jet and emerald eyes' are not her own description of herself. We see the goldfish too:

> Still had she gaz'd; but 'midst the tide
> Two angel forms were seen to glide,
> The genii of the stream:
> Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue
> Thro' richest purple to the view
> Betray'd a golden gleam.

This is *almost* seeing from the cat's-eye view—but not really: 'angel' and 'Genii' carry no allusions to cat vocabulary. And the Popean touches regarding the fishes' colour carry us further into the realm of the literary and away from the cat—if the beginning of this stanza proposes the cat Selima as observer, by the end we have lost her. She remains fenced in by an Aesopic objectivity.

The descriptions of the fish in Seward's poem *do* remind us of Gray and, like Gray, Seward adapts the kind of language used in Pope:

> There, as our silent-footed race behold
> The crimson spots and fins of lucid gold.

But this is not, as it were, the main event. The by now conventionalized fish become much more what a cat would want—as they leave the water voluntarily. And they are overtaken by a host of other similarly amiable and catchable prey—products of a cat's imagination, not fitting any human aesthetic (in marked contrast to the fish):

> While birds unwinged hop careless o'er the
>   ground,
> And the plump mouse incessant trots around.

The wells of cream offer another kind of sensory experience, and the piling up of sensuousness is achieved through the invocation of smell and touch simultaneously (and right after taste) in the 'Warm marum' (marjoram) and green valerian tufts. Yes, a cat's heaven would have cream, herbs and certainly catnip. We do not end the poem with these sensuous images so lovely to the cat. The last note is an elegiac regret at parting. Even in heaven she may miss her home and her human friend and the life she knew:

> O'er marum borders and valerian bed
> Thy Selima shall bend her moping head,
> Sigh that no more she climbs, with grateful glee
> Thy downy sofa and thy cradling knee;

The cat proves capable of loyalty and affection, her virtues thus making her implicitly worthy of cat heaven—or of human heaven too. There is a comic reversal, as Seward's Selima faces death in a style very unlike that of Gray's greedy and accident-prone Selima. Seward's Selima has conscious dignity and religious hope. The greater reversal lies in the cat's regret that her owner cannot be with her. Owners of animals in Christian (and other) cultures often express regret that their pets cannot be with them in an orthodox afterlife—here the tables are turned. And indeed, what would a human do with plump mice, wells of cream, and tufts of catnip? But the poem shows what arrogance we exhibit when we assume that there is a heaven fit for human purposes to which animals are not allowed. The sharing (imaginatively and comically) of the cat's sensations and desires is a liberation into a range of sense experience, and an expression of confidence in the value of what we term the 'animal' nature.

When women poets are being most serious about the importance of the animal nature, they often disguise the seriousness in some form of comedy that can induce us to participate in the Pythagorean festival of throwing off our usual

identities and expectations. Anna Laetitia Barbauld's 'The Mouse's Petition' is a poem in the *persona* of the mouse that has been caught in a trap and awaits the experimentation of Dr Priestley. The poem was, naturally enough, taken up as a statement against animal experimentations, and Barbauld, not wishing to appear unscientific, pointed out that 'the poor animal would have suffered more as the victim of domestic economy, than of philosophic curiosity.' In her later explanation Barbauld claimed that all she meant was to express 'the petition of mercy against justice'—but that is *not* what the poem says, for of course from the mouse's point of view what is being done to him is an extreme case of *in*justice—it is arbitrary tyrannical cruelty. The mouse uses contemporary political language to make its point:

> Oh¡ hear a pensive prisoner's prayer,
> For liberty that sighs;
> And never let thine heart be shut
> Against the wretch's cries.
>
> For here forlorn and sad I sit,
> Within the wiry grate;
> And tremble at th' approaching morn,
> Which brings impending fate.
>
> If e'er thy breast with freedom glow'd,
> And spurn'd a tyrant's chain,
> Let not thy strong oppressive force
> A free-born mouse detain.
>
> *('The Mouse's Petition')*

From the language of political rights, the mouse turns to the rights of nature, which are physical rights. The great natural law is the right to exist.

> The well taught philosophic mind
> To all compassion gives;
> Casts round the world an equal eye,
> And feels for all that lives.

Not only should there be compassion, but empathy. To see the world with an *equal* eye is to feel the claims of all life. From this philosophical point there is but a short step to the Pythagorean theme, and the mouse takes it:

> If mind, as ancient sages taught,
> A never dying flame,
> Still shifts through matter's varying forms,
> In every form the same,
>
> Beware, lest in the worm you crush
> A brother's soul you find;
> And tremble lest thy luckless hand
> Dislodge a kindred mind.

This is a moral-philosophical and even religious point of view remote from Christianity but closely resembling Jainism, and certain branches of Buddhism. It may well be that our poets were affected, however indirectly, by the new contact with India brought about by colonial expansion in the eighteenth century. But the mouse also entertains the Epicurean idea that there is no life after death—that the bodily life of this existence is our all in all:

> Or, if this transient gleam of day
> Be *all* of life we share,
> Let pity plead within thy breast
> That little *all* to spare.

Ostensibly the mouse is talking *only* of the annihilation in death of mere animals. But by this point there is no felt difference between 'them' and 'us'—all is subsumed as 'we', so the possibility of 'one transient gleam of day' allotted to *all*, man and animal, as the only portion of their existence, is truly included. It scarcely matters, however, which group will perish eternally and which only temporarily—the urgency is so pressing, the life of here and now so immediate. It is hard not to see within this petition a plea for all sense-life, and for the powers of sensing as of the utmost importance, worthy of religious respect. The animal life of 'mere' sensuousness, of sense perception, is the real life. That modern point of view is of course going to clash with Priestley's modern point of view that regards animals as implements in technological expansion. Priestley contradicts nature in deliberately and slowly taking from nature's commoners the vital air. Breathing itself becomes one of the first great primary sensations and sense-pleasures as soon as its cutting-off is threatened.

Barbauld's very popular poem is highly efficacious as verse—if not in stopping experimentation on animals. It is perhaps, however, slightly marred by a hint of self-conscious cuteness. Barbauld's best poem on animal life and animal claims is 'The Caterpillar'. The speaker is the human woman who admits without apology that she has been raising hundreds of cocoons and caterpillars from the orchard tree. But then she looks at one caterpillar on her finger, and cannot kill it:

> No, helpless thing, I cannot harm thee now;
> Depart in peace, thy little life is safe,
> For I have scanned thy form with curious eye,
> Noted the silver line that streaks thy back,
> The azure and the orange that divide
> Thy velvet sides; thee, houseless wanderer,
> My garment has enfolded, and my arm
> Felt the light pressure of thy hairy feet;
> Thou hast curled round my finger; from its tip
> Precipitous descent¡ with stretched out neck,
> Bending thy head in airy vacancy,

This way and that, inquiring, thou hast
  seemed
To ask protection; now, I cannot kill thee.

The caterpillar does not speak in a fabulous manner, but its presence is insisted on. It becomes more real and more active as the speaker progresses. The description of the appearance of the caterpillar is striking in its minute detail. We clarify the silver line, distinguish the azure and the orange.

Such detail combines the scientific interests of the period with its poetic interests. One finds details like this in Thomson's *Seasons*, and Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) is of course full of such detail. Darwin may himself have been influenced by Seward, the earlier poet; she knows and alludes to him, and his biology. His writing while in progress may have influenced her in turn; presumably his work was an influence on Barbauld's later work. We sometimes forget that the 1790s saw the first shoots of an evolutionary hypothesis which was to be formalized and turn into something else after the work of the later Darwin in the next century. Barbauld's description of how the caterpillar *looks* is still in keeping with the lines of what we may call 'male poetry'. But the continuation in intimate physical connection with the caterpillar strikes me as something that one would find only in female poetry—of any period. A subtle use of the Pythagorean motif whereby man and animal are equalized can be recognized in the equalizing of human and insect. 'My arm/ Felt the light pressure of thy hairy feet'—'arm' and 'feet' are both words used of the human body. The woman and the caterpillar begin to share a body, as it were, to trade bodily sensations. The caterpillar is sensing the woman's hand while she senses him. If she is looking at it, so the caterpillar too is looking about. The individual caterpillar becomes a highly sensuous object, not only in its coloration (that kind of sensuous appeal can be captured in glass cases) but in the life that is in it that makes it an agent with impact on the world—the 'light pressure' of its 'hairy feet'. Both alien and homely, the caterpillar has the utmost reality. Its felt immediacy causes the woman to see it in a kind of religious sensation:

> Making me feel and clearly recognize
> Thine individual existence, life,
> And fellowship of sense with all that breathes

To recognize ones own sensuous power, to write sensuously, should entail breaking through to 'the fellowship of sense'.

The pleasure that we might find in this moral is shadowed and complicated by the end of the poem. The woman speaker compares her sparing of the caterpillar in her general 'persecuting zeal' against caterpillars to the act of a soldier who in the midst of war urges on 'the work of death and carnage', but spares one enemy:

> Yet should one
> A single sufferer from the field escaped,
> Panting and pale, and bleeding at his feet,
> Lift his imploring eyes—the hero weeps
> He is grown human, and capricious Pity,
> Which would not stir for thousands, melts for
>   one
> With sympathy spontaneous—This not Virtue
> Yet 'tis the weakness of a virtuous mind.

*('Caterpillar')*

We are here at the end in a very male world of ruthless violence, so consistent that the act of mercy is felt as an anomaly, a whim, a weakness that cannot be described as 'Virtue', but is merely a reflex in favour of individuality. The speaker's own act becomes impossible to categorize. She is not a moral example. There seems no sure way back to 'humanity', save to take the unthinkable road of respecting all life—which might doom her apple tree, but would also put an end to the inhumanity of war. The 'fellowship of sense' opens a way to something more than a sentimental moment. This telling phrase 'fellowship of sense' points towards a feeling or intuition of what might be called 'one flesh' in a sense different from that of the Bible or the Prayer Book's marriage service. The caterpillar is like the human victim—one flesh with us in the 'fellowship of sense'. We have the frustrating glimpse of alternatives that cannot be clearly set out. Barbauld refuses to sentimentalize herself or her sparing of the creature. The momentary relation between herself and that creature, however, is a moment of sensory pleasure, and the living with the caterpillar, following its senses too, offers a route of escape from limitation.

What I have called the 'Pythagorean theme' in eighteenth-century poetry is a trope (or set of tropes) emphasizing the value of the animal existence, the body's own capacities and energies, the holy vitality of the senses. Eighteenth-century women poets keep trying to find ways to express the respect that should be given to the animal and sensory nature. Like Ann Finch in

her 'Nocturnal Reverie', they provide moments of escape from a world where everything is known, the hierarchies are clearly measured, and where the senses (like woman herself) occupy a low place, along with mere 'brutishness'. When I find these eighteenth-century women poets dealing with the relation to animals, they are always trying to express some way of acknowledging equality, and relationship. The 'Pythagorean' poems (and now I know my word has become a kind of shortland) question assumptions about spiritual and moral life, and try to point to other responsibilities. In doing this, the poets exhibit great versatility, and powers not only of sensory description but also of conceptual re-positioning. Some male poets heard them, as well as the other women poets who followed them; I see the influence of these writers on Blake, for example, and certainly on Cowper, who perhaps took aboard more than any other male poetic writer what the women were saying. Yet in Cowper there is, it seems to me, always still that distance between animal and man that is a distance between subject and object—when he describes his hares, for instance. The women poets seem to be bent on breaking down that barrier between subject and object, between 'Man' and animal which is a barrier parallel to the Lockean barrier betwixt mind and world.

### THE FAIRY WAY OF WRITING

There is another trope or device that I would wish to emphasize, partly because it provides a contrast to the Pythagorean motif, a contrast and complement within the women's poetry. Like writing about animals and birds, this subject lends itself to ridicule and dismissal. Women poets often write about elves and fairies. Some of them got quite good at it. Percy told Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi that in her (unacted) verse drama *The Two Fountains* she had written better about fairies than anyone since Shakespeare. This was not a dubious distinction in Percy's eyes, though it might be to others. Women repeatedly chose to deal with elves and fairies partly because, like the animals, these (imaginary) beings offer a reflecting screen where sensation and reflection can be played with, away from the world of man-made regulations and cultural pressures. Moreover, fairies have the distinct advantage over animals—as over humans—that they do not know death. Even

more remarkable, they do not know *pain;* emotional suffering is not part of their scheme of life.

Fairies do not have to be moral—a great convenience, and an enviable one to women, who are always being told they must be moral, chaste and very careful, and should always put other people first. Fairies do none of these things. Frances Greville puts the case most clearly in her 'Prayer for Indifference' of 1759. She asks Oberon to find her a magic balm that will render her unloving and uncaring. The poem is really about the emotional torment of a wife who is not loved by her husband. The fairy power would remove from her the acuteness of emotion which is like veritable sensation. As with physical sensation, pain is stronger than pleasure:

> Far as distress the soul can wound,
> 'Tis pain in each degree;
> Bliss goes but to a certain bound,
> Beyond is agony.

There is a certain affinity with Emily Brontë's Gondal poetry in this style and this tone—one could guess that Brontë knew Greville's often-anthologized poem. Should Oberon grant the boon, she will be saved from moral sensations of empathy, saved from the responsibilities of pity as well as from her own sorrow: 'The heart, that throbbed at others' woe / Shall then scarce feel its own.' If Oberon will grant this, she in turn will wish him 'never-fading bliss':

> So may the glow-worm's glimmering light
> Thy tiny footsteps lead,
> To some new region of delight
> Unknown to mortal tread;
>
> *('A Prayer for Indifference')*

The elf going blithely off to the new region of delight is closely associated with the speaker who would also be gaining a new 'region of delight' unknown to other mortals. Oberon's life is a life of sensations rather than of thoughts. Sensations, unencumbered by sorrow, guilt, or depression, become something most desirable. Such are the sense impressions that the poem ends with, having begun with the turmoil of inner emotional feeling and heart-sadness:

> And be thy acorn goblets filled
> With heaven's ambrosial dew,
> From sweetest, freshest flowers distilled
> That shed fresh sweets for you

Taste, physical taste, takes over from emotional-feeling—again, an overturning of the hierarchical values that say emotional feeling is much more important than physical taste.

When they write about fairies (and elves and nymphs), eighteenth-century women poets gain a release from moral pressure and cultural direction. They can imagine a life where sensation is honoured—and, as not the case with animals, honoured without pain. A number of writers wanted to take a moral holiday with the fairies, who can rejoice in pure sensation. So Anna Seward does, in her 'Song of the Fairies to the Sea-nymphs':

> Hasten, from your coral caves,
> Every nymph that sportive laves,
> In the green sea's oozy wells,
> And gilds the fins, and spots the shells!
> Hasten, and our morrice join,
> Ere the gaudy morning shine!

Surely this is imitated by Ann Radcliffe, in her heroine Emily's poem 'The Sea-nymph' in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), which might be called 'The Sea-nymph's Reply to Seward's Fairies'. Radcliffe's sea-nymph has the advantage over the fairies in being able to hide deep within the cool depths of the sea: 'Down, down a thousand fathom deep, / Among the sounding seas I go'. Sea-nymphs do not, like Ann Finch, need night to escape the heating sun: 'In cool arcades and glassy halls / We pass the sultry hours of noon,/ Beyond wherever sun-beam falls'. The sea-nymphs is not without moral responsibility—she tries to save ships, and to cheer ship wrecked mariners with song. But 'Emily's' poem (which has its disturbing elements, and even undersea acknowledges authority and control emanating from Neptune) ends in a hope of perpetual pleasure:

> Whoe'er ye are that love my lay,
> Come, when red sun-set tints the wave,
> To the still sands, where fairies play:
> There, in cool seas, I love to lave.

The harmony between land and sea, imaged in the dancing of sea-nymphs and land fairies, can take place only at night-time. Both poems, but especially Seward's, fall into the category of Finch's 'Nocturnal Reverie' in imagining an escape from daylight, a refuge from the hot glare of reason and certainty. The Enlightenment sun was certainly felt to have its negative side. Seward's fairies invite the sea-nymphs to join in the antique dance, the 'morrice' before 'gaudy morning'. The fairies and nymphs are somewhat timid creatures, it strikes us—they cannot be imagined as taking control, only as expressing elusiveness. They don't get pinned down—although it is hard to deal with fairy beings extensively without imagining their falling into pain and imprisonment too, as is the case with Mrs Piozzi's *Two Fountains*. At best, the idea of 'fairies' and other little supernatural beings like them permits the imagining of a fully pleasurable relation with nature. As the fairies are not encumbered with souls and responsibilities, they can love the natural world wholeheartedly and even take a share in its creation. Imagining such a love gives an imaginative release which yet is always known to be only evanescent, merely 'fancy'.

Emily, the author of the sea-nymph poem within Radcliffe's novel, is inspired by Renaissance public cultural images when she sees a water-pageant in Venice:

> Neptune, with Venice personified as his queen, came on the undulating waves, surrounded by tritons and sea-nymphs. The fantastic splendour of this spectacle, together with the grandeur of the surrounding palaces, appeared like the vision of a poet suddenly embodied, and the fanciful images, which it awakened in Emily's mind, lingered there. . . She indulged herself in imagining what might be the manners and delights of a sea-nymph, till she almost wished to throw off the habits of mortality, and plunge into the green wave to participate them.

Venice offers images of sensuous pleasure and escape, and the possibility that Venice itself momentarily represents of the 'embodiment' of poetry stimulates Emily to search for more freedom of manners and sensation. Such needs for freedom of manners and sensations of course have to be encoded; the very needs themselves are like the sea-nymphs, kept below, in the depths. Emily knows enough to categorize her reveries in a knowingly negative way: 'she could not forbear smiling at the fancies she had been indulging'. But she goes ahead and embodies her 'fanciful ideas' in her poem.

Customarily, in 'fairy' poems the relation to the fairy world is thought of in terms of relation to water and air—those two elusive elements. The relation to the animal world is harder, darker, more land-based. Accounts of this relation bulge with substance, abound in impacts and disconcerting consumptions and destructions. That is the truer world, and of course the harder to deal with. Much had been done to separate animal from human. Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in its latter parts, however, admits the great difficulty of setting up boundaries—Locke even admits that

Nature is not interested. But few followers of Lockean politics and epistemology wanted to grapple with that. The women were living in a culture which asserted that their own 'lower' status was clearly known and naturally definable, just as was the arrangement of the species below them. In order to liberate the sensuousness in their own writing, they found ways to challenge the arrangements regarding species—including imagining the sensuous life in 'species' that didn't exist, or the harder task of imagining what it feels like to respect the sensuous life of other beings who really do indubitably share our planet, if often only at our will and sovereign pleasure. The sensuousness of the women's poetry seems all the more remarkable if one realizes how many cultural dictates militated against their taking note of their own sensations, and how surprising it is that (on the whole) they avoid that standby of Augustan appeal to the senses, the evocation of disgust. Women poets obviously suspect disgust as having ideological implications. Disgust belongs to the power of the categorizers, who know what is good and what is bad. Disgust is the reaction of the gazers who look at the female poet in Leapor's Mira's picture. Disgust won't do. It turns off the senses that need to be turned on.

**Source:** Margaret Anne Doody, "Sensuousness in the Poetry of Eighteeth-Century Women Poets," in *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730–1820*, edited by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, Macmillan Press, 1999, pp. 3–31.

### Rachel L. Mesch

*In this essay, Mesch examines the novel* Les Lettres d'une Peruvienne *by Francoise de Graffigny in order to show that women participated in the social and philosophical developments of the Enlightenment.*

In her article "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Joan Kelly argues that women did not experience the expansion of social and personal opportunities that characterized this period for men. Rather, the same developments that inspired renewed cultural expression for men had a decisively adverse effect on women. Kelly thus challenges the traditional periodization that summarizes an era without regard for women's roles. In the past several years, Kelly's question has been reformulated with respect to another historical and literary category—the

> **IN A SAUSSURIAN MOMENT, ZILIA REVEALS THE ARBITRARINESS OF THE NAMES AND LETTERS WE USE TO FORM MEANING; WRITING BECOMES JUST ONE IMPERFECT MEANS AMONG OTHERS TO GIVE MATERIALITY TO THOUGHT."**

Enlightenment—for which women's experiences have not been taken fully into account. In most characterizations, the Enlightenment refers to the philosophical innovations undertaken by an elite male group. Women were certainly a favorite topic of the Enlightenment philosophe, whose fascination with otherness made the opposite sex a compelling subject of contemplation. Yet it remains unclear to what extent women themselves were able to participate in and profit from Enlightenment discoveries.

In American commentary on the French tradition, the question of how women experienced the Enlightenment has been inspired largely by a renewed interest in Françoise de Graffigny's *Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne*. This text was widely popular at the time of its publication in 1747, but disappeared from the French canon in the nineteenth century. A reading of Graffigny's novel suggests that, unlike the case of the Renaissance, the intellectual growth that characterized the Enlightenment could have had a certain advantage for women as well, creating an opening for otherwise silenced voices to speak. Even if—and perhaps especially because—Graffigny was not ultimately considered an intellectual peer to her male counterparts, it is striking to see the extent to which she shared in their critical approaches.

Graffigny's epistolary novel continues in the path of her canonized male predecessors, who conceived before her the encounter between French culture and the exotic other. Her novel, which weaves a tragic love story into the cultural exchange, was dismissed until recently by many critics as an inferior imitation of Montesquieu and Voltaire. The heroine of Graffigny's novel is a Peruvian woman, Zilia, shipped off by European captors to France, where she is held in the

household of an amorous Frenchman, Déterville. The majority of the letters that comprise the novel are addressed to Zilia's Peruvian lover, Aza, from whom she has been tragically separated. Writing according to the Peruvian system of knotting known as quipos, Zilia attempts to relay her new experiences to Aza, until she finally discovers that he has betrayed her romantically.

Because *Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne* most often has been considered a roman sentimental and not a roman philosophique according to the dichotomy through which we define the literature of the period, its philosophical implications mostly have been ignored. However, behind the travails of Zilia's unrequited love is a compelling struggle for identity across the terrain of cultural difference. Far from all that is familiar to her, Zilia depends on learning the French language not only for communication, but also in order to construct a new self within a new universe. Her challenge is to assimilate the rules of French culture without submitting blindly to their patriarchal logic. The love relationship becomes what Nancy K. Miller has called "an enabling fiction," no more than a literary device that ultimately falls to the background in the drama of Zilia's identity struggle.

Indeed, through the character of Zilia, Graffigny enables us to hear what the voice of a female Enlightenment might have sounded like, for Zilia is a feminist critic who dismantles the binds of patriarchy using the philosophe's own critical tools. The foremost of these tools is defamiliarization, a common literary device used in Enlightenment philosophical fictions. Through a shifting of perspectives, defamiliarization has the effect of rendering bizarre that which would normally be taken for granted. In Graffigny's novel, it is the French language which is defamiliarized, as Zilia astutely reveals the way language lodges and hides culture's biases. Thanks to her defamiliarizing gaze, Zilia's philosophical vision is so piercing that it challenges the hegemony of the very power structures out of which she speaks. Although in her ignorance of French culture she may first appear naive, Zilia is shrewd in observing the ramifications of this culture for her identity. Her ability to analyze the structures of domination hidden in the French language ultimately free her from their grasp; as a cultural critic, she is able to construct an independent position for

herself that is remarkably free from the traditional requirements of French society. It is thus understandable that Graffigny's critique could not be assimilated entirely into Enlightenment thought. As an intellectual heroine, Zilia challenges not just the barriers confining her within the text, but also those that kept women silent in most of French society.

Graffigny combined in Zilia certain elements of the literary types used by Enlightenment writers to effect the defamiliarizing relationship with French culture, without reconstituting any one of these characters in particular. Montesquieu and Voltaire, for example, used the noble savage and the traveler from far-off lands to stage the conversation between the French and the Other. In noting Zilia's difference from these types, we see that Graffigny has not just haphazardly created a pastiche from this tradition, but rather pieced together her character in such a way as to place her in a privileged position for cultural criticism.

On the one hand, Zilia's exotic origins and her ignorance of Western culture recall the *bon sauvage*. The *bon sauvage*, however, is characterized by his ignorance, which also constitutes his privilege:

> "ne sachant ni lire ni écrire, il s'épargne une foule de maux; il obéit à sa bonne mere, la nature: et donc, il est heureux. Les civilisés sont les vrais barbares: que l'exemple des sauvages leur apprenne à retrouver la liberté et la dignité humaines."

*(Hazard, 18)*

Zilia, by contrast, knows how to read and write; the opposition between nature and culture is thus displaced to the level of language. Indeed, Zilia believes that her kidnappers are the barbarians because, despite their literacy in their own native tongue, they are unable to interpret the signs of her sadness:

> "Loin d'être touché de mes plaintes, mes ravisseurs ne le sont pas même de mes larmes; sourds à mon langage, ils n'entendent pas mieux les cris de mon désespoir."

Her captors' weakness constitutes Zilia's very strength: her ability to read the non-linguistic signs of the other. Furthermore, as a result of her hermeneutic talents, Zilia is not the object of the critical gaze, but rather the critical subject who does the looking and the writing. This subject position links her to the travelers in Montesquieu and Voltaire who arrive in France from

exotic countries. However, these characters, as Janet Altman remarks, "have already received sophisticated European educations before they arrive in France [and] seem to have mastered (or were born knowing) the language of every country they visit" ("Graffigny's Epistemology," 176). Zilia, then, is in a unique linguistic position. She is situated in language—she is literate in her own tongue—but outside of French. This position complicates the prototypical critical relationship with the other, creating a linguistic barrier which Zilia must negotiate in order to render her judgments.

Altman notes that "the rigid delimitation and opposition of male and female spaces, identities, and spheres of activity that so frequently structure more familiar narratives of desire [are] strikingly absent in Graffigny's novel" ("Graffigny's Epistemology," 182). Indeed, the spaces that were opposed in Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* are paradoxically joined in Zilia's experience. There is no longer a relay between the liberated thoughts of the traveler who can explore the world and the confined arena of the woman's words from within the *sérail*; the traveler and the prisoner are now one and the same. This doubled posture only widens the scope of Zilia's vision. At the same time that she is bombarded with the foreign language, Zilia is excluded from most linguistic relationships. Graffigny suggests, however, that Zilia's exclusion from linguistic relationships, which is intimately linked to her femininity, helps her better to understand language's mechanisms. While her Spanish captors use an interpreter to communicate with Aza, they deprive Zilia of any linguistic affirmation. She thus becomes extremely sensitive to what is not said, and this exclusion from language immediately is established as a privileged position:

> Tu crois sincères les promesses que ces barbares te font faire par leur interprète, parce que tes paroles son inviolables; mais moi qui n'entends pas leur langage, moi qu'ils ne trouvent pas digne d'être trompée, je vois leurs actions.

Because Zilia is deemed unworthy of verbal communication, she must interpret actions, which prove to be more reliable than words. She is thus able to see what Aza ignores: verbal language can be duplicitous, and the rules of language are not universal. While the Peruvian never lies, the European manipulates his words in order to hide his actions.

Graffigny presents this prisoner-traveler, at once inside and outside of language, as having the spirit of the *philosophe*. Despite (or perhaps because of) the difficulty in speaking from her position, Zilia wants to learn. The instinct to give up (as did Montesquieu's Roxane) is countered by the stronger instinct to express her feelings. In one moment of frustration, Zilia closes her eyes to escape the foreignness around her; yet she discovers that

> "renfermée en moimême, mes inquiétudes n'en étaient que plus vives, et le désir de les exprimer plus violent."

It is as if the impossibility of articulating her surroundings inspires her desire to keep trying to speak nonetheless:

> Fatiguée de la confusion de mes idées … j'avais résolu de ne plus penser; mais comment ralentir le mouvement d'une âme privée de toute communication, qui n'agit que sur elle-même, et que de si grands intérêts excitent à réfléchir? Je ne le puis … je cherche des lumières avec une agitation qui me dévore.

The vocabulary used to describe Zilia's unceasing desire to learn implicitly inscribes her within the philosophical project of the era. Her philosophical leanings are grounded in her origins: she comes from *le pays du Soleil*—in other words, *le pays des Lumières*. Zilia seems predisposed not just for critical but for philosophical success, in the self-conscious tradition of the era.

Zilia's assimilation of the French language recalls the means of linguistic classification practiced by the Enlightenment's natural scientists. In *Les Mots et les Choses*, Foucault describes the method of *l'histoire naturelle* as fundamentally a theory of language, arguing that natural science consisted of a process of renaming objects in nature:

> "Pour établir le grand tableau sans faille des espèces, des genres, et des classes, il a fallu que l'histoire naturelle utilise, critique, classe et finalement reconstitue à nouveaux frais le langage" (175).

Natural science implicitly recognizes that language is what enables us to understand nature in the first place. Foucault explains that

> "les mots et les choses sont très rigoureusement entrecroisés: la nature ne se donne qu'à travers la grille des dénominations" (173).

As a result of this interdependence, natural science demands a critical relationship with

language through which the existing correspondences between les mots and les choses are challenged.

Turning back to Zilia, we can see similar dynamics of renaming at work. For Foucault, the possibility of *l'histoire naturelle* depends on the preexistence of non-scientific language:

> "au-dessus des mots de tous les jours (et à travers eux puisqu'on doit bien les utiliser pour les descriptions premières) se bâtit l'édifice d'une langue au second degré où règnent enfin les Noms exacts des choses" (172).

Similarly, like the natural scientist who works from within his ability to talk about nature in non-scientific terms, Zilia enters the French language from within her own language. If Zilia had been a noble savage, outside of any sophisticated linguistic system, she could have learned all French vocabulary by simply drawing upon the stable relationship between French word and French thing, without the interference of her own linguistic code. But because she already has associations between words and things in her native language, she quite naturally substitutes Peruvian words for French things when possible. When she encounters French things that do not exist in Peru, she is unable to access a pre-existing relationship between word and thing. Instead of simple substitutions of Peruvian words for French ones, she must divide each thing into its comprehensible parts—releasing the thing from the word—in order to arrive at something she can articulate. This position between languages enables her critique. She unwittingly breaks down the relationship between French word and French thing, as she linguistically recontextualizes it according to her own interpretive constructs. Her description ultimately has the effect of transforming the thing, of defamiliarizing it, as it is resituated in a new language all her own.

This process of deconstructing language before renaming recalls the dynamics of natural science described by Foucault:

> L'histoire naturelle est située à la fois avant et après le langage; elle défait celui de tous les jours, mais pour le refaire et découvrir ce qui l'a rendu possible à travers les ressemblances aveugles de l'imagination; elle le critique, mais pour en découvrir le fondement. … Entre le langage et la théorie de la nature, il existe donc un rapport qui est de type critique; connaître la nature, c'est en effet bâtir à partir du langage un langage vrai mais qui découvrira à quelles

conditions tout language est possible et dans quelles limites il peut avoir un domaine de validité.

Like the scientist, Zilia undoes familiar language as she searches for the basis of its authority. In finding herself between the word and the thing, she is able to discover the hidden conditions that make language possible, but that the false simplicity of labels hides. This position is necessarily critical, but it has a productive goal. Once Zilia has challenged the foundations, she will build her own language, assimilating all the corrections that her critique has enabled. Like the *histoire naturelle*, then, Zilia

> "se loge tout entière dans l'espace du langage, et elle a pour fin dernière de donner aux choses leur vraie dénomination."
>
> *(Foucault, 175)*

The advantage of Zilia's position becomes most explicit when she reveals the non-universality of that which we normally associate with all language, such as writing and books. To describe writing, for example, Zilia does not need to write. The first seventeen letters are "written" with quipos, a Peruvian system of knotting. In one of her last letters written with quipos, she describes writing through her own form of non-oral communication:

> Cela se fait en traçant avec une plume de petites figures qu'on appelle lettres, sur une matière blanche et mince que l'on nomme papier; ces figures ont des noms; ces noms, mêlés ensemble, représentent les sons des paroles; mais ces noms et ces sons me paraissent si peu distincts les uns des autres, que si je réussis à les entendre, je suis bien assurée que ce ne sera pas sans beaucoup de peines.

This is defamiliarization par excellence. Rendered by Zilia

> "une méthode dont on se sert ici pour donner une sorte d'existence aux pensées",

writing is recontextualized as a social convention rather than a universal and natural choice for self-expression. In a Saussurian moment, Zilia reveals the arbitrariness of the names and letters we use to form meaning; writing becomes just one imperfect means among others to give materiality to thought. Through her anthropological observations, Zilia comes to realize that language is produced by and inscribed in culture, as she remarks with her last quipos:

> "le langage humain est sans doute de l'invention des hommes."

Zilia thus reminds her readers that she sees their writing just as they see hers. As a critic, she has called into question any assumptions we have about what is "normal" by upsetting the stable balance between word and thing.

Zilia's desire to master the structures of the French language requires her mastery of French culture as well. Because cultural indexes are more easily accessed than language itself, interpretation of this culture becomes the first step towards linguistic competence. As Zilia encounters objects which are not linked to a specific vocabulary in her native tongue, she defines these objects through their cultural significance. In so doing, Zilia reveals dynamics that would be hidden by a simple and stable relationship between word and thing. For example, upon finding herself on a ship, Zilia writes an anguished lament to Aza, in which she notes the disjunction between what she sees and what she can articulate:

> "pourrais-je te persuader ce que je ne comprends pas moimême?."

At first, Zilia can only determine in the most general terms what this machine is not: natural.

> "Toute la connaissance que j'en ai, est que cette demeure n'a pas été construite par un être ami des hommes."

This initial instinct is confirmed when she arrives finally at the window:

> "Quelle horrible surprise! … Je suis dans une de ces maisons flottantes dont les Espagnols se sont servis pour atteindre jusqu'à nos malheureuses contrées."

Many modern critics have dismissed Zilia's defamiliarizing moments as hackneyed replays of Enlightenment clichés underlining the naiveté of the ingénu character. Zilia's naive sounding reaction forcefully betrays, however, the hidden motives of the seemingly normal object. Through her foreign eyes, Zilia identifies the boat as a symbol of the corruption of European power; the ship is defined as the mechanism of foreign invasion, indeed, the most basic threat to the integrity of her nation. Zilia compensates for her lack of vocabulary, then, with an explanation that penetrates the object's significance in much greater depth than its lexical label ever could.

Another instance of Zilia's defamiliarizing cultural critique occurs when she first rides in a carriage. Zilia is at once delighted and troubled by the pleasures of this mode of travel:

> J'ai goûté pendant ce voyage des plaisirs qui m'étaient inconnus. Renfermée dans le temple dès ma plus tendre enfance, je ne connaissais pas les beautés de l'univers; quel bien j'avais perdu! Les yeux parcourent, embrassent et se reposent tout à la fois sur une infinité d'objects aussi variés qu'agréables.

Again, Zilia's position subtly preserves the trauma of exclusion while using this position to a critical advantage. Even from her exile, she speaks as a philosophe, astutely grasping the points of cultural tension and ultimately voicing her objections. She is struck by the pleasures of the mobile liberty she is experiencing because she has always been confined. She is thus able to appreciate the very ability to see the world and its infinity of new objects—an ability that the traditional Enlightenment traveler took for granted. At the same time—also because she has always been confined—Zilia is more sensitive to the ways in which the illusions of power can distort one's relationship to the universe:

> On croit ne trouver de bornes, à sa vue que celles du monde entier. Cette erreur nous flatte; elle nous donne une idée satisfaisante de notre propre grandeur, et semble nous rapprocher du Créateur de tant de merveilles … Un calme délicieux pénètre dans notre âme, nous jouissons de l'univers comme le possédant seuls; nous n'y voyons rien qui ne nous appartienne.

Without access to the sociolect in which the mechanisms of power are couched within familiar and non-threatening terms, Zilia penetrates the psychological effects of the world view that authorizes and motivates the French voice. Although she temporarily delights in seeing from this position, Zilia cannot help but note its dangerous error. The sensation of omnipotence she experiences is countered by an implicit reminder that the French pleasures of possessing the universe are a threat to her own Peruvian heritage. She finds herself seeing from between these two worlds, negotiating between two fundamentally different linguistic realms. In order to speak from this vantage point, her challenge will be to reconcile the language of the captor with the position of the captive.

Zilia's ability to see the cultural role of the objects she encounters enables her to avoid assimilating these roles into her own usage. A prime example of this is her introduction to the mirror, another object which had a pre-existing relationship to the French ingénu character. Zilia's reaction to the mirror is different from that of the Sicilian slave in Prévost's *Histoire*

*d'une Grecque moderne* (1740), to choose one example, because the defamiliarized moment is followed by a rejection of the mirror. In contrast to her predecessor, Graffigny allows her character to distinguish herself from the cultural construction she encounters—to voice the critique herself rather than to be the object of it. Just as the modes of travel revealed the psychology of the Frenchman, Zilia's reaction to the mirror stages the fundamental psychological differences between Zilia and the Frenchwoman. Unlike French women, Zilia has never seen herself from the outside. As she stands before the mirror, she believes she is seeing a Peruvian sister:

> Quelle surprise extrême, de ne trouver qu'une résistance impénétrable où je voyais une figure humaine … je le touchais, je lui parlais, et je le voyais en même temps fort près et fort loin de moi. … Le Cacique m'a fait comprendre que la figure que je voyais était la mienne; mais de quoi cela m'instruit-il? Le prodige en est-il moins grand? Suis-je moins mortifiée de ne trouver dans mon esprit que des erreurs ou des ignorances?

Rather than delight in the pleasure of her own image, Zilia is troubled. Because her identity is composed from within, she cannot understand the purpose of this object. Her discomfort points to what is ultimately a basic cultural distinction. French women are concerned with their external appearance, at the expense of their internal well-being. They are thus more accustomed to looking at themselves than to communicating with others. In a later letter Zilia attributes this fault to their education:

> Au peu de soin que l'on prend de leur âme, on serait tenté de croire que les Français sont dans l'erreur de certains peuples barbares qui leur en refusent une. Régler les mouvements du corps, arranger ceux du visage, composer l'extérieur, sont les points essentiels de l'éducation.

By refusing to identify from the outside, Zilia is rejecting a fundamental relationship between French language and culture. She chooses to exclude this French object, which essentially defines the French woman, from her own French vocabulary. Paradoxically, her refusal to assimilate the mirror into her own self-conception, to view herself from the exterior, enables her to speak French better—to be more French, in a sense, than the French women themselves. Because she learns French outside of the French educational system, she succeeds in achieving a higher linguistic competence. She remarks:

> [Les Françaises] ignorent jusqu'à l'usage de leur langue naturelle; il est rare qu'elles la parlent correctement, et je ne m'aperçois pas sans une extrême surprise que je suis à présent plus savante qu'elles à cet égard.

Thus, Zilia underlines the fundamental contradictions that create the gap between

> "[ce que les Françaises] sont et ce que l'on imagine qu'elles devraient être."

As she rebuilds the language according to her own voice, she will avoid submitting to such contradictions.

Before she has learned to speak, Zilia begins to communicate with her captors using the signs she can assimilate: gestures, actions, and expressions. She notes that one captor

> "à son air de grandeur, me rend, je crois, à sa façon, beaucoup de respect;"

another (Déterville) takes her hand repeatedly, which she interprets as a kind of superstition. This non-verbal language makes explicit certain interpersonal relationships hidden in the language of words; it also betrays their contradictions, which are confusing to Zilia.

> Un moment détruit l'opinion qu'un autre moment m'avait donnée de leur caractère et de leur façon de penser à mon égard. Sans compter un nombre infini de petites contradictions, ils me refusent … jusqu'aux aliments nécessaires au soutien de la vie, jusqu'à la liberté de choisir la place où je veux être. … D'un autre côté, si je réfléchis sur l'envie extrême qu'ils témoignent de conserver mes jours … je suis tentée de penser qu'ils me prennent pour un être d'une espèce supérieure à l'humanité.

Paradoxically, Zilia thinks she does not understand the behavior of her male captors because of the rigorousness of her observations. In the hopes of understanding their wishes for her, she interprets every interaction, expecting to find logic in relationships that reveal themselves as fundamentally irrational. What the reader understands is that Déterville is in love with Zilia; we are therefore not surprised by the combination of worship of the object of desire and exertion of power over this object. To Zilia, however, one aspect of Déterville's behavior cannot be reconciled with the other; her discomfort challenges the accepted symmetry between adoration and subjugation.

Zilia's unsuspecting entrapment within the contradiction of male desire reveals the extent to which female oppression by the male lover can be embedded in and protected by language:

Il commence par me faire prononcer distincte-
ment des mots de sa langue. Dès que j'ai répété
après lui, oui, je vous aime, ou bien, je vous
promets d'être à vous, la joie se répand sur son
visage, il me baise les mains avec transport, et
avec un air de gaieté tout contraire au sérieux
qui accompagne le culte divin.

Because she cannot yet understand Déter-
ville's words, Zilia continues to interpret his
actions. She observes that

"le ton, l'air, et la forme qu'il y emploie me
persuadent que ce n'est qu'un jeu à l'usage de
sa nation."

She concludes that the repetition of these
phrases are part of some sort of French custom-
ary exchange; thus, the actual formulas repeated
lose their meaning. Indeed, Zilia's ignorance
enables her to understand this exchange in a
more profound way than Déterville can himself.
He maintains the illusion that Zilia is learning in
repeating, that with each repetition she means
more fully what she says. But all that Zilia learns
is that this repetition in itself makes the French-
man happy; or, in other words, French custom
requires that the man dictate and the woman
repeat. From the point of view of the reader,
who understands the meaning of the repeated
words, the cultural critique is even stronger. As
she blindly repeats these words while ignoring
their coded significance, Zilia becomes the
woman parrot who chirps for the master all
that he wants to hear; her own feelings are nec-
essarily excluded from this exchange. A phrase
normally charged with emotional significance
(especially in the roman sentimental, the genre
in which this novel is usually classified) is thus
stripped of its sense when it serves as a tool of
male domination.

Zilia's linguistic perspicacity assures that,
when she finally learns to speak and write, she
will have discarded all the mechanisms of
French culture which hinder her ability to com-
municate freely. Her confrontation with the
dynamics of French culture and her apprecia-
tion for the conditions which make language
possible enable her to

"bâtir à partir du langage un langage vrai."

*(Focault, 175)*

Just as she rejected the mirror as a founda-
tion for her subjectivity, she reconstructs verbal
language with respect to her own sensibilities. As
a result, her language is markedly different from
that of her French master. Zilia learns to speak

French while Déterville is at war. When he
returns, she demonstrates to her teacher what
she has learned, but the teacher no longer under-
stands the words of his student. Zilia insists that
she loves Déterville, but he is unable to under-
stand her usage.

"Mais expliquez-moi quel sens vous attachez à
ces mots adorables: je vous aime,"

he pleads, but Zilia has clearly missed the
pained desire underlying this plea. In a rather
striking reversal, the foreigner explains to the
native the meaning of his own words:

"Ces mots doivent … vous faire entendre que
vous m'êtes cher, que votre sort m'intéresse,
que l'amitié et la reconaissance m'attachent à
vous."

As a result of her cultural critique, she has
been able to separate the

"je vous aime"

from the

"je vous promets d'être à vous";

she has unhinged the verb aimer from amour
and linked it to *amitié*.

Indeed, in the new lexicon that Zilia has
created for herself as a French woman, love is
no longer an active possibility for Zilia. Once
Déterville tries to explain his feelings, to con-
vince her that he loves her—in the French
sense—she is shocked:

Comment cela se pourrait-il? repris-je. Vous
n'êtes point de ma nation; loin que vous
m'ayez choisie pour votre épouse, le hasard
seul nous a réunis, et ce n'est même que
d'aujourd'hui que nous pouvions librement
nous communiquer nos idées.

If love is based upon similarity and homoge-
neous communication, love cannot exist between
a French man and a Peruvian woman. In a sense,
then, Peruvian love cannot be translated into
French. For French women, love is the only emo-
tion to be concerned with

("Si je leur parle de sentiments, elles se défend-
ent d'en avoir, parce qu'elles ne connaissent
que celui de l'amour;");

for Peruvian women, it is one emotion
among many others. Furthermore, if French
love does not interest Zilia, Peruvian love
seems no longer possible. After coming to
terms with Aza's infidelity, the love that she
relished in all her previous letters is rewritten
as a kind of slavery. She warns Déterville in her
last letter:

"C'est en vain que vous vous flatteriez de faire prendre à mon coeur de nouvelles chaînes."

Her new-found ability to speak from the position of another language thus also enables her to look critically upon her own culture and to reconstruct Peruvian by the same logic.

As the novel closes, Zilia has succeeded in finding a place for herself in the French language even as she holds fast to her Peruvian distinctions. In this respect, she succeeds where Aza fails; Aza has been seduced by the new culture of his surroundings and chooses to live according to its rules rather than his own. Ironically, this choice prevents him from marrying a Peruvian woman. Zilia, on the other hand, refuses to submit to the end carved out for her within French society—marriage with Déterville. As she replaces amour with *amitié,* she shows her resolve to live in French according to her own modifications of its rules. Furthermore, in her last letter, Zilia proposes the replacement of her monologic letters with a dialogue. The intellectual exchange she invites would neutralize the power hierarchy between captor and captive:

> Vous me donnerez quelque connaissance de vos sciences et de vos arts; vous goûterez le plaisir de la supériorité; je la reprendrai en développant dans votre coeur des vertus que vous n'y connaissez pas.

Zilia's refusal of the traditional female dénouement of marriage is matched, then, with the promise of an ongoing intellectual conversation. Rather than join with Déterville as his wife, Zilia offers to join him as a fellow philosopher, ready both to learn and to teach. Zilia's specialty, however, is not simply the virtues of the heart. Her existence in the world of the other has equipped her with a unique lens into understanding the self.

Even as Graffigny excludes love from her dénouement, she offers a more fundamental relationship between philosophy and feelings— a relationship that liberates woman from her traditional ending. At the end of the novel, Zilia describes a new *jouissance* that links feelings to thoughts:

> "le plaisir d'être; ce plaisir oublié, ignoré même de tant d'aveugles humains; cette pensée si douce, ce bonheur si pur, je suis, je vis, j'existe" (362).

In substituting this philosophical *jourissance* for the traditional union of lovers, Graffigny succeeds in creating a literary space in which the woman can determine her own identity.

As I have noted already, critics of *Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne* have traditionally classified it as a love story rather than a roman philosophique. That Graffigny's contemporary readers shared this view is confirmed by their dissatisfaction with the ending, in which the love plot they had been following ultimately is subverted and eclipsed by the philosophical resolution. Readers who considered Zilia's social commentaries as mere asides were naturally frustrated with this lack of a romantic dénouement. Even those who took her philosophizing seriously were unsettled by her refusal of marriage and were troubled by the intersection of the love story and the cultural critique. They were unsettled, then, by the impact of the female philosophical voice on the structures of *sensibilité*. In fact, in her manipulation of literary convention, Graffigny suggests a more profound and problematic relationship between the categories of roman sentimental and roman philosophique than had previously been imagined. In a sense, *Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne* had to take the form of a roman sentimental, because Zilia's philosophical critique arises from her imprisonment within the love narrative that had defined women's roles. Before Zilia, there had been no place for a female intellectual in the roman sentimental. By bringing her philosopher into the boudoir, so to speak, Graffigny protested against the limitations of the female narrative. She temporarily shifted the paradigms of the philosophe, suggesting that his intellectual structures restricted the possibilities for representing women's lives. As Graffigny adds a certain emotional urgency to the cultural critique by making identity politics a condition for narrative voice, we catch a glimpse of what it might have meant to be a female philosophe. For Graffigny, it seems, such a philosophizing in the feminine meant an attention to both the emotional and the intellectual stakes involved in the construction of an independent female voice.

Paradoxically, we might measure Graffigny's intellectual success by her practical failure. Like Déterville who could not recognize Zilia once she had assimilated his own teachings, Graffigny's contemporaries could not fully interpret the message of their own student. While her stylistic innovation of combining the

cultural critic and romantic heroine were noted by at least some of her peers, the political implications of this gesture were ignored. Instead of contemplating the choice of philosophy over marriage, Graffigny's readers criticized this lack of traditional closure. Zilia's success as a female philosophe points then to both the possibility and impossibility for women to have participated in the Enlightenment. On the one hand, Enlightenment critical strategies opened up an avenue for critique; with these tools of observation and analysis, even the most disenfranchised voice—the voice of the female foreigner—could express its opposition to the dominant patriarchal culture. On the other hand, the feminist implications that emerged with this voice were perhaps too threatening to be recognized as such. Recent research has suggested that Graffigny's reception was relatively blind to her gender; readers situated her originality within the context of Enlightenment innovations—thus ignoring the feminist subversiveness of her heroine—and even saw her as paving the way for the likes of Diderot, Voltaire, and Rousseau. It might also be argued, however, that Graffigny's most radical innovation in her philosophic and sentimental novel was in using a female intellectual to collapse the structures that had limited her self-expression. Unfortunately, no tradition of writers—male or female—seized upon Graffigny's path as a new way to represent the female voice.

**Source:** Rachel L. Mesch, "Did Women Have an Enlightenment? Graffigny's Zilia As Female Philosophe," in *Romantic Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4, November 1998, pp. 523–37.

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> This volume collects twelve essays by worldwide scholars of eighteenth-century literature. The contributors explore the works and influences of diverse figures such as Christian Wolff, Gottfried Leibniz, G. E. Lessing, and Immanuel Kant.

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> Broadie reveals the importance of Scottish thinkers and writers during the Enlightenment by compiling historical information with relevant writings, some of which have not been reprinted since the eighteenth century. The book is arranged by subject, making it easy for students to find passages relevant to their interests.

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> Porter revises traditional opinion in regard to the importance of British writers during the Enlightenment. Although emphasis is usually placed on France and America, Porter demonstrates how the movement was advanced by the

efforts of great British thinkers, who made a substantial impact on their society.

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This collection of essays sheds light on the role of women during the Enlightenment. The essays explore the important contributions made by women in politics, society, culture, and science.

# Existentialism

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1960

Existentialism is a philosophical approach that rejects the idea that the universe offers any clues about how humanity should live. A simplified understanding of this thought system can be found in Jean-Paul Sartre's often-repeated dictum, "Existence precedes essence." What this means is that the identity of any one person—their essence—cannot be found by examining what other people are like, but only in what that particular person has done. Because no one can claim that his or her actions are "caused" by anyone else, existentialist literature focuses on freedom and responsibility.

Existentialism attained the height of its popularity in France during World War II. While the German army occupied the country, the philosophers and writers who gathered to discuss and argue their ideas at the cafés in Paris captured the attention of intellectuals around the world. The oppressive political climate under the Nazis and the need for underground resistance to the invading political force provided the ideal background for Existentialism's focus on individual action and responsibility.

Although the French war-era writers are most frequently associated with Existentialism, its roots began much earlier. Existentialism can be seen as the response to the frightening loneliness that prompted Friedrich Nietzsche to pronounce in the 1880s that "God is dead." People's loss of faith in religious and social order created
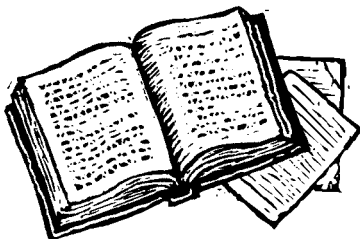
an understanding of personal responsibility, which led to literary works that reflect the existentialist's loneliness, isolation, and fear of the uncaring universe. Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels, written in the 1860s and 1870s, show existential themes, as do twentieth-century works by Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin, and Nathaniel West. The French existentialists were so influential on writers elsewhere in Europe and in the United States that many contemporary philosophical works show some influence of their thought.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986)

Beauvoir was born in Paris on January 9, 1908, and lived there most of her life. She was educated at the Sorbonne, where she met Jean-Paul Sartre in 1929. They began a personal and intellectual relationship that continued for fifty years. Mostly known for her 1949 book *The Second Sex*, a two-volume examination of the roles of women throughout history, Beauvoir was also a prolific writer of fiction. Her novels, mostly based on events of her own life, provide readers with fictionalized versions of the vibrant intellectual scene in Paris throughout the forties and fifties. They include *She Came to Stay* (1949), based on the romantic complication between her and Sartre and a young student who lived with them; *The Blood of Others* (1946), about a young man's struggle to remain uninvolved in the political situation around him; and *The Mandarins* (1954), about the dissolution of the Parisian intellectual community after the war. *The Mandarins* won the prestigious Prix Goncourt. Beauvoir also wrote plays and philosophical texts. Her death from pneumonia on April 14, 1986, marked the end of the first generation of existentialists.

### Albert Camus (1913–1960)

Albert Camus was one of the most influential figures in the existentialist movement that emerged in Paris in the years before and during the Second World War, although he himself refused to accept the label "existentialist." Camus was born November 7, 1913, in Mondovi, Algeria, a country in northern Africa that at the time was a colony of France. Soon after France entered in World War I, Camus's father



*Franz Kafka* (*AP Images*)

was drafted into the army, and he never returned. Albert Camus and his brother were raised by his mother and grandmother in poverty, in a three-room apartment in the working-class section of Algiers.

Camus studied philosophy at the University of Algiers. Graduating in 1936, he was unable to work as a teacher because he had tuberculosis. He became affiliated with a leftist theater group and wrote for a newspaper and moved to Paris just before the start of World War II. In 1942, he published one of the most important and influential novels of his career, *The Stranger*, about a man who, acting out of complex circumstances, kills a man whom he does not know. The situation explored in the book and the protagonist's detached, curious attitude about his own behavior captured the basic mood of Existentialism and made Camus an international success. His second most significant novel, *The Plague*, was published in 1947. The novel's depiction of a plague that sweeps across a country was seen as an allegory for the wartime occupation of Nazi forces and of the struggle of the individual against political oppression.

As his fame grew, Camus distanced himself from the existentialist movement in Paris,

rejecting their Marxist political stance in favor of political action free of any party. The intellectual rift between him and Jean-Paul Sartre became well known in France. Camus's literary reputation suffered, as his opponents painted him as a populist who was afraid of offending the bourgeoisie because his main interest was selling books. He stayed active in the theater, writing plays and sometimes directing, and in 1957, at age forty-three, Camus won the Nobel Prize for literature. He died in an automobile accident near Paris on January 4, 1960.

### Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881)

Dostoevsky was a Russian novelist whose works examine human existence as a tragedy in which the struggle for rationality is constantly undermined by the inherent senselessness in human events. Born October 30, 1821, in Moscow, he was the son of a surgeon, a cruel and strict man who was murdered by one of his serfs when Dostoevsky was seventeen. In college Dostoevsky studied to be a military engineer, a career path he abandoned after graduation in order to be a writer. His early novels were well received, but they did not anticipate the intellectual achievements he was to later reach.

In his twenties, Dostoevsky began associating with a group of radical socialists, for which he was arrested and sentenced to death. The death sentence was commuted, but the feeling of impending death affected him permanently. He served four years of hard labor, followed by four years of military service.

In 1864, he published *Notes from the Underground*, a short novel that presents the view that humans value freedom over all else, even happiness. This emphasis on freedom identifies Dostoevsky as an antecedent of the existentialist movement. His next novel, *Crime and Punishment*, remains his most popular work, and it presents the existential situation of a man who kills another man while robbing him and learns to cope with the moral ramifications of his action. His novels *The Possessed* and *The Idiot* address the issue of moral behavior in a world in which the actions of humans are not controlled by God. His final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, was completed just months before Dostoevsky's death from emphysema complications on January 28, 1881. Its plot concerns four sons who each bear some guilt in the death of their father, mirroring the guilt Dostoevsky himself felt after his father's murder.

### Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961)

Ernest Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois, on July 21, 1899. At age eighteen, Hemingway did not want to go to college, choosing instead to be a newspaper reporter. Six months later, in 1918, he joined the Red Cross Ambulance Corps to aid World War I soldiers on the Italian front. He was wounded after only a few months and was sent home. Hemingway resumed reporting work, eventually moving to Paris to be a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. There he connected with prominent contemporaries such as Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and John Dos Passos. Encouraged by this group of writers, known later as the Lost Generation, Hemingway began to write fiction and poetry. His novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) is a semi-autobiographical account of a group of expatriates traveling around Europe. Hemingway returned to North America in 1923. By 1929, the success of Hemingway's novels made him financially independent. He lived in Key West, Florida, traveling to Spain and Africa to gather material for his writing. Hemingway won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953 for *The Old Man and the Sea*; the following year, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Hemingway was an active sportsman—and accident prone, receiving serious burns, sprains, gashes, and other injuries on his adventures. His health was also degraded by alcoholism. His memory purportedly damaged by electroconvulsive therapy, Hemingway committed suicide on July 2, 1961, at his home in Ketchum, Idaho.

### Franz Kafka (1883–1924)

A writer of short stories and novels, Kafka often portrayed a surreal world, touching upon themes of modern life such as alienation, absurdity, and the deeply felt dread that is often expressed in existential literature.

Born in Prague, Bohemia (later Czechoslovakia), on July 3, 1883, Kafka spent his childhood in Prague's Jewish ghetto. He was educated as a lawyer and spent some time in a government job, working on workmen's compensation claims. He published several important short stories, including "The Hunger Artist" and *The Metamorphosis*. In spite of his request that the manuscripts of his novels be destroyed after his death, his literary executor saved them

and published them. They include *The Trial*, about a man who finds himself accused of a crime, although no one will tell him the charge against him, and *The Castle*, about a similarly indecipherable bureaucracy that keeps the main character from entering the building referred to in the title.

Kafka died of complications from tuberculosis on June 3, 1924, at the age of 41. He thought that his literary career had been a failure, when in fact his insights into the fear and confusion caused by modern social life were to make him one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century.

### Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

Kierkegaard was born on May 5, 1813, in Copenhagen, Denmark. His father rose from poverty to amass a considerable fortune, retiring early to devote his time to Christian philosophy. At eighteen, Kierkegaard entered the University of Copenhagen to study theology. On his twenty-second birthday, Kierkegaard's life changed when he found out that his father's Christianity was flawed: the older man had once cursed God and had years earlier impregnated a servant. This revelation drove Kierkegaard from religious studies to a life of hedonistic excess. Another significant event in his life happened when, at twenty-seven, he became engaged to a beautiful heiress but called the engagement off two days later. The woman went on to marry and lead a happy life, but Kierkegaard continued to obsess over her throughout his writing career.

Kierkegaard's writings are a mixture of fiction, philosophy, letters, journal entries, aphorisms, and parables. He rejected formal philosophical systems of knowledge, maintaining that no one system could ever offer a complete understanding of the world. His first work, *Either/Or*, was an assemblage of short unrelated sketches aimed at convincing readers that life is a series of choices. He went on to produce over twenty books. The most significant of these, such as *Fear and Trembling* and *The Concept of Dread*, explore the terrible aspects of human freedom. The other significant aspect of his philosophy was its fervently Christian nature despite the philosopher's strong opposition to organized religion.

Kierkegaard died in Copenhagen on November 11, 1855. During his lifetime he was mocked in newspapers and vilified in churches, and his writing was not read outside Denmark until well into the twentieth century. In the early 2000s his ideas are recognized as the groundwork of existential thought.

### Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)

Sartre was the single most important figure of French Existentialism. Born June 21, 1905, in Paris, France, and raised by middle-class Protestants, Sartre made the decision at an early age to be a writer and to expose the hypocrisy of the comfortable life offered to him by his parents and grandparents. In college he studied philosophy, particularly the branch known as Phenomenology, which concerns itself with the fact that life can be experienced but not really known. Throughout the 1930s, he wrote both fiction and philosophy with equal sincerity, leading, in 1938, to the autobiographical novel *Nausea*, which helped define the uneasy position of people in the modern world. A short story collection followed. His reputation as a literary writer established, Sartre distinguished himself as one of the century's most important philosophers with the 1943 publication of *Being and Nothingness*, in which he examines the human situation as the awkward position of existing but being aware of nonexistence.

In the years after World War II, when Existentialism reached the height of its popularity, Sartre remained in the international spotlight as a philosopher, writer, and political activist. He wrote several plays that continue to be performed into the twenty-first century, including *Dirty Hands*, *No Exit*, and *The Flies*, all demonstrating the existentialist motto, coined by Sartre, "To be is to do." In 1964 Sartre was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, but he refused to accept it because he did not think that such an establishment should define a writer's achievement. Sartre was a familiar face around Paris and was continuously in the news until his death on April 15, 1980, from a lung ailment.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The Brothers Karamazov

Most of Dostoevsky's works concern the existentialist struggle between freedom and responsibility, but the theme is handled with particular grace in his last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, first published in 1880. In this book, a son kills

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS
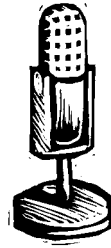
- Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir are featured in the 1979 documentary film *Sartre by Himself*. Released as a motion picture in the United States in 1983, it was as of 2008 available from Citidal Video. Urizen Books published a book of the interviews from the film in 1978.

- William Hurt, Raul Julia, and Robert Duvall starred in a 1994 film of *The Plague*, by Albert Camus. As of 2008, the cassette was available from LIVE Home Video.

- Marcello Mastroianni, Anna Karina, and Georges Wilson starred in the 1968 film version of *The Stranger*, Camus's most famous novel. The film is in French with English subtitles and as of 2008 was available on cassette from Paramount Pictures.

- The life of Jean-Paul Sartre is the subject of *Existence Is Absurd*, a video presentation that was part of the Maryland Public Television series *From Socrates to Sartre*, narrated by Thelma Z. Lavine and available from Insight Media.

- A six-videocassette course in the basics of Existentialism, entitled *No Excuses: Existentialism and the Meaning of Life*, is available from The Teaching Company of Springfield, Virginia. Dr. Robert Solomon conducts the twenty-four lectures in this 2000 series.

- An audiocassette recording of Sartre's play *No Exit* was released in 1973 by the Edwards/ Everett Company of Deland, Florida.

- A British Broadcasting Corporation program, *Daughters of Beauvoir*, was made available on a 1989 videocassette from Filmmakers Library of New York.

- An audio cassette adaptation of Albert Camus's novel *The Plague* was recorded at Constitution Hall in Washington, DC, on May 11, 1973, with Alec McCowan narrating. Featuring music by the National Symphony Orchestra, it was released in 1975 by Decca.

- *The Little Prince* (1974) is a classic film that won a Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score in 1975. Directed by Stanley Donen, it stars Steven Warner as the little prince and also features roles by Richard Kiley, Bob Fosse, Gene Wilder, and Joss Ackland. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from Paramount.

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his father, while his two brothers, for separate reasons, feel a sense of guilt over having let the event occur. One chapter in particular "The Grand Inquisitor" was instrumental in promoting existential themes long before the term "Existentialism" even came into usage. This section, a dream sequence, concerns a debate between an inquisitor who represents the devil, and Christ himself, regarding the question of whether humans are or should be free. Long been considered Dostoevsky's most brilliant work, *The Brothers Karamazov* is a most thought-provoking novel by one Russian literature's most philosophical writers.

## The Immoralist

André Gide was a great influence on the French existentialists, particularly his 1902 novel *The Immoralist*. It concerns a scholar from Paris who falls ill while traveling with his new bride in Tunis. He survives, but his illness leaves him with a taste for life that he was lacking before, so that he quits his intellectual work, leaves Paris to live on a farm, and eventually ends up traveling away from civilization, further and further south on the African continent. The quest for authenticity, for escaping the familiar and conventional, is one that the existentialist writers would return to again and again, as their characters come to recognize what they thought to be true is really false.
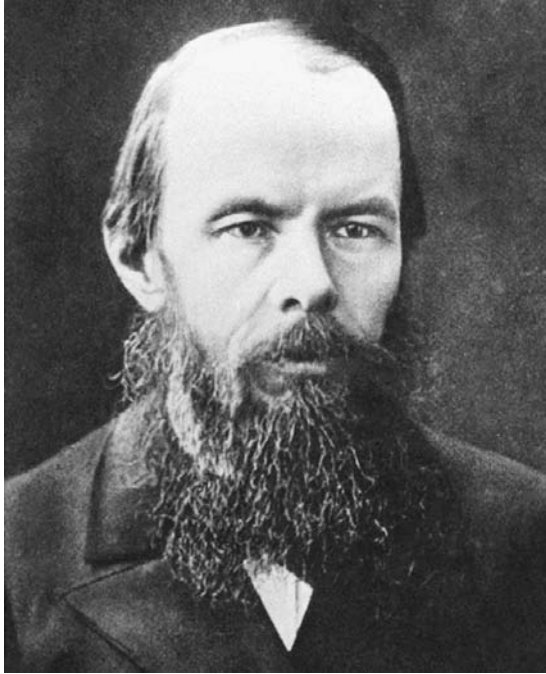
*Fyodor Dostoevsky* (The Library of Congress)

Unlike the protagonists of existentialist books such as Camus's *The Stranger*, however, Gide's Michael is constantly thinking over his situation, not just reacting, making him a well-rounded character while some other existential heroes come off as being hollow.

## The Little Prince

*The Little Prince*, written and illustrated by the French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, is often categorized with children's books, perhaps because it has cartoon illustrations or because it rejects the arbitrary rules that adults enforce. It is this last element, however, that qualifies it as a work of existential literature. The story is a fantasy about an airplane pilot who crashes in the Sahara Desert, where a little prince who lives on an asteroid with a single flower approaches him. He explains his travels to different asteroids and the people whom he has met on each. The book offers a satire of serious adults, including a judge, an alcoholic, and a businessman. Its affirmation of childlike innocence has made it a perennial favorite since it was first published in 1943, but the issues that it raises about the superficiality of social structure and the purity of freedom make it one of the more uplifting examples of existential thought.

## The Mandarins

Readers interested in the postwar existentialist movement in Paris find two benefits from Simone de Beauvoir's novel *The Mandarins* (1954). First, it is a book true to the existentialist ethos, with characters who struggle to follow their philosophical beliefs while giving in to the basic romantic entanglements that complicate ideological purity. Also, it is a compelling, thinly veiled autobiography, recording Beauvoir's own affairs and affiliations during the late forties and early fifties, when some of the world's greatest thinkers sought out the apartment she kept with Jean-Paul Sartre. Beauvoir brings a feminist sensibility to her characters that the male existentialists show no interest in. This book was the winner of France's highest literary award, the Prix Goncourt. Though it is not one of the most frequently read works of existential literature as of 2008, it is considered Beauvoir's finest novel.

## Nausea

*Nausea* was Jean-Paul Sartre's first novel, published in 1938. It is a fictionalized account of the author as a young man and is generally considered to be one of the most influential books in the French existential movement. Written in the form of diary entries, the book presents the life of a writer, Antoine Roquentin, who finds himself feeling sick about no particular complaint, but rather about life itself. Because of its unique style and theme, *Nausea* excited the passions of some literary critics and philosophers when it was first published, while others found it to be too obscure and self-important. In the early 2000s, readers are interested in it as much for the movement that it created as for the ideas that were made familiar by later writers in the movement.

## No Exit

Jean-Paul Sartre's surreal stage play, *No Exit* (1944) gave the world the phrase "Hell is other people." The setting is minimal: three characters are confined to one room, not remembering how they got there, carrying on with social interaction until they realize that their small-talk and amenities are the whole point of being there, that they have been damned to each other's company for eternity. Though the catchphrase already mentioned has become the point on which readers and viewers focus, the more important point is why these characters have been condemned to

hell: they have all lived with "bad faith," which was Sartre's concept of a life lived insincerely, fearing instead of embracing the universe's lack of meaning. This play was instrumental in bringing the concept of Existentialism to the United States in the late 1940s, and Sartre's storytelling and language are powerful enough to keep the play interesting for modern audiences, so that it has continued to be produced frequently.

## The Stranger
Albert Camus's 1942 novel *The Stranger* was one of the most widely read books of the twentieth century. Its plot concerns a young Algerian man, Meursault, who kills a man for no reason after a minor scuffle and the court trial that ensues. During the trial, the emphasis is not on whether Meursault committed the murder and not on his possible motive, but rather on the type of person he is. The prosecution focuses on external matters, such as how the defendant treated his mother and his girlfriend, making it clear that it is his existence, not just his action, that is on trial.

Meursault is the quintessential existential hero—aloof and cool. He does not think his actions matter much and is not afraid to accept responsibility for what he has done. Some critics have written this novel off as dated—a clear look at a worldview that has passed like any fad. Others believe that the sense of alienation and absurdity Camus captured will never pass from style.

## The Sun Also Rises
Ernest Hemingway is often considered to have looked at the world with an existential point of view and that is most obvious in his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. Published in 1926, the work portrays a man who has been injured in World War I, who is trying to find meaning to his life by traveling from one destination in Europe to another, always seeking excitement and distraction. Allyson Nadia Field describes *The Sun Also Rises* as a travelogue not only to sights around Europe, but also to a lifestyle. Hemingway's distinctive style does not let readers in on the thoughts of his protagonist, Jake Barnes, but his precise descriptions of actions and tightly focused dialogue make the feelings of the character known. While later Hemingway novels have more tightly structured plots, the disillusionment and freedom in *The Sun Also Rises* make it an ideal vehicle for existential ideas.

## The Trial
When Franz Kafka died in 1924, his novel *The Trial* was not finished, but his literary executor put the pieces together to publish it the following year. The story concerns Joseph K., a government bureaucrat who is awakened in his bed one morning and taken off to jail. He is released soon after but is told to report back to court regularly. Throughout the whole experience, no one—not the officers who arrest him, the judge, or his own lawyer—tells Joseph what crime he is accused of. As with all of Kafka's works, this absurd situation is used to explore deeper philosophical truths about the nature of society and of the individual, showing how the political system can isolate a person from the basic truths that he once took for granted. The book was written long before the French philosophers coined the term "existentialist" in the 1940s, but its themes and style are the same as the ones they were to use. Though Kafka died in obscurity, he came to be considered as one of the most talented literary figures of the twentieth century.

## Waiting for Godot
Written by Irish playwright Samuel Beckett and first produced in Paris in 1953, *Waiting for Godot* has become a mainstay of modern theater. Its absurdist plot features two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait near a barren tree on an empty stretch of road for someone named "Godot," who may represent their pointless hopes. The fact that nothing significant happens during the play's two acts helps to make the existential point of the play: the lack of meaning when life is not actively lived. Beckett's artful use of language makes it easy for readers and viewers to experience the play without becoming bored. Even when the dialogue seems to make no sense and when the characters seem to be bickering with each other pointlessly, there is a deeper meaning to Beckett's structure that offers a running commentary on the state of modern existence.

## THEMES

### *Atheism*
Existentialism seems to recommend abandonment any belief in God because the concept of God contradicts the idea of personal responsibility that is at the center of the philosophy. Jean-Paul Sartre, the most prolific existentialist

## TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Describe the plot of a movie that you have seen that you would call "Existential," and explain what you think are the existential elements about it.

- Writers have noted that the American way of life, with its emphasis on personal freedom, is particularly well-suited to existential thought. Write a dialogue between Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the Declaration of Independence, and Jean-Paul Sartre, the key figure in Existentialism, with each character explaining his position to the other.

- Research the basic beliefs of Zen Buddhism and compare them to those of Existentialism, pointing out how they are alike and how they differ.

- Some critics have charged that Americans are too commercial to accept an abstract philosophical concept. Design an advertising campaign to "sell" Existentialism to the general public.

- Look through newspapers and magazines for examples of what the existentialist writers would call "bad faith," and discuss them in class.

writer, was an atheist, as were Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. The characters in their novels can be seen as people coping with the loss of faith in God by trying to determine the proper behavior in the absence of some supreme being.

There is, however, a subset of existential writers who combine religious feelings with Existentialism. One of these was Søren Kierkegaard, who solved the question of how to reconcile a belief in God with responsibility of one's own actions in his philosophical works such as *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *The Concept of Dread*. For Kierkegaard, there was no contradiction between freedom and God. In fact, the basis of religious belief was the ability to choose

freely to believe. Another religious existentialist was Martin Buber, whose 1923 philosophical work *I and Thou* brought together Jewish, Christian, and humanist beliefs. The book uses personal relationships, such as the ones one forms with other humans ("Thou"), to explain the human relationship to God, who is seen as the ultimate "Thou."

### Freedom

Existentialism derives from the principle that human behavior is based on nothing except free choice. It rejects those theories that try to find other factors that control behavior, such as economic, social, or psychological systems that exist in order to explain what people do. Existential writers do sometimes recognize such comprehensive worldviews, but they do not accept them as being acceptable explanations or excuses for behavior. Sartre, for instance, was a lifelong supporter of the Marxist theory of class struggle, but he would not accept Marx's theory that certain behaviors are *necessary* for certain classes. Instead, he explained why members of one class might behave similarly as a choice made by people who were unaware of their freedom to choose.

This sense of freedom sometimes leads the protagonists in existential works to commit actions that are commonly considered evil, as if to assert to themselves that no universal system of justice will bring punishment down on their heads. Thus, Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Meursault in Camus's *The Stranger*, and Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son* commit murders with no remorse. In each of these books, the transgression is not punished by divine justice, such as the ways that other writers might have the criminals fall victim to illness or bad luck, but they are prosecuted by the legal system.

### Guilt and Innocence

One of the central concerns of existential thought is that, in the absence of divine or biological rules, people must be responsible for their own actions. This is the price of freedom; with no rules from God or psychological traumas to excuse what one does, the responsibility for each action falls on the individual. Hemingway's characters offer a good example of this condition. They follow rules of behavior that they establish for themselves, often referred to as the "Hemingway code." Whereas other writers

might present characters that are victims of fate, the characters in Hemingway's books and other existential literature are responsible for their own fate. Other examples of this are Sartre's play *Dirty Hands*, which shows its protagonist accepting guilt for murdering an obviously dangerous opponent during wartime, and Beauvoir's *The Blood of Others*, in which a student who is shaken by the inadvertent death of a colleague decides that he must still participate in violent radical political activity.

The presumption of innocence that comes from absolute freedom is inverted in the works of Franz Kafka, most notably in his novel *The Trial*. Instead of being an existential hero who chooses to make himself guilty, Joseph K. is proclaimed guilty by a dense and illogical legal system, for reasons he cannot understand. Rather than focusing attention on the free individual, Kafka shows the repressive social order that makes it difficult for the individual to realize that he is, in fact, free to decide his own fate. By making the bureaucracy that condemns Joseph K. so impersonal and irrational, Kafka shows how transparent it is. In this novel, the legal system is frightening, but it is not in control of the individual. The superficial charge of guilt helps readers see how shallow it is to believe in any universal system of guilt of innocence.

### Identity and Self

Existentialism, like other philosophical movements, seeks to explain human identity and condition. Other systems might define identity in relation to something, such as when psychologists find the roots of identity in past experiences or in the effects of chemical balances in the brain, or when Romanticism frames identity in terms of man's relationship to nature. In Existentialism, however, there is no point of reference for human identity. A person's identity does not exist in anything except that person's actions. As Sartre explained it, "existence precedes essence"; there are no rules governing a person's essential identity until after that person exists.

French Existentialism crossed over to the United States in the early 1950s, when the civil rights movement was just beginning to give a voice and identity to black Americans. The two were a natural fit. Blacks who had been treated in society in accordance with the color of their skin were open to the existential concept that a person creates his or her own identity. One of the preeminent American novelists of the twentieth century, Ralph Ellison, explored existential themes as they applied to the race issue in his 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, about a black man's struggle for self-identity against society's narrow definitions of him.

### Alienation

Alienation was considered by many intellectuals throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to increasingly be the condition of civilized humans. It is the feeling of isolation, of not belonging, of standing alone. Since the advent of the Industrial Age, social philosophers such as Karl Marx have shown how people are alienated from the work that they do, with the connection severed by the economic and industrial system. Psychologists have shown alienation as a rift between the conscious and unconscious aspects of self. Theologians have shown humanity as becoming increasingly alienated from reality as the importance of God diminished.

Existentialism can be seen as a response to the social phenomenon of alienation. As the feeling grew of being left out of society, so did the existentialist's philosophy that it is natural to be separate from society because the idea of belonging to society is an illusion. It is no coincidence that one of the most prominent novels of the French existentialist movement is Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. As its title implies, the protagonist is outside the social order, alienated even from those closest to him. In novels such as *The Deer Park* in 1955, Norman Mailer applied the concept of Existentialism to the particular form of alienation that was felt in the postwar United States, with fear of the atomic bomb and of Communism. Mailer devised the concept of the "hipster," who reacts to everything with his own wry sense of irony. In fact, the term "existential hero" came to be used to describe characters in books and movies who acted alone, who had no ties to anyone, and who followed the rules of behavior set down by his own understanding of the world.

## STYLE

### Persona

Many existential works employ a persona who is a stand-in for the author, with similar life experiences and views. The word persona is Latin,

meaning "mask." Authors of fiction tend to hide behind characters like masks, to convey their ideas in the context of their stories, but this is even more common than usual in existential literature. One can draw clear correlations between characters in Sartre's *Nausea*, for instance, and the people of his early life, and between most of the protagonists in Simone de Beauvoir's novels and her own experience and beliefs. Terry Keefe concluded in his essay "Beauvoir's Memoirs, Diary and Letters" that "in spite of obvious difficulties involved, autobiographical material in Beauvoir's fiction must sometimes be acknowledged to be as telling, or as 'accurate,' as material presented in non-fictional form." The main reason that so many literary works by existential writers feature thinly masked versions of their authors' lives is the genre's clear background in philosophy. Writers such as Sartre and Beauvoir are primarily philosophers, accustomed to pondering the underlying principles that may explain the circumstances of their own lives. The nature of philosophy is to consider the human condition and to locate the individual's place in the world. Existentialism, in particular, rejects the idea that one can understand another person's thoughts. Existential philosophers who have expended most of their energy understanding themselves as unique individuals are typically inclined to think of the protagonists of their works as masks for themselves.

## Mood

Existential literature is often characterized as grim, depressing, and hopeless. This reputation clings to the movement in spite of the efforts of writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre to show it as an optimistic worldview that offers its readers a chance to take control of their own fates. One reason that Existentialism is assumed to be bleak is that it consciously tries to change people's minds about their traditional avenues of hope. Those who believe that God will justify in the afterlife the hardship of mortal existence will find their ideas opposed in existentialism, and those who believe in the ability of science to raise human behavior toward perfection experience the same sort of resistance. Lacking the hope that one can look to these external sources for comfort and salvation, existential thought aligns itself with the sometimes frightening prospect of meaninglessness, directly standing up to the blank void that other philosophies try to fill. The titles of books such as *Fear and Trembling*

and *The Concept of Dread* by Søren Kierkegaard, whose works formed the basis of the existentialist movement, give some insight into Existentialism's reputation as a philosophy of despair.

While many works of existential literature do, in fact, tend to emphasize life's pointlessness, it would be too restrictive to say that despair is their only message. The inherent pointlessness of life is almost always followed by an encouraging example about how life can be given meaning by the individual. This is most clearly seen in the short stories of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway's story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" has two waiters discussing the bleak existence of an old man who comes to their cafe every night. Readers who focus only on the meaninglessness of the old man's life miss the larger point—that he has somewhere to go that gives him comfort. Similarly, Hemingway's "The Killers" shows a washed-up boxer who waits without hope for two contract killers who are coming to get him, but it is told from the point of view of a young man who is unwilling to sit quietly and accept grim fate.

## Structure

Because existential writers do not view their characters as the products of past events, their works seldom use the linear, chronological plots that many novelists and playwrights use. Conventional narrative structure is built upon the premise of causality, with one event resulting in the next, following each other in succession to create a cumulative result. While other writers present a psychological web that shows how each character's personality is constructed, characters in existential works are not bound to such interpretation. As a result, existential works tend to present a sequence of events that o not typically appear to be related.

Existentialism tends to support an absurd view of the world, one that ignores commonly assumed rules of reality. In Franz Kafka's short story *The Metamorphosis*, for instance, a man wakes to find himself transformed into a giant bug—the situation is completely illogical, but it helps the author make a point about the pervasive absurdity of common daily life. Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* takes place in an unnamed, barren wilderness, with two people standing near a tree at a crossroads. The play does not have a plot, just a series of conversations

that happen to occur after one another. The lack of any meaningful causal relationship between events helps to reinforce the existential idea that the human condition has no inherent meaning or structure.

### Humanism

Humanism is the cultural and literary philosophy that spread through Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a response to oppressive church doctrine. At the time, the position of clerics was that human beings were weak and immoral. Humanism offered the optimistic view that humanity was rational and was thus able to understand truth and goodness without the Church handing down the definition or intervening. To some extent, Existentialism is the ultimate form of Humanism because it takes all responsibility for human happiness and achievement out of the hands of fate and places it in the hands of human beings.

Yet there has been some debate about whether Existentialism is really a humanistic philosophy. Many existentialists would define themselves as humanists because of their commitment to human responsibility over reliance on outside influences. Detractors, by contrast, say that the philosophy's emphasis on the nothingness and meaninglessness of the world paint too dismal a picture for humanity. They refuse to believe that the existentialist position that action is necessary but pointless can be considered a positive attitude toward humanity. Jean-Paul Sartre addressed this controversy in his early essay "Existentialism Is a Humanism."

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Nihilism

Nihilism is a philosophy that asserts that existence is meaningless, that traditional beliefs and values are unfounded, that there is no truth. It is a philosophical stance that recognizes no values and sets no goals. The word comes from the Latin word *nihil*, meaning "nothing," and was coined by the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev in his 1862 novel *Fathers and Sons*. The concept is related to the philosophy of the ancient Greek skeptics who rejected the idea of philosophical certainty, and it has appeared in one form or another repeatedly in Western civilization.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, nihilism was most closely associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher who saw it as more than just despair, but as a force of destruction. In his book *The Will to Power*, published in 1901, Nietzsche predicts that the meaninglessness presented by nihilism would win acceptance over other systems of thought and that nihilism would eventually lead to society's collapse.

When Existentialism became popular in the 1950s and 1960s, Sartre's idea of life as "nothingness" was seen as a nihilistic position. Leaders of the movement such as Sartre and Camus struggled to show Existentialism as a positive force, but their insistence that true existentialists should embrace life despite its emptiness was not quite convincing for many. The rejection of external values always led back to the idea that existence must be meaningless. Existentialism became almost synonymous with nihilism, leading to a popular caricature of existentialists as grim, dark, empty individuals. Existentialists, by contrast, thought of themselves as fighting nihilism by giving life meaning in spite of its natural meaninglessness.

### Theatre of the Grotesque

Theatre of the Grotesque was an Italian movement characterized by plays that emphasize the ironic and macabre aspects of daily life in the World War I era. This movement was named after the play *The Mask and the Face* (1916) by Luigi Chiarelli, which was subtitled "a grotesque in three acts." Theater of the Grotesque was a reaction against the Naturalism of the nineteenth century and included playwrights Luigi Chiarelli, Alessandro Varaldo, Enrico Cavacchioli, and Alberto Casella. The movement influenced the work of famous Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello, who wrote *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). Theatre of the Grotesque, known in Italian as *teatro grottesco*, was a brief movement, but it influenced the much larger and ongoing movements of Absurdism and Existentialism.

### Absurdism

The main philosophers of the French existential movement, including Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus, wrote dramas for the stage in addition to novels and essays. It is fitting, then, that one of Existentialism's lasting legacies was the Theatre of the Absurd. Absurdist dramas presented

no direct linear plot line, instead mocking the traditional forms by presenting the unexpected, and by actively defying any attempts to read meaning into the events on stage. There was always a tendency for artists to violate conventions, to make people think by refusing to give them what they anticipated, but this tendency increased by sharply in the early twentieth century, with Dadaism and Surrealism. It was only after Existentialism gained international attention in the 1950s, making the concept of "meaninglessness" a familiar subject among intellectuals, that a school of drama based in absurdity developed. Samuel Beckett published *Waiting for Godot* in 1953; *The Bald Soprano*, by Eugène Ionesco, was performed in 1956; and Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* played on Broadway in 1959. These are among the most important and representative works in the Theatre of the Absurd.

The term "absurd" was first used to describe literary works by Albert Camus. In 1961, theater critic Martin Esslin's book *Theater of the Absurd* named the movement that was already in full swing. Esslin observed how absurdist drama avoided making statements about the human condition by presenting it in its rawest form, which often led to situations that would be incomprehensible within the common view of reality but which were well suited for the stage. Unlike existential fiction, which focused on the internal struggle for beliefs, drama does not present internal thoughts to the audience (except in asides), and so it can focus its energies on the strange instability of the external world. In the early 2000s, Absurdism is a staple of the theater, with constant revivals of the plays from the fifties and sixties and new plays that, while not purely absurd, incorporate absurdist elements.

### Phenomenology

Jean-Paul Sartre, who first put the phrase "Existentialism" into use as a branch of philosophy, based his thought on his studies in the philosophy of phenomenology. The two are closely linked. Phenomenology is a twentieth-century philosophical movement that examines the relationship between experience and consciousness. The founder of this movement was German philosopher Edward Husserl. In his 1913 text *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Husserl explored the structures within consciousness that enable the human mind to conceive of objects outside of itself. Because the mind is able to think of things that do not exist

as well as things that do exist, Husserl focused upon the mind's activity, leaving aside the overall question of existence. Husserl called actions such as remembering and perception "meanings," and the act of examining these meanings "phenomenological reduction."

Although Husserl is credited with generating phenomenology, the name most often associated with that movement is that of his colleague Martin Heidegger. Heidegger focused attention squarely on the question of being, presenting the experience of life as "Dasein," or "being there," putting emphasis on experience as opposed to abstract concepts. Language was also a strong part of Heidegger's phenomenology because humans would have no way of contemplating existence without it. As Heidegger phrased it, "Only where there is language is there world." His philosophical works gave serious consideration to the philosophical value of poetry.

In college, Sartre studied phenomenology, and his theories about Existentialism grew out of Heidegger's ideas. The relationship between the two philosophies can be seen in the title of Sartre's major philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*, which mirrors the title of Heidegger's own 1927 masterwork *Being and Time*. Sartre's Existentialism adapted Heidegger's phenomenology, combining his emphasis on language and experience with Husserl's idea that consciousness is always directed away from itself toward objects and not at the nothingness of the subjective self. Since the 1940s the two philosophies have been so closely related that they are often referred to by the combined term "existential phenomenology."

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Antecedents

Philosophies are meant to capture the truth, and so there are likely to be traces of any philosophy at any time throughout history. For example, traces of Existentialism can be found in the life of the Greek philosopher Diogenes, who in the fourth century BC founded the Cynics, who distrusted civilization's artifice. existential ideas also appear at various times throughout the world's literature, such as when Job in the Old Testament questioned whether his concept of God was truly relevant to his troubles, or when

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1930s–1940s:** The world falls into its second global conflict in thirty years, and it looks like international war will be the nature of the modern world.

  **Today:** Conflicts tend to be small, regional affairs. One side might be able to assemble a coalition or a mission of United Nations forces from around the world, but it has never been met with a similar international force.

- **1930s–1940s:** News about events in other countries travels by radio broadcasts, leaving much about other nations to the imagination. After World War II, broadcasters and consumers begin investing heavily in television: from 1945 to 1948 the number of U.S. homes with televisions rises from 5,000 to a million, and by 1950, 8 million sets have been sold.

  **Today:** News about world events travels faster on the Internet than news organizations can prepare it for broadcast.

- **1940s:** World War II ends when the United States uses atomic bombs to destroy two Japanese cities. This action initiates the Atomic Age. During the postwar years people try to understand the military potential for what came to be known as mutual assured destruction.

  **Today:** The potential for nuclear annihilation has existed for several generations. In that time, nuclear arms have not been used.

- **1940s:** Soldiers returning from World War II start a population boom, which leads to a new youth culture. Existentialism's emphasis on the "now" appeals to the youth culture's break with the past.

  **Today:** Advertisers have long realized the purchasing power of youths, and much of popular culture is aimed at consumers between ages ten and twenty.

- **1940s–1950s:** Europe is the respected focus of Western culture, the center of progressive thinking. In the 1950s, while most of the European countries are struggling to rebuild after World War II destroyed their manufacturing ability, the United States rises to be an economic superpower.

  **Today:** The international reputation of the United States slumps during the protracted occupation of and conflict in Iraq, and in the United States the economy enters recession with increased home foreclosures and inflationary prices for food and gasoline.

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Shakespeare had Hamlet question the purpose of his own existence by asking, "To be, or not to be?"

The first philosopher to touch upon existential themes was the French writer Blaise Pascal, who, in the seventeenth century, rejected the idea that rational humans could explain God. Like the later existentialists, Pascal accepted life as a series of irrational paradoxes.

As a formal philosophy, Existentialism began to take form in the 1800s, with the writings of Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard thought of life as an impossible choice between two conflicting attitudes: the aesthetic, which is based on immediate experience, or existence and the ethical, which is based on ideals. He presented the ethical life as false, based upon imaginary concepts, but the aesthetic life was not satisfying either. In fact, for Kierkegaard, the aesthetic life led only to despair, because human consciousness is not satisfied with the sheer, raw experience that might be enough to distract an unconscious being. His writings, particularly his book *Either/Or*, were not essays or treatises. They had a literary style to them, presenting his ideas as character sketches, dialogs, and imaginary correspondences.

Unlike Kierkegaard, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was an atheist who believed that religious belief was a sign of weakness, which would leave society vulnerable to destruction by those who held no such illusions. Nietzsche's completely unsentimental atheism paved the way for the existential view that life is based on nothingness.

The most immediate antecedent to Existentialism was the twentieth-century philosophy of phenomenology, especially as practiced by the German writer Martin Heidegger. Phenomenology raised questions about how humans could ever know the world that they encounter outside their own consciousness. As with Existentialism, phenomenology relied heavily on examples from literature for understanding, giving the imagined world nearly as much credibility as the experienced world.

## French Existentialism

Although earlier philosophers and writers had ideas upon which this philosophy was based, it was Jean-Paul Sartre who gave it the name Existentialism. In school, Sartre studied the works of German philosophers, wrote his exit exam on Nietzsche, and he studied in his postgraduate years under Edward Husserl, who is widely considered a founder of phenomenology, a philosophy similar to Existentialism. In 1928, at the age of 23, he met Simone de Beauvoir. The two fell in love and spent most of the next fifty years living together on and off, although they never married. In 1938, one of the major texts of existentialist literature, Sartre's novel *Nausea* was published, giving the world its first sense of the moral despair of the philosophy and the cold, unsentimental intellect of the fiction.

The year after *Nausea* was published, Adolph Hitler gave up any pretense of peace by attacking Poland. France went to war against Germany and was captured in 1940. While France was occupied by Germany, the new existential movement flourished. The principle figures if the movement were acquaintances in Paris, including Sartre, Beauvoir, and Albert Camus (although Camus would come to resent being called an existentialist when hostilities formed between him and the others). Their ideas were spread by a magazine that Sartre edited, *Les Times Moderne* ("Modern Times"), and through their plays and novels, which had gained international attention. The war was a fitting backdrop for plays and novels with existential themes, which concerned protagonists who were willing to act politically rather than die passively. The war gave French Existentialism an air of tragic Romanticism, as existential heroes, well aware that nothing they did could change the insanity of the larger social order, still made noble choices, presumably without the false encouragement of sentiment or religion.

After the war ended in 1945, Existentialism became a household word, but the writers who made it famous moved on to other interests. Sartre became increasingly interested in Marxism, and the main circle of French existentialists shunned Camus when he rejected Sartre's political stance. Although Sartre was to identify himself as an existentialist for the rest of his life, his postwar writings never captured readers' imagination as had the radical works produced under the Nazis.

In the United States, Existentialism reached its height of popularity in the 1950. After the stock market crash of 1929, the country suffered desperate times, and the cautious conservatism that had characterized the generations of the Depression and the war gave way to a new youth culture. The disaffected Beat generation, lacking any major political struggle, grappled with meaninglessness and was ripe for Existentialism's message that the world is absurd and that individuals create their own morality.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Existential literature as a phrase came to be seldom used. The description became, for the most part, irrelevant. One reason that literary works are not labeled existential as much as they used to be is that the movement, which captured the wide readership during World War II, faded from public attention after the 1980 death of its most charismatic practitioner, Jean-Paul Sartre. Modes of literature and philosophy that once would have been described as existential were later described by other terms. On the positive side, the main reason that the description existential seems so irrelevant is the massive popularity that it had in the 1940s and 1950s. Calling literature existential is almost a way of stating the obvious, since most contemporary literature presumes an existential worldview.
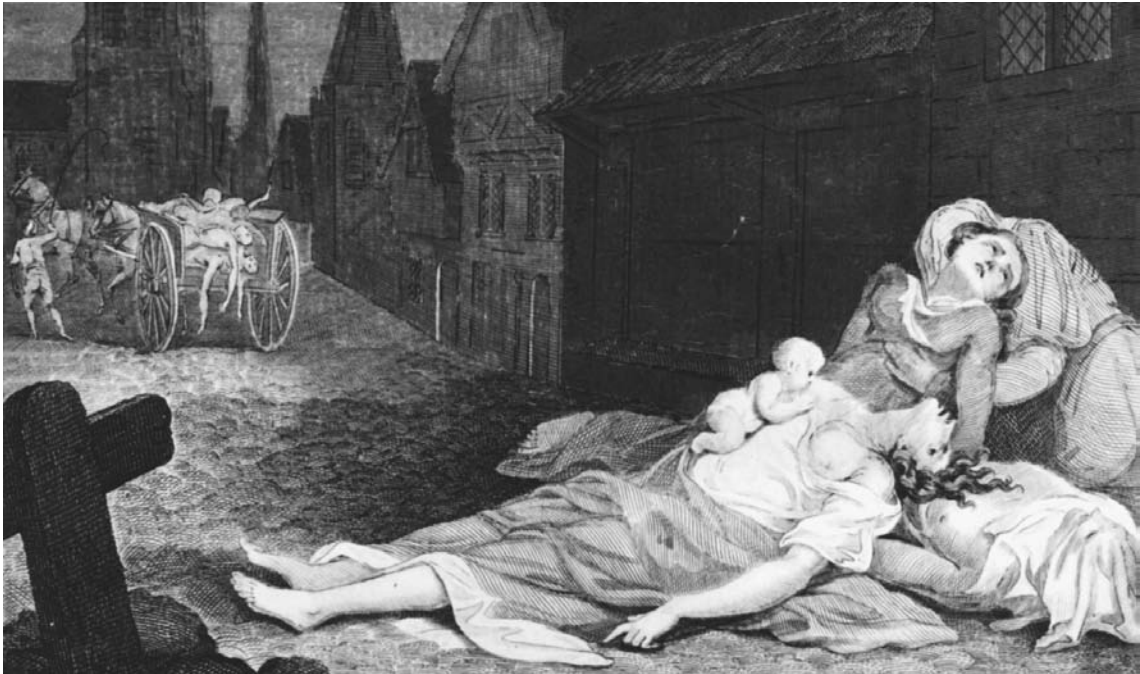
*Depiction of London during the Great Plague, which struck in the year 1665* (Hulton Archive / Getty Images)

From the start, existential literature was seen as little more than a forum in which the existential philosophers presented their ideas. For example, Charles I. Glicksberg, in his 1945 essay "Literary Existentialism," writes, "Though Existentialist literature, particularly in the field of fiction and drama, does exist, it has thus far contributed nothing by way of innovation in aesthetic form. By and large, it is a literature based upon a philosophy, a Weltanschauung, a method of interpreting the life of man upon earth, his character and destiny." It soon developed that the most important reason for reading the literature produced by the French existentialists was to prove, if only to oneself, that one belonged to their intellectual society. In 1951, James Collins introduced his book *The Existentialists* with an explanation about the relationship between Existentialism and how one lives. Stating his intention to focus on disagreements between members of the existential community, he noted that, in studying the people and not their writings, "the picture that [emerges] is drawn more in terms of methods and problems than of a common fund of doctrinal content." As with Glicksburg, the literature was deemed less important than the ideas and the people who lived those ideas.

The shift in Existentialism's relevance in literature came during the 1960s and can be seen in the writings of Hazel E. Barnes, one of the movement's most prolific observers. In her 1959 book *The Literature of Possibilities*, Barnes begins her exploration of existential ideas with this bold statement: "About the middle of this century novelists and playwrights stopped making men and women to order for psychologists and began to re-create Man." A few sentences later she attributes that view to Jean-Paul Sartre, but only after she has drawn readers in with that challenging claim. By 1967, in the chapter "Existentialism and Other Rebels" of her book *Existentialist Ethics*, Barnes was defending the philosophy from being lumped with other, similar movements with which it might be confused: Ayn Rand's Objectivism, the Beatnik or Hipster nihilism espoused by Norman Mailer and others, and Oriental philosophies, especially Zen Buddhism. "Like man himself, philosophy is always 'in situation,'" Barnes wrote, continuing that Existentialism "is acutely aware of its own position in the world order of the twentieth century. It can envision its own transcendence." One of Existentialism's strongest supporters, Barnes could already see it dissolving, losing its character to similar philosophies, new and old.

Today, critics frequently point out existential elements in literary works, usually those set in contradictory or self-defeating situations. While used frequently to describe specific elements of literary works, it is seldom used in an attempt to understand an author's worldview. Christopher O. Griffin examines the works of contemporary southern author Barry Hannah and finds significant overlap with Existentialism. Griffin concludes that Hannah's work will take its place, in time, among the big names scholars have ascribed to Existentialism. In literature, the word *existential* refers to a mood, rather than to a specific philosophy.

## CRITICISM

### David Kelly

*Kelly is a professor of literature and creative writing at Oakton Community College and College of Lake County and has written for numerous scholarly publications. In the following essay, Kelly argues the case for using Sartre's novel* Nausea *as the touchstone for gauging existential literature.*

The concept of "existential literature" is a tricky one. Since Existentialism is a philosophy that means to describe existence, everything that has ever been done or written should rightfully fall within its bounds, since everything exists. Even works meant to illuminate other philosophies could be interpreted by existentialists as their authors' attempts to cope with their existential condition, and might reasonably be categorized as existential. But it is useless to have a category with no distinguishing characteristics to set its members off from everything else: if everything is existential, then there would be no use having the word, because the word "everything" would cover their shared idea well enough.

Another possible way to recognize existential literature would be to limit the phrase to works produced by the members of the French intellectual movement—primarily, Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus—who named this philosophy during the 1940s, and the writers who followed their example. Since these are the writers who willingly associated their works with Existentialism, they would seem to be the ones who are producing the existential literature. Unfortunately, participation in the existential movement alone does little to help define existential literature. The works of Kafka, Dostoevsky, and early Hemingway are all
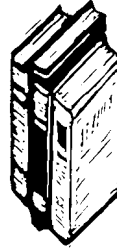
clearly existential in nature, even though their authors never had the philosophy defined for them. What about Hamlet's dilemma, or Abraham's choice to sacrifice Isaac in the book of Genesis? These are clearly existential moments, if not actual examples of existential literature. Closely associating existential literature with the French existential movement also raises the problem of the people who chose to call themselves and their work by that name when it was in vogue. At the peak of Existentialism's popularity in the 1950s, there were hundreds of fans who used the existential concept of *angst* to describe their unhappiness, or mistook medium-sized disappointments for "dread." Their works are not considered truly existential, whether the writers thought they were or not.

Labels are anathema within a philosophy that can be characterized by the catchphrase "existence precedes essence." It would be dishonest to the core beliefs of Existentialism to make any general claims about the essence of existential literature. It is the nature of the philosophy that each piece of literature, especially the literature associated with it, should be experienced before it is defined. More than other literary movements, such as Romanticism or even Modernism, existential literature cannot be identified by checking it against a preexisting list of aspects to see if it fits some sort of profile.

In the absence of any set criteria, there is still a possibility of calling a body of literature "existential" by recognizing what specific works resemble. This open-ended option for identifying things is like the one used by the Supreme Court justice who could not define pornography but felt sure that he would know it when he saw it. Maybe there are not and cannot be rules that identify the varieties of existential literature, but there should at least be some useful standard by which any one work, experienced in and itself, could have the term applied to it in some meaningful way.

The most likely candidate for a work of existential literature that can be used to test other literature against would be Jean-Paul Sartre's 1938 novel *Nausea*. It is not the most accomplished or successful novel of the existential movement, nor even the most fully realized literary work that Sartre himself produced, but this novel has particular characteristics, both in its technique and in its historical situation, that identify it with Existentialism in a way that other works lack.

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- American author Walker Percy's 1961 novel *The Moviegoer* tells a poignant and humorous existential story. The plot concerns a young man who tries to find meaning for his life at the movies, with no satisfaction.

- *Dangling Man* (1944) was Nobel laureate Saul Bellow's first novel. It presents a young man in the existential limbo of having been drafted into the army and waiting to be called up.

- *The Plague*, by Albert Camus, examines how people react to an outbreak of bubonic plague in the north African town of Oran, Algeria. The range of human behaviors covered in this novel are as relevant today as they were when it was published in 1947.

- Students often find Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical writings dense and unintelligible, but the essays in his book *Existentialism and Human Emotions* are chosen to introduce the philosophy to broad audiences.

- *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's lively, loose-knit allegorical exploration of the relationship between humanity and the world, considered to be the masterpiece of his formidable career. Nietzsche does not directly lecture but instead presents vignettes, mysteries, and riddles, laying the foundation for the existential approach to literature.

- By 1961, when Joseph Heller's absurdist war novel *Catch-22* was published, the existential view of life's meaninglessness had prevailed upon a generation. Set in a bombing squadron during World War II, the book uses humor to raise questions about contradictions that come from order and logic.

- John Barth's sprawling 1956 novel *The Floating Opera* approaches serious existential themes with humor and fantasy. The book hardly holds to a single plot, but its events center around man so extremely disillusioned with the world that he cannot even find a reason for his own suicide.

- One of the central texts of the existential worldview, Søren Kierkegaard's 1843 book *Fear and Trembling* examines the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac to raise questions about man's place in the world and relation to God. This book is one of the best examples of religious Existentialism, as opposed to the French atheistic existentialism.

- Famed psychotherapist and theologian Rollo May explained the considerable use of Existentialism in understanding the workings of the mind in *The Discovery of Being: Writings in Existential Psychology*, a collection of explanatory essays that was reprinted in 1983.

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*Nausea* was Sartre's first published novel. This means that it was the work that launched the literary career of the man who launched the philosophical movement. At the time, Sartre had published some philosophy, but with *Nausea* he put his philosophy into motion on the page, giving his ideas a reality that talking about them could not achieve. The fact that it was published before he attained a widespread reputation as a literary and philosophical genius almost certainly gave him a freedom that he would have to fight for in later years, when he was aware of the weight a whole world of followers would put on his every word. Later, Sartre was to view the ideas in *Nausea* as "dated," noting that he thought so even at the time of its publication. His philosophy moved on, becoming more involved with questions of political commitment than those of simply existing, such as those shown in his next-most-famous literary achievements, the plays *No Exit* and *Dirty Hands*. Readers can argue which of

> READERS CAN ARGUE WHICH OF SARTRE'S NOVELS OR PLAYS WAS THE 'BEST,' AND EVEN WHICH STAGE OF HIS EVOLUTION WAS MOST 'AUTHENTIC,' BUT HIS FIRST NOVEL, *NAUSEA*, HAS A PURITY THAT IT HOLDS IN COMMON WITH ALMOST ALL OTHER EXISTENTIAL LITERATURE THAT CAME BEFORE IT OR AFTER."

Sartre's novels or plays was the "best," and even which stage of his evolution was most "authentic," but his first novel, *Nausea*, has a purity that it holds in common with almost all other existential literature that came before it or after.

Stylistically, *Nausea* has the elements that most people have in mind, if only subconsciously, when they speak about existential literature. The story steers clear of a linear plot. Instead, its narrator, Antoine Roquentin, organizes it like a series of journal entries. It is a narrative technique that is common to much existential writing, from Kierkegaard to Nietzsche to John Hawkes. Just as the point of Sartre's novel, and the cause of Roquentin's nausea, is the contrast between existence and meaning, so too this character's existence is at odds with the faith that readers can traditionally invest in the hidden stream of meaning that holds a plot together. Lacking the desire to sustain a traditional narrative, existential literature works best in short stories, plays (which always take place in the here-and-now), and fragmented novels like *Nausea*, where scene changes appear as random as the situations in life.

*Nausea*, in fact, dispenses with its faux-diary style without any hesitation. For example, a section called "Sunday" starts on page 40 and continues on to page 57, which would be an extraordinary amount of writing for a diarist, even one as obsessed with his own ideas as Roquentin, to record in a single day. That particular entry is written in the present tense, and it includes four pages of dialog. Clearly, Sartre was not interested in maintaining the illusion that this was anything like a diary: illusion and Existentialism are incompatible. Most works recognized as existential are just as jarring and fragmented, with little attempt to establish a fictional "reality."

Roquentin's story follows his search for meaning, which leads him through familiar channels of live and community, God and Humanism, before leaving his life as empty as it was at the novel's start. The conflict between reality and meaning has Roquentin nauseous at the beginning, and in the end he is just a little short of convincing himself that writing a book about his experiences might help him accept his situation. It is no small achievement for an author to have his protagonist change so slightly over the course of a novel: Sartre achieves this by filling Roquentin's days with minutely observed details. He creates a reality for the reader, one that is just a little too real for Roquentin to bear. Such an intricate rendering of detail is just good fiction writing, existential or otherwise.

One final element that makes this novel exemplary existential fiction is its relationship to the author's life. *Nausea* is generally recognized as a thinly-veiled autobiography. It would be almost impossible to conceive of existential literature that does not have the authenticity of its author's own doubts, fears, and misery as a kind of subtext. Not all philosophies require that their fictional versions be bound to the lives of their authors, but not all philosophies are so intricately tied to the author's sense of authenticity, to the importance of her or his own life. Regardless of whether it was written after Sartre or before, existential literature leaves readers with a strong sense of the teller of the tale. This is why, despite its existential elements, *Hamlet* would not qualify as existential literature: Shakespeare is always indistinguishable in his works. On the other hand, Franz Kafka, who is recognized as a leading existential writer, can tell a richly imagined tale, but his presence is still felt. For instance, Kafka never starved in a circus cage for spectators to watch, as the protagonist does in his story *The Hunger Artist*. Still, no one can doubt that the suffering for art that is the story's central metaphor was indeed Kafka's own suffering.

In his introduction to *Nausea* in the current paperback edition, Hayden Carruth examines the ways in which this novel was certainly not the first or finest work of existential literature, and its protagonist was in no way the first "existentialist man." What makes the book so extraordinary, according to Carruth, is that Sartre's

*Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir* (AP Images)

Roquentin is "a man living at an extraordinary metaphysical pitch, at least in the pages of the journal he has left us." This, in the end, might be the thing that makes this the *most* existential work of all. Existentialism is not a philosophy given to sustained fiction, and in this one small book Sartre takes it about as far as it can go. Readers who know Existentialism when they see it are advised to stay away from definitions as much as possible. But, when there is any doubt, they can refer back to this novel, where they will see this particular worldview take form in every word.

**Source:** David Kelly, Critical Essay on Existentialism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Christopher O. Griffin

*In this essay, Griffin uses existential thought and the writings of existential writers to analyze the works of southern author Harry Monroe. It focuses on the novel* Geronimo Rex.

From beneath the bleachers of the Dream of Pines Colored High School practice field, the narrative voice of Harriman (Harry) Monroe, protagonist of Barry Hannah's novel *Geronimo Rex*, confesses wonder and dread at the sound of music. The music Harry experiences at the

novel's opening is that of the Dream of Pines Colored High School band, directed by "a fanatic man named Jones who risked everything to have the magnificent corps of student musicians he had." While Jones and his band themselves serve negligible roles in terms of plot, Harry's encounter with them in the opening pages of the book sets forth some of the novel's major thematic and metaphoric images.

In the world of music, an overture introduces the listener to a larger piece while also "indicating the character" of that piece. In a similar sense, Chapter 1 functions as an overture to the philosophy of *Geronimo Rex*. More specifically, Harry's examination of the relationship between Jones and his band members lays a philosophical groundwork for the novel by revealing the absurdity in notions of determinism and by implying a Sartrean philosophy of freedom. In addition to the theme elicited from the Jones/band relationship, the music created by this union, with its intuitive link in Harry's mind to action, serves as a subtle yet powerful metaphor for the experience of authentic being in the midst of the bourgeois irresolution and inauthenticity of his father. Finally, Harry's early, vicarious exposure to the atrocities of World War II

> **HAVING SEEN THE HORRORS OF WAR AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE, HARRY POSSESSES A HAZY AWARENESS OF THE ABSURDITY AND CRUELTY OF LIFE, WHILE HIS FATHER STILL ADHERES TO FALLACIOUS IDEAS OF ESSENTIAL MEANING AND PURPOSE."**

provides evidence supporting the childhood emergence of his keen and sometimes brutal existential perspective. These three themes submerge and surface throughout *Geronimo Rex,* providing structure and meaning to even the most absurd stops along Harry's existential journey. More important, perhaps, is that this "existential ethic," established in this, Hannah's debut novel, marks the defining philosophic key in which his scores of later works—both short and long—are loosely played.

Jones's Dream of Pines Colored High School band was undoubtedly the best in Louisiana, and to the eight-year-old Harry Monroe spying from beneath the stands, its image and sound created "a weird forest that sent dread right down to my bones." While the dread of unmitigated existence is, in the words of Kierkegaard, "different from fear and similar concepts which refer to something definite," the dread felt here by the young Harry at first appears more akin to that experienced by an awe-struck devotee before a god. Harry's implicit view of Jones as a god whom he initially seems to revere aligns with his later delusional allegiance to "gods" of equal absurdity. Whether it be music, women, or the novel's namesake, Geronimo, the gods to which Harry bows always dole out absurdity to their followers. Besides this, however, Hannah seems to be suggesting something of greater philosophical import, for in spite of his fear and awe before the "scary celestial horde" that is Jones's band, Harry still possesses enough mettle to admit that for all the scene's beauty and power, "I knew this man was crazy."

In addition to the correlation that can be made between Jones and the other "gods" which throughout *Geronimo Rex* vie for prominence in Harry's periodic episodes of Sartrean bad faith, the scene described above offers a parodic vision of the conventional God in his Heaven. This comparison is subtly supported by the text: Jones's godlike fierceness in commanding his band, like the fierceness of the God of the Old Testament, "was the kind of wrath you didn't mess with," and Jones demands a level of musical praxis which makes "the kids...ashamed to come back [to practice] next day without their parts down perfect." Moreover, Harry admits never to have seen Jones's face, "not ever," a condition similarly noted of God in Exodus 33:17–23. In this Old Testament passage, God agrees to let Moses see his back, but pointedly maintains that "my face shall not be seen." "[Y]ou cannot see my face," says God, "for man shall not see me and live" (v. 20). In his fear, Harry entertains similar thoughts about Jones: "I got the notion he'd kill me if he found me hidden down there [beneath the bleachers] to peek on his band in what [Jones] thought was its imperfect state; it was scary, all the way around—the great music out there, and Jones above."

Both literally and symbolically, Harry's situation broaches questions concerning conventional authority and determinism, and in doing so, the scene lays a subtle but important philosophical groundwork for the novel as a whole by implicitly advancing a Sartrean philosophy of freedom over the conventional idea of a free-will/determinism paradox, one that attempts to account for the individual's freedom of choice while still maintaining the idea of a deterministic, authoritative God.

In *The Quintessence of Sartrism,* Maurice Cranston writes that "Sartre's starting point as a philosopher was his rejection of the teaching of the central philosopher of the French tradition, Descartes." Similarly, Hannah's starting point for *Geronimo Rex* is a parody of Descartes's and others' notions of cosmic determinism. With "Jones above" in the symbolic position and role of the conventional Godhead, "the great music out there" (symbolic of the created world) subtly parodies the conventional interpretation of supratemporal power and influence. In the manner of Sartrean thought, beneath this veneer of beauty and power is a madman demanding an impossible perfection, all the while cursing "No, no, no!"

Sartre's existential novel *Nausea* is often cited as the work of fiction which best illustrates the revelation of existential awareness—the dreadful-yet-awesome apprehension of one's

unjustifiable being in the midst of a wholly contingent existence. In *Nausea,* the protagonist, Antoine Roquentin, comes to an existential realization analogous to Harry's as the former observes the pulsing ocean from the shoreline:

> The *true* sea is cold and black, full of animals; it crawls under this thin green film made to deceive human beings. [People] all round me have let themselves be taken in: they only see the thin film, which proves the existence of God. I see beneath it!

In *Geronimo Rex,* Harry, viewing the world from the existentially privileged "vantage slot under the bleachers", also perceives the contingent and "crazy" truth of what he witnesses. When the raving leader halts his troops in order to reprimand out-of-step band members, Harry confesses with more than a touch of irony, "That Jones must've had some ear, and some kind of wrath to overcome that music the way he did." The perfection Jones demands of his "creation" is in truth a frightening—and ridiculous—idea.

As in Kierkegaard's famous example of Abraham before Yahweh, situations of "determined" action such as the marching of Jones's band reveal the free potential for action inherent in *any* situation. The band members on the field are not held by force; they could choose to do anything. They choose, however, to march, to follow the "incredibly difficult and subtle military drills" determined by Jones, regardless of the impossibility of attaining his desired absolute perfection. Moreover, their devotion is extraordinary. "In two months," writes Harry of Jones, "he had them all considering serious life careers in music":

> The tone-deaf dummy on cymbals quit smoking so he could conserve his wind, and looked forward to studying at a conservatory after graduation. Three girls quit doing what they used to because of loss of energy on the clarinet.

Although his voice is nevertheless obeyed, the apparent reality of Jones's control—and by analogy, of conventional ideas of God and cosmos—is shown to be absurd.

While Jones and his band offer a deeply philosophical implication concerning the Sartrean concept of existential freedom, music itself—here as well as at particular moments later in Harry's life—is intuitively linked to action. "This band," confesses Harry in Chapter 1, "was the best music I'd ever heard, bar none. They made you want to pick up a rifle and just get killed somewhere." Music plays a key role in *Geronimo Rex,* serving Hannah as a subtle metaphor for the existential experiences of Harry Monroe. Like moments of existential revelation, music in performance possesses an immediacy unapproached by notes—or words—on a page, and it is such that it can be experienced without "conscious understanding." As Hannah has remarked in one recent interview, "Music remains the ultimate act to me; I love it because there's no comment after good music." Harry's intuitive response to the music of Jones's band leads him to conclude in his retrospective narration that he was a musician before he even could play an instrument. Like existence, music surrounds Harry, even before he is able to understand it. As a child, Harry admits his inability to understand on an abstract, rational level the notes blasting off that field in the middle of the Louisiana pines, but his experience nonetheless sends "dread right down to [his] bones" and calls him to action. Harry's response to the situation thus moves beyond fear of Jones as a god and into the realm of existential angst.

Only a moment of reflection is necessary to conclude that an eight-year-old boy has no business bearing arms and dying in battle. Nevertheless, this is the intuitive call Harry receives from his experience with Jones's music; it is beyond rational thought and squarely in the realm of existential possibility. Harry's intuitive desire to "pick up a rifle and just get killed somewhere" is, as Kierkegaard writes concerning existential dread, "the reality of freedom as possibility anterior to possibility." While the actual possibility of such action is practically impossible, the possibility of such a possibility is experienced intuitively, beyond any rational, conscious consideration of the "actual" possibility. This "possibility anterior to possibility," however, is conjoined at this point in the story with the reality of his situation—a Louisiana mill town in 1950—and so his desire is not converted to action. But what this moment *does* do is articulate Harry's tendency toward (or openness to) existential possibility.

In one of the earliest passages in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea,* Roquentin demonstrates a moment of incomprehensible, yet palpable, existential dread similar to that felt by Harry hiding beneath the high school bleachers. Standing before the churning ocean watching children

"playing ducks and drakes", Roquentin picks up a stone to toss into the water, just as the children are doing without the slightest reservation. "Just at that moment," however, writes Roquentin, "I stopped, dropped the stone and left." Roquentin's difficulty in hurling the stone is linked to the mysterious feelings of dread which have begun to attack him. "I can't explain to myself," he writes; "anyhow, it was certain that I was afraid or had some other feeling of that sort. If I had only known what I was afraid of, I would have made a great step forward."

The anxiety of existence that the informed reader recognizes in Roquentin is the same felt by Harry at the mercy of Jones's band. After conveying the sentiment quoted earlier—that such music makes him "want to pick up a rifle and just get killed somewhere"—Harry adds, "The trombones and tubas went deeper than what before my heart ever had room for. And I just didn't know what to think." While confronted with the desire to act—whether to throw a stone or to take up a rifle—the protagonist in each story is unable to do so. Moreover, each protagonist "can't explain to [him]self" (*Nausea*) the nature of his dread. For the most part Harry, like Roquentin in *Nausea*, struggles throughout *Geronimo Rex* to resolve the myriad dilemmas that result either from action taken recklessly, or from paralysis resulting from overanalysis or bad faith. As a child, however, Harry demonstrates an acute ability to create existential meaning through action.

Harry's strong affinity at such a young age for World War II reveals one of the major factors accounting for his intuitive existential perspective. In *Nausea*, writes René Lafarge, Roquentin's intuition "is [revealed] through a harrowing experience, both disgusting and frightening, [in which] being is grasped in its contingency and its gratuity. . . . " Just as Sartre himself found in World War II the impetus for his own existential viewpoint, so does Harry, in viewing images of the harrowing death and frightening action of war, develop as a child the ability to accept life's brutality as merely a consequence of existence, to resist the paralysis of feigned erudition or overanalysis, and to act "when some simple act [is] called for."

Repeated references throughout the early pages of *Geronimo Rex* to World War II reinforce the importance of action in Harry's psyche and demonstrate Hannah's subtle cues signaling

an important historical source for the novel's philosophical underpinnings:

> I'm second-grader Harriman Monroe. My mind is full of little else but notes on the atrocities of World War II. I saw them all in photographs in a book compiled by a national magazine. It was on some playmate's daddy's shelf. Then I'm eight, third grade, and have in part understood what I saw. I'm not clever enough to be horrified yet.

The harrowing atrocities of World War II provide Harry with the same evidence that historically supported Sartre's pronouncement of the contingency of existence. In his autobiographical work, *The Words,* Sartre remarks that "children and soldiers don't bother their heads about the dead." Harry's comments above confirm here the applicability of Sartre's words. Images of war rend the veil of convention and common notions of civility. Harry's viewing of photographs of war atrocities, having already occurred by the time the reader meets him, exposes him to the potential brutality of existence and the contingency of humankind's civility. Humans can be civil or horrible to one another with equal ease, just as a seemingly innocent object like a cheese knife can be used to eat dessert or gouge out an acquaintance's eye. By extension, any suggestion of a purposeful essence inherent in anything is seen to be merely wishful thinking.

Harry's exposure to the horrors of war stands as a major influence in the emergence of his keen existential self-awareness. Nevertheless, according to Sartre these same conditions also surround all humanity, rendering all, in a sense, isolated by conflict. Cranston supports this reading of Sartre, agreeing that "existentialists lay great stress on the isolation, the solitude, the 'abandonment' of the individual; and no existentialist writer has stressed this more than Sartre . . . " The contingent, random absurdity of individual existence, once realized, prohibits the individual from seeing life through established convention. As Roquentin amazedly admits in *Nausea*, "*Anything* can happen, *anything.*"

Two episodes from Chapter 2 in particular portray Harry as possessed of an uncanny sense of the existential milieu. Harry's killing of one of his neighbor's peacocks and the entanglement arising from the mysterious appearance in his yard of a festering dog and a dying mule expose to the reader the futility of both feigned erudition and conventional belief. These incidents, as well

as the settings in which they occur, not only reveal Harry's existential vision but also heighten its clarity by contrasting it with the bourgeois mindset of his father, Ode Elann. As a child, Harry recognizes the possibility arising before possibility, and this recognition reveals itself in his willingness to act. In the end, Harry's childhood view of life and death—of human existence—aligns itself surprisingly closely with that of Sartre, as several comparisons will confirm.

One would think that such a revelation, experienced in the truth of subjectivity, would be difficult to ignore. Sartre, however, argues that all individuals are aware of the reality of existence, yet most practice a form of self-deception or self-delusion that keeps the harsh truth of existence at bay. For Sartre, the difference that separates those with authentic existential perspective from those without it involves the latter group's *mauvaise foi,* defined by Cranston as "culpable self-deception, by means of which certain people evade their moral responsibility." When in *mauvaise foi,* often translated as "bad faith," an individual denies both the harsh brutality of existence as well as the total gratuity of Being, choosing instead methods of evasion such as abstracted thought or belief in conventional (and often bourgeois) value systems. Such evasion, claims Sartre, is immoral. One must choose to confront one's existence, acknowledging one's past for what it is—mediocre, ineffectual, or whatever—and then choose to throw oneself forward, to project oneself, to *be,* creating for oneself an essence—a history—involving authentic commitment and action rather than continued inauthentic, self-deceived flight. Among adults such commitment is rare, although in the young it is often implicit in their simple and direct perspective. For Harry, this existential ethic is first demonstrated in his childhood reactions to violence and death.

Hannah, of course, is not the first author to delineate the presence of an intuitive existentialist perspective in children. For the existential philosophers, it seems, the implicit innocence of youth allows closer encounters with the dread of existence, while such encounters remain obscured from or denied by adults. The philosophical premise for the intuitive existential perception of children can be traced back to the earliest generally acknowledged existentialist, Kierkegaard. In *The Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard directly addresses the presence of existential dread in children, whom he sees as "posited

in innocence" and, therefore, "not [seated in] guilt", as might occur in the anxiety over a particular wrongdoing, for example. "This dread," writes Kierkegaard, in fact "belongs to the child so essentially that [the child] cannot do without it; even though it alarms him, it captivates him nevertheless by its sweet feeling of apprehension." This apprehension, however, is "more definitely indicated as a seeking after adventure, a thirst for the prodigious, the mysterious."

In *Geronimo Rex,* Harry's desire for adventure and its manifestation early in the novel in the form of war fantasies tightens the link between Kierkegaardian dread and Sartrean existentialism stemming from the violence of war. Harry plays in patches of cane "where," he thinks, "the Jap snipers should've ideally been sitting in the high crotches and just ready to be potted by my air rifle." On another day of play, Harry calmly notes that "a piece of stick I'd thrown at the mailbox a week ago" had been imagined as "a grenade and the mailbox [as] a German's mouth." Such adventuresome play clearly associates Harry's behavior with that described by Kierkegaard.

Besides philosophical precedent, however, there is also autobiographic evidence on the part of both Sartre and Hannah that suggests the personal impetus for their existential perspectives. In *Jean-Paul Sartre: Freedom and Commitment*, Charles G. Hill points out that "[Sartre] was already aware as a child of [the contingency] about existence." In his autobiography, *The Words,* Sartre admits a moment of childhood existential revelation which reveals that the seeming innocuousness of Kierkegaard's comments in reality is not so:

> At the very moment when [I was convinced] that nothing exists without a reason...my own reason for being slipped away; I would suddenly discover that I did not really count....Nobody, beginning with me, knew why the hell I had been born.

*(Qtd. in Hill, p. 41)*

The seminal influence of such a revelation on Sartre's work is evident, for as an adult, he worked out on a philosophical level this recognition of gratuitous existence first felt intuitively in his childhood.

Instead of the disturbingly confessional mode emphasized above by Sartre, Hannah uses the veils of fiction and humor to discuss his own childhood. In his heavily autobiographic work

*Boomerang,* Hannah implies the prodigiousness of existence, toning down Sartre's pessimism by mingling his recollections of childhood with punches of humor nonetheless containing the potential for great destructiveness. The results strongly reinforce Kierkegaard's views on the intuitive existentialism of children:

> We were so tiny but we were sincere. . . . [W]hen we were tiny we fought and we had secret intrigues. We built a fort out of railroad ties. The kids would roam out and find pecans and horse apples and a stick of dynamite.
>
> There were Reds and Nazis out there.
>
> We knew about dynamite.

Here Hannah intuitively demonstrates Kierkegaard's philosophical observations while also demonstrating the power inherent even in the play of children. The quest of *Boomerang*'s narrator—virtually Hannah himself—for "secret intrigues," along with the underlying seriousness of very real danger, informs the character and experiences of Harry Monroe in *Geronimo Rex*.

While considerably more overtly humorous than Sartre in his ironic "portrait of the respectable citizens of Bouville . . . as they take their Sunday strolls" in *Nausea* (Hill, p. 40), Hannah creates a bourgeois industrial backdrop before which he lays out the existential drama of most of Book One of *Geronimo Rex*. In Book One, the condition of *mauvaise foi* is clearly presented in the life of Ode Elann Monroe, Harry's father. As the behavior of Ode Elann Monroe demonstrates, the attempt both to maintain meaningless conventions of civility where events demand coarser or more direct action and to avoid confrontation with the mediocrity of one's own life fails to protect those in fear of the surging contingency of existence. This failure, while experienced individually, is yet symptomatic of a class of people against whom much of Sartre's *Nausea* was directed. *Nausea,* writes one critic, is in large part "a scathing satire of the bourgeoisie and its 'principles'" (Hill, p. 40). For Barry Hannah, Ode Elann acts as the bourgeois target of young Harry's existential indictments.

Harry's description of his home, situated between the houses of "the Sink brothers, who were the paper mill barons of Dream of Pines," contains as great a stereotype of bourgeois capitalism as anything in the seaside town of Bouville in *Nausea*. Before the arrival of the Monroes, the Sinks in their greed had turned the surrounding woodlands, once "looking deep and sappy," with "real shade on the road and big rocks lying mossy off the roadbank," into a "smelly heap a mile east of Pierre Hills"— the pretentious name the Sinks bestowed upon their estate. Harry observes, "By the time my old man moved us into our house . . . the Sink brothers and the rest of their friends managing the mills had stoked up such a glut of wood in the mill production that Pierre Hills itself breathed a slight fart of the industrialized woodlands."

The Sinks provide an image of bourgeois stature to which Ode Elann, Harry's father, shamelessly aspires. Ode Elann, owner of a local mattress factory, "always had a blind admiration for anybody holding monstrous wealth." According to Harry,

> [Ode Elann] thought it took an unearthly talent to become rich beyond rich. He loved the city of New York because it was so incomprehensibly rich. He loved paying homage to it, and I guess that's why we took all the New York magazines and newspapers.

Like Sartre's benefactors of Bouville who "try, through their portraits, to prove that their lives were 'necessary' and 'right'" (Hill, p. 41), Ode Elann Monroe takes "all the New York magazines and newspapers" in order to bolster his idea of himself as a member of the cultural and financial elite. Himself a parvenu in comparison to the Sinks, Ode Elann longs to be accepted by the upper echelon of bourgeois society that the brothers symbolize. Thus it follows that Ode Elann "didn't really allow anything to be said against the Sink brothers" even when they "never sent condolences or anything" when Harry's mother had a miscarriage. Harry eventually forces his father to see the futility in such groveling, but at this point in Harry's life, his father lives in obsequiousness to his bourgeois icons, the Sink brothers.

In addition to his bourgeois vision of wealth, Ode Elann nurses Sartrean bad faith concerning the notion of intellectual pursuit: "He was one of these magazine handsomes who was turning gray in the hair at forty-five; the gray strands were flames from a hot and ancient mental life, or so he thought." But despite all of the New York reading materials in the Monroe household, "nobody read anything in them beyond the gaudiest headlines." Surprisingly keen in his observations, Harry unemotionally notes the chimera of his father's erudition:

[Ode Elann's] mental life was always the great fake of the household. He had three years at L.S.U., makes sixty thousand a year, has the name of a bayou poet . . . and has read a book or two over above what he was assigned as a sophomore. . . . [H]e's a snob, and goes about faking an abundant mental life.

Ode Elann's intellectual airs have a profound impact on the young Harry. By observing his father's self-deception, Harry develops a dislike for hollow rumination, and he comes to identify easily such falsity in others beside his father. At the age of eight, however, Harry's primary interaction is on the home front, and so his disdain for such delusion is focused on Ode Elann. Harry's hypothesis concerning his father's true activity during the latter's periods of "thought" when "he's demanding Quiet Hours outside his study after supper" reveals the existential basis both behind his father's behavior and beneath Harry's criticism of it:

[In] his study, . . . if my guess is right, he sits scrutinizing his latest hangnail and writing his own name over and over in different scripts until he bores himself into a coma. About midnight, he charges out of the study, ignoring Mother and me watching the national anthem on the television, every insipid show of which (TV was bland-new to us then) he adored better than breath, but denied himself for the mental life, and he is banging into the walls of the hall making toward his bed and sleep, so frightened by the mediocrity of his own thoughts that it's truly sad.

The grim hilarity of Harry's description of his father nevertheless belies a deeper observation of existential import, one expounded upon by Sartre, although it is strongly prefigured in the work of Martin Heidegger.

Heidegger argues that mere positivist "[c]alculation uses everything that 'is' as units of computation . . . and, in the computation, uses up its stock of units." This calculation, which Sartre would identify as the bourgeois attempt to create order and meaning out of either the material or the abstract, can never reach the essence of Being itself, because the things calculated are always part of what-is (existence), not what transcends what-is—Being. Harry in his innocence recognizes this, while his father, despite his partial college education—which he felt entitled him to "life on a higher plane"—"always endured the horror of knowing that his thoughts in the study were no different than the ones he had during the day when he added a random sum on the to-the-

good book." In equating Ode Elann's thinking with mere calculation, Hannah adopts a deeply philosophical analogy symbolizing the inability of Harry's father to contemplate Being, which according to Heidegger must be conceived by "thinking . . . thoughts [that] not only do not calculate but are absolutely determined by what is 'other' than what-is."

But not only can Harry's father not conceive beyond mere calculation; he also cannot surmount his cowardice in the face of existence. It is this "dread of dread" which exudes from Ode Elann Monroe, and which in fact causes his paradoxical despair over and maintenance of a self-deluded mental life. Unconsciously following the lead of Descartes, Ode Elann hopes that by engaging in abstracted thought, he can separate that thought from consciousness and thereby avoid confrontation with his mediocre bourgeois being and perhaps understand his existence in terms of a "meaningful" abstraction.

In contrast to his father's bad faith, Harry in his childhood demonstrates what might be called "good faith," the delineation of which it now seems appropriate to present. "The nature of consciousness" for Sartre "simultaneously is to be what it is not and not to be what it is" (*Being*). Despite the complexities of this condition of consciousness—a condition that undermines the possibility of good faith as opposite to and separate from bad faith—Sartre maintains that "that does not mean that we can not radically escape bad faith." Instead of the term "good faith," Sartre defers in a footnote to a term original to Heidegger: "authenticity." Sartre's development of authenticity, however, moves beyond Heidegger's more overtly academic analysis of praxis and on to a more concrete realization of authenticity in specific contexts.

As opposed to his father, young Harry Monroe has no reservations about this existential perspective, for his actions demonstrate a commitment in perfect accord with Sartre's pronouncement on authenticity. That perspective, like Roquentin's in *Nausea*, is "'prereflexive,' or instinctive" (Hill, p. 39). But unlike Roquentin, whose "reactions to things, people, and situations . . . cause varying degrees and types of physical distress as he periodically rejects what he senses to be the truth about existence", Harry's childhood existential intuition assesses a given situation and reacts immediately, before becoming bogged down in purposeless deliberation that

is, in fact, only an attempt to delay or avoid taking action.

Harry's commitment to action is best presented in his slaying of one of the Sink's peacocks, an action to which the protagonist commits himself wholly and for which he provides a straightforward Sartrean explanation. A second demonstration appears shortly after this one, but in both, Ode Elann's reaction to Harry's acts clearly reveals his bourgeois obsequiousness and his flight from the harshness of existence.

"The Sink brothers had two peafowl that came trespassing in our cane patch alongside the driveway," begins Harry. Ode Elann, taken in by the bourgeois ascendancy of the Sinks, relishes the peacocks' "prissing around on his land," believing that the peacocks' presence signifies some vague comradeship between his family and the Sinks. Harry, however, thinks otherwise of the birds: "The female was a whore, and the male lived on her, and was jealous as hell."

"Seeking after adventure" (Kierkegaard, p. 38), air rifle in hand, Harry one day attempts to explore the cane patch, pressing "back to the deeps, where the Jap snipers" of his World-War-II-permeated imagination "should've ideally been sitting . . ." Instead of the Japanese, however, Harry "hit a dip and slid off into that peafowl dung I didn't know was there." The resulting scene is not a sanitary one: "It was all in my hair and up the barrel of my gun, and my lever had this unmentionable stalactite of green hanging on it."

Harry's response to his experience in the cane patch subtly foreshadows the time of the explosive resurgence of Harry's own existential awareness during college: "I looked around and saw there wouldn't be any decent playing in here until maybe I was twenty." It is with the discovery of Geronimo in college that Harry fully realizes the Sartrean nature of his existence: that committed action always supersedes the bourgeois paralysis that results from overanalyzing options. In an absurd world, action must precede moral speculation upon action; committed action, in fact, becomes *the* moral choice. Immediately following his experience in the cane patch, Harry places himself in a situation demanding just such action.

One day, as he is "walking out for the papers at the end of the drive," Harry is attacked by the male peacock, who "all of a sudden beats out of the deeps and starts hammering at my thigh."

Harry clearly states that he "wasn't thinking about the birds or the cane" prior to this incident. Like Roquentin in *Nausea*, Harry does not seek out existence; rather, manifestations of it rush in on him. On the surface, Harry acknowledges that after the peacock's sudden and unprovoked attack, "I was afraid of him." If the peacock is seen as a metaphor for some Sartrean Other, then the episode contains a powerful lesson in existence and action, for despite his fear, Harry refuses "to detour around the cane walking back on account of any bird." Instead of cowering, Harry chooses to act:

> I picked up a piece of stick I'd thrown at the mailbox a week ago, pretending the stick was a grenade and the mailbox was a German's mouth; it was a healthy length of hickory, never a very feasible grenade. I walked back on the cane edge of the drive, and got to where the cock ambushed me coming out. The old boy was roosting about four feet off the ground this time and jumped on me at head level, making a loud racket in the cane as he launched himself. This terrified me, but I stood still and swung on the peacock with both arms. I caught him on the head, and his beak swerved like plastic. He dropped on the bricks like a club, his fantail all folded in. I toed him. He was dead, with an eye wiped away.

Having seen the horrors of war at such a young age, Harry possesses a hazy awareness of the absurdity and cruelty of life, while his father still adheres to fallacious ideas of essential meaning and purpose. Moreover, Harry is not so weighted down with his father's "sheer timidity" that he cannot take action when life demands it. Harry's fear is not enough to drive him to cowardice, as his father's fear of the mediocrity of his own life has driven Ode Elann to the cowardice of feigned erudition.

Motoring up the drive immediately after Harry has "toed" the peacock, Ode Elann can only stare in frightened amazement. When the father finally speaks, another of the peacock's metaphorical functions is suggested. At first in denial, Harry's father asks helplessly, "It's not dead, is it, son?" Then, realizing the truth, he declares, "Pray to God. He *is* dead." The pronoun in Ode Elann's pronouncement contains an ambiguity which provides the key to interpreting the significance of the peacock here, for while "He" seemingly refers to the dead peacock, the word's proximity to "God" echoes the infamous claim made in Nietzsche's *Joyful Wisdom* by the madman with the lantern:

Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction?—for even Gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him.

The aftermath of Harry's violent act is more than his father can handle, and even though the peacock's death offers Ode Elann a moment of existential insight, he is too far gone in his bad faith to confront the truth. Like the message of Nietzsche's madman, who, casting down his lantern, cries to the astonished listeners, "I come too early. . . . [M]y time has not yet come," the existential import of the peacock's death comes too early for Ode Elann to realize fully. The reader, nevertheless, can recognize in the scene several metaphors symbolizing Harry's own emergence into an awareness of the existential ethic.

Once Harry's father has pronounced the death of the bird, he asks Harry, "Why would you kill a lovely bird like. . . . You know who he belongs to, don't you?" In his language, Ode Elann reveals his primary reason for being upset: the bird, symbol of his connection with the Sinks (and their status), has been brutally struck down by his own son. Harry's reply to his father's question is simple and direct, "He came at me. Twice." Harry's answer to his father's next question, "What do you think we're going to do about this?", is equally abrupt:

> "Put some lime on that sucker, he'll melt into the ground without a stink in three–four days." The old man's jaw dropped.
>
> "Who taught you about *lime*?"
>
> "Aw, the Nazis used it on bodies in concentration camps."
>
> "Oh yeah? You're really getting an education, aren't you?"
>
> "Yessir. You want me to handle it?" The old man was looking away at some hopeless horizon.
>
> "I want *what?*" he said.
>
> "You want me to handle this peacock. I'll drag him up in that cane. You get me a little lime, and nobody'll know nothing." Now the old man's roasting me with a hard look.
>
> "You get your little ass up to the bathroom and get your pants down. I'm going to handle *you.*"

Harry's father exhibits anger and confusion at his son's knowledge but more importantly at

his ability to act. Note that Harry, who throughout the novel generally adheres to correct grammar, comments that after he disposes of the peacock, "nobody'll know nothing." Heidegger's premise in "What is Metaphysics" is that by bravely thinking beyond mere calculation of what-is, an awareness of Nothing which was once intimated through existential angst or dread reveals itself in its relationship with Being. Similarly, Sartre argues that the authentic individual has realized himself as the origin of the Nothingness that haunts him in his existential angst. Based on such a preponderance of symbolic evidence, it can be argued reasonably that were he to take action, Ode Elann—a "nobody" certainly by Harry's standards—would experience a truly existential moment, a moment of confrontation with Nothingness. As is to be expected, however, Ode Elann continually but unsuccessfully flees from such an encounter. Nevertheless, the metaphorical significance of this episode in *Geronimo Rex* is one of the most powerful, and its presence early in the novel signifies the importance of existential themes within the story.

Shortly after the incident with the peacock, Harry finds himself in another situation exposing the meaninglessness of existence and of the primacy of action. Despite his father's "trying to explain the concept of a yard chore and what it had to do with Duty," Harry finds himself skeptical of the idea, preferring to let the leaves in the yard "lay and rot, and just imagining all the moldering beauty underneath they must be causing." The appearance of a large Doberman in the front yard, apparently having been led there by the pheromones of Harry's menstruating terrier, Maggie, "save[s Harry] immediate Duty on the leaves." What is important about this incident, however, is not the Doberman but Ode Elann's cowardice and inability to act:

> But the old man couldn't do anything about the Doberman. . . . It was the gentleness of his that my mother always bragged on him about. I didn't see this side of him, or wasn't ready to see it, until a couple of days later, when it was too sad to miss.

With this transition, Harry recounts the incident that, more than any other, opens his eyes to his father's inability to take action. Harry writes that one morning, the Doberman is replaced by a "new suitor-dog outside. He wasn't on the porch. He was out in the edge of the cane. He was a sick, scabby, and practically

hairless combination of Spitz and setter." The disgusting dog does not arrive alone, but with a mule, the two "apparently . . . joined up to see the last of it together. They were both clearly terminal." Just as Harry's experience in the "the deeps" of the cane prefaces his killing of Bayard the peacock, Ode Elann's experience with the Doberman prefaces his encounter with the Spitz-setter and the mule.

Although both Harry and his father spy the creatures simultaneously while staring out the bay window of their home, they have diametrically opposed reactions. "All right, Daddy, I'll go be getting the lime in the garage while you get the shotgun. Better put in some double-aught shells", declares Harry without a moment's consideration. To Harry, the immediate response to the situation is one of action. His father, however, again demonstrates his ineffectual existence: after "fak[ing] three paragraphs of thought", he suggests, "They look like they're on the move. Don't they?" and takes Harry on to school, leaving the decrepit animals out near the cane. In order to avoid action, Ode Elann practices *mauvaise foi,* although his asking "Don't they?" immediately after his attempt at self-deception clearly indicates that this statement is an excuse to avoid action, not a logical conclusion based on observation.

"The animals," Harry states laconically, "didn't leave. They were still out there four days later. The old man's sense of beauty was hurt." To a man like Ode Elann, the cruelty of existence as seen in the "hewed-out," "mangy", odiferous and quite clearly dying creatures in his yard is horrifying, and shooting the animals would be too blatant an admission of the senseless existence of these two creatures. Instead, Ode Elann asks Harry to use his air rifle to "pop them" into moving elsewhere. The reader realizes by this point that the father's bourgeois "gentleness" is in reality nothing more than a fear of facing life's cruelties, and that it is not the animals' welfare being considered, but rather the self-deceived, idealized conception of the world under which Ode Elann operates. When his father changes his mind about the air rifle and tells Harry, "Wait! . . . Don't do that. No use to hurt them if they just *can't* move", Harry realizes that "the old man's as gentle as a nerve."

Such gentleness is a great impediment to action, Harry learns. When the animals do not leave but continue to deteriorate in his yard, Ode Elann attempts another maneuver to avoid action: "There's an organization I've heard of that handles these types of animals" he offers, despite the fact that no such organization is to be found in Dream of Pines. Inaction creates guilt on the part of Ode Elann, but his cowardice in turn refuses to permit action. One day, when father and son are out in the yard examining a spot from which the dog had shuffled a few feet, Harry's father finally admits his self-deception to his son:

> Where the dog had lain in the grass, hair remained, and hundreds of maggots.
>
> The old man winced, and groaned, "Harry. This is the first time in my life I ever knew God let things like this happen. . . . I've read books about it," he said flatly. "But somebody has been keeping the real information from me. When things die, they get eaten by worms. They really do."

Ode Elann's revelation is not merely that "when things die, they get eaten by worms." His revelation is that the world abounds in senseless cruelty and absurdity. In reality, of course, Ode Elann has known but has been deceiving himself, acting in bad faith by evading the brutality of existence.

Despite this revelation, however, Ode Elann is still unable to take action to resolve the situation, as Harry observes with great acumen, "[Ode Elann] was not a hero of tender feelings; this gentle portion of himself mixed up his mind quite a bit, and landed him in protracted confusion, when some simple act was called for." Harry finds in this characterization something of his older self; as Harry later admits of himself, Ode Elann would "have to *dream* an answer before he knew it was right. He'd wake up and know what he ought to do, having just seen some righteous version of himself in his dream." This and the words of his wife are the only things capable of initiating action in Ode Elann, and neither one stems from personal commitment. The novel later reveals in Harry similar characteristics, and even at this point Harry-as-narrator readily admits such similarities: "The old man and I always tended to trust every girl we ever knew, and little else but our own dreams in sleep."

One Saturday night, Harry rises from sleep to realize that his father has "dreamed something, or the old lady had risen up in the night and commanded something in short, simple English." From the beginning of the ordeal,

Harry, of course, has "wanted to personally shoot the big mule sucker and see him cave in." Yet his father has refrained from action, because, according to Harry's mother, "He thinks he can shoot them in a kinder way than what the sheriff would." Harry immediately recognizes the absurdity of the idea, stating that "a bullet to the brain is just a bullet to the brain. . . . You can't die quick in different ways." Like his father, Harry's mother is alarmed by her son's frank awareness of the facts of existence. After reprimanding him with her transparent belief that "little boys aren't supposed to be thinking about bullets to the brain," she helplessly offers that "Daddy has to think it out," despite Harry's assessment that "Daddy's waited wrong this time."

At six the next morning, Harry and his father finally rise to take action. The animals, as if sensing the finality of their situation or perhaps the final breaking of Ode Elann's "gentleness," had "gotten in the cane and smashed it up, wallowing": "The mule was lying dead among some broken stalks. The dog lifted up his head in the foot-high pin-plants on the edge of the cane. He smiled when the old man shot him with the twelve-gauge."

In the end, Harry's father is forced to take the same action called for weeks ago by Harry when the animals were first sighted. Moreover, Ode Elann's inability to act has only resulted in the prolonged suffering of two creatures, as well as his own suffering of guilt due to his inaction. In a lesson known intuitively by Harry in his innocence, Ode Elann finally learns the inexplicable nature of existence and the necessity of action over thought, real or feigned. Harry observes, "I think he gave up trying to be a perfect neighbor to the Sink boys that morning." Harry's father even admits in retrospect, "That peacock Bayard needed killing," and he tells Harry, "I was proud of you when you bashed him." Harry, however, realizes that this is merely another, a different, form of bad faith on the part of "Ode Elann Monroe: slayer of the Spitz-setter. Puller of the trigger when the chips were down."

From a theme-setting overture to several character-defining episodes of absurdity and action, the early pages of *Geronimo Rex* place heavy but subtle emphasis on the existential milieu and the two modes of addressing it: bad faith versus authentic action. Like Roquentin's experiences in Sartre's *Nausea,* Harry's engagements relate to him the contingency of existence as well as the absurdity of notions such as authority, determinism, duty, and idealistic abstraction. Nevertheless, throughout these examples Hannah keeps the deeper philosophic issues at arm's length, referencing them obliquely, making their final purpose unclear. Moreover, the humor in Hannah's characters consistently threatens to undermine the presumed "seriousness" of any of the novel's philosophic import.

When prodded during a 1992 interview concerning the character of Harry Monroe, Hannah reveals what could be taken as the definitive statement on *Geronimo Rex*'s angst-ridden protagonist:

> Hannah: I admit it. Harry's a creep. A jerk. And I don't care for him. It's me.
>
> Cawelti: He carries a gun . . .
>
> Hannah: Very cowardly, and [a] punkish thing to do—
>
> Cawelti: Did you ever carry one?
>
> Hannah: I didn't, but I kinda wanted to, you know I wanted to have a smart coat, and have a gun. I realize now that it's a very clichéd, Southern thing to do. There's not a damn thing original about it, every redneck can do it and does. I think it's in the French mode, you know, creating art by drawing a pistol. You know, it's the absolute act, the act of firing a gun randomly into a crowd—it's the absolute act of art.
>
> Cawelti: Existential act.
>
> Hannah: Right, your existential act.
>
> Cawelti: You've gotta make some choices—
>
> Hannah: I had existential pretensions about Harry.

Hannah's claim of having "existential pretensions about Harry" suggests on one hand an admission of his attempt to create in Harry an existential hero "in the French mode." On the other hand, Hannah has always demonstrated a strong tendency toward farce—something he has admitted doing with all things both Southern and serious. "In one respect," writes critic Fred Hobson, "Hannah belongs to the guns-guts-and-glory world of southern thought. . . . In another respect, it might be claimed, Hannah writes a critique of that southern world." If Hobson seems hesitant to take sides on the issue, it is due to intelligence rather than indecision; of the two options offered, Hannah consistently takes both.

In his biographical and literary sketch of Hannah for *Contemporary Fiction Writers of the South*, Owen Gilman, Jr. concludes that "future scholarship will be obliged to assess Barry Hannah's supercharged style as a mode of being." I would argue that within Hannah's work the search for an authentic mode of being runs much deeper than his style alone—that in fact Hannah's work is haunted by "the big questions" of existence, and that his stories reflect very human attempts to confront those questions with varying degrees of courage and cowardice. It is the resulting interplay that brings Hannah's humor sparkling to the surface. Hannah has said that "all life is absurd, but if you keep laughing and smiling, you can make it better." Discussing his novel *Ray,* Hannah offers the following:

> Life *is* a lot of confusion and pain and death, and the only way to deal with it is to face it with the attitude that there's no place to go but up. "Sabers up gentlemen!" is the way I end *Ray*. That's all I know. Straight ahead. Hit 'em high. Let's go get 'em again. That's the only solution I know. There's too much depression and confusion and death to allow any *real* hope. We don't have a f——ing chance. But "Sabers up!"

Hannah thus remains existentialism's postmodern faithful, cognizant of the philosophy's inherent and undermining potential for farce amid a fragmented, nostalgic, and disintegrating South, yet unwilling to forsake the glorious and daring pursuit of authentic meaning. In *Geronimo Rex,* as well as throughout his canon, Hannah's oblique handling of deep philosophical issues within the rowdy framework of "neo-Southern Gothic" humor evinces his intuitive command of both the existential ethic and its farcical critique. It is a credit both to the author and to the South that Hannah juggles the fragments of this postmodern world while often making us laugh ourselves to tears.

**Source:** Christopher O. Griffin, "Bad Faith and the Ethic of Existential Action: Kierkegaard, Sartre, and a Boy Named Harry," in *Mississippi Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 2, Spring 2001, pp. 173–96.

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> Solomon brings the subject of Existentialism to life for readers by presenting imagined interviews with Sartre, Heidegger, and Camus. The result is more focused and less abstract than actual interviews with these authors, serving well as an introduction to their thoughts.

# *Expressionism*

Expressionism arose in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a response to bourgeois complacency and the increasing mechanization and urbanization of society. At their most popular between 1910 and 1925, just before and just after World War I, expressionist writers distorted objective features of the sensory world using Symbolism and dream-like elements in their works illustrating alienating and often emotionally overwhelmed sensibilities. Painters such as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Edvard Munch helped to lay the foundation for Expressionism in their use of distorted figures and vibrant color schemes to depict raw and powerfully emotional states of mind. Munch's *The Scream* (1894), for example, a lithograph depicting a figure with a contorted face screaming in horror, epitomized the tone of much expressionist art. In literature, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche emphasized cultivating individual willpower and transcending conventional notions of reasoning and morality. His *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1885), a philosophic prose poem about the "New Man," had a profound influence on expressionist thought. In France, symbolist poets such as Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire wrote visionary poems exploring dark and ecstatic emotional landscapes.

In Germany in the twentieth century, poets such as Georg Trakl and Gottfried Benn practiced what became known as Expressionism by abandoning meter, narrative, and conventional

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

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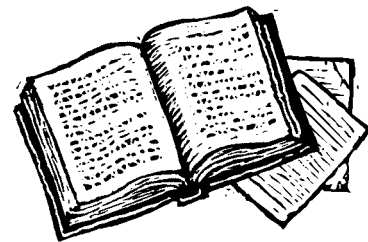
syntax, instead organizing their poems around symbolic imagery. In fiction, Franz Kafka embodied expressionist themes and styles in stories such as *The Metamorphosis* (1915), which tells of a traveling salesman who wakes to find himself transformed into a giant insect. Expressionist dramatists include Georg Kaiser, Frank Wedekind, Ernst Toller, and August Strindberg, often referred to as the "Father of Expressionism." Some critics claim Strindberg's play *To Damascus* (1902) is the first true expressionist drama; others argue that it is Reinhard Johannes Sorge's *The Beggar*, performed in 1917; and still others claim it is Oskar Kokoschka's *Murderer, the Women's Hope*, written in 1907. The discrepancy underscores the question as to whether a coherent literary movement called Expressionism with a common set of features ever really existed or whether it is more an attitude towards art and society. In the early 1930s, the Nazi regime, which considered the movement decadent, banned its practitioners from publishing their work or producing their plays.
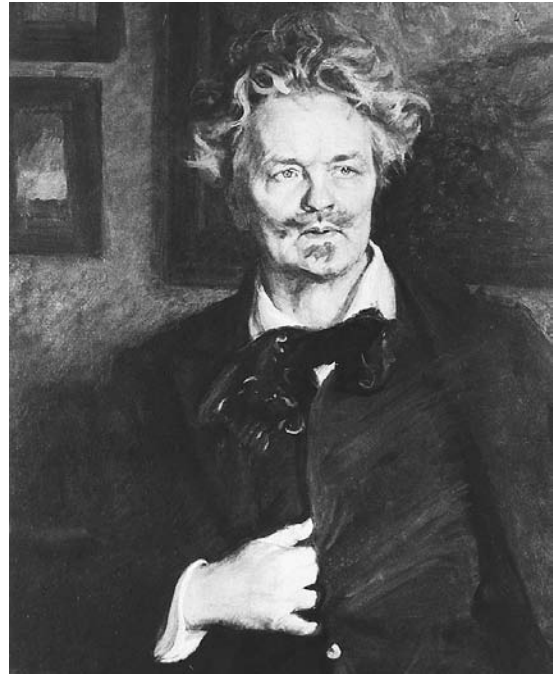


*August Strindberg* *(Painting by Richard Bergh. © Bettmann / Corbis)*

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Federico García Lorca (1898–1936)

Federico García Lorca was born June 5, 1898, in the Andalusian region of Spain to a wealthy family of landowners. As a young man, he became involved in the art scene of the city of Granada, publishing his first book in 1918. In 1919, García Lorca moved to Madrid where he immersed himself in the theater and began writing plays; however, his avant-garde work was not appreciated by audiences. Although he continued to write plays, García Lorca next focused on poetry. His most famous collection of verse is *Gypsy Ballads* (1928), which made him a literary success. García Lorca was homosexual and had many relationships with other men, most of them ending badly, which contributed to the young man's depression. From 1930 to 1936, García Lorca was director of a student theater company that toured rural Spain and performed classic works with modern interpretations. During this time, he wrote his expressionistic play, *Blood Wedding* (1933). Civil war broke out in Spain in July of 1936; García Lorca was arrested and shot by the Nationalist militia on August 19, 1936, for unknown reasons. Critic Denis Mac-Shane, like others, suspects it was for his leftist politics and homosexuality. His body was dumped in an unmarked grave.

### Franz Kafka (1883–1924)

Born on July 3, 1883, in Prague, Bohemia (later Czechoslovakia), Franz Kafka was an introverted, sickly, and shy boy who struggled to meet the expectations of a demanding father. After receiving a law degree in 1906, Kafka began writing in earnest, publishing his stories in the literary magazine of his good friend, Max Brod. Kafka died of tuberculosis on June 3, 1924, in Austria. Kafka had directed Brod to burn all of his manuscripts. Brod ignored Kafka's wish and, over the next few decades, edited and published all of the author's unfinished stories.

Like many of the expressionists, Kafka was influenced by Nietzsche and Strindberg. His writings, primarily novels and stories, depict an absurdist view of the world, which he describes in paradoxically lucid terms. In the use of symbols and types, his stories often resemble parables. Like Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka's characters often find themselves in the midst of an incomprehensible world, consumed with guilt and alienated from

those they love. *The Trial*, for example, a novel unfinished at the time of Kafka's death, concerns a bank clerk who is arrested but never told the charges. He futilely attempts to negotiate a Byzantine legal system to find the answer, but never does, and is finally killed "like a dog." In modern times, the term "Kafkaesque" is used as an adjective suggesting something possessing a complex, inscrutable, or bizarre quality.

### Georg Kaiser (1878–1945)

Widely acknowledged as the leader of the expressionist movement in theater, Georg Kaiser was born November 25, 1878, in Magdeburg, Germany. Kaiser's father, an insurance agent, was frequently away on business, and his mother, who schooled her six children at home, raised Kaiser. Like many of the characters in his plays, Kaiser was a traveler, venturing to Argentina for a time and throughout Europe. As business did not temperamentally suit him, he had difficulty making a living. However, his family financed his travels until 1908, when he married the wealthy Margarethe Habenicht. In plays such as *The Citizens of Calais* (1917) and *From Morn to Midnight* (1917), Kaiser juxtaposed fantasy and reality, used rapidly shifting scenes, and gave his characters generic names to underscore their symbolic and universal significance. Kaiser's plays typically feature a questing protagonist who searches everywhere for meaning but finds none. These characters often commit suicide. Kaiser's famous trilogy of plays—*Coral* (1917), *Gas I* (1918), and *Gas 2* (1920)—are as relevant in the early 2000s as they were in the 1920s in their indictment of mindless and mechanized labor and the selfishness of big business.

Kaiser's influence on the development of European drama cannot be overstated. Along with Strindberg and Toller, he changed the direction of twentieth-century drama by opening it to other dramatic possibilities. Critics consider Kaiser and Bertolt Brecht, who also used expressionist techniques, the two leading German playwrights of the twentieth century. Kaiser's plays were banned when the Nazis came to power in 1933. At the beginning of World War II, the writer fled to Switzerland, where he died of an embolism on June 4, 1945.

### Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953)

Born in New York City on October 16, 1888, Eugene O'Neill spent the first years of his life traveling around the country with his family while his father performed. Family dysfunction became a staple theme of his plays and is a recurring theme of expressionist theater. O'Neill read Strindberg and Wedekind while recuperating from tuberculosis in 1912 and began writing plays incorporating expressionist techniques and style. Not only was O'Neill the first American to write expressionist plays, but he was the first American playwright to receive international acclaim for his work. *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), O'Neill's first full-length play, received the Pulitzer Prize, and in 1936 the literary community showed its approval by awarding O'Neill the Nobel Prize in Literature. He is the first American playwright to have won the award. Literary historians point to his 1920 play, *The Emperor Jones* as an example of American expressionist theater, as well as *The Great God Brown* (1926). In these plays, O'Neill uses ghosts, music, lighting, and stage sets to externalize the inner life of his characters. Other O'Neill plays include *Desire under the Elms* (1924), *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1939–1941). After a long illness, O'Neill died of pneumonia on November 27, 1953, in Boston, Massachusetts.

### August Strindberg (1849–1912)

Often referred to by literary historians as the "Father of Expressionism," (Johan) August Strindberg was born January 22, 1849, in Stockholm, Sweden. His father, though well intentioned, was a strict disciplinarian whose expectations the writer labored under and rebelled against. Strindberg's lifelong difficulty with women both frustrated him and fueled his creative energies. Strindberg was opposed to the idea of a liberated woman, yet he was also attracted to women who refused to be limited to the role of mother and wife. This conflict contributed to three divorces and a string of failed romances. A novelist and essayist as well as a playwright, Strindberg had his first play produced when he was 21. However, for much of his life he struggled financially, working as a librarian, newsletter editor, tutor, and journalist. His controversial ideas often landed him in trouble, and in 1884 he was tried—yet acquitted—for blasphemy for stories he wrote that belittled women and criticized conventional religious practices. Toward the end of his life, Strindberg achieved critical as well as financial success, and his plays were performed throughout Europe. In 1912, he was awarded the "anti-Nobel Prize" in recognition for the way in which his writing challenged conventions and authority. He died in May of that year from stomach cancer.

Strindberg's early plays, written in a naturalistic vein, address historical matters using realistic dialogue as the primary means of communication. He developed his expressionist style, which he referred to as "dreamplay," in his later work. In plays such as *The Road to Damascus* (1898–1904), *The Dream Play* (1901), and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907), Strindberg uses "types" instead of fully developed characters and incorporates visual elements and music into the action to symbolize humanity's unconscious desires. In his dream sequences, Strindberg frequently represents humanity's misery and search for meaning and redemption.

### Georg Trakl (1887–1914)

Georg Trakl was born February 3, 1887, in Salzburg, Austria, into the middle-class Austrian family of an artistic but emotionally unstable mother. Trakl developed emotional problems as an adolescent. His reading of gloomy writers such as Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Arthur Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Baudelaire only added to his despair, as did his liberal use of various opiates. Trakl wrote frequently but only began to publish regularly after he met Ludwig von Ficker, editor of the journal *Der Brenner*, who nurtured his talent and provided Trakl with a vehicle for his poetry. Trakl's emotional health deteriorated during World War I, when, as a dispensing chemist, he had to care for a large number of wounded men. Seeing the obscene wounds of soldiers and witnessing their unrelenting pain compounded Trakl's own misery, and he was hospitalized for depression. In Krakow, Poland, on November 3, 1914, Trakl overdosed on cocaine.

Trakl's poems use symbolic imagery and have a dream-like structure. He frequently strings images that on the surface appear unrelated, but on a deeper level are tonally coherent. In this way, his poems are close to musical compositions in their structure. Although they are frequently about decay, death, and despair, Trakl's poems such as "All Souls," "A Romance to Night," "Mankind," and "Trumpets" often embody a kind of spiritual longing, characteristic of much expressionist verse. American poet Robert Bly helped to renew interest in Trakl's poetry during the 1970s by translating his work and linking it with "deep image" poetry.

### Frank Wedekind (1864–1918)

Born Benjamin Franklin Wedekind in Hanover, Germany, on July 24, 1864, Wedekind became one of the first playwrights in Germany to experiment with expressionist techniques. The son of a doctor and an actress, Wedekind studied law before dropping out of school to lead a bohemian life. Wedekind made his contempt of middle-class society evident in his plays, which attack hypocrisy and repressive sexual mores. In plays such as *Pandora's Box* (1904) and *Spring's Awakening* (1906), Wedekind graphically depicts themes of sexual repression in an effort to force audiences to change their behavior. He is perhaps best known for *Lulu* (1905), in which the protagonist, a femme fatale with a monstrous sexuality, is murdered by Jack the Ripper, a character based on the historical serial killer who terrorized London's streets at the end of the nineteenth century. Wedekind's didactic approach to theater includes using heavily stylized dialogue, bizarre characters and plots, and a loosely knit episodic structure to jar audiences out of their complacency. Bertolt Brecht praised his work and followed Wedekind's example in his own plays. Wedekind died of pneumonia in Munich, Germany, on March 9, 1918.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Blood Wedding

*Blood Wedding* premiered in 1933 and is the first in a trilogy of rural plays by García Lorca, which includes *Yerma* (1934) and *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1936). A Bride and Groom are preparing to be married even as their union stirs up old hurts and relationships. At the reception, the Bride rides off on horseback with an old lover. The Groom chases the two into the forest. When he finds them, the two men fight and kill each other, leaving the Bride alone and her white dress bloodied. García Lorca has also included hyper-realistic, expressionistic elements such as characters who personify the Moon and Death. *Blood Wedding* is one of García Lorca's best-known plays.

### The Citizens of Calais

*The Citizens of Calais* catapulted Kaiser into the literary limelight virtually overnight in 1917. Opening just as World War I was coming to a close, the play spoke to the sense of sheer exhaustion felt by the German populace and carried the message of conciliation. For his plot, Kaiser drew on a famous incident that allegedly occurred

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- The 2000 film *Pollock*, starring Ed Harris, is a portrait of artist Jackson Pollock, a leader of the abstract expressionist painters popular during the 1940s and 1950s. The film is based on the biography *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith.

- Mai Zetterling's 1981 documentary *Stockholm* presents a portrait of the Swedish city, its people, and their leaders. The film also includes a historical introduction to the works of Strindberg.

- Actor Paul Robeson starred in the 1933 adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones*.

- The Norwegian Film Institute distributed director Unni Straume's film, *Dreamplay*, an adaptation of Strindberg's play of the same name.

*Frank Wedekind* (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection / Corbis-Bettmann)

in 1347 during the Hundred Years' War between England and France. Faced with the destruction of Calais, Eustache, a wealthy merchant, sacrifices himself by committing suicide in an attempt to convince others of the significance of free will and the need for courage. The play is important to expressionist thought for its depiction of the "Neuer Mensch" (New Man), a modern human being who salvages meaning from the world through taking responsibility for his actions and setting an example for others. Many of Kaiser's plays include a Christ-like protagonist who fits this "New Man" profile, and who would lead society into a new age of brotherhood through example.

### A Dream Play

Strindberg's 1901 *A Dream Play* foreshadows many expressionist techniques and themes in its presentation of the unconscious. The plot concerns the daughter of an Indian god who adopts human form and discovers, through encounters with symbolic characters, the meaninglessness of human existence. With the obvious exception that the protagonist is female, the action parallels the story of Christ's life. The play itself—presented in sixteen scenes that flash backward and forward in time—takes the form of a dream with symbols such as a growing castle, a chrysanthemum, and a shawl signifying aspects of the dreamer's life such as the imprisoned or struggling soul and the accumulation of human pain. The characters are also symbolic. Victoria, for example, represents the ideal, yet unattainable, woman. The play has become a staple of European theater and continued to be performed into the early 2000s.

### The Emperor Jones

Eugene O'Neill wrote and staged *The Emperor Jones* in 1920. It was the first American play to use expressionist techniques and the most successful of O'Neill's early work. By using lights, sound, and sets, as well as actors' gestures, symbolically, O'Neill shows the audience his protagonist's psyche. As Brutus Jones, a black American who is tricked into becoming emperor of an island in the West Indies, runs through the jungle chased by rebellious natives, he has a series of encounters

that symbolize not only events from his personal history but from his racial heritage as well. In this way, Jones is more a type representing all black men than a unique individual. The play ran for 204 performances and gave the playwright confidence to continue experimenting with expressionist techniques. Such experiments include the use of masks in *The Great God Brown*, with spoken thoughts in *Strange Interlude* (1928) and *Dynamo* (1929), and with a chorus in *Lazarus Laughed* (1928).

## The Metamorphosis

Kafka's 1915 *Metamorphosis* is arguably the best known of his stories and novels and the most anthologized. The plot revolves around Gregor Samsa, a salesman who wakes up to discover he has turned into a giant insect. Samsa is locked in his room and ignored by his family until he dies. Critics point to Kafka's heavy-handed use of symbolism in the story, a primary feature of Expressionism, and some read Samsa's transformation as representative of Kafka's own feeling of inadequacy in relation to his overbearing father. Stylistically and thematically, the story speaks to the experience of many expressionist artists and writers, who sought to find ways to express their sense of alienation from society and family and their quest to find meaning in a meaningless world.

## Poems

*Poems*, published in 1913, is the only volume Trakl published during his life. In the introduction to *Autumn Sonata: Selected Poems of Georg Trakl*, Carolyn Forche calls Trakl "the first poet of German Expressionism," and notes that Trakl, like fellow expressionists Karl Kraus, Oskar Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele, was intensely alienated from the order of German industrial society. Trakl's poems embody this alienation: they are fragments, nightmarish images of a world choked with chaos, and of a tenuous and battered self attempting to function in that world. The logic connecting the images is associative, rather than linear. These lines are from *A Romance to Night*:

> The murderer laughs until he grows pale in the
>   wine,
> Horror of death consumes the afflicted.
> Naked and wounded, a nun prays
> Before the Savior's agony on the cross.

Critics debate Trakl's status as a Christian poet, but they came to pay more attention to his work than any other German expressionist poet.

Studies such as Francis Michael Sharp's *The Poet's Madness: A Reading of Georg Trakl* (1981), Richard Detsch's *Georg Trakl's Poetry: Toward a Union of Opposites* (1983), and a number of subsequent translations of his poems attest to his growing influence on contemporary poetry and his importance to understanding Expressionism poetry.

## Right You Are (If You Think You Are)

Pirandello's play *Right You Are (If You Think You Are)* was published in 1917 and is a short, expressionistic play about a family—a husband, wife, and the son's mother-in-law—that moves to a new town after their town is destroyed by an earthquake. The wife never leaves the house, which the husband and the mother-in-law explain with very different reasons. She says her daughter is distraught because her husband thinks she is someone else. The husband says the mother-in-law is deluded and will not accept that her daughter is dead and he has remarried. Because the earthquake destroyed all evidence, there is no way to determine the truth. In this drama, Pirandello comments on the elusive nature of truth and the relationships within a family.

## Spring's Awakening

Wedekind's *Spring's Awakening*, published in 1891 but not performed until 1906, explores the theme of adolescent sexuality in a distinctly modern and expressionistic manner. In nineteen episodic scenes, Wedekind presents the stories of a few teenagers as they struggle through sexual maturity because of the ignorance of their teachers and parents who themselves are sexually repressed. Wedekind's Expressionism is evident in his use of heavily stylized dialogue, which mixes lyrical and cutting irony with prosaic speech to create a seriocomic tone. He also has a character return from the dead, something that could not happen in naturalistic theater. A satirical indictment of the hypocrisy and prudery of middle-class German society, Wedekind's play was heavily censored, though it was also one of the playwright's most successful works.

## THEMES

### Regeneration

The defining event of the expressionist movement is World War I. After the war, much expressionist

*Transformation* follows the central character's spiritual progress through a series of episodes, connected only through the character's experience. The protagonist, Friedrich, a young Jewish sculptor, transforms himself from an alienated and wandering artist into a friend of the proletariat who finally finds a cause to believe in and die for. At the end of the play, Friedrich implores the masses to create a society based upon compassion and justice, and to throw off the yoke of capitalist oppression.

### Human Condition

Expressionist literature is defined by protagonists and speakers who passionately seek meaning in their lives. They often discover that the life they have been living is a sham, and through a sign or circumstance, or dint of sheer will, attempt to change their lot. Kaiser's dramas, for example, feature protagonists who struggle to make difficult choices in recapturing a sense of authenticity. His play *The Burghers of Calais*, for example, details the action of a central character that kills himself so that fellow townspeople might survive. Another Kaiser play, *From Morn till Midnight* (1917), also concerns a protagonist who seeks regeneration through martyrdom. In much expressionist literature, it is the journey, rather than the goal, which is most important.

### Sexuality

Part of the expressionist drive to represent truth involved tackling what expressionists saw as the hypocrisy of society's attitude towards sex and sexuality. Strindberg, Reinhard, and especially Wedekind all explicitly addressed the ways in which society sapped humanity's life force by either ignoring or repressing the sexual drive. More than any other expressionist, Wedekind, who derived many of his ideas from Strindberg and Nietzsche, attacked bourgeois morality in his dramas. In *Spring's Awakening*, he represents institutions such as the German school system as agents of deceit and mindless evil in their attempts to keep students ignorant of their own sexuality. His "Lulu" plays glorify sexuality, as his main character asserts her desire to live passionately. Perhaps no other expressionist writer embraces Nietzsche's call for humanity to embrace life and energy in all of its animalism.

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# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- After studying the expressionist paintings of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky, compose a poster in the expressionist style for Strindberg's *A Dreamplay* or O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*. Present the poster to your class and describe its expressionist features.

- With at least three other classmates, brainstorm a list of images for the following emotions and ideas: fear of death, journey of the soul, betrayal of a friend, unrequited love, rebelling against authority. What differences do you notice between your images and those of your classmates? Write a short essay accounting for these differences.

- Research German expressionist director Fritz Lang's movies *M* and *Metropolis*, and present your research to the class. Then show one of the movies and hold a discussion of whether or not Expressionism is successful as an approach for film.

- Edvard Munch's lithograph *The Scream* is often cited as being one of the earliest and most representative of expressionist paintings. It is also one of the most heavily marketed images of the twentieth century. Write a short essay explaining why this is so.

- Read *Citizens of Calais* by Georg Kaiser, poems from Georg Trakl's collection *Poems*, and Kafka's story *The Hunger Artist*, and then compose a list of what is similar about all of these works.

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writing portrayed the attempt to forge a new future for Germany. Writing from this time champions the birth of the "New Man," the "new vision," and the "new society." Toller's play *The Transformation* typifies one strain of early postwar expressionist drama, as it shows how one man's spiritual renewal is linked to his country's regeneration. Written as a *stationendrama*, The

### Alienation

Before World War I, the alienation portrayed in expressionist literature was often related to the family and society in more general, some might say adolescent, ways. After the war, alienation was more directly related to the state. For example, Kafka's protagonists, such as Gregor Samsa, are ostracized by their families because they do not conform to familial expectations. Most expressionist writers came from middle-class families who embodied the very hypocrisy they sought to expose in their writing. Later dramatists such as Kaiser and Toller wrote about the alienation experienced by workers. Kaiser's *Gas* trilogy graphically depicts the injustice of Wilhelmian capitalism towards the working class, underscoring the inherent corruptness of a system in which owners are pitted against employees, who have no claim to the things they produce. Director Fritz Lang adapted the trilogy into his popular 1927 film, *Metropolis*, underscoring the inhumanity of a society that lets technology grow unchecked.

## STYLE

### Abstraction

For expressionists, abstraction is the distillation of reality into its essence. Expressionists are not interested in presenting the world as human beings might see it or apprehend it through any of the senses, but rather as they emotionally and psychologically experience it. In drama, abstraction means that a play is conceptual rather than concrete, and it means that plots and characters are frequently symbolic and allegorical. For instance, a character might simply be called "Father," as in Strindberg's play *The Father*, or "Cashier," rather than, say, Mrs. Jones, as in a realistic play. The idea is to show the universality of human experience rather than its particularity. In poetry, writers such as Trakl attempt to represent the psychological depth and texture of the human experience through a series of fragmented and disjointed symbolic images, rather than relying on narrative or a speaker with a coherent identity.

### Monologue

Monologues are speeches by a single person, and they are especially prevalent in expressionist theater. Partly, this is due to the didactic nature of much expressionist theater, and partly it is because Expressionism often champions the individual and his vision of the world. When characters speak to themselves, which they often do in expressionist plays, the monologues are called soliloquies. Strindberg, Kaiser, and Toller all made extensive use of monologues and soliloquies in their plays.

### Genre

Many expressionists had the idea that art could not be separated into categories such as plays, poetry, or fiction. Instead, they experimented with mixing genres. Plays often contained dance, music, and sets that resembled art galleries, and characters would periodically launch into verse. Expressionists such as Wassily Kandinsky, a painter, poet, and dramatist, practiced this form of "total art" in productions such as *The Yellow Sound*, in which he uses color, music, and characters with names such as "Five Giants," "Indistinct Creatures," and "People in Tights" to abstractly represent the human condition.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Abstract Expressionism

With its roots in the expressionist movement of the early part of the century, abstract expressionism, also known as the "New York school," was developed in New York City and Eastern Long Island in the mid-1940s. Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Philip Guston, and others focused on the materiality of painting, often using oversized canvases, incorporating accidents that occurred during composition into the painting, and experimenting with color and space to express the painter's vision. One of the most controversial of the group, Pollock, would lay down huge canvases, and then drip, throw, and splash paint on it, often using sticks and trowels instead of brushes. The resulting "painting," sometimes a mixture of paint, sand, and glass, embodied the artist's own turbulent creative processes. Because abstract expressionist art was nonrepresentational and because the subject of many of the compositions was the making of the work itself, a large part of the public did not take it seriously at first. However, critics such as Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg, who coined the term "Action Painting," worked hard to popularize it. Robert Coates was the first to use

the term "abstract expressionism," in the *New Yorker* in 1936.

## Film

Expressionist techniques were used extensively in film in the 1920s, as German directors such as F. W. Murnau, G. W. Pabst, and Robert Wiene adapted techniques from art and theater for the wide screen. The first truly expressionist film is Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), which used exaggerated camera angles, painted scenery, and the lighting of individual actors to create a nightmarish atmosphere. Film historians also consider *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to be the first horror film. In the 1940s, directors such as Billy Wilder, Michael Curtiz, and Otto Preminger used the bizarre perspectives and lighting techniques of expressionist film to create what some critics claim is a distinctly American style: film noir. Films such as Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953) feature cynical, disillusioned male protagonists stuck battling an existential crisis while searching for the answer to some inscrutable or ill-defined problem, usually concerning a dangerously sexy woman. Many of the noir screenplays from the 1940s are derived from the hard-boiled detective novels of writers such as James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, and Dashiell Hammett. Film noir is filmed in black-and-white and characterized by gritty urban settings, witty banter, flashbacks, and voice-overs. They do not end happily.

## Early Twentieth-Century Painting

Expressionist painting, like literary Expressionism, sought to depict emotional and psychological intensity and, like its literary cousin, formed a response to Realism. One group of expressionists was the Fauves (i.e., wild beasts), represented best by Frenchmen Henri Matisse and Georges Rouault. Like many expressionists, these two were inspired by the painterly innovations of van Gogh and Gauguin, particularly their liberal use of bold colors and distorted shapes to signify raw emotion. Matisse arranged line and color to express the essence of subjects, and is known more for what he leaves out of his paintings than what he puts in. Rouault used violent brush strokes in his portraits of noble figures like Christ to reveal his own inner passion. In Dresden, Germany, a group of artists calling themselves "The Bridge" (Die Brücke) practiced a darker style of Expressionism. They drew inspiration from van Gogh and Gauguin as well, but also from Munch, the Norwegian painter famous for his 1894 lithograph, *The Scream*. Painters including Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, and Kokoschka put brush to canvas to explore a passionate, yet often angst-ridden view of the world and themselves. They often painted street scenes of Berlin, emphasizing the hostile, alienating quality of modern urban life. In Munich, "The Blue Rider" (Der Blaue Reiter), a group of artists headed by the Russian, Kandinsky, practiced an even more abstract style of Expressionism. Kandinsky and fellow "rider" Franz Marc abandoned all pretenses toward objectivity, composing pictures purely of line and color, with no resemblance to the physical world. Marc's color symbolism and Kandinsky's geometric abstraction were attempts to embody the spiritual dimension of humanity, itself an unseen entity.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Pre-World War I Germany

Expressionism blossomed in Germany in the early part of the twentieth century during the reign of William II. Germany was a relatively prosperous country under Wilhelm, with an established middle class, and it is the very complacency of this middle class, its order, efficiency, and obsession with social conventions, against which many writers and artists rebelled. In particular, expressionists saw hypocrisy in German society's repressive and repressed attitudes towards sex and the simultaneous popularity of prostitution. In *Literary Life in German Expressionism and the Berlin Circles*, literary historian Roy Allen notes, "The flourishing of prostitution in the Wilhelminian era, as the expressionist viewed it, most sharply gave the lie to the effectiveness of the Wilhelminian approach to morality, particularly to sexual conduct." Wedekind's plays underscore this hypocrisy. In *Spring's Awakening*, for example, he singles out German schools for their part in keeping children ignorant about their own bodies and sexuality. Sigmund Freud's theories on infantile sexuality and the unconscious during this time had a profound effect on expressionist thinking. In 1900, Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, followed in 1901 by *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and in

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1910–1920:** Largely as a result of the introduction of new weapons such as tanks, poison gas, and airplanes, more than ten million people die in World War I, creating an atmosphere of pervasive disillusionment and despair.

  **Today:** Technological advances make it easier for countries and individuals to develop nuclear and biological weapons, increasing the potential for worldwide catastrophe.

- **1910–1920:** In Russia, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, seize power and proclaim Russia a Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

**Today:** Having largely abandoned communism, Russia makes steps towards a full-fledged democracy and market economy.

- **1910–1920:** Expressionist literature, drama, and art dominate the avant-garde in Europe, shocking audiences and viewers in its departure from Realism.

  **Today:** The capacity of art and literature to shock is largely gone, and no one movement or approach dominates. Instead of shock, readers and viewers often feel boredom in response to artists' and writers' experimentations.

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1905 by *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. For expressionists, the sexual instinct provided humanity with its drive and creative force. A society that stifles that drive by either ignoring it or demonizing it, produces citizens who could never wholly be themselves.

However, most expressionists during this time were not political activists, at least not in any substantial way. Instead of taking to the streets, as revolutionaries were doing in Russia, they met in coffee houses and cafes in Berlin and Munich and published their work in journals they often started themselves, after established presses rejected their writing. Herwarth Walden of *Der Sturm* and Franz Pfemfert of *Die Aktion* were two editors who left big publishing houses to start their own magazines dedicated to expressionist writings. Allen characterizes those who were part of the cafe circle of writers and artists as a historical type: "In many respects, the expressionists in these circles exhibit features commonly associated with the bohemian artist as he has appeared in societies dominated by the middle class in the last approximate century and a half."

### War Years and After

For many Germans, the start of World War I was a surprise. Some were quickly politicized and voiced their opposition to the war, some fled to Switzerland, and others joined the military and died in battle. Many journals ceased publishing altogether, as military authorities began censoring them for antiwar sentiment. The publication of new journals was banned, without the permission of military authorities. Antiwar or anti-establishment plays were also routinely banned, but at least one director and theater manager, Max Reinhardt, circumvented public censorship by producing "invitation only" plays. After the war, while Germans struggled for direction and purpose, many expressionists joined the Communist Party and fought for the Revolution. They poured back into the cafes, with a new sense of urgency, their art now wedded to a political ideal. Kaiser, Toller, and Carl Sternheim produced plays espousing pacifism and universal brotherhood, while various political factions fought for control of the government. Toller's play *The Transformation*, produced in 1919, captures the spirit of postwar enthusiasm for new beginnings, as does *A Man's Struggles*, written while Toller was imprisoned during the last two years of the war. The former features Friedrich, an example of expressionist drama's "New Man"—a Christ-like figure with none of the baggage of being

*Egon Schiele's expressionist style* Self-Portrait with Black Clay Vase and Spread Fingers *(Imagno / Hulton Archive / Getty Images)*

God—who undergoes a series of nightmarish trials and tribulations only to overcome them in the end and lead the masses into a new and glorious future.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Critics and literary historians do not agree on what constitutes literary Expressionism, or even if it was a movement. For example, in his book *Expressionism*, R. S. Furness acknowledges the attempts others have made to trace the origin of the movement back to the eighteenth century's *Sturm and Drang* but claims, "It can also be argued that Expressionism is simply the name given to that form which modernism took in Germany." Roy Allen calls the problem faced by literary historians in trying to define

literary Expressionism a "bugbear." Other critics and literary historians are more confident in their assessment. Ernst Toller, who is considered one of the leading postwar expressionist playwrights, writes of the movement, as embodied in drama: "Expressionism wanted to be a product of the time and react to it. And that much it certainly succeeded in doing." Mark Ritter points out, in "The Unfinished Legacy of Early Expressionist Poetry," that early literary Expressionism is particularly difficult to pin down and agrees with Allen that perhaps, "One does much better to conceive of early Expressionism as a number of loosely connected circles, primarily in Berlin." In *German Expressionist Drama*, literary historian Renate Benson argues that Expressionism originally emerged in the fine arts, initiated by the Paris exhibition of Fauvist painters and that literary Expressionism followed. Benson laments the fact that

the Nazis banned expressionist drama when Hitler came to power: "It is a tragic irony…that young German audiences after 1945 only became acquainted with Expressionism through the works of foreign writers…who themselves had been so powerfully influenced by German Expressionists." John Walker extends Expressionism's reach to include the American detective novelist Dashiell Hammett, arguing that his noir, expressionistic novels were influenced by the urban expressionism of Bertolt Brecht's *Jungle of Cities*.

## CRITICISM

### Chris Semansky

*Semansky holds a Ph.D. in English from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and he is an instructor of literature and writing whose essays, poems, stories, and reviews appear in publications such as* College English, Mississippi Review, New York Tribune, The Oregonian, *and* American Letters & Commentary. *His books include* Death, But at a Good Price *(1991) and* Blindsided *(1998). In this essay, Semansky explores the idea of Expressionism as a literary movement.*

Critics struggle over whether or not there ever was a coherent expressionist movement, or if it is merely a label of convenience for literary historians seeking to characterize a wide range of writing practices in Western Europe in the early twentieth century. What *can* be said is that Expressionism was both part of a larger set of practices and attitudes that come under the umbrella of Modernism, and that it was a response to realistic modes of representation.

Modernism, as it applies to literature, is a term broadly used to denote certain features of form, style, and subject matter in writing in the early decades of the twentieth century. Thinkers influential to modernist literature include Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, and Karl Marx, all of who challenged status quo ideas about the nature of humanity, morality, society, and writing itself. World War I furthered the adoption of Modernism, as writers such as James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot experimented with stream of consciousness, fragmentation, and other nonlinear modes of narration to represent a world whose foundations had been shaken to its roots.

## WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
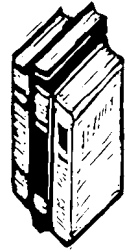
- Siegfried Kracauer's study of early German film (1910–1940), *From Caligari to Hitler*, provides insight into Expressionism's influence on German cinema.

- Giles MacDonogh's 2001 biography, *The Last Kaiser: The Life of Wilhelm II*, tackles three important issues in the ruler's life: his personality, his relationship with his parents, and his role in the outbreak of World War I. Wilhelm II ruled Germany during the peak of Expressionism.

- Bernard S. Myers's book *The German Expressionists: A Generation in Revolt* (1957) surveys expressionist painters and painting in the 1920s and 1930s.

- Roy Pascal's study *From Naturalism to Expressionism: German Literature and Society*, published in 1973, traces the roots of Expressionism to the late nineteenth century, examining its relationship to Naturalism and Realism.

- In 1986, Christopher Waller published *Expressionist Poetry and Its Critics*, a study of how writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Mann, and Robert Musil would critically approach representative expressionist poets.

- Ulrich Weisstein's essay "German Literary Expressionism: An Anatomy," in the May 1981 issue of *German Quarterly*, explores how difficult it is to find common features for works that are often lumped under the category "German Literary Expressionism."

Expressionism undoubtedly was a part of Modernism, but was it a movement?

In his study of Expressionism in Berlin, Roy Allen defines the idea of a "literary movement" as "the concerted activities of an organized group or group of individuals work[ing] or tend[ing] towards some goal in behalf

> **THE SCREAM, THEN, A RESPONSE TO THE SUDDEN RECOGNITION THAT THE SELF IS AT ROOT ALONE AND WITHOUT INTRINSIC MEANING, IS THE DEFINING IMAGE OF EXPRESSIONISM."**

of . . . literature." Allen historicizes Expressionism by focusing on those writers who regularly met in cafes in Berlin and published one another's work. However helpful this definition might be for the historian interested in the details of small communities of writers with plans to change the order of things, it is of little use to the student trying to grasp the larger context from which Expressionism springs. Understanding the mind of the writer, as well as stylistic features and themes of what is commonly referred to as Expressionism, provides a more helpful introduction to the phenomenon.

Most critics, historians, and literature handbooks note Expressionism's response to Realism as a mode of representation. In literature, Realism refers to a historical period and a particular approach to writing. As practiced by novelists in the nineteenth century, Realism referred to descriptive writing that was plausible and that represented the ordinary in familiar ways. It attempted to reproduce the world as it was seen. Readers could believe what they read because their own experience confirmed that such stories could, in fact, happen. Instead of some far-flung romantic plot about exotic people in distant places, the realist writer focused on the everyday, describing the mundane and the local. Realists used language as a mirror held up to the world, and were interested in portraying the "thingness" of life. The more "realist" the description, the more it matched the experience of the reader. Wilhelm Raabe, for example, a German Realist writer, described the everyday life of Berliners in his 1857 novel.

Expressionists responded to Realistic writing and art not only because it embodied what for them was a life-denying way of being in the world, but because they believed that the Realists, in attempting to portray truth, in fact were perverting it. The society that Realists portrayed

in all of its middle-class frumpiness and injustices was the same one that expressionists believed was sapping their very lifeblood. Austrian author Hermann Bahr sums up the expressionist attitude best in his 1916 study, *Expressionismus*: "Man screams from the depths of his soul, the whole age becomes one single, piercing shriek. Art screams too, into the deep darkness, screams for help, for the spirit. That is expressionism." The scream, then, a response to the sudden recognition that the self is at root alone and without intrinsic meaning, is the defining image of Expressionism. In this way, expressionist writers anticipated the Existentialists who came to dominate the literary establishment after World War II.

By its nature, a scream distorts the face, denaturalizes it. A quick look at Munch's 1894 lithograph by the same name will attest to this. This is what the expressionists desired—to show the horror of everyday life, not its ordinariness. Poets such as Georg Heym and Jakob van Hoddis displayed this horror in their apocalyptic visions. The latter's poem, *End of the World* provides one early example of expressionist verse:

> The bourgeois' hat flies off his pointed head,
> the air reechoes with a screaming sound.
> Tilers plunge from roofs and hit the ground,
> and seas are rising round the coast (you read).
> The storm is here, crushed dams no longer
>   hold,
> the savage seas come inland with a hop.
> The greater part of a people have a cold.
> Off bridges everywhere the railroads drop.

Juxtaposing mundane statements such as "The greater part of people have a cold" with sensational images of trains dropping from bridges is a feature of much expressionist poetry, as is associative logic in general, but these features do not cut across all expressionist verse. Another side of literary Expressionism is its revolutionary strivings. Apart from all the doom and gloom, many writers, especially after World War I, worked for social change. Expressionist chronicler Walter H. Sokel points out the difficulty of this endeavor in his study *The Writer in Extremis*: "German Expressionism sought to be two things in one: a revolution of poetic form and vision, and a reformation of human life. These two aims were hardly compatible." Sokel notes that by eschewing Realism as the stylistic base of their idealism, expressionist writers were not able to wed their desires for

*Paul Robeson as Brutus Jones from the film* The Emperor Jones, *written by Eugene O'Neill (© Underwood & Underwood / Corbis)*

social change with their penchant for artistic experimentation. In other words, by limiting the accessibility of their work to the initiated and the educated, they also limited their potential influence. Some, like Franz Werfel, a Czech, and Hanns Johst adapted. Sokel writes of this group:

> What all of them gained was success in personal terms, a mass audience, the triumph of personal integration and power in the world. What they lost was success in aesthetic terms—the permanence and long-range effectiveness of their works.

In an essay for Victor Miesel's *Voices of German Expressionism*, Gottfried Benn, a leading expressionist writer, goes as far as to call Expressionism "a new form of historical existence" that was European at root, not German. Benn notes that between the years 1910–25 in Europe, "There was hardly another style except an anti-naturalistic style." Ulrich Weisstein, in exploring whether Expressionism is a style or a view of the world, points out that the word "Expressionism" was first used by French painter Julien-Auguste Hervé in 1901 to

distinguish the work of Matisse and other painters from their impressionist predecessors, but did not find general acceptance until 1911 when art critics began to use it more liberally to describe Fauvist paintings. It was not until 1915 or so that the term was even used in reference to literature. Underscoring Expressionism's broader philosophical claims, Weisstein writes:

> Luckily…[Expressionism's] socio-political aspect can be subsumed under the term Activism. If, excluding this aspect, one defines the term broadly enough to include man's attitude toward himself, his fellow beings and the world at large, one can defend the use of Weltanschauung [i.e., worldview] in the sense of a sharp rejection of previously embraced views on the part of an entire generation.

Considered in this light, Expressionism could be seen as a generational conflict born out of younger artists' disgust with the inadequacies—aesthetic, political, and social—of the previous generation. Combined with the desire not to reproduce the world, but to capture its essence in all of its chaos and rage, the expressionist literary movement was not limited to Germany. Rather, it spread across Europe and the United States, where writers held similar attitudes and were engaged in like literary enterprises. This is more true for poetry and fiction, less so for drama.

**Source:** Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on Expressionism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## John Walker

*In this essay, Walker argues that jungle like cityscapes, which objectify the humanity of characters placed in such settings, resonate with and draw from expressionist literature. The author compares expressionism and noir fiction.*

The subject of expressionism, that tortured mutilation of congealed panic and anxiety, emanates its strongest contours when cast against the background of the modern urban landscape. The noisy and unpredictable machinery of the metropolis confronts the subject as an alien force that continuously threatens any vestige of individual autonomy. The harsh juxtaposition of wounded subjectivity with the chaos of commerce, the cacophony of technologies, and the utterly inhuman industrial backgrounds exhibits the dissolution of social community into scattered and disconnected fragments. In the midst of the most developed concentration of the

> THE URBAN ZONE OF THE CRIME NOVEL APPROPRIATES THE JUNGLE METAPHOR OF THE EXPRESSIONIST METROPOLIS BY REPRESENTING THE MODERN CITY AS AN ARENA OF ANARCHIC VIOLENCE WHERE INDIVIDUALS ARE SET AGAINST EACH OTHER IN HOSTILE CONFLICT."

forces of technological achievement and civilized social organization, the isolated and alienated character of the modern subject comes most prominently to the surface.

The urban zone of expressionism is a monolithic entity that antagonizes and annihilates the isolated energies of the subject. Walter Benjamin refers to "the impenetrable obscurity of mass existence" (Baudelaire 64) in which the individual is dissolved into the mob. The city itself figures as the anthropomorphic subject of many modernist endeavors, from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* to Alexander Döblin's quasi-expressionist *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, which depicts a protagonist entirely constructed from the assembled rhythms, ideologies, and fragments of information imposed on subjectivity by the monolith metropolis. In the cityscapes of George Grosz and Otto Dix, the geography of the city resembles the infernal regions of Hieronymus Bosch, where each individual is consigned to a particular torment and compelled to replicate mechanically a specific and pointless task in utter isolation from the swarming multitudes on all sides.

Modern literatures unite the paradoxical vision of the urban landscape as technological anti-utopia with the metaphor of the primeval jungle. Metropolitan technologies contribute to an atmosphere of noise, light, and sudden violence whose obscure origins and unpredictable concatenations conjure visions of jungle environments. The arbitrary violence and apparent lawlessness of city life create an atmosphere of anarchy that recalls social configurations of tribal warfare. Economic imperatives that set individuals in hostile competition replicate

primeval conditions where survival is based on a straggle against all others.

The conflation of city and jungle corresponds to a similar conflation of machine and animal. The total mechanization of activity and the subsequent death of inner life experienced by the subject of modern labor is represented by analogies to inanimate mechanical processes or to the unreflective instinctual violence of the savage beast. The absence of civilized responses of sympathy and social conscience, made obsolete by market imperatives of total competition, engender a sense of identity with the amoral extravagances of the animal kingdom.

American gangster and detective literatures fully incorporate the urban mythos of expressionism; the noir genre is based on the exploration of the underside and the unconscious of the city and its geography. Noir film and the detective story of the 1920s and 30s do not merely adopt the landscape of the expressionist scene, but further assimilate and develop expressionist atmospheres, techniques, and theoretical orientations. These genres intersect most prominently in films like Fritz Lang's *M* and the works of German emigrant Otto Preminger. The expressionist resonances in Dashiell Hammett's work are so pronounced that direct citations from the movement can be clearly identified.

The urban jungle mythos that serves as the background for expressionism and noir is elaborated in Bertolt Brecht's *Jungle of Cities*, composed in 1924. Brecht constructs a gigantic Chicago of mythic proportions, a metaphysical projection of Chicago in its distorted and transfigured essence in which the audience is instructed to concentrate on the expressionist agon: "concern yourself with the human element, evaluate the antagonists' fighting spirit impartially and concentrate your interest on the showdown."

While Brecht was careful to distance himself theoretically from expressionism, the aesthetic resonances of the movement abound in his work. *Jungle of Cities* dramatizes a vast retinue of expressionist styles and techniques: Hyperbole, distortion, caricature, and mechanization all modulate characteristic expressionist themes of domestic conflict and a revolt against reification and economic determination.

Brecht utilizes the telegraphic fragments of speech and compacted phrases of expressionist dialogue. His protagonist, in the midst of conflict and apropos of nothing, suddenly gazes idly out the window and intones, "Ninety-four degrees in the shade. Traffic, noise from the Milwaukee bridge. A morning, like any other." The Salvation Army Officer recites an inventory of commodities as if a section from a menu had been cut out and pasted into the dialogue: "Cherry Flip, Cherry Brandy, Gin Fizz, Whiskey Sour, Golden Slipper, Manhattan Cocktail . . . and, the specialty of this bar: Eggnog. This alone consists of the following . . ." These montaged fragments of discourse are mixed with blunt colloquialisms punctuated by extended lyrical monologues.

Brecht's arrangements of scenes recall the stationendrama model of expressionist theater. Certain scenes are arranged as a series of vignettes from isolated stage areas where self-sufficient minidramas or parables are enacted. Scene 5 alternates between the separate dramas going on in a bedroom, a hallway, and a saloon. These seemingly arbitrary arrangements undermine conventional aesthetic models of harmonious transition and organic totality, and instead exhibit an organizational principle based on mechanization and dissonance.

The pronounced mechanization of character and discourse is exemplified by the sudden appearance and staccato monologue of The Man in scene 8:

> I've got three minutes to give you some information, and you've got two minutes to act on it. This is it: half an hour ago, Police Headquarters received a letter from one of the state prisons. It is signed by a certain George Garga, and he incriminates you on several counts. The patrol wagon will be here in five minutes. You owe me a thousand bucks.

He is paid and immediately disappears in the manner of an automaton. He comes from nowhere and vanishes into nowhere. His totally disinterested attitude, his prefabricated speech and its precise price tag testify to the administrative zeal and bureaucratic efficiency that not only dictate business affairs and legal relations but thoroughly permeate the consciousness and experience of the economic subject in the modern urban environment.

This expressionist trademark of objectification of character by function can be seen in the list of cast members, which includes The Worm, The Baboon, and The Snubnose. These characters are the magnified perversion of their economic functions; the mutilations imposed on the

personality are externalized and projected in the form of caricature.

Expressionist distortions of nature or the urban landscape are precipitated by the projection of wounded subjectivity onto the external world. The assault of urban conditions on the senses of the individual is often characterized by the experience of claustrophobia. Hence Marie complains of the intrusive pressure of the sky against her body. On the shores of Lake Michigan, the only scene outside of the city in the drama, she fails to experience a sense of comfort from the pastoral scene, and instead observes, "Those trees—they look as if they were covered with human shit.... And the sky's so close you could touch it, and what do I care for it." Her projected anxiety transforms her environment into a sinister and oppressive monstrosity.

The antagonist Shlink embodies the fully dehumanized being. From poor migrant beginnings, he rose to the position of owner of a timber industry, and the economic exploitations entailed in that rise have reduced him to an empty and dehumanized replicant. He explains, "don't expect any words out of my mouth. All I have in my mouth is teeth." His lack of words testifies to the absence of any modicum of humanity capable of expression; there is nothing left of him but material. Shlink's understanding of his condition is based on a corporealization of interiority: He projects his inner state onto his skin and thereby recognizes it as part of his own displaced body. He explains to Marie:

> my body's gone numb, it affects even my skin. You know, in its natural state human skin is too thin for this world. So men take care to see it grows thicker. There would be nothing wrong with the method, if only you could stop it from growing.

The dehumanization necessitated by economic objectification colonizes all other spheres of personal life as well, and the doomed attempt to mediate between objectifying economic activity and human emotional relations reconfigures subjectivity as a form of schizophrenia.

Shlink tells Marie about his skin to explain why he is incapable of love. He has no emotional surplus to give her, and the only value she can have for him is market value. Her exclamation "They're selling me!" demonstrates the painful awareness of her own objectification in a capitalist economy where prostitution is universalized and desire is bought and sold on the market. Her

only consolation for this awareness is in a masochistic identification with her commodity function as prostitute, and she thereby demands to be paid for love from Shlink.

The stake wagered on the metaphysical battle of Shlink and Garga is whether or not there is any way out of reification. When Garga refuses to sell his opinion in the opening scene, he affirms that there is some sphere of his existence that remains self-determined and is therefore not for sale. Shlink's response that "Your opinion is immaterial too—except that I want to buy it" refutes the prospect of a sphere of existence that is not reducible to quantifiable exchange value.

As Shlink demonstrates the power of his position by buying off Garga's family, mistress, and job, Garga revolts by stripping off his clothes and running amok. This archetypically expressionistic response to moral conflict is reminiscent of the Cashier in *From Morning to Midnight*, who performs a similar flight from signifying systems. Intoxicated by the heat of conflict and the suspense of his sudden catastrophic awakening, Garga quotes Rimbaud and raves expressionistically: "And that—is freedom.... I have no knowledge of metaphysics, I do not understand the laws, I have no moral sense, I am an animal." He equates his freedom with the abolition of his inherited civilization and a renewed identification with the primeval beast. He responds to the challenge of urban economic demands by abandoning morality and culture, and reverting to animal instincts. Karl Marx refers to the alienation of labor as a process whereby "What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal." Garga embodies this transposition through a reversion to the uninhibited instinctual activity of the wild beast.

Shlink circumvents this strategy by converting Garga into an exploiter and thus reintegrating him into economic determinations. In order to wage conflict, Garga must objectify himself; as an object he in turn objectifies others and thereby enters into complicity with cycles of reification. Confronted with the apparent ubiquity of these cycles, he expresses his awareness to his mother in terms that do not permit a satisfactory resolution:

> We aren't free. It starts with coffee in the morning, and blows for being such a bad monkey, and mother's tears are salt to season the children's meal: and she washes their little shirts in

her sweat, and you are all taken care of and safe, safe, until the Ice Age comes, while the root grows right through your heart. And when he's grown up, and wants to do something, wants to go the whole hog, what does he find out? He'll find he's already been consecrated, paid for, stamped and sold at a good price, so he isn't even free to go and drown himself!

Family life and the maternal relation, ideologically conceived as zones of refuge from economic determinations, are here represented as thoroughly permeated by the paralyzing processes of reification. Even suicide is figured as a prefabricated gesture already inscribed within these ubiquitous cycles.

Yet human beings cannot be entirely obliterated: The individual retains a ghost of vanquished humanity even in urban environments of totalizing objectification. The Salvation Army Officer's lament—"People are too durable, that's their main trouble. . . . they last too long"—is confirmed by his failure to die even after shooting himself in the head. These remnants of humanity, distorted beyond recognition by economic dehumanization, come to the surface and reemerge in immeasurably disfigured forms: Love and affection are thereby transformed into sadism and masochism. This is the psychological mechanism implied by the frontier code that motivates the love/hate ambivalence in Shlink and Garga's relations. The objective impossibility of benevolent human contact in an atmosphere of total alienation compels them to seek contact through hatred, conflict, and antagonism.

The tableau for the staging of their final showdown is in the gravel pits on the edge of town. The industrial wasteland thus replaces the prairie as the site for the isolated male confrontation in the new world. Shlink concedes the inevitable stalemate of their attempt at engagement by emphasizing the impossibility of transversing the utter isolation that separates human beings:

> I've been watching animals: and love, or the warmth given off by bodies moving in close to each other, that is the only mercy shown to us in the darkness. But the coupling of organs is all, it doesn't make up for the divisions caused by speech. . . . And the generations stare coldly into each other's eyes. If you cram a ship's hold full of human bodies, so it almost bursts—there will be such loneliness in that ship that they'll all freeze to death.

Spatial proximity is described as a condition that paradoxically increases spiritual separation,

and the metaphor of the ship's hold suggests an analogy to the claustrophobic conditions of modern urban arrangements. Shlink proceeds to invoke the vision of the primeval jungle as a utopian counterpart to the emotional death of the subject of civilization: "The forest! That's where mankind comes from, from right here. Hairy, with ape's mouths, good animals who knew how to live. It was all so easy. They just tore each other to pieces." Far from the cheerful pastoral utopias of harmony with nature envisioned by the Enlightenment, Shlink projects a utopia of anarchic and bestial violence. Characteristic of expressionist reverie, the deepest desire of wounded subjectivity is found in atavistic frenzies of destruction; existence is validated exclusively by moments of highest passion and fiercest energy.

The detective fiction of Dashiell Hammett reproduces the model of human relations exhibited in expressionist drama and developed in Brecht's *Jungle*: The antagonists are stripped of individual characteristics and reduced to a deformed though imperishable human essence. Against the backdrop of a bleak and brutal chaos ruled by utterly immoral forces, they face each other in their respective moral isolation, locked in deadly opposition.

The urban zone of the crime novel appropriates the jungle metaphor of the expressionist metropolis by representing the modern city as an arena of anarchic violence where individuals are set against each other in hostile conflict. George Grella observes that "the gangster novel (like many American detective stories) seems a kind of urban pastoral." The gangster novel functions as a meditation on the landscape of the modern city.

The mythic vision of the American landscape, both urban and rural, has always held a great fascination for European projections of absolute alienation and moral solitude. Brecht and Kafka, among many others, utilized this mythic territory as the background for their modernist fictions. André Gide remarks that "the American cities and countryside must offer a foretaste of hell" (qtd. in Madden xxvi). In the proportions of mythic America, one confronts the realities of Europe by gazing on them in magnified form. Hammett's work performs this same optical demonstration for the natives: By defamiliarizing conditions that have become ideologically obscured by

processes of habituation, the horror of those conditions is made manifest.

Hammett's *Red Harvest* presents the modern city as a zone of tribal warfare where legally justified structures of authority cannot be distinguished from illegal hierarchies of gang rule. These anarchic conditions are indicated as the direct result of the antagonistic competition imposed on social relations by capitalist economies. The protagonist's client, Elihu Willsson, has exercised the iron rule of capital over the town for 40 years as baron of the banks and newspapers. This perfect collusion of the interests of capital and the production of ideology does not prevent a mass uprising of the mine workers, and Willsson hires armed mobs to bust the labor unions. By the beginning of the novel, the mobs have shattered the unions and are fighting among themselves to divide up the town, compelling Willsson to call on the Continental Detective Agency to secure his interests.

In Carl Freedman and Christopher Kendrick's article, "Forms of Labor in Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*," the resulting social conditions in the town are described as an analogy to fascist Italy in terms of a "feudalization of illicit power." With reference to Benjamin, they observe that "The individualism of the gangster power structure makes for a permanent state of anarchic emergency." The ceaseless cycles of violent retribution among conflicting gangs are assimilated by the populace as the normalized environment of urban life, and economic survival is predicated on a strategic alliance with superior firepower.

Hammett's town, with characteristic lack of subtlety, is appropriately named "Personville" (pronounced by the locals as "Poisonville"), an almost direct citation of expressionist abstraction of place into general category. Hammett's description of the town could serve as stage directions for the backdrop of the expressionist metropolis:

> the smelters whose brick stacks stuck up tall against a gloomy mountain to the south had yellow-smoked everything into uniform dinginess. The result was an ugly city of forty thousand people, set in an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been all dirtied up by mining. Spread over this was a grimy sky that looked as if it had come out of the smelter's stacks.

Nature is hereby reified as a waste product of labor, and the claustrophobia imposed by this industrial sky contrasts to the metaphorical transposition of the jungle onto the activity within the city.

With characteristic expressionist condensation, Hammett's protagonist is named "the Op": a two-letter abbreviation of his economic function as Continental Operative. After noting the infernal character of Personville, the Op spots three caricatures of policemen, unshaved, unbuttoned, and smoking cigars while directing traffic, and he immediately deciphers the absence of legitimized authority in the town. "Don't kid yourselves that there's any law in Poisonville," he explains later to his recently arrived assistants.

The Op internalizes and absorbs the anarchy of the urban environment and embarks on a strategy based on the provocation of violence and antagonisms among rival gangs in the effort to have them destroy each other in the process. He explains to his ally, the junky-prostitute Dinah Brand, that he could have accomplished his ends through legal means, "But it's easier to have them killed off, easier and surer, and, now that I'm feeling this way, more satisfying." He derives sadistic pleasure from the replication of the cycles of violence, and he describes his desensitized condition with the same corporealization of interiority as Brecht's Shlink: "I've got hard skin all over what's left of my soul." He identifies the encroaching metropolis as the source of the violent fever that penetrates his subjectivity like a disease: "It's this damned town. Poisonville is right. It's poisoned me." The smothered condition of his soul seeks cathartic release in violent agitation, and he refers to the pleasure experienced from this release as an intoxication.

The Op internalizes and replicates the violence of his environment in the manner of a machine, yet his delirium precipitates a regression to animal instincts. This paradoxical conflation of machine and animal serves as the principle of characterization that motivates the inhabitants of the urban pastoral. In "The Poetics of the Private-Eye," Robert Edenbaum observes that in Hammett's novels, "Action is determined mechanistically—or animalistically." The apparent ease with which Edenbaum equates mechanical and animal determinations reflects the instability of these categories in Hammett's narration.

In *The Rebel*, Albert Camus reads the American crime narrative as an aesthetic that operates "as if men were entirely defined by their daily

automatisms. On this mechanical level men, in fact, seem exactly alike, which explains this peculiar universe in which all the characters appear interchangeable, even down to their physical peculiarities." Camus refers to these characters as "the symbol of the despairing world in which wretched automatons live in a machine-ridden universe." The totalizing mechanization of behavior in the crime narrative testifies to the violence done to subjectivity by the encroaching technologies of modern urban conditions.

Despite Camus's disparaging view of the crime novel, he perceives what most commentators on the genre have missed: "This technique is called realistic only owing to a misapprehension. . . . It is born of a mutilation, and of a voluntary mutilation, performed on reality." The conventional circumscription of Hammett's fiction within a tradition of American realism totally disregards all characteristic components of his style and theoretical orientation. Hammett's use of abstraction, mechanization, and caricature dismantle realist conventions by mutilating the subject of representation into defamiliarized form.

The perfectly prefabricated automatisms of Hammett's subjects contrasts to a reified animation of the technological object. Automobiles dart about and weapons discharge as if operating according to their own independent volition. The cigarette ashes on Sam Spade's desk come to life and twitch and crawl about in the breeze. These anthropomorphisms testify to the fetishized character of objects in an urban environment of totalizing reification.

Hammett's generally sparse descriptions are based on a rigorous condensation of the subject, which is reconfigured as congealed abstraction. In "The Farewell Murder," the Op describes a house in terms of a mutilated conglomeration of geometric figures; the intensely asymmetrical arrangement of converging diagonal lines reads like a stage setting for Caligari:

> Take a flock of squat cones of various sizes, round off the points bluntly, mash them together with the largest one somewhere near the center, the others grouped around it in not too strict accordance with their sizes, adjust the whole collection to agree with the slopes of a hilltop, and you would have a model of the Kavalov house.

The Op's observations disdain attention to referential detail. Instead they enact a narrative compression of the scene that approximates an expressionist model of prose: His subject is transformed into a generic abstraction that is consequently mutilated into idiosyncratic form. Hammett's prose here undermines realist conventions by emphasizing the discursive construction of the image and directing attention towards the artificiality of the descriptive act.

Hammett's narration reduces the subject to economic function or idiosyncratic trait, and then distorts and magnifies this feature to subsume the entire individual. Physical characteristics are contorted into cartoon proportions and arranged surrealist configurations. In "The Golden Horseshoe" the Op spots a stranger in the bar and describes him as "A tall, rawboned man with wide shoulders, out of which a long, skinny, yellow neck rose to support a little round head. His eyes were black shoe-buttons stuck close together at the top of a little mashed nose." This absurd collage of distorted features and incongruous objects has more in common with dada caricature than realism.

The description of Willsson in *Red Harvest* could refer to one of Grosz's sinister portraits: "The short-clipped hair on his round pink skull was like silver in the light. . . . His mouth and chin were horizontal lines." Hammett's characters are drawn with a mark and a dash: reduced to compact visual signifiers and geometries of abstracted essence. The description of Sam Spade that opens The Maltese Falcon evokes a similar geometry of personal characteristics:

> Samuel Spade's jaw was long and bony, his chin a jutting v under the more flexible v of his mouth. His nostrils curved back to make another, smaller, v. His yellow-grey eyes were horizontal. The v motif was picked up again by thickish brows rising outward from twin creases above a hooked nose, and his pale brown hair grew down—from high flat temples—in a point on his forehead. He looked rather pleasantly like a blond Satan.

The alphabetical figure is stamped on Spade's face like a typographical collage; individuality is dissolved into typology. Hammett's relentless abstraction of character responds to the increasingly abstract conditions imposed by pervasive modern bureaucracies, which are inscribed as a visual signifier on the subject's body.

The nickname, partially necessitated to maintain anonymity in the city crowd, reconfigures subjectivity as caricature. Hammett's novels are populated by characters identified according

to the conspicuously deformed physical characteristic: the Thin Man, the Fat Man, Big Chin, or Chinless Jerry. In *Red Harvest,* the villains Whisper and the Voice are named according to their discursive capacities. The Dis an' Dat Kid and the Whosis Kid are reduced to cartoon parodies of their namelessness. The Op's boss is simply the Old Man, an abstract typology that suggests the presence of authority in the colloquial reference to the father.

The notoriously compact prose for which the crime novel is famous necessitates a narrative contraction of action into brief staccato segments. These segments tend to focus on the sharply delineated visual image, and the action unfolds like a montage of snapshots.

> A curtain whipped loose in the rain.

> Out of the opening came pale fire-streaks. The bitter voice of a small-caliber pistol. Seven times.

> The Whosis Kid's wet hat floated off his head—a slow balloon-like rising.

Hammett substitutes the empty hat in the place of the Kid, which defies gravity and floats off as if under its own power. The intense objectification of images recalls expressionist contractions of the subject, and the fragmented pace of the unfolding scene imitates expressionist rhythms of sudden shocks and abrupt pauses. Human beings are carefully subtracted from the scene, whereas the pistol is invested with the power of speech, and inanimate objects like the curtain and the hat seem to be animated with independent volition.

As the Op walks into a boxing arena in *Red Harvest*, he gives an atomic inventory of the scene in four sentences, one word each: "Smoke. Stink. Heat. Noise." This intensified brevity recalls the telegraphic conventions of expressionism. One of the Op's colleagues speaks exclusively in miniaturized fragments of information. He reports his activities in the manner of a speaking machine: "Spot two. Out three-thirty, office to Willsson's. Mickey. Five. Home. Busy. Kept plant. Off three, seven. Nothing yet." The Op then flaunts his semiotic prowess by translating the meaning of these prefabricated signifiers for the benefit of the reader. Hammett parodies this convention in a section from *The Dain Curse*, where the Op objects to the verbosity of a friend who responds, "Tell me what's up while I try to find one-syllable words for you."

The brevity of dialogue and description in Hammett makes his novels almost appropriate to stage production. Sometimes he dispenses with description entirely, and large sections of his books (particularly *The Thin Man*) are composed exclusively of character dialogue and monologue. The extended monologues, often confessions or case histories, can be highly idiosyncratic in their use of colloquialisms and regional slang. At other times they are simply journalese, speech stripped down to the delivery of commodified fragments of information. In *Red Harvest*, some nameless detective informs the Op, "'Donald Willsson, Esquire, publisher of the Morning and Evening Heralds, was found in Hurricane Street a little while ago, shot very dead by parties unknown,' he recited in a rapid singsong." The detective's mechanical voice confirms what his speech has already made clear: He is an automaton capable of replicating prefabricated speech patterns devoid of human inflection or digression.

The Op is located in San Francisco, an appropriate city for the gothic atmospheres of Hammett's scenery. The fog hangs low, and figures are obscured like ghosts wandering in and out of the darkness. In "The Big Knockover," the shadows themselves are personified, speak and vanish. The Op is often performing the function of the shadow, tailing unsuspecting nomads of the city. During pursuits, Hammett inserts precise geographies of the city streets, reminiscent of Döblin's insertion of urban topographies in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

Hammett's interiors, perfectly appropriated by noir film, are defined by their angular composition and harsh dark and light contrast. A typical interior is described in "The House on Turk Street":

> the hall was lighted with the glow that filtered through the glass from the street lights. The stairway leading to the second-story threw a triangular shadow across part of the hall—a shadow that was black enough for any purpose. I crouched low in this three-cornered slice of night, and waited.

This highly expressionistic scenography suggests the anthropomorphic character of darkness that seeks to penetrate the interior. The unstable demarcation of inside and outside dramatizes the threat posed to urban interiors by the external forces of crime and darkness. The Op as the morally ambivalent figure who crosses that boundary is significantly attracted to the

darkness in which he seeks refuge and the cover of invisibility.

The Op's invisibility constitutes the foremost characteristic of his wavering and mutable identity. His capacity as detective consists mainly in his ability to disappear into the background or transform his personality to deceive his antagonists. He is presented without preexisting personal relationships or familial antecedents. Just as he busily removes all traces of his presence before leaving the scene of a crime, he is constantly erasing his identity in personal relationships.

The absence of stable identity in Hammett's work corresponds to an epistemological uncertainty concerning the nature of being. The anthropomorphic character of objects suggests a capacity for mutability that undermines the potential for a fixed essence. The symbol for this epistemological emptiness is the Maltese falcon: the priceless artifact of historical significance that motivates a global pursuit and inspires a murderous determination in all those attempting to take it into possession. At the conclusion of the novel, the falcon turns out to be counterfeit: an empty projection of the fictions imposed on it by imagination.

The verbal reticence of so many of Hammett's figures can be partially ascribed to a conviction that the act of signification is a philosophically futile process that does nothing to alter the fundamental emptiness of signified phenomena. The Op's customary reliance on tautological utterances reflects a conscious inability to construct an authentic discursive response. After hearing the impassioned confession of a murderous bank clerk straggling to understand his own motives, the Op reflects, "I couldn't find anything to say except something meaningless, like: 'Things happen that way.'"

The emptiness of signification in Hammett's work negates the possibility of satisfactory closure to the mysteries and puzzles conjured up in his narratives. The conclusions of his novels are always vaguely unsettling because the final solutions seem like false constructions and shed suspicion on the inventive powers of the detective. *The Thin Man* concludes with a highly conjectural and somewhat preposterous explanation of events by the protagonist, who concedes that his hypothetical resolution is based on speculation. The last word of the book belongs to his wife, Nora, who responds, "That may be, but it's all pretty unsatisfactory." This is a startling concluding note for a genre conventionally based on the expectation of definitive resolution and stable closure.

How does a detective operate in an epistemologically uncertain universe in which there is no stable truth behind the deceptive illusions on the surface? The Op responds by abandoning the chimerical search for concealed master narratives and instead scrambles signification by inventing falsehoods and projecting them onto phenomena. The Op's most important talent thus becomes his capacity for discursive intervention as a means of generating conflict. Unlike most detective figures, he rarely resorts to physical coercion, but rather relies on his ability to spread rumor and create subversive alliances and antagonisms. He walks into a boxing ring in *Red Harvest*, and merely by the utterance of the phrase "Back to Philly, Al"—which conceals a false threat of reprisal against one of the fighters—he manages to unfix the flight and provoke a series of murders and conflicts among rival gangs. He routinely fixes false alibis for himself and manufactures evidence against others. In "The Golden Horseshoe," unable to sustain a conviction due to lack of evidence, he invents a false crime to hang a criminal for a murder he didn't commit.

The Op's illicit tactics of detection suggest the profound moral ambivalence of his identity and activity. The diabolical character of Hammett's protagonists is reinforced by the visual analogy of Spade to Satan in the first paragraph of *The Maltese Falcon*. Edenbaum refers to the Op's method as "not a divine plan but a satanic disorder." The subversive potential to collapse systems of signification places these characters in opposition to the reified administrative structures that dominate and determine their environment.

In *Red Harvest*, the Op explains his twisted methodology to Dinah Brand: "Plans are all right sometimes ... and sometimes just stirring things up is all right—if you're tough enough to survive, and keep your eyes open so you'll see what you want when it comes to the top." Freedman and Kendrick translate this strategy as "the apparently spontaneous capacity both to activate the energies present in the dialogic world and to weather the anarchic psychological and social effects that are thus set in motion." The Op works to short-circuit the machinery of

social relations through an expenditure of surplus energy; his liberating function is his destructive capacity for dismantling systems of signification and discursive alliances and preserving himself in the process of their collapse.

Hammett's detectives operate as agents of sabotage in the manner of Benjamin's "Destructive Character": "For destroying rejuvenates in clearing away the traces of our own age; it cheers because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed eradication, of his own condition" (Reflections 301). This reduction and eradication is performed by the narrative as well, which obliterates referential capacities through a relentless application of dissonant aesthetic maneuvers designed to dismantle narrative content. The utopian aspect of this narrative is achieved by the momentary liberation from ossified discursive reifications.

Freedman and Kendrick contrast modes of detection in Hammett with conventional detective narration by explaining that "it involves not the decoding of a discrete series of facts but, rather, an encoding process that activates the surplus energy inherent in his world." It is within this encoding process that the Op enacts his rebellion against instrumental reason. By imposing his own creative narrative on the world, he constructs a utopian moment that evades the administrative imperatives of his work. He momentarily defies the mechanisms that otherwise determine his reified function, and gives his labor the aesthetic character of play.

**Source:** John Walker, "City Jungles and Expressionist Reifications from Brecht to Hammett," in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Spring 1998, pp. 119–33.

## J. M. Ritchie

*In the following introduction excerpt, Ritchie provides an overview of formal elements in and original sources of German Expressionism.*

### I. FORMAL FEATURES OF EXPRESSIONIST DRAMA

However disparate the views on Expressionism may be, it is generally true that an Expressionist play will tend to be different from a Neo-Romantic or Naturalistic play, no matter how extensive their common roots. Perhaps the most striking formal feature of Expressionist drama is abstraction. Essentially this means that the Expressionist dramatist is not concerned with projecting an illusion of reality on the stage; instead he gives something abstracted from

> AFTER THE DREAM, THE MOST OUTSTANDING FORMAL ELEMENT IN THE EXPRESSIONIST DRAMA IS THE MONOLOGUE. THIS IS PERHAPS NOT SURPRISING CONSIDERING ITS FUNCTION AS THE MAIN VEHICLE FOR EXPRESSING THE SUBJECTIVE DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE SOUL OF THE LYRICAL-DRAMATIC PROTAGONISTS."

reality, that is, either something taken from the real world but reduced to the bare minimum, or something totally abstracted from reality in the sense that the norms of time and place and individuation have been completely abandoned. Hence in Expressionism there is constant stress on giving the essence—the heart of the matter—deeper images instead of "mere" surface appearances. Not surprisingly, actions and plots are also pared down to the important outlines and only crucial situations are presented, while all "unnecessary" detail is eliminated. This same tendency is noticeable in the treatment of the dramatic figures, which show no characteristic features of particular individuals but tend to embody principles which the author holds to be important. As such, they bear no names and instead are often simply designated as Father, Mother, Husband, or Wife. Other dramatic figures can similarly represent states of mind, social positions, official functions, etc.; hence they are introduced merely as Cashier, Officer, and the like. The intention is clearly to move away from the specific and the conditioned to a more general sphere of reference and significance.

Abstraction of this kind is, needless to say, by no means restricted to Expressionist drama; indeed, it is a feature of Expressionist art in general. All in all, this is in line with the Expressionists' reaction against the materialistic philosophy of the Naturalists, who tended to show the force of milieu, race, class, and social circumstance as factors conditioning the character of the individual. The Expressionists were not interested in character in this sense and did not attempt to create dramatic characters in their

plays. Character for them meant a limitation of scope. They were more concerned with the soul, that which is common to all men. Instead of creating an impression of real people in real situations, the Expressionist dramatists will therefore strive with religious longing for something beyond the merely material, for eternal and transcendental values.

While this is the essential nature of Expressionistic abstraction, the rejection of the principle of mimesis was given various explanations. Kasimir Edschmid, for example, said in a speech on literary Expressionism: "The world is there. It would be senseless to repeat it." But whatever the reasons offered, time and place were ignored by the Expressionist dramatist so that he could feel free to create his own subjective universe. The dream, with its associations apparently lacking in cause or logic, was substituted for normal reality. For this practice there was a model to hand in Strindberg, though there had been forerunners within the German dramatic tradition, among whom Kleist attracted most attention. Thus, from Sorge's *Der Bettler* (The Beggar) to Kaiser's *Gas II*, one constantly encounters dream-like sequences and figures.

After the dream, the most outstanding formal element in the Expressionist drama is the monologue. This is perhaps not surprising considering its function as the main vehicle for expressing the subjective developments within the soul of the lyrical-dramatic protagonists. The use of the monologue demonstrates yet another contrast with the Naturalists, who had argued that in real life people were supposed to converse and not soliloquize. No sooner had the monologue been banished, however, than it made its way back into the drama with even greater force than before, not least through the monologue dramas of Neo-Romantic dramatists like Hofmannsthal. The revival of the monologue was propitious for the Expressionist dramatist, who did not see life in terms of communication and sociability. Even his very explosions of longing for brotherhood and *Gemeinschaft* express an awareness of the fundamental isolation of man. Thus, egocentricity and solipsism become another hallmark of his works, expressed in formal terms by the long soliloquies of the one central figure, about whom all the other figures cluster like satellites around a major planet. The protagonist expresses *himself*

alone; he does not speak for others, however much he may apostrophize mankind in general.

This solipsistic character of the Expressionist drama explains another feature, namely the scream. The Expressionist dramatist is not concerned to show normal life lived at a normal level or tempo. Instead, he strives for the exceptional and extreme situation, in which the protagonist simply explodes. In this way, once again he breaks through the restricting bonds of normalcy and is beside or beyond himself. At its best this means arriving at a state of ecstasy, which is the aim of the fundamental religious striving of the Expressionists. Ecstasy means experiencing the Divine immediately and absolutely, and not merely attempting to grasp it logically or rationally. At the same time, rhetorical and ecstatic monologues are not merely an expression of the thoughts and feelings of the isolated protagonists; they have a powerful effect on each member of the audience who is there to be stirred up out of his bourgeois mediocrity by powerful utterance. Clearly, such monologues can be as unwieldy as similar speeches in a Baroque drama by Andreas Gryphius or Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein; but the effect, once the improbability is accepted, can be equally overwhelming.

It must be admitted, however, that a potential source of weakness in Expressionist drama is the almost exclusive focus on one central protagonist, while all the other figures in the drama are reduced to mere reflections of his central position. However, it is possible to overstress the dangers of the single-perspective play. The same kind of technique was, after all, employed by Kafka in his fixed-perspective narratives to very powerful effect. At its best, as for example in Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (From Morn till Midnight), the solipsistic drama could be extremely successful in the way all other characters in the play mirror and reflect the problems of the cashier. Less successful is a more lyrical drama like Sorge's *The Beggar*, where even the hero's mother, father, and girlfriend seem to have been introduced simply in order to illuminate significant aspects of the young hero's soul.

As far as the actual structure of an Expressionist drama is concerned, dynamism has been singled out as the one significantly new element. By this is meant not only the forceful nature of the language employed, but also the principle whereby the protagonist is shown following a certain path through life. Hence, the drama

becomes a *Stationendrama*, following the ancient religious model of the stations of the cross. This means, in effect, a sequence of scenes which follow rapidly one upon the other, often with no obvious link between them. Here again there were models in the German dramatic canon, notably in the theater of Storm and Stress, though nearer to hand were the examples of Strindberg and Wedekind. Essentially, the dynamic, episodic structure mirrored the inner turmoil and awareness of chaos in the soul of the central figure, who, following the religious model, often goes through a total transformation. Such a *Wandlung* (the title of one of Toller's plays) is most clearly apparent in the case of Kaiser's cashier who is a mere machine-man in a bank and is electrically switched on by the touch of an exotic Italian lady. Through her his transformation becomes possible; he becomes aware of "life" and tries to realize his full potential as a human being. So from being a robot he is awakened to the possibility of human existence and sets off on his quest for fulfillment, being totally transformed from one second to the next. The religious parallels to his *Aufbruch* (new start) and his pilgrimage are made symbolically clear throughout.

Even on the printed page, one major difference between an Expressionist drama and its predecessors is immediately obvious by reason of the frequent alternation between verse and prose. Here again the Expressionist sees no reason to be arbitrarily limited to the single register of natural speech and is prepared to be unnatural and poetic; not that the verse is generally poetic in the normal melodic sense: instead, the Expressionistic dramatist preferred free verse which he could move into and out of quite easily, depending on the level of speech in the particular moment of the action. In verse he was able to leave the rational, logical world behind and penetrate to the deeper levels to express the stirrings of the soul. Here the poetic utterance conforms to the ecstatic state and the elevated manner. That here the Expressionist was yet again laying himself wide open to attack from hostile critics is readily apparent. Such attacks were not slow to come and have never stopped. Yet such pathos was not a simple sign of artistic impotence; on the contrary, it was a deliberately chosen style of the large gesture and the grand manner. The scream could end in stammering incoherence; pathos could result in Baroque-like effusion;

but at its best the drama could be deeply stirring in its combination of rational control and surging emotion. Here once again extreme opposites seem to be the mark of the Expressionist style, which could be extremely dense, concentrated, compressed on the one hand, while on the other this shortness, sharpness, and eruptive spontaneity could overflow into seemingly endless monologues.

It is generally easy to identify the Expressionist style on the page not merely by the alternation of verse and prose but also by the proliferation of exclamation marks, dashes, and question marks, sometimes in clusters, while even the longest speech generally breaks down into shorter units, characterized by missing articles, eliminated particles, and condensed verbal forms in order to create the lapidary style of *Ballung*. Yet while such a style is, or can be, extremely aggressive and disturbing, another feature needs to be mentioned, namely its hymnic quality. Here Sorge's *The Beggar* and Hasenclever's *Der Sohn* (The Son) offer excellent examples of the manner in which the dramatists can soar higher and higher in tone, in the manner of a musical crescendo.

And yet it must not be thought that the Expressionist always operates at such a high level; indeed, it could be argued that the most striking weapon in the Expressionist armory was the ready exploitation of the grotesque, a technique deliberately designed to effect a break from a high level of tension and plunge down to the banal. The possibilities of the grotesque had been amply demonstrated by Wedekind in *Frühlings Erwachen* (Spring's Awakening) and elsewhere, and the Expressionist playwrights were not slow to follow his example. Hence, in the excitement of the Six Day Race in *From Morn till Midnight* the cashier sees five people squeezed together like five heads on one pair of shoulders till a bowler hat falls from one head onto the bosom of a lady in the audience below, to be imprinted on her bosom forever after. The bowler hat is followed by the middle man of the five, who plunges to his doom below as Kaiser puts it, like someone just "dropping" in! Such a use of the grotesque can be screamingly funny, but also screamingly terrifying. The mark of the grotesque is the distortion and exaggeration of the normal, the exploitation of caricature and distortion for effect.

## II. THE ROOTS OF EXPRESSIONIST DRAMA

One question that has exercised the minds of critics is how far back one has to go to find the sources of that modernism in form and content associated with the theater of Expressionism. Medieval mystery plays have often been mentioned in this context, not merely because so many Expressionist plays share the religious striving of such early forms of theatrical production, but also because one of the features of Expressionism seems to have been a highly intellectual longing for a return to simpler forms. Hence, such obvious delight in *tableaux* as the "gothic" setting of Kaiser's *Die Bürger von Calais* (The Burghers of Calais) reveals, while the striking conclusion to Kaiser's play not only deliberately stresses the religious parallels to a secular situation, but also abandons language completely for a mode of expression relying on the visual impact of light, grouping, and gesture. Similarly, the whole play tends to follow a medieval "revue" pattern, in which sequences of scenes, or pictures, take the place of continuity of plot. Constantly referred to in connection with Expressionistic plays is the term *Stationendrama*. Hence, although an Expressionist play may appear on the surface to be very modernistic, modeled for example on Strindberg's *To Damascus*, the idea suggested is the far older one of the quest, involving the equally religious possibility of a revelation or transformation in the course of this path through life. Little wonder, then, that Expressionistic plays often adopted the form of the *Läuterungsdrama*, i.e., the play of purification in which an Everyman figure experiences an illumination and changes his life from one moment to the next. A feature of the Naturalistic play was the depiction of man as a creature of many conditioning factors. Man was a product of his environment, his class, race, and creed; his life ran along certain fixed tracks from which he could not deviate. The Expressionist dramatist, on the other hand, demonstrates that man is always free to choose and change. His are plays of "becoming," like Barlach's *Der blaue Boll* (Blue Boll). This character has been forced into a certain role in society, but, as the play demonstrates, he is a man and not a machine or an animal, and in the epic form of seven stations, or *tableaux*, he makes his "decision." Many Expressionistic plays are therefore also *Entscheidungsdramen*, plays in which a crucial decision for the course of a whole life is made. Very often, as in *Blue Boll*, the decision is a fundamental one involving the "Erneuerung des Menschen," the regeneration of man, a phrase which once again stresses the religious nature of so many Expressionistic works. Not surprisingly, plays of this kind tend toward universal themes and cosmic dimensions, which may mean that the characters are diminished, in one sense, as beings of flesh and blood and expanded, in another, to become representative figures for some aspect of the human dilemma.

But it would be wrong to seek the roots of Expressionist drama exclusively in the religious drama of the Middle Ages. Much more to the point is the general tendency to go back beyond the comparatively recent tradition of nineteenth-century drama to absolute simplicity combined with universal significance. This, Nietzsche had demonstrated, was to be found in the classics, not however, in the Apollonian world of beauty and light, but in the Dionysian sphere of darkness and ritual. Hence, from Kokoschka's *Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer Hope of Womankind) onward, there is an increasing emphasis on myth. The process of condensation and compression becomes a paring down to the quintessential. The result is an economy going beyond the extreme simplicity of Greek classical drama and a concentration on all the hymnic, rhetorical potential of language. But it must be admitted that this process of reduction and concentration, combined with ritual incantations and myth-making, has some unfortunate results. However exciting it may be, Kokoschka's playlet on the myth of the purification of man who, in his struggle with woman, dies to be reborn, is so compressed that the meaning is largely obscured. In a myth-seeking play like Unruh's *Ein Geschlecht* (One Family), which was much praised in its own time, practically every permutation in the relationship between a mother and her children is projected through highly charged language—love, hate, incest, possible fratricide and matricide—while the action, which is not bound to any particular age or country, takes place before a mountain cemetery high above the wars in the valley. The results of such mythologizing can often be ludicrous, as for example in the mother's dying words which sound like an echo from Kleist, whose *Penthesilea* was indeed one of the sources of Unruh's inspiration: "Here, here and there too, plunge all your steel shafts deep into my blood! I'll melt them down till nothing remains to hurt my children."

An example of the fruitful use of classical simplicity is Goering's war play *Seeschlacht* (Naval Encounter). Unruh's play is marked by shouts, screams, and exclamations, and Goering's play too is a *Schreidrama* or "scream play," another label often attached to Expressionist drama. But the striking feature of *Naval Encounter* is the tight discipline and the controlled, hard, highly stylized language. The quick switches from short, sharp stichomythic utterances of classical brevity to long monologues of considerable eloquence are a feature of the new Expressionist style which revels in the conjunction of extremes—ice-cold with fever-heat, compression with expansiveness, logicality with ecstasy, stasis with dynamicism. Characteristically, too, there is little or no plot—merely the situation of men moving toward their inevitable fate, in this case sailors in a gun turret going into battle, and hence to their death. There is no realistic detail: the stylization is now complete, the compression to abstract form extreme, the process of depersonalization total. The whole work with its Socratic dialogue has the style and rigor of a classical tragedy with its constant suggestion of forces outside man controlling his destiny. Yet the final outcome is not determined by fatalism but by the individual who stands out against the forces that threaten to control him and mankind. Man's duty to man is thus the chief criterion. Hasenclever, too, adopted the classical style in his antiwar play *Antigone;* his play *Menschen* (Humanity) is an even better example of the dangers of hovering between classical simplicity and a passion-play structure.

However, Expressionist dramatists were not generally accused of excessive formalism (though, as has been seen, the tendency toward classical concentration and condensation laid them open to this charge): they were more likely to be accused of formlessness. On the whole, this charge is probably unfair and brought about by the Expressionistic predilection for the open forms of drama associated with the German Storm and Stress. These open forms, in fact, as used by the previously underestimated Klinger and J. M. R. Lenz, whose works included balladesque and filmic scene sequences, gradually came to be appreciated in the period which began just before World War I and ended just after it. Indeed, Lenz in particular emerged as a model for the twentieth century. An even more important influence than Lenz was Georg Büchner, also an exponent of the open form, whose most important drama was produced successfully for the first time about this period. The impact of his *Woyzeck* can be seen particularly in the Alban Berg opera *Wozzeck*, which it inspired.

**Source:** J. M. Ritchie, "Introduction," in *German Expressionist Drama*, Twayne Publishers, 1976, pp.15–39.

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# Gothic Literature

The Gothic, a literary movement that focused on ruin, decay, death, terror, and chaos, and privileged irrationality and passion over rationality and reason, grew in response to the historical, sociological, psychological, and political contexts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although Horace Walpole is credited with producing the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, in 1764, his work was built on a foundation of several elements. First, Walpole tapped a growing fascination with all things medieval, and medieval romance provided a generic framework for his novel. In addition, Edmund Burke's 1757 treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, offered a philosophical foundation. Finally, the Graveyard School of poetry, so called because of the attention its poets gave to ruins, graveyards, death, and human mortality, flourished in the mid-eighteenth century and provided a thematic and literary context for the Gothic.

Walpole's novel was wildly popular, and his novel introduced most of the stock conventions of the genre: an intricate plot; stock characters; subterranean labyrinths; ruined castles; and supernatural occurrences. *The Castle of Otranto* was soon followed by William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786); Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797); Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796); Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1797); Mary Shelley's

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1764

*Frankenstein* (1818); and Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820).

While it may be comparatively easy to date the beginning of the Gothic movement, it is much harder to identify its close, if indeed the movement did come to a close at all. There are those such as David Punter in *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* and Fred Botting in *Gothic* who follow the transitions and transformations of the Gothic through the twentieth century. Certainly, any close examination of the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, or Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in the nineteenth century demonstrates both the transformation and the influence of the Gothic. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the ongoing fascination with horror, terror, the supernatural, vampires, werewolves, and other things that go bump in the night evinces the power the Gothic continues to exert.

In its attention to the dark side of human nature and the chaos of irrationality, the Gothic provides for contemporary readers some insight into the social and intellectual climate of the time in which the literature was produced. A time of revolution and reason, madness and sanity, the 1750s through the 1850s provided the stuff that both dreams and nightmares were made of.

# REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

## William Beckford (1760–1844)

William Beckford, known as both the richest and most eccentric man of his time, was born September 29, 1760, in London, England. By all accounts, Beckford was brilliant, musically gifted, and highly artistic. He was also scandalous and hedonistic. He had no desire to follow in his father's political or business footprints, much to his father's dismay. Rather, young Beckford preferred to travel, write, spend money, and collect art. Because of improper relationships with his cousin's wife, Louisa, and a young man named William "Kitty" Courtenay, Beckford was sent by his mother to the Continent to give the scandal time to die down. Indeed, young Beckford's life followed this pattern repeatedly. He would remain in England until the scandals mounted and then would retreat to the Continent for a cooling-off period. He married in 1783



*Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* *(© Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library / Alamy)*

in a movement to save whatever was left of his reputation; however, his wife died in childbirth in 1785. During this time, Beckford built and rebuilt Fonthill Abbey, considered either the most amazing building or the greatest monstrosity in England at the close of the eighteenth century. Like Horace Walpole, only much, much wealthier, Beckford indulged his passion for the Gothic and for collecting art with his domicile. Another important trait of Beckford's was his fascination with Oriental mysticism. At an early age, he read and reread *The Arabian Nights*. This passion led directly to his composition of *Vathek* in 1786. Beckford died on May 2, 1844, at Lansdowne Crescent, after battling fever and influenza.

## Emily Brontë (1818–1848)

Emily Brontë was born in Thornton, Yorkshire, England, on July 30, 1818. She lost her mother and two of her sisters when she was very young, which brought the remaining family members—father, son, and three daughters—closer together. Along with her siblings Branwell, Charlotte, and Anne, Brontë created fantastical worlds as a child, which the children shaped with stories and poems. As young women, the Brontë sisters

pseudonymously published some of their poetry although Emily is generally regarded as the great poetic talent of the family. The sisters each published novels, as well. Brontë's Gothic novel *Wuthering Heights* was published under her pseudonym Ellis Bell in 1847 to mixed reviews. She died on December 19, 1848, at age 30, from tuberculosis, only a few months after the death of her brother Branwell. Anne died five months later, leaving only Charlotte and her father. Charlotte, then a renowned author herself, republished *Wuthering Heights* in 1850 under her sister's real name. Laurie Stone argues that Charlotte was disturbed by Brontë's untamed talent and is likely the one who destroyed much of her sister's letters and childhood poems and sanitized the rest.

### Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810)

The first American novelist, Charles Brockden Brown, was born into a Quaker family in Philadelphia on January 17, 1771. Although he began his education with the intent to become a lawyer, the law soon lost its appeal for him. Apparently, the task of the lawyer to defend a client whether the client was innocent or guilty bothered Brown's sense of morality. This sense of morality often led Brown to take socially radical stances. In this, he seems deeply connected to and influenced by William Godwin. For example, Brown's novel *Alcuin* (1798) explores the ambiguities of marriage and the rights of women. It is for *Wieland* (1798), however, that Brown earned his reputation as a Gothic writer. Considered Brown's best novel, *Wieland* explores the roles of religion and rationality. Clearly, Brown's insistence on a moral stance separates him from some of the earlier Gothic writers such as Beckford and Lewis. Nevertheless, Brown's intense fascination with the inner workings of a character's mind deeply influenced later writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Brown died in Philadelphia in February of 1810, probably from tuberculosis.

### Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775–1818)

Born in London on July 9, 1775, M. G. Lewis attended school in Westminster and Oxford. He traveled to Germany in 1792, where he learned to speak German. While there, he became well-acquainted with German Gothic fiction. He stated to his mother that the reading of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* inspired him to write his most famous work, *The Monk*, published in 1796. Tradition has it that he completed the work in ten weeks and that it instantly made him a literary star at the age of twenty. Indeed, for the rest of his life, Lewis was referred to by his contemporaries as Monk Lewis. Lewis introduced graphic horror into the Gothic genre, describing in great detail physical torture and putrefaction, as well as steamy sexual encounters. Whereas Radcliffe relied on suspense, or the fear of violence, Lewis abandons the fear of violence for the violence itself. Unlike Radcliffe, Lewis used supernatural devices without feeling compelled to offer rational explanations for uncanny events. It was through such techniques that Lewis incorporated German popular literature into the mainstream of English literature. Lewis died of yellow fever in May of 1818, on the way home from Jamaica, where he had been visiting his inherited holdings.

### Charles Robert Maturin (1780–1824)

Charles Robert Maturin was born in Dublin, Ireland, on September 25, 1780. Maturin attended Trinity College, Dublin. His family, noted Huguenot refugees active in the Anglo-Irish community, met with reversal when his father was dismissed from his civil service job. Maturin, who had taken orders in the Anglican Church in 1803, attempted to augment his living by writing. Although his drama *Bertram* met with success on the London stage, Maturin's financial prospects continued to diminish. Some attribute his growing eccentricities to his attempts to deal with poverty. Certainly, both his nationalism and his criticism of the Anglican Church did not endear him to the Anglo-Irish community. The author of several novels, Maturin is best known for *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Many historians and literary critics call this both the last and the greatest of the Gothic novels. His work was admired by such literary figures as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Makepeace Thackeray. The French writer Honore de Balzac even wrote a sequel to *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Maturin died at the age of forty-four on October 30, 1824, in Dublin.

### Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

Born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, Edgar Allan Poe is a well known American poet and short story writer. He was orphaned at three and raised by John Allen, with whom he had an uneasy lifelong relationship. Poe was a victim of depression; he turned to alcohol for relief and eventually became an alcoholic. His

marriage to his beloved cousin Virginia Clemm ended with her death in 1847. While many critics suggest that Poe is a post-Gothic writer, he nevertheless used many Gothic conventions in his own work, including medieval settings, supernatural occurrences, terror, and architectural ruins. Certainly, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1834) has all of the Gothic ingredients. Moreover, Poe is particularly important to the ongoing influence of the Gothic on contemporary literature, moving the genre from an external to an internal psychological focus. Poe died in Baltimore on October 7, 1849, from complications related to a brain lesion.

### Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823)

Ann Radcliffe, born Ann Ward in London on July 9, 1764, wrote a series of Gothic romances that set the course of the genre for years to come. Indeed, Radcliffe's name is nearly synonymous with a particular style of the Gothic, one that uses the supernatural but generally provides a rational explanation at the end. Young Ann Ward married William Radcliffe, a well-to-do Oxford graduate, in 1787. They had no children and traveled extensively. Radcliffe's diaries of her travels seem to have provided settings and detail for her novels. Unlike other more notorious Gothic writers, Radcliffe lived in relative obscurity, although she achieved immense success with her novels. In 1794, Radcliffe published what was to become the most popular of her novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Like other Gothic novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is set in rugged mountains. Radcliffe's novel, *The Italian* (1797), written in response to Lewis's *The Monk*, is generally regarded as the superior novel, however. Alastair Fowler in *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature* credits Radcliffe with establishing "wild landscape as a standard feature of romance; even if, as she wrote, the full terror of landscape was already fading." Fowler further argues that Radcliffe's technique was deliberate: By interspersing elaborate description into her narrative, Radcliffe "keeps delaying the action and distancing it into perspective." Perhaps the most influential of all Gothic writers, Radcliffe retired from writing at the height of her career, unhappy with the uses to which her writings were put. Ann Radcliffe died suddenly in London on February 7, 1823.

### Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851)

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, born in London on August 30, 1797, to feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, moved in the most radical literary circles of her day. At sixteen, she became the mistress of the poet Percy Shelley and a close personal friend of George Gordon, Lord Byron. The death of her mother when she was ten days old haunted her all her life. Mary Godwin, as the daughter of two intellectuals, was well educated and self-taught, able to hold her own with some of the best minds of her time. In the summer of 1816, Mary Godwin, her lover Percy, and her stepsister Claire traveled to Switzerland, where they took up residence near Lord Byron on Lake Geneva. It was here that the well-known ghost story competition among the young literati produced Mary Shelley's best-known novel, *Frankenstein*. In December of 1816, Percy Shelley and Mary Godwin married. Six years later, Percy Shelley died by drowning in the Ligurian Sea. Mary Shelley died in London from a brain tumor on February 1, 1851. Her work continues to exert influence on contemporary fiction and criticism.

### Horace Walpole (1717–1797)

Born September 24, 1717, in London, Horace Walpole was the Earl of Orford. Educated at Eaton and Cambridge, Walpole became friends with Thomas Gray, Richard West, and Thomas Ashton, early members of the so-called Graveyard School of poetry. Gray in particular influenced Walpole in his development of a Gothic imagination. In 1739, Walpole toured the Continent with Gray, crossing the Alps, another important influence on his development as a Gothic writer. In 1747, Walpole purchased Strawberry Hill, a home on the Thames River in Twickenham. For nearly thirty years, Walpole built and rebuilt the house, turning it into a "little Gothic castle," in his own words. Walpole also established a private press at Strawberry Hill, and it was from here that he published his most famous work, *The Castle of Otranto*, in December 1764. Initially, Walpole hid the fact that he was the author of the work, saying that it was a translation by William Marshall of a medieval Italian text. The book met with success, however, and in the second edition, Walpole revealed his own authorship. He told a friend in a letter that the idea for the novel had come to him in a dream. *The Castle of Otranto* is

particularly significant because it was the first Gothic novel written. Indeed, the novel provided for later writers nearly every convention found in subsequent Gothic writing. After a long life of letters, politics, and architectural innovations, Walpole died at Berkeley Square, London, on March 2, 1797.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The Castle of Otranto

*The Castle of Otranto*, by Walpole, published in December 1764, is universally regarded as the first Gothic novel. Set in some undefined medieval past, the novel draws on heroic romance as well as legends and folklore. In this one novel, Walpole established virtually every convention of Gothic literature. These include the Gothic castle, a presence so real as to nearly be a character in and of itself. He also uses gloomy weather, clanking chains, midnight bells, and subterranean passageways. The story is a strange one: Manfred, Prince of Otranto, has one son, Conrad. On the eve of Conrad's marriage to the lovely Isabella, a huge antique helmet falls on Conrad and crushes him. Manfred decides to put away his wife and take Isabella as his wife in order to continue his line. This is not something Isabella wants and thus begins the chase and imprisonment. In due time, readers find that the peasant Isabella encounters in the passageways is really the true heir of Otranto; the death of Conrad was in repayment for the sins of his father. It is impossible to overestimate the influence this novel has had on the course of Gothic writing. Walpole's invention and imagination set the arc of the novel for years to come.

### Dracula

*Dracula* was first published in 1897 by Bram Stoker, an Irish writer and theater manager. The novel is part of the Victorian Gothic period, a resurgence of Gothic literature that appeared approximately a century after the first Gothic literary movement started by Walpole. Stoker spent a year researching vampires and folklore before writing his novel. The tale is epistolary or told through letters and journal entries. Jonathan Harker, a young lawyer, visits Count Dracula in the Carpathian Mountains to give him real estate advice. Dracula trails Harker back to England where he stalks Harker's fiancée Mina.

As Mina's friend Lucy begins to mysteriously waste away, a professor and vampire specialist, Van Helsing, is brought in to consult. When Lucy suddenly dies after being attacked by a wolf-like creature, Van Helsing finds her living as a vampire and kills her permanently. Mina marries Harker but Dracula does not give up, feeding her his blood to create a bond between them. Van Helsing and Harker use this bond to find out where Dracula is hiding. In the final confrontation, Dracula is killed and turns to dust, freeing Mina from their connection. Mina and Harker live happily thereafter.

### *"The Fall of the House of Usher"*

Edgar Allan Poe's most famous story was published in 1839, some years after the height of the Gothic movement. Nevertheless, the story is, as are many of Poe's stories, classically Gothic in setting, theme, and mood. Fred Botting, in *Gothic* writes, "The house is both a Gothic manifestation, an architectural ruin set in a desolate and gloomy landscape and a family equally in decay, dying from an unknown and incurable disease." The story also contains the element of claustrophobia in the premature burial of Roderick Usher's sister as well as the scent of incest in the intimately close relationship between Usher and his sister. Unlike earlier Gothic novels, however, the plot of "The Fall of the House of Usher" is not episodic, but rather builds steadily and intensely to its nearly excessive climax, when, just as Roderick Usher announces he has buried his sister alive, she bursts through the door, and the entire house collapses. Poe concentrates on "avoiding all impressions alien to his effect," thereby giving "his tales an extraordinary unity of tone and colour," according to Edith Birkhead in her seminal book, *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance*. Poe's transformation of the Gothic in this and other works continues to influence contemporary horror writing.

### Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1818. The novel does not fit neatly into any generic designation, but many critics suggest that it is the first modern work of science fiction. However, Shelley's emphasis on isolation, wild landscapes, supernatural occurrences, and the haunting presence of the double places the novel within the context of the Gothic. The narrative of *Frankenstein* is complicated; it opens on a boat

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- *The Best of Gothic Horror* is a collection of abridged novels and stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mary Shelley recorded on audio tape by Countertop Audio and released in June 2000.

- A film of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" was produced in 1928 and directed by Jean Epstein. A second film adaptation of the story starred Vincent Price and was directed by Roger Corman in 1960. Both versions are available on videotape.

- *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, a film directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh, was released in 1994. The film claims to be a much closer rendition of Shelley's novel than the earlier film *Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale and released in 1931, although both versions were very popular with viewers. As of 2008, both were readily available on video.

- An audio tape of an abridged version of *The Castle of Otranto*, produced by Naxos Audio Books in 1995, provides a brief introduction to the famous work that started the Gothic movement.

- *Wuthering Heights* has been made into a movie many times, but the 1939 film, which deals only with the first generation of characters, starring Merle Oberon as Catherine and Laurence Olivier as Heathcliff, is considered a classic. It won a 1940 Academy Award for Best Black-and-White Cinematography. The movie was directed by William Wyler and originally distributed by United Artists. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from most major retailers.

- *Dracula* (1931), starring Bela Lugosi, is a classic adaptation of Stoker's famed novel. Lugosi's portrayal of the Gothic villain Count Dracula became the yardstick by which all other Dracula adaptations are measured. Directed by Tod Browning, this film was available on DVD from Universal Studios as of 2008.

- Professor Jack G. Voller maintains a comprehensive Web site at http://www.litgothic.com with research suggestions, a library of e-texts, extensive factual material, a large database, and critical articles. The site is easily navigable, reliable, and useful for a student starting a study of the Gothic.

- Professor Douglass H. Thomson of Southern Georgia University maintains a site at http://personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~dougt/lg.htm that offers a superb collection of articles, a glossy of literary Gothic terms, an author list, and other resources.

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sailing in the Arctic, when the crew sees a large figure driving a sledge. The next day, they find another sledge, this one containing Victor Frankenstein, who then recounts to the captain of the vessel the story of his life and the creation of the monster. Shelley also includes some six chapters from the monster's point of view, in which he speaks of his own life. Ironically, it is through the pen of a woman that this novel transforms the Gothic from a feminine form of literature. That is, earlier Gothic novels featured heroines fleeing for their lives and honor. In Shelley's novel, there are virtually no female characters, and Victor is a cold and hard scientist. Indeed, Shelley brings together both the rationality of science and the irrationality of the will to power. Victor is the model of a man seduced by the power of science, unable to see until it is much too late that there are some things, such as the creation of life, that belong to God alone.

## Melmoth the Wanderer

Written by Charles Robert Maturin in 1820, *Melmoth the Wanderer* is often called the last
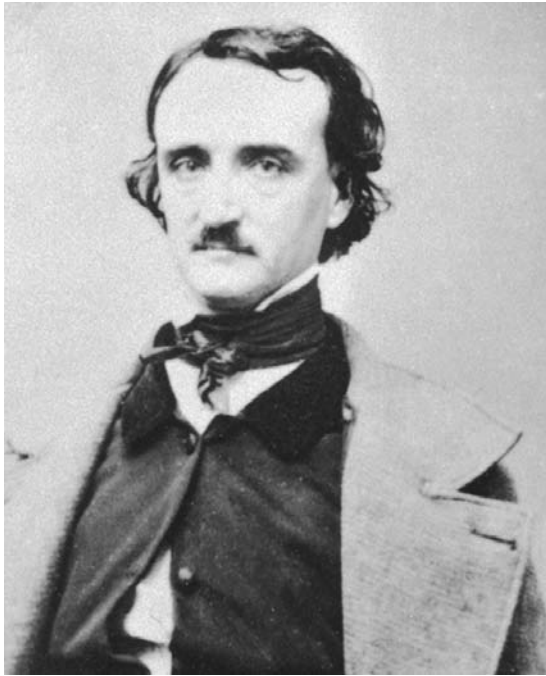
*Edgar Allan Poe* (© *Bettmann | Corbis*)

Gothic novel. It is the story of a Melmoth, a Wanderer who has bargained his soul for a longer life. Regretting the choice he has made, he finds that if he can persuade someone to take his bargain on, he will be free. Most notable in *Melmoth the Wanderer* is Maturin's convoluted narrative style. While it hearkens back to the medieval frame story, it also looks forward to post-modern distortions of chronology and location. These dislocations create a story of the supernatural more closely related to dream sequences than the novels that had come before. Inside the frame is a series of tales that recount Melmoth's visits to the people he wants to take on his bargain. For example, in one story, he appears to a young woman whose lover has gone mad. The Wanderer offers to cure him if she will take on his bargain. She refuses. Indeed, although the Wanderer chooses to appear to people whose lives are utterly miserable, and although the Wanderer promises them that they can have the entire world, none of them will trade their immortal souls for what Melmoth offers. At the conclusion of the novel, Melmoth has been unable to get out of his bargain and must sacrifice his soul. Edith Birkhead in *The Tale of Terror* suggests that the Wanderer is connected to the legend of the Wandering Jew,

Dr. Faustus, and Milton's Lucifer. One might also add Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Ancient Mariner to this list. Certainly, in his deeply divided, alienated state, he resembles the hero/villains of other Gothic novels. It is in the unity of its human misery, however, that the novel makes its mark upon the genre.

## The Monk

M. G. Lewis wrote *The Monk* in 1795, when he was just twenty-one years old. It took him all of ten weeks to complete the novel, and it appeared in print in 1796. Lewis wrote the book after reading Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Two different stories comprise *The Monk*. In one plot, two lovers, Agnes and Raymond, are separated by their parents and the Catholic Church. Agnes is pregnant and is sent to a convent where she is chained to a wall and tortured. She gives birth to her baby, who then dies in front of her. In the other plot, the monk Ambrosio breaks his vows of chastity through the machinations of the evil Matilda. Through a series of complicated plot twists, Ambrosio murders one woman and rapes another. He ends up in an Inquisition prison and then sells his soul to Satan. He dies a horrible and prolonged death. Critics of the day found the novel to be both obscene and blasphemous. Nevertheless, the novel was wildly popular. *The Monk* shifts the Gothic novel from the explained supernatural of Ann Radcliffe; the supernatural in *The Monk* is truly supernatural. In addition, Lewis's prose is both graphic and intense; his descriptions of the putrefaction of the dead baby, for example, are particularly disturbing. Nevertheless, *The Monk* continued to expand the popularity of the Gothic novel in its heyday of the 1790s.

## The Mysteries of Udolpho

Radcliffe's Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) built on the groundwork laid by Walpole. In this novel, Radcliffe draws on many of the conventional tactics of the Gothic novel but emphasizes the use of suspense. She sets *Udolpho* in the medieval past, 1584, and in France and Italy. Her novel is not the bloody, steamy affair of many of her contemporaries, such as Lewis; she instead chooses to use long passages describing sublime landscapes. Her novel does, however, include chases through subterranean passages and considerable violence. The narrative of the story is complicated: the protagonist, Emily, finds herself in an apparently haunted

castle, replete with shadows, footsteps, inexplicable noises and music, and veiled portraits, under the control of her aunt's evil husband. Radcliffe introduces many supernatural elements but includes explanations for all of them by the time the novel concludes. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, along with Radcliffe's later novel, *The Italian*, set the standard for Gothic literature in the 1790s.

## Vathek

First written in French and then later translated into English, *Vathek*, written by William Beckford and published in English in 1786, is the story of a mad caliph's vices and his descent into hell. Beckford formulated the idea of *Vathek* at a Christmas Eve orgy at Fonthill. Many consider *Vathek* the best Oriental tale in English. Lord Byron, in particular, found Beckford's work to be powerful. Certainly, any reading of *Vathek* will acknowledge Beckford's infatuation with *The Arabian Nights*. Some critics have identified Vathek's wild life as a reflection of Beckford's own; the author led a life of excess and eccentricity. For all that, *Vathek* moves the Gothic novel out of medieval Europe and into an exotic, Oriental setting. The novel exerted considerable influence on writers such as Hawthorne, Poe, and Stephane Mallarmé. Artists and musicians also engaged the fantastic world of *Vathek*.

## Wieland

In 1798, Charles Brockden Brown, an American, published *Wieland*, the first Gothic novel written in the United States. The work is known for its psychological depth as well as for its Gothic excess. Brown explores the role of religion in the lives of driven characters. For Brown, morality resides in the individual conscience, and revealed religion may produce horrific results. In *Wieland*, a ventriloquist's evil tricks, along with religious fervor, convince Wieland, the main character of the novel, that God wants him to kill his family. He does so, killing his wife and children. His sister narrowly escapes to narrate the tale. In the novel, Brown tries to negotiate between the rationality of the Enlightenment and the irrationality of religious fervor. By so doing, Brown shifts the Gothic tale from supernatural events and superstition into the realm of human psychology. Is Weiland mad or deluded? Do his crimes spring from insanity, or has his religious calling merely rendered him

irrational? A dark and brooding book, *Wieland* remains a masterpiece of American literature.

## Wuthering Heights

*Wuthering Heights* (1847) was unusual when it was first published because Brontë used a nonlinear narrative to tell her story. The novel is told as a flashback by Heathcliff's housekeeper Nelly to his new tenant, Lockwood. Nelly tells Lockwood that Heathcliff was brought to Wuthering Heights from the streets of Liverpool forty years earlier by Mr. Earnshaw who raised the child as his own. Nelly describes how his daughter Catherine becomes best friends with Heathcliff, while his son Hindley resents the other boy. When Mr. Earnshaw dies, Hindley becomes head of the estate and drives Heathcliff and Catherine apart. Heathcliff is made to work like a servant while Catherine is pushed into the company of a nearby family, the Lintons. Their son Edgar Linton eventually proposes to Catherine who reluctantly agrees to marry him; she is really in love with Heathcliff. Enraged, Heathcliff leaves. When he returns years later, he is wealthy, bitter, and vindictive, intent upon ruining Hindley and Linton. Heathcliff is successful at destroying the happiness and lives of those around him, even extending this ruination to include their children. He finally gives up on his vendetta when he learns that Catherine's daughter Cathy is in love with Hindley's son Hareton. Heathcliff dies and is reunited with Catherine, who has haunted him since her death.

## THEMES

### Terror and Horror

Terror and horror are the tools of the Gothic novelist. Drawing on the work of Edmund Burke, Ann Radcliffe distinguished between the two terms, suggesting that terror grows out of suspense while horror produces disgust. In other words, a character experiences terror in the anticipation of some dreaded event; the character experiences horror when the event really happens. Thus, in Radcliffe's novels, there is an emphasis on terror and the terrible, which she creates through her long descriptions of sublime landscapes and her intimations of the supernatural. Moreover, the agonizing suspense to which she subjects her characters produces terror in both the character and the reader.

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Many critics suggest that the Gothic continues to influence contemporary art and literature, primarily through the media of film and video. Consider Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video, various film adaptations of *Frankenstein*, and a selection of films based on Stephen King's books. How do these works reflect the basic characteristics of Gothic literature? How do twentieth- and twenty-first-century representations transform the idea of the Gothic prevalent in earlier centuries?

- Read selections from Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, and then connect Burke's ideas to one Gothic novel. How do Burke's ideas find expression in the novel you select? Be sure to use specific examples from the text to support your claim.

- Read about scientific, biological, psychological, and spiritual explanations for why humans dream. Sigmund Freud's *On Dreams* might also provide you with useful information. Connecting your reading about dreams with the interior landscapes of Gothic fiction may help you understand the imagery and narrative present in many Gothic novels.

- Through parody, writers reveal and mock standard conventions of a given genre. For example, the *Airplane* series of films renders the convention of the disaster film both visible and very funny. In her novel *Northanger Abbey*, eighteenth-century writer Jane Austen parodies the Gothic novels of her day. Read *Northanger Abbey* and identify the specific characteristics Austen is parodying.

However, the eventual explanation of all things supernatural relieves her reader from the experience of horror. Lewis, by contrast, chooses horror for his novels. His prose focuses on the details of the horrible, including torture and putrefaction. In his work, Lewis describes in disturbing detail the physically revolting and morally decadent.

## Appearance and Reality

Gothic literature often explores the difference between appearance and reality. For example, in Radcliffe's works, events often appear to have supernatural causes. However, by the end of the book, Radcliffe offers logical explanations. Thus, in the case of Radcliffe, it is possible for the reader to distinguish by the close of the novel what is real and what is apparent. By contrast, writers such as Lewis do not always differentiate between appearance and reality. This ambiguity leads to a dreamlike (or nightmarish) atmosphere in the novel. Readers recognize the state: for all intents and purposes, a dream appears to be real until awakening. It is in the foggy fugue state, however, that the dreamer is unsure of what is the dream and what is the reality. In addition, other writers play with appearance and reality through the use of different narrative structures and voices. Poe famously develops the unreliable narrator who appears initially to be sane but who, through the course of the story, is revealed to be insane. The struggle to differentiate the reality from the appearance rests at the heart of much Gothic literature.

## Confinement

Nearly every Gothic novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contains some element of confinement. Indeed, many critics have commented on the sense of claustrophobia found in Gothic fiction. Often this occurs with the entrapment of the heroine in some ancient castle. When she finally escapes her room or cell, she finds herself within a subterranean passageway with no apparent way out. It is the lack of escape that causes the terrifying claustrophobia. Isabella's flight through Otranto is an example. Likewise, in *The Monk*, Agnes is chained to a wall to be tortured. The struggle against the confinement elicits both horror and terror in the reader. Perhaps the master of confinement, however, is Poe. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Madeline Usher is buried alive. Such scenes hold considerable horror. Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* is another tale of claustrophobic containment, as the narrator, Montresor, walls Fortunato in a crypt, where he has lured him to taste fine sherry. Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* also uses this theme, but in this case it is the heart of the murdered

victim that is confined but refuses to remain hidden. Whether it be prison cells, monastic cells, shackles, locked rooms, or dark tunnels, the space of the Gothic novel is claustrophobic and confining, tapping into a primal human fear.

### Justice and Injustice

While the world of justice and injustice might seem to be absent from the world of the Gothic, on closer examination, it seems clear that guilt and reparation of sins are at the center of many stories. In Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the death of Conrad, the heir to his father's estate, apparently takes place as a way of righting a wrong. That is, Conrad's ancestor comes back from his grave to assure that Otranto goes to the rightful heir. This is the case of the sins of the father being visited on the children; at no time does it seem that Conrad knows that his title is faulty. Likewise, Madeline and Roderick Usher pay for the sins of their family with their own decay and death. Their house collapses on them, ending the family line. Thus, the "fall of the house of Usher" has two meanings: the house itself literally caves in and the lineage of Usher also falls as a result of the sins of earlier generations. *Melmoth the Wanderer* also explores this theme. In the Gothic world, justice must ultimately triumph, even if the justice that is meted out is severe. Ambrosio, for example, in *The Monk*, deserves to be punished; however, his punishment is horrible. Because the Gothic is a literature of excess, it is little wonder that the justices and injustices are also excessive. Thus, the gloom that hangs over the heads of many characters is the knowledge that in their own day they will have to pay for the wrongs their ancestors committed.

### STYLE

### Setting

In Gothic literature, the setting may be the single most important device. Gothic writers generally set their novels in wild landscapes; in large, often ruined, castles; and/or in subterranean labyrinths. In Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the castle itself plays a major role in the novel. Robert Kiely writes in *The Romantic Novel in England*: "If anything gives this novel unity and animation, it is the castle. The place itself seems sufficiently charged with emotion to require little

assistance from the characters. In fact, external conditions play a larger part in determining the behavior of the characters than do their own internal motivations." Thus, the setting itself provides as much suspense as does the plot or the characters.

In addition, Gothic writers as a rule set their novels in the distant, medieval past, in what they thought of as the Gothic period. However, their descriptions have little to do with the medieval period as it was; rather, the settings in Gothic novels reveal much more about what eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers believed about the Middle Ages. For Gothic writers, the medieval past was a time of superstition and Catholicism, made exotic and eerie by monks, nuns, ghosts, and crumbling castles. Although most of the novels are set in some European landscape, others, most notably Beckford's *Vathek*, have foreign locations, such as the Middle East. Again, removing the setting of the novel from contemporary locations and time periods allowed Gothic writers to infuse their works with the fear of the unknown, mysterious occurrences, and strange, unusual customs.

### Diction

Diction is the choice of words and the order of words a writers make for their literary creations. Diction may be on the continuum from informal, or low diction, to formal, or high diction. In Gothic novels, writers opted to use somewhat archaic and formal language, particularly in dialogue. Although the word choices are not accurate representations of the speech patterns of medieval people, the diction of a Gothic novel is reminiscent of a medieval romance. Further, the diction removes the novel from the present-day reality. Walpole, for example, writes the following for his heroine Isabella in *The Castle of Otranto*: "Sir, whoever you are, take pity on a wretched princess standing on the brink of destruction: assist me to escape from this fatal castle, or in a few moments I may be made miserable for ever."

### Narrative

Narrative is an accounting of an event or sequence of events, real or invented. In literary criticism, the expression "narrative technique" usually refers to the way the author structures and presents his or her story. Gothic literature can be characterized by the complex and complicated narrative structures writers give their work. There are usually

plots within plots, and there are episodes that seem to have little connection to the episodes immediately before and after. The episodic nature of the narrative perhaps can be attributed to the Gothic writers' attention to medieval romance. William Malory's early fifteenth-century *Morte D'Arthur*, a compilation of medieval Arthurian romances circulating in Malory's day, for example, comprises episodes of knights, damsels, challenges, and castles. Likewise, Gothic writers often provide little transition or explanation for the arrangement of their episodes. The overall effect, both in medieval romance and Gothic novels, is to render the narrative strange and fragmented.

Gothic writers also often present an exceedingly complicated narrative, woven around some theme or idea. For example, in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, there are stories within stories. Kiely describes the narrative of this book in his *The Romantic Novel in England*: "The structure of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, a series of narrations within narrations—often compared with a nest of Chinese boxes—defies conventional chronological sequence and replaces it with obsessive variations on the single theme of human misery." The overall effect of such construction is to distort the chronological and spatial development of the story and to give the overall work a dreamlike quality.

### Mood

The mood of a literary work is the emotional attitude with which the subject is handled by the author. Mood is conveyed in a work through the author's handling of diction, setting, and narrative. In the case of Gothic novels, the mood is one of fear, anxiety, terror, and horror. Both the characters and the readers of Gothic novels experience these emotions to the fullest extent possible for human beings. The dark, dreary, and morbid settings as well as the sublime mountainous landscapes serve to invoke terror, while the suspense created by mistaken identities and long chase sequences through cellar passageways produce both fear and anxiety. Many critics speak of the claustrophobia of Gothic novels, created by coffins, prisons, dark halls, passages, and interior spaces. At its best, Gothic literature evokes the same kind of emotional response from its readers as do nightmares and night terrors. Just as the dreamers often find themselves fleeing from shadowy monsters or evil-doers, characters in Gothic novels likewise flee from those who would do them harm. Readers of Gothic novels are able to experience these strong emotions vicariously, through the trials of the main characters. They are able to be deliciously, if safely, frightened out of their wits by the narrative twists and turns. That this is able to happen can largely be attributed to the prevailing mood Gothic authors develop.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Architecture and Art

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the impulse toward the Gothic affected not only literature but also architecture. William Kent (1686–1748) was perhaps the best-known landscape designer and architect of the time, and he helped rich landowners design and build elaborate buildings and landscaping. These designs included mock towers, castles, and abbeys constructed to look as if they had been built in the Middle Ages and had since fallen into ruin. David Stevens, in *The Gothic Tradition*, reports that Kent "even went so far as suggest 'planting' dead trees to present an appropriately ghoulish effect."

Likewise, a number of artists of this time, including Spanish artist Francisco de Goya and English poet and engraver William Blake, produced works that visually represent the Gothic. In particular, Goya's "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters," drawn in 1799, has been called by Richard Davenport-Hines in *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil, and Ruin* "perhaps the most important single image for the historian of the gothic."

### American Variations

In addition to the eighteenth-century Gothic writer Brown and nineteenth-century writer Poe, American writers have embraced the Gothic in a variety of forms. Hawthorne's so-called family romances that include *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables* demonstrate the author's fascination with the supernatural as well as the sins of the father. Herman Melville's great masterpiece *Moby Dick*, with its monstrous, ubiquitous whale might qualify as an American transformation of the Gothic. Clearly, the works of writers such as Ambrose Bierce and H. P. Lovecraft also demonstrate the continued influence of the Gothic with their strange and grotesque subjects. In yet another variation of

the movement, a group of twentieth-century southern writers came to be part of a movement called the Southern Gothic. Including William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, among others, the writers of the Southern Gothic used themes of decay, death, and dissolution as well as the grotesque. Later authors such as Stephen King, Anne Rice, and Peter Straub have tapped the Gothic as a source for their writing. Vampires, monsters, and ghoulish creatures figure prominently in the works of these writers.

### The Gothic and Film

Perhaps the most notable variation on the Gothic movement, however, is not a literary movement at all but rather the introduction of film during the twentieth century. From the first silent movies, audiences have demonstrated their delight at being terrified. In the 1920s and 1930s, many movies were made about Frankenstein, Dracula, and werewolves. Later films drew on the work of Poe. Actors such as Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney, and Vincent Price made their careers on their roles in horror films. Furthermore, films such as *The Shining*, released in 1980, starring Jack Nicholson and directed by Stanley Kubrick, featured many of the characteristic elements of the Gothic novel. Based on a novel of the same name by Stephen King, *The Shining* features a huge, deserted, old hotel that turns out to be haunted. There are supernatural events and chases through the corridors of the hotel. Madness and chaos reign. Nicholson's portrayal of the lead character, a down-on-his-luck writer, is both excessive and terrifying, as are the best of the Gothic novels. Many critics of the Gothic, including Punter, Davenport-Hines, and Botting, trace the twentieth-century horror film all the way back to *The Castle of Otranto*.

### Victorian Gothic

A century after Walpole's novel launched the Gothic literary movement, Victorian readers enjoyed a resurgence of this genre. The Victorian era spans the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901. Penny dreadful novels were popular at this time, so named because each installment of the serial tales cost a penny and because the writing was not very good and designed only to titillate the audience of young working-class men and women. Penny dreadfuls were not the only Gothic literature available at this time, however. Charlotte Brontë published her acclaimed novel *Jane Eyre* in 1847—the same year her sister Emily's novel *Wuthering Heights* was published. Both feature vulnerable women and fearsome ghost stories. Elizabeth Gaskell, who was the first biographer of Charlotte Brontë, used Gothic elements in her stories, including "The Doom of the Griffiths" (1858). A few decades later, Oscar Wilde published his frightening novel, *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891), Bram Stoker published *Dracula* (1897), and Henry James published *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Even Isak Dinesen is recognized as having used Gothic elements in her fiction, as argued by Ellen Rees in her examination of "The Dreamers." In the United States, Gothic literature was also undergoing a revival. Edgar Allan Poe was publishing his stories and poems, including "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842) and "The Raven" (1845). Ambrose Bierce, a famed author in his day who met a mysterious end in Mexico, wrote fantastical and supernatural tales, including the short story collection *Can Such Things Be?* (1893). The Victorian era of Gothic literature came to an end with the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

### Detective Fiction

Detective fiction is generally considered to have begun with the publication of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Murders at the Rue Morgue" in 1841 and is therefore also an outgrowth of the Victorian Gothic literary movement. Poe's story featured an eccentric detective named Dupin who reappeared in two later stories. He was most famously followed by Arthur Conan Doyle, whose fictional detective Sherlock Holmes appeared in over fifty short stories and four novels between 1887 and 1927. Conan Doyle's fiction was nowhere near as noir as the detective fiction of Dashiell Hammett. Hammett wrote five novels and over eighty short stories, as well as comics and radio serials. His most famous novel is *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), featuring the fictional detective Sam Spade. The 1920s and 1930s marked a golden age of detective fiction and authors such as Agatha Christie, Ellery Queen (pseudonym for Frederic Dannay and Manfred Bennington Lee), and Dorothy Sayers. Since its inception, detective fiction has never gone out of style; it continues to be a popular genre among readers.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### The Enlightenment

Many historians and scholars explain the rise of the Gothic as a response to the prevailing mode of rational thought and reason. Indeed, eighteenth-century thought was dominated by an intellectual movement called the enlightenment by later historians. Enlightenment philosophers and writers privileged reason and human understanding above emotions and feelings. Furthermore, the rise of experimental science during this period offered an empirical model for how one could arrive at truth.

A secular movement, the Enlightenment strove to demonstrate that knowledge could only be derived from science and natural philosophy, not from religion. Indeed, religion and spirituality, particularly Catholicism, were relegated to the realm of the "irrational." Enlightenment philosophers steadfastly believed that only through attention to rationality, reason, and balance could humankind improve. The thinkers of the Enlightenment looked for their models to the classical period of Greece and Rome, rejecting what they saw as the "barbarism" of the medieval period.

As the eighteenth century waned, however, growing numbers of thinkers and writers began to rebel against the rationality of the Enlightenment and to produce works that privileged the irrational, emotional responses and feelings, and the uncanny. They argued that truth could not be derived from pure thought but rather could be approached through the senses. In particular, Gothic literature, art, and architecture revolted against the strict rationality of the Enlightenment. Gothic writers looked to the Middle Ages for their models. While some scholars see the rise of the Gothic as a response to the Enlightenment, there are others who argue that the Gothic is an essential part of the Enlightenment, with the Gothic providing the mirror image of the Enlightenment. In either regard, the two movements are inextricably linked in the study of the eighteenth century.

### The Age of Revolutions

A second major influence on the rise of the Gothic was the military and political situation in North America and Europe. The late eighteenth century was a time of revolt and violence. In North America, the thirteen English colonies banded together and fought for independence from England. The first bloodshed of the war

was at the battles of Concord and Lexington in April of 1775. In July 1776, the delegates of the First Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia declared independence, naming their country the United States of America. This was the first colonial war in England's history and the first time a new country had come into being by a declaration of independence. The war ground on for some seven more years before the surrender of British General Cornwallis at Yorktown. This victory was largely made possible by assistance from the French, whose naval power prevented English ships from coming to the aid of their army. Although the founding fathers clearly were Enlightenment thinkers who depended on reason and rationality to justify their bid for independence, they were nonetheless radical thinkers who opened the door to a democratically governed as opposed to royally governed understanding of statehood.

If the outcome of the American Revolution came as a shock to Europeans, it was nonetheless a ripple compared to the tidal wave of the French Revolution, which began in 1789, just six years after the 1783 treaty that settled the American War. The French Revolution shook the foundations of European statehood and introduced long years of terror and cultural anxiety. Many critics see the foundation of the Gothic movement in the French Revolution. Ronald Paulson, for example, in his article "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution," argues that "The Gothic did in fact serve as a metaphor with which some contemporaries in England tried to come to terms with what was happening across the Channel in the 1790s." Whereas many pre-Romantic and Romantic writers supported the French Revolution early on, as the violence and bloodshed degenerated into what has become known as the Reign of Terror, English writers and other citizens became increasingly worried over the chaos and uncertainty taking place just across the Channel. The terror of the Gothic novel, along with its images of chase and capture and its threat of evil overcoming good, reflects how deeply anxious both writers and the reading public had become.

### Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful

A final influence on the growth of the Gothic sprang from a philosophical treatise on aesthetics called *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, written and published by Edmund Burke in 1757. Burke's ideas had far-reaching implications. In this treatise, drawing on the classical philosopher

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1770–1820:** Revolutions in North America and France cause changes in systems of government.

  **Today:** Breakup of the former Soviet Union in 1991 continues to cause widespread shifts and changes in government structures in Europe.

- **1770–1820:** Poor crops and widespread poverty fuel resentment among the low classes of the exorbitant court of Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette. The French Revolution produces the Reign of Terror, a period of rampant executions of all those who serve or are associated with the ruling classes and the Church. Perhaps as many as 4,000 are killed in Paris, including the king and queen.

  **Today:** Following two decades of civil war, ongoing crop failure, poverty, and starvation, conflict between various sects, civilians, and military groups in the early 2000s intensifies in Darfur on the western edge of Sudan. Some 600,000 people are displaced amid widespread destruction and killing that approaches genocide.

- **1770–1820:** Growing interest in the supernatural, the irrational, and the terrifying is evidenced by novels such as *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk*, and *Frankenstein*.

  **Today:** Growing interest in the supernatural, the irrational, and the terrifying is evidenced by the popularity of writers such as Stephen King, television programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *X–Files*, and suspense films such as *The Sixth Sense*.

- **1770–1820:** Romantic writers and philosophers privilege feelings and emotions as legitimate ways of knowing; they also locate truth in beauty.

  **Today:** Postmodernist writers and philosophers suggest that all reality is no more than language and that ultimate truth is impossible to determine.

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Longinus, Burke distinguishes between beauty as a product of proportion and dimension and the sublime as a product of wild, irregular, and uncontrollable nature. For example, a perfectly groomed and well-designed garden could be beautiful, invoking pleasure in the eye of the beholder. On the other hand, a view of the Swiss Alps with its craggy cliffs and huge dimensions would be sublime, invoking a kind of terror or fear in the viewer. The sublime carries with it both elements of attraction and terror. According to David Punter in *The Literature of Terror*, as a result of Burke's treatise, "the excitation of fear becomes one of the most significant enterprises a writer can undertake; thus also fear is recognized as the primary means by which the dictates of reason can be bypassed." Punter continues with a discussion of Burke's contribution to Gothic literature:

> Many of the details of Burke's analysis have relevance to the Gothic writers—in particular his emphasis on obscurity, vastness, magnificence as constitutive elements of the sublime—but his most important contribution was to confer on terror a major and worthwhile literary role.

By the 1790s, Burke's ideas had become so widespread that Ann Radcliffe was able to write an essay distinguishing the differences between horror and terror. It is impossible to say whether Burke created his times, or the times created Burke. In any event, his writing proves to have continued significance in the field of horror writing up to the present day.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Gothic literature has elicited spirited critical debate from its earliest days. According to Botting in his book, *The Gothic*

*Muckross House in Killarney, Ireland, is a fine example of gothic architecture* (© Dave G. Houser | Corbis)

Between 1790 and 1810, critics were almost univocal in their condemnation of what was seen as an unending torrent of popular trashy novels. Intensified by fears of radicalism and revolution, the challenge to aesthetic values was framed in terms of social transgression: virtue, property and domestic order were considered to be under threat.

Such reactions from critics are not surprising. The aesthetic values of the eighteenth century included order, proportion, and decorum, based largely on classical models from the Greeks and Romans. Works of art (including literature and architecture) that flouted these conventions and took shape from the medieval past were looked upon as inferior, so much so that the term "Gothic" was applied to anything that seemed barbarous or hideous. However, while Gothic literature may have been scorned by the intelligentsia and literary critics of the day, it found rapid and overwhelming popularity with the reading public. That the reading public included growing numbers of women and middle-class readers may suggest a reason for the widespread popularity of the genre. It is also likely that the shift in readership offered a threat to established scholars and writers of the day, making their response to Gothic literature vitriolic in the extreme.

Contemporary criticism was not entirely negative, of course. No less a personage than the Marquis de Sade, in his book *Idee sur les Romans*, offered that "this kind of fiction, whatever one may think of it, is assuredly not without merit; twas the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all Europe has suffered." The Marquis de Sade points particularly to Lewis's *The Monk* as a work of special merit.

More recent criticism has approached Gothic literature from a variety of directions. Punter in his *Literature of Terror* outlines a number of approaches critics often take. First, critics often see Gothic literature as a "recognisable movement in the history of culture, with recognisable sociopsychological causes." That is, events and ideas present in the culture find an outlet through Gothic literature. Punter, David Stevens in *The Gothic Tradition*, and Ronald Paulson in "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution," an article appearing in the journal *English Language History*, among many other critics and historians, all comment on the connections between contemporary historical events and the rise of the Gothic.

Another critical track is the formalist approach. That is, critics examine the narrative

structure of the Gothic novel to find those elements that bring unity to the work. Conversely, other formalist critics approach Gothic fiction, according to Punter, by revealing its "narrative complexity and its tendency to raise technical problems which it often fails to resolve."

Three important critical strategies prevalent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century include psychoanalytical, Marxist, and feminist critiques. In the first place, the work of Sigmund Freud, particularly his 1919 essay, "The Uncanny," informs many critics, who use Freud's formulation of the death wish, the Oedipus complex, repression, and divided self as productive means of entry into the complexities of Gothic fiction. Likewise, Marxist critics examine the class structures of the novels. There are clearly upper- and lower-class characters in all the novels under discussion, and these characters reflect the class biases of the novelists themselves. Finally, feminist critics, such as Margaret Anne Doody, concentrate either on an analysis of the female characters of Gothic literature or on the role played by female writers in the development of the Gothic.

Although the Gothic movement itself may have ended in about 1820, the Gothic continues to exert considerable influence on both literature and criticism. If anything, critical interest in the Gothic continues to grow at a remarkable rate, perhaps because of the renewed interest in monsters, the uncanny, the supernatural, and the unexplained evident in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century culture.

## CRITICISM

### Diane Andrews Henningfeld

*Andrews Henningfeld is a professor of English literature and composition who has written extensively for educational and academic publishers. In this essay, Andrews Henningfeld considers the device of the "double" in Gothic literature and connects the prevalence of this device to psychological, cultural, and historical causes.*

Perhaps the single most interesting literary device used by Gothic writers is that of the "double." Generally, the most common form of doubling in literature is the *doppelgänger*, a German term meaning "double-goer." A literary *doppelgänger* often takes the form of an alternate identity of the main character. Sometimes this can be

## WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
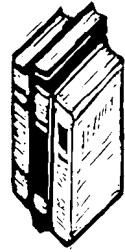
- *The Days of the French Revolution* (1999), by Christopher Hibbert, offers an excellent and readable introduction to the important historical event. Hibbert often uses vignettes of people's lives and events to bring to life the historical detail.

- David Blayney Brown's *Romanticism* (2001), in the Art and Ideas series, focuses on European artists during the years 1775–1830, connecting radical new ideas about art to the larger social and political scene of the day. An important consideration for any student is how the Gothic fits within the larger scope of the Romantic movement in art, literature, and music.

- A readable and thorough biography of Edgar Allan Poe is Jeffrey Meyer's *Edgar Allan Poe* (2000). This book concentrates on the events and details of Poe's life rather than offering a critical history of his works. As such, it is an important companion piece to studies of Poe's works.

- *Evil Image: The Literary Art of Terror from Daniel Defoe to Stephen King* (1981), edited and introduced by Patricia L. Skarda and Nora Crow Jaffe, is a compilation of Gothic short fiction and poetry from the past two hundred years. The book is an excellent start for students want to read a wide variety of Gothic literature in a short period of time.

- *Three Gothic Novels* (1966), edited by E. F. Bleiler, contains the texts of *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole; *Vathek*, by William Beckford; and *The Vampyre*, by John Polidori, as well as a fragment of a novel by Lord Byron. Bleiler also provides a short introduction to each of the novels included.

in the physical form of a biological twin; sometimes writers create a demonic character that functions as a representation of another character's dark side. A famous example of this

> **DOUBLING, THEN, SERVES NOT ONLY AS A LITERARY DEVICE DESIGNED TO INVOKE TERROR IN THE READER, OR AS A COMPLICATED NARRATIVE MANEUVER, BUT ALSO AS AN IMPETUS FOR SELF-REFLECTION AND GROWTH."**

technique is Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*. In Gothic literature, the *doppelgänger* is often threatening and a cause for terror. Shelley's *Frankenstein* offers one of the best examples of the use of a *doppelgänger* in Gothic literature. As Aiga Ozolins points out in the article "Dreams and Doctrines: Dual Strands in *Frankenstein*," "There is ample evidence in the novel that the creature functions as the scientist's baser self." Further, Edgar Allan Poe makes use of the double in "The Fall of the House of Usher." In this case, Roderick Usher and his sister are biological twins, so closely connected that when the sister appears to die and is buried, Usher realizes too late that she has been buried alive. The horror of premature burial is doubled by this technique. The reader is first horrified by Usher's proclamation that they have buried her alive; and then even more horrified by Usher's horror. While the *doppelgänger* may be the most apparent form of the double in Gothic literature, there are many other, more subtle ways, that writers introduce notions of doubling in their fiction. Through mirrors, artwork, blurred characters, confusion between the dead and alive, the divided hero/villain, and *déjà vu*, doubles in Gothic literature proliferate like reflections in a funhouse mirror.

So prevalent is the notion of doubling in Gothic literature that it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify Gothic novels that do *not* use the device in some form. One way that Gothic writers often introduce a double is through the use of literal mirror images. A character gazes into a mirror, for example, and sees not only himself but also his darker side at the same time. Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll looks in his mirror to behold the demonic Mr. Hyde.

Less apparent, but no less effective, is the use of a figurative mirror image. In an essay in *The*

*New Eighteenth Century* discussing Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, critic Terry Castle argues, "Characters in *Udolpho* mirror or blur into one another. Characters seem uncannily to resemble or replace previous characters." Castle also points out the inability in this novel for characters and readers to distinguish the dead from the living. Again, death is a mirror image of life; the confusion over who is dead and who is alive created by this mirroring is major point of terror. "The Fall of the House of Usher" makes use of this device in the confusion of the burial of Usher's sister. Is she dead, or is she alive when placed in the tomb? Is she alive, or is she dead when she suddenly bursts into the room where Usher is in the process of revealing his doubts about her death to the narrator? "One sure sign of the double," argues critic Margaret Anne Doody in "Desert Ruins and Troubled Waters: Female Dreams in Fiction and the Development of the Gothic Novel," appearing in the journal *Genre*, "is his haunting presence."

Another way that Gothic writers introduce doubling into their work is through the use of artwork. It is a stock device in Gothic fiction that portraits and artwork can come alive at any moment. In Lewis's *The Monk*, the evil Matilda has a portrait of the Madonna painted for the monk Ambrosio. Unbeknownst to Ambrosio, however, Matilda has had her own image embedded in the picture of the Madonna. Thus, when Ambrosio adores the portrait of the holy Madonna, he also adores the satanic Matilda. This adoration of a doubled portrait leads to violently sexual dreams and Ambrosio's ultimate destruction.

A much less obvious, but nonetheless potent, use of the double is in the creation of the wanderer, a stock character in Gothic literature, represented by such characters as Maturin's Melmoth, Shelley's monster, and Coleridge's Ancient Mariner. These characters are outsiders, the mirror images of the "civilized" men or women. They are alienated from society, solitary, and estranged. In *The Adversary Literature: The English Novel in the Eighteenth Century—A Study in Genre*, Frederick Karl describes the wanderer as "truly countercultural, an alternate force, almost mystical in his embodiment of the burdens and sins of society." Thus, the wanderer stands as a double for the character enmeshed in the trappings of society. For example, the Ancient Mariner doubles the Wedding Guest in Coleridge's poem. The Mariner,

a wanderer, is doomed to periodically accost a civilized person and share his story. The confrontation allows brief respite for the Mariner, as he shares his burden with his civilized double.

The self-divided hero/villain, found so often in Gothic fiction, offers yet another way to examine the notion of doubling. In this case, the character is often brave and cowardly, strong and weak, moral and depraved. Certainly, Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein falls into this category. He is a brilliant scientist, so bent on overcoming death that he crosses the boundary that divides the moral from the immoral. He sees himself to be above such petty and bourgeois distinctions, a precursor of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ubermensch*, or "Overman." However, Frankenstein is both triumphant and repentant, a deeply troubled and deeply divided individual, so deeply divided that the warring sides of his psyche seem to belong to a set of mirror image twins.

Even time and experience become doubled in Gothic fiction through the use of *déjà vu*, the feeling that one has experienced an event before, and memory, the recollection of a real event. In many ways, this feeling is like a haunting; it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify why one has the feeling. By introducing the sense of *déjà vu* in their stories, Gothic writers bring both the past and the future into the present. Although a character may only experience an event once in reality, the twin devices of recollection and *déjà vu* allow the experience to happen again and again and again within the pages of the novel.

Finally, a number of critics identify an important theme in Gothic literature: that the sins of the father will be visited upon the son. In other words, the evil that someone does in his or her lifetime will be repaid in the lives of his or her offspring. Again, while this may not seem like an obvious use of doubling, it allows a Gothic writer to reintroduce the injustice perpetrated by a previous generation on the current generation, until the injustice is righted. Thus, sin is doubled and doubled until it is corrected.

Given that the use of doubling techniques features so heavily in so much Gothic literature, perhaps it is important to identify the roots of the double, as well as critical interpretations of its function in the literature. Most obviously, the use of the double in Gothic literature seems to spring from the duality of the Middle Ages, the era that Gothicists attempt to recreate in their

writing. Certainly, medieval romance offers many models of the use of the double: Malory's story of the twins Balin and Balan who meet each other in combat, unknown to each other, is an excellent example, as is the Guinevere/false Guinevere motif of the Arthurian legend. G. R. Thompson's chapter, "A Dark Romanticism: In Quest of a Gothic Monomyth," in *Literature of the Occult* speaks to the duality of the Middle Ages made graphic by "the evocation of the transcendent, upward thrust of Gothic cathedrals" and "the vision of the dark night of the soul and the nightmare terrors of demons." That both are so present in the literature and the iconography of the Middle Ages demonstrates at least one channel through which notions of the double find their way to Gothic literature.

Likewise, the eighteenth century was also a time of extreme duality. The Enlightenment emphasis on reason and rationality, so dominant in this time, denies fully one half of human experience, that of passion and emotion. Writers of the eighteenth century were obsessed with distinguishing good from evil, truth from falsehood, and reason from passion. Perhaps the only way, then, for writers to account for both sides of this duality was to separate them in the creation of doubling experiences. And yet, throughout Gothic literature, it is as if what has been divided struggles mightily for reunion, a reunion that often results in death.

There are a variety of critical interpretations of how the double in Gothic literature functions as a response to the dualities discussed above. Frederick Frank in *The First Gothics* calls the Gothic "the literature of collapsing structures where even the narrative context itself is in a constant state of fall with no possibility of a visionary reordering." He further quotes Thompson, who argues that Gothic literature "begins with irreconcilable dualities." Thus, the attempted synthesis or reunion of the divided narrative, the divided psyche, and the divided culture ultimately and inevitably fails.

Botting in *The Gothic* identifies the use of the double in Gothic literature, along with other stock features, as the "principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties." The growth of science, for example, with the decline of religion offers such an example of a cultural anxiety. Thus, Frankenstein and his monster are both embodiments of the anxiety caused by the replacement of ultimate meaning with science. Likewise, the French Revolution, with its violent

*An illustration from* The Monk, *written by Matthew Gregory Lewis* (Public Domain)

upheaval of social structures, is yet another cultural anxiety.

Finally, many critics turn to psychology for an interpretation of the function of the double in Gothic literature. Freud, in his essay "The Uncanny," reviewed the work of Otto Rank, who studied "the connections which the 'double' has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death." Freud argues that although the double starts out as a form of ego protection in children, it becomes "the uncanny harbinger of death—a thing of terror." Certainly, readers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century would find it difficult to even think about the notion of the double without referencing Freud and perhaps Carl Jung. The double can be seen as a representation of the divided self, personifying the pleasure seeking id, the self-aware ego, and the morality of the super-ego. Likewise, mirror images provide a way that the self can project its own darkness out of itself onto another.

Doubling, then, serves not only as a literary device designed to invoke terror in the reader, or as a complicated narrative maneuver, but also as an impetus for self-reflection and growth.

Doody offers that "The most important point regarding the double is the necessity to confront and recognize the dark aspect of one's personality in order to transform it by an act of conscious choice." That is, the double allows a character to both confront his or her own darker self and reintegrate that self. Thus, the double, be it as *doppelgänger*, literal or figurative mirror image, artwork, or *déjà vu* functions as a means for self-confrontation and self-knowledge not only for the characters in the stories but for the reader of Gothic literature as well.

**Source:** Diane Andrews Henningfeld, Critical Essay on Gothic Literature, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Ellen Rees

*In this essay, Rees argues that modernist author Isak Dinesen in her Gothic short story "The Dreamers" uses two earlier Gothic stories. From Robert Louis Stevenson's story "Olalla," Dinesen was inspired to create her character Olalla who is an inversion of the title character in Stevenson's story. Dinesen drew from Jules Amadee Barbey d'Aurevilly's story "At a Dinner of Atheists" to create the character of Rosalba for her story.*

We know that Isak Dinesen strove to create intricate intertextual puzzles in her writing. More than many other writers, she consciously engaged in an ideological dialogue with her literary predecessors by often subverting nineteenth-century patriarchal discourse, as Sara Stambaugh points out (19). Primary sources of inspiration and irritation for Dinesen include major writers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, but also lesser-known figures as well.

A rich example of Dinesen's use of nineteenth-century sources is the second to last story in the 1934 collection *Seven Gothic Tales*, "The Dreamers." In this analysis, I will examine the gothic precursors for the figures Olalla and Rosalba, who are presented as alternative identities for the tale's female protagonist, Pellegrina Leoni. The figures and their hypotexts can serve as a case study in Dinesen's intertextual practice, a way of interrogating the frequent comment that Dinesen can and should be read through the lens of postmodernism (see Rostbøll 12; Kyndrup 149). Two nineteenth-century texts—Robert Louis Stevenson's story "Ollala" from 1885 and Jules Amadée Barbey d'Aurevilly's story "À un dîner d'athées" [At a Dinner of Atheists] from the 1874 collection of stories *Les Diaboliques* [The She-Devils], which contains a Rosalba

> **WHETHER OR NOT THIS REFERENCE IS THE DIRECT SOURCE FOR DINESEN'S MEDITATION ON DREAMERS FIFTY YEARS LATER, THE SUGGESTION THAT THE KNOWING WOMAN FUNCTIONS AS AN IMPORTANT CATALYST FOR AND PROVOCATION OF MASCULINE IDENTITY IS STRONG."**

character—served as points of departure for Dinesen in her subversion of nineteenth-century patriarchal constructs of female identity. Just as the later story "Ehrengard" is in important ways a rewriting of Kierkegaard's "Forførerens dagbog" ["The Diary of a Seducer"], so too is "The Dreamers" a rewriting of these two gothic tales. I will give close readings of the ways Dinesen uses these two stories and conclude by suggesting that her intertextual use of these two gothic precursors does not in fact represent an anachronistic example of postmodernism, but rather that her narrative practice fits into the less-widely discussed literary movement known as late modernism. By late modernism, I mean the laughter and doubling, and the "excess of narration over narrated event" (150) that Tyrus Miller has identified in the works of writers such as Djuna Barnes, Wyndham Lewis, and Mina Loy. According to Miller, late modernism is a distinct literary historical development that anticipates certain elements of the postmodernism that was to follow and critiques the modernist formalism that preceded it.

Robert Langbaum made reference to "Olalla" in his 1964 monograph on Dinesen (104), but no other scholar has carried out a thorough comparison of the two texts although Stambaugh discusses "Olalla" briefly. The only scholars to make any mention of Barbey's text as a possible source for Dinesen's Rosalba figure are Susan Brantly (who makes the comment only in passing in noting that both versions of Rosalba have "a double nature" [60–1]) and, indirectly, Eric O. Johannesson, who lists Barbey along with Horace Walpole and E.T.A. Hoffmann as the gothic writers who come to mind as "sources of inspiration for Dinesen" (55). Yet in "The Dreamers" it is clear that Dinesen consciously plays with pastiche and that the

rewriting of these gothic precursors consists of more than just a superficial similarity. We see this pattern as well in Dinesen's reworking of Georges du Maurier's 1894 novel *Trilby,* which presents a Svengali-Trilby dyad that Dinesen reworks in the figures of Marcus and Pellegrina, as Marianne Juhl and Bo Hakon Jørgensen have discussed (148–51). We see here a pattern of inversion: whereas Trilby is an empty shell given voice only by the powers of Svengali, in Dinesen's version Pellegrina, even after having lost her once great voice, still holds immense power over Marcus, who is a help-meet rather than an impresario.

Beyond Pellegrina and the two female characters on whom I intend to focus in this analysis, Dinesen's male protagonist, Lincoln Forsner, also has a literary precursor as Tone Selboe has pointed out. The Norwegian author Sven Elvestad's 1927 collection of neo-gothic short stories *Himmel og hav* [Sky and Sea] contains a text entitled "Lincoln Forssners siste dage" [Lincoln, Forssner's Last Days]. We know from Dinesen's correspondence that she was familiar with Elvestad's work as early as 1923 (*Letters* 164). Dinesen's library has been catalogued by Pia Bondesson, but it does not include Elvestad's *Himmel og hav* so it is likely that Dinesen borrowed the text from her Norwegian friend Gustav Mohr. That the use of the name is a conscious choice by Dinesen is borne out by the unmistakable similarities in theme between the two stories. Regarding the connection between "The Dreamers" and "Lincoln Forssners siste dage" Selboe makes the following comparison:

> *Novellen har flere likhetstrekk med "Drømmerne," men Blixen har sin vane tro snudd rollen om. I Elvestads novelle fortelles det om den svenske billedhugger Lincoln Forrsner [sic] som forlater sin kunst, søker fornedrelsen og gjennom intense nervepåkjenner til slutt oppløses forsvinner ... Det er kvinnes pågående spørsmål—en "invasjon" ikke ulik den Pellegrina utsettes for—som er foranledningen til Lincolns endelige og mystiske forsvinning.*

> (The short story has many similarities to "The Dreamers," but Blixen has as usual inverted the roles. In Elvestad's short story, we learn of the Swedish sculptor Lincoln Forrsner [sic] who abandons his art, seeks degradation, and as a result of intense nervous strain finally disintegrates and disappears. ... It is a woman's insistent question—an "invitation" not unlike the one to which Pellegrina is subjected—that is the cause of Lincoln's final and mysterious disappearance.)

Selboe has here identified an intertextual pattern of inversion that is true not only for Lincoln Forsner, but for Olalla and Rosalba as well.

Given the pattern identified by Selboe, the fact that Dinesen's library contained the 1911–12 edition of Stevenson's collected works (Bondesson 103) as well as an original copy of Barbey's *Les Diaboliques* (24), it is worthwhile to inquire more deeply into these intertextual revenants in "The Dreamers." I hope to demonstrate that Dinesen actively inverts the characteristics of the two female characters by reversing their roles and calling into question the assumptions about female identity that the source stories present. Further, I hope to be able to comment more broadly upon Dinesen's use of intertextualism as a narrative strategy based upon these examples.

All three of the writers discussed here consciously positioned themselves in relation to the English gothic tradition handed down from Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe. Stevenson's literary project fits into the late nineteenth-century Victorian gothic shift from its original eighteenth-century concerns to a preoccupation with the monstrous body as Robert Mighall points out (139). Barbey was according to B.G. Rogers "an ardent admirer of Ann Radcliffe's novels" (27) and each of the six stories in *Les Diaboliques* contains gothic elements. Dinesen openly claimed the discursive space of the gothic with the title of her first collection of tales. Johannesson's 1961 study of Dinesen's works pointed out some of the important gothic motifs that Dinesen utilized. He notes "Dinesen's dependence on the Gothic and decadent tradition is evident, but the significant fact concerning this dependence is the manner in which she makes this tradition serve her own vision" (55). In recent years, a number of scholars have continued to investigate her relationship to the gothic, in particular Sibyl James, as well as Marianne Juhl and Bo Hakon Jørgensen, who devote a chapter of their respective books to the question, "Why Gothic Tales?" Within a more limited context, Brantly has taken up the same question (14–6). For James, the most important aspect of Dinesen's engagement with the gothic tradition is the emphasis on imagination, and she argues that in her tales Dinesen was "reaching back to transform certain aspects of the past that she considers valuable into modes operable in the present" (James 139). Further, James notes that Dinesen parts company with the gothic tradition on the question of "moral sentiment" (140). For James, Dinesen consciously rejects moral questions of right and wrong and focuses instead on alternative values such as wit, imagination, and narrative play. Juhl and Jørgensen compare Dinesen's gothic tales to those of Edgar Allan Poe and E.T.A. Hoffmann, noting that while the fantastic or supernatural in Poe or Hoffmann is in many respects the key element of the story, Dinesen shifts her attention from depicting actual supernatural to what the notion of fantastic events can tell us: "It is thus not the general and principal character of the fantastic that interests Karen Blixen [Isak Dinesen] but, on the contrary, its indication-value for the approach of dawning recognition in the characters with relation to their *ordinary* human relationships" (132, emphasis original). Brantly provides a useful summary of the English and German gothic traditions as they relate to Dinesen as well as an overview of previous scholarship.

In "The Dreamers" Dinesen offers up an apology for the gothic through the voice of Mira Jama, who, no longer able to tell frightening tales because he has lost the ability to fed fear, longs for the days when his terrifying tales were popular: "The great princes, fed up with the sweets of life, wished to have their blood stirred again. The honest ladies, to whom nothing ever happened, longed to tremble in their beds just for once. The dancers were inspired to a lighter pace by tales of flight and pursuit." The notion of the honest ladies longing to tremble in their beds is key: as Brantly points out, Dinesen's engagement with the gothic is primarily concerned with the rewriting of traditionally restrictive representations of women and female sexuality. Brantly notes that within gothic conventions "women with sexual experience are dangerous, occasionally madwomen, and most often punished by the end of the story" (59). In this she builds on the arguments first presented in Sara Stambaugh's discussion of Dinesen's anti-misogynistic program in chapter 5 of her 1988 book *The Witch and the Goddess in the Stories of Isak Dinesen*. Stambaugh says that "The Dreamers" "can be read as a study of the womanly woman's answer to misogyny" (100). In other words, in the tale Dinesen poses the question of what happens to male identity when confronted with female sexuality.

**THE CONTEXT OF "THE DREAMERS"**

Before turning to Dinesen's probable hypotexts, there are a few words that should be said about "The Dreamers." The tale is long—over eighty pages—and marked by an elaborate frame narrative, four separate inset stories, and a correspondingly complex chronology. To complicate matters even further, each part of the narrative takes place in a different geographical location. Juhl and Jørgensen have convincingly, but perhaps too dogmatically, mapped out the chronology of the frame and inset narratives (140). Lincoln Forsner tells his story to Mira Jama in 1863 on a dhow sailing from Lamu to Zanzibar along the east African coast. The story he tells is of a meeting at a pass in the Swiss Alps "twenty years ago" (279). Juhl and Jørgensen take this statement literally, but in my reading, the time span is probably a few years shorter, given the specific historical references. Stambaugh also takes issue with the rigid chronology, noting that the actual historical uprising on Zanzibar that serves as the background to the frame narrative took place a few years earlier than 1863.

Throughout the course of Lincoln's narrative, we hear the inserted narratives of three other men: his German friend Friederich Hohenemser (to whom Lincoln refers as "Pilot" after a dog he once owned), Hohenemser's Swedish friend Baron Arvid Guildenstern (Langbaum notes the reference to one of the two "undistinguishable nonentities" from *Hamlet* [105]), and the wealthy Dutchman Marcus Cocoza (who is frequently and reductively identified as "the old Jew"). All four are linked to the fate of a mysterious woman who bears a snake-like burn scar on her throat. Together they meet her at a mountain pass in the early winter of 1843, not long after Pilot's meeting with her in Lucerne during late 1842 and approximately nine months after Lincoln's affair with her in Rome, according to Juhl and Jørgensen's timeline. The Baron's affair had taken place even earlier, in 1836, in the Loire valley of France. The three men discover that the women they have loved are one and the same, and only after her protector Marcus Cocoza tells them of the terrible fire in the Milan opera house in 1830, do they learn the origin of her serpent-shaped scar and her real name, Pellegrina Leoni.

Although these inset stories do not appear in chronological order in the text, the dates and locations are important cultural referents, particularly since a number of identifiable historical figures populate the text. Dinesen consciously bends the boundary between authentic and fictional, and it is the task of her readers to interpret the significance of her manipulations. This tension between possible fictional worlds and historical reality gives her narrative a perpetual playfulness that shares qualifies with late modernist texts such as Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936) or Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), as I argue in *On the Margins: Nordic Women Modernists of the 1930s*.

The Madame Lola figure (a revolutionary hat maker of Lucerne) has so far proved difficult to locate within Dinesen's copious library. The reference to Hohenemser's uncle, Baron de Watteville, suggests Honoré de Balzac's *Albert Savarus* (1834–35) from *La Comédie humaine* as a possible hypotext since a Swiss Baron de Watteville is a central character in the novel. There is, however, no Lola character. Stambaugh speculates that Madame Lola may be a revision of the Josef von Sternberg's 1930 film *Der blaue Engel* [*The Blue Angel*]. She notes that the film's heroine, "Lola-Lola, destroys the identity of her victim. In his introduction to the authorized translation, Sternberg brags that he reversed the plot of his source, Heinrich Mann's *Professor Unrath*, as well as the name and role of the cabaret singer" (104 note 24). The date Juhl and Jørgensen give for Lola's revolutionary adventure (late 1842 or early 1843) does not correspond exactly with historical events in Switzerland. An uprising of radicals against Jesuits along the lines described in "The Dreamers" did indeed take place in the city of Lucerne but slightly later, specifically in December 1844 (Zimmer 124). With no clear literary precedent for Madame Lola, at this point I turn instead to Olalla and Rosalba.

**"OLALLA" AND OLALLA**

While Dinesen's Olalla is a prostitute, Stevenson's is a secular saint. Stevenson's story concerns the adventures of a British officer and first-person narrator who finds himself in need of two months' rest after a battle injury in Spain. The specific war is not given, but in all likelihood it was during the French peninsular invasion that began in 1808, and the officer would have been fighting on the side of the Spanish. According to the doctor who attended him, the officer was "wounded in the good cause," and this judgment is later confirmed when the officer uses this fact as a reason why the local Spanish priest should think well of him. He is sent by his doctor to the country

residence of a reclusive Spanish family that has fallen from its high position. The officer becomes acquainted with the three living members of the family, the Señora, her mentally deficient son Felipe, and her daughter Olalla, who is described paradoxically both as a "saintly poetess" and "a saint" and as a woman of extreme seductive beauty. After finally meeting her in person, the narrator says: "The pale saint of my dreams had vanished for ever; and in her place I beheld this maiden on whom God had lavished the richest colors and the most exuberant energies of life." Since Dinesen's Olalla is a prostitute in Rome, the connection between the two seems murky. It is important to remember, however, that Dinesen's pattern of inversion not only applies to her use of hypotexts, but also to her own story. Once the reader remembers that another of Pellegrina's roles, Rosalba, is that of the former consort of the Spanish general Tomás Zumalacárregui (Dinesen calls him "General Zumala Carregui"), who led the Spanish troops in the Napoleonic invasion that forms the backdrop for Stevenson's "Olalla" and looks ahead to Barbey's Rosalba story set in the same war, it becomes clear that Dinesen created a complicated set of resonances between Rosalba and Ollala.

Despite its focus on Catholic saintliness and Calvinistic prudishness, "Olalla" stands out among Stevenson's fictional works because "of all the completed works ... only 'Olalla' deals with sex as an animal passion," according to Edwin M. Eigner (206). Precisely because of their respective profound religious beliefs about the sinful nature of the body and sexuality, the officer and Olalla experience the sexual attraction they feel for each other as a threat to their identities. The two gaze at each other without yet having spoken, "exchanging salvos of attraction and yet each resisting." When Olalla finally does speak to the officer, it is to tell him that he must leave. The officer is utterly confused by their eventual physical embrace: "I hated, I adored, I pitied, I revered her with ecstasy. She seemed the link that bound me in with dead things on the one hand, and with our pure and pitying God upon the other; a thing brutal and divine, and akin at once to the innocence and to the unbridled forces of the earth." Stevenson's emphasis here on the predetermined, genetically coded attraction the two characters feel for each other threatens to overwhelm their sense of self and individualized identities as virtuous believers.

The narrator is prepared for his eventual meeting with Olalla by the portrait of one of her ancestresses that hangs in the room he stays in. The emphasis throughout is on the inevitability of genetic inheritance, on Olalla's inability to escape both her family's physical beauty and its moral degeneration despite her personal inclination toward saintliness. Olalla blames her own physical attraction for the officer on traits inherited from her corrupt family: "The hands of the dead are in my bosom; they move me, they pluck me, they guide me; I am a puppet at their command; and I but reinform features and attributes that have long been laid aside from evil in the quiet of the grave. Is it me you love, friend? Or the race that made me?." Kenneth Graham describes the dilemma with which the two characters grapple as a question of whether "the *otherness* of the body, its time-bound flesh, its genetic fixity [is] a curse and obliteration of the self; or is such otherness, in the impersonality and universality of passion, a release and a fulfillment" (45–4, emphasis original). It is perhaps this question in particular that drew Dinesen to "Olalla." Stevenson, however, seems clearly to side with the rejection of the body and its lusts. At the end of the tale Olalla and the officer part without having consummated their passion, but with both their identities reaffirmed by the rejection of the flesh. After the officer departs from the *residencia*, he remains in the vicinity, and the two have one final meeting at the site of a bloody and garish crucifix that emphasizes the differences between their respective Christian belief systems. Olalla again begs the officer to leave saying, "Suffer me to pass on upon my way alone; it is thus that I shall ... be the most happy, having taken my farewell of earthly happiness, and willingly accepted sorrow for my portion." Reflecting upon the hideously suffering Christ and no longer aware of Olalla's presence, the officer gains a new understanding "that pleasure is not an end but an accident; that pain is the choice of the magnanimous; that it is best to suffer all things and do well." At this point the story ends with his setting off down the path and taking one last look at Olalla leaning against the crucifix. Dinesen, on the other hand, is more interested in exploring the second notion that Graham suggests, that the loss of identity that passion entails leads to a transcendence over conventional sexual mores, a triumph over the narrowness of patriarchal (and specifically Christian) definitions of gendered identity and

sexuality. Whereas Stevenson's Olalla bends to the will of her church, Dinesen's undertakes a project leading to a transcendence of patriarchy and including performing the role of prostitute.

In his analysis of the tale, Langbaum relegates the connection to Stevenson to a footnote. In it, he conjectures: "Isak Dinesen must have been struck in Stevenson's story by the idea that extraordinary beauty is both more than and less than human. It is characteristic of her that she combines Olalla and the mother in the ambivalent figure of Pellegrina" (104, note 1). The intertextual resonances that the textual origins for Rosalba and Olalla add to the tale go even further than Langbaum suggests in that they complicate and refine the questions of identity that Dinesen raises in the text. By looking to the hypotexts, we see more than the stereotypes of whore and saint: we see Dinesen radically rescripting the gothic tradition to create female identifies who are far from silenced by patriarchal fears about the (sexual) power of women and who instead propel at least some men into the realm of what Dinesen calls the "dreamer."

Stambaugh elaborates arguing that "because of his Calvinistic background, he [Stevenson] is a prime example of the loathing for one's body which Dinesen attributes to Christianity and especially to strict Protestantism. If Dr. Jekyll fears his body so much that he wants to split off what he sees as his evil, animal half, in 'Olalla' Stevenson projects the same hatred of the body onto women" (103). I would add that it is not only the Protestant prudery represented by the officer, but also the Catholic mores represented by Olalla and thus a whole range of Christian constructs of sexuality that Dinesen rejects. Stambaugh argues that Dinesen reverses the story by having her Olalla teach Lincoln "how to escape from a background and outlook similar to Stevenson's" (104). Lincoln knows Olalla carnally because she is a prostitute before he comes to know her as an individual and comments directly upon the foolishness of the prudish English codes of courtship exemplified by Stevenson's narrator. He states, "I have never been able to get anything out of the orthodox love affairs of my country." Dinesen's Olalla represents the opposite of determinism, namely the free play of identity. She is described as one of a rare kind of women "who are self-luminous and shine in the dark, who are phosphorescent, like touchwood." Dinesen's Olalla is in multiple senses a knowing—but not necessarily knowable—woman. As a prostitute she knows the ways of the flesh, while at the same time she exhibits extraordinary sense and sensibility about the world: "There never seemed to be to her much difference between joy and pain, or between sad and pleasant things. They were all equally welcome to her, as if in her heart she knew them to be the same." This conclusion contrasts sharply with Stevenson's Olalla, who lives in fear of awakening or acknowledging her carnal nature and thus must live in almost total isolation from the world. In creating her Olalla, Dinesen consciously unites virtue and sexuality to suggest a new construct of womanhood based on knowing. In this she refutes the fate of Stevenson's Olalla, who is denied both her saintly virtue (when she acknowledges her attraction to the officer) and the possibility of sexual fulfillment (when she refuses to marry him) because of Stevenson's notion of biological determinism. Yet despite having learned to embrace his sexual nature, Lincoln (perhaps somewhat like Stevenson's officer) makes a fatal error in reducing Olalla to one identity rather than emulating her multiplicity and acceptance of the fleeting nature of all things. Rather than moving on in life he (and one suspects the same of Stevenson's officer) fails to move ahead in life along a traditional trajectory becoming instead one of the tribe of male "dreamers" who have been privy to the multi-faceted nature of female identity and have been unable to master it.

### "À UN DÎNER D'ATHÉES" AND ROSALBA

In a similar reversal, Dinesen constructs a Rosalba widely (mis)recognized as a living saint while Barbey's Rosalba is a notorious consort to an entire battalion of the French army. Barbey dates Rosalba's story precisely to 1808 when she was the lover of a fictional officer in the French army during the campaign into Spain, the foreigner Major Ydow. Dinesen's Rosalba story takes place nearly thirty years later thus making it unlikely (though not impossible) that the woman whom Dinesen describes as having passed thirty is the same person as the young courtesan. Whereas Barbey's frame narrative surrounding the story of Rosalba describes a group of mostly military men who lost everything when Napoleon was defeated and who now espouse an unusually virulent form of atheism, Dinesen wryly sets her story about Rosalba in an extraordinarily pious and elitist conclave of aging royalists thus establishing further resonances within

the pattern of reversal that marks her intertextual play.

On the one hand, Barbey's narrator describes Rosalba as "la plus corrompue des femmes corrompues—dans le mal, une perfection!" ["*the* most depraved of all depraved women—the perfection of vice" (emphasis original)] while on the other hand she is "pas seulement une fille de l'air le plus étonnamment pudique pour ce qu'elle était; c'était positivement la pudeur elle même" ["not merely astonishingly modest, she was Modesty itself"]. Further, the narrator says, "La Rosalba était pudique comme elle était voluptueuse, et le plus extraordinaire, c'est qu'elle l'était en même temps" ["La Rosalba was as modest as she was voluptuous, and strange to say she was both at once."] The comparison of this description, with Dinesen's inset narrator are striking. He calls Rosalba "a holy witch and wanton saint" and makes repeated reference to her sexual experience, as for example when he notes wryly, "that she had, before his death, stood in a more earthly relation to the martyr in no way damaged her reputation" or when he speculates that "either … Rosalba can count the names of her lovers with the beads of her rosary, or she is some perverse old maid." Dinesen's rewriting of Rosalba is thus not simply an inversion, for she maintains the character's paradoxical nature as a key element. What is different in the hands of the two writers, however, is the ways in which the two Rosalbas are interpreted by the male characters. In both the Barbey story and the Dinesen revision, the central masculine concern appears to be the threat of the knowing woman. In both cases, women of sexual experience exercise an irresistible attraction to men who subsequently struggle desperately to control that knowledge and the power it appears to give the woman, yet the results are nearly opposite.

Barbey's Rosalba, with her multiple sexual partners and disregard for the emotional turmoil that ensues, suggests a gender reversal of the Don Juan legend, which was a central preoccupation for Dinesen as well. Charles Bernheimer points out the problem that Rosalba's indifference poses to Barbey's narrator, Mesnilgrand: "She, however, refuses to romanticize their affair, to give him any kind of linguistic privilege over her sexuality, to narrativize her body" (336). Mesnilgrand is one of only many in a long series of lovers, and as Eileen Sivert notes "Rosalba responds to everyone and so to no

one" (160). In refusing to name them, she thus effectively obliterates the identity of all her lovers. Conversely, Dinesen's Rosalba accepts the Swedish Baron as a lover who fancies himself a Don Juan in his own right. The importance of the Don Juan myth in "The Dreamers" has been examined at length by, among others, Langbaum. For the purposes of this discussion, it is important to note that the generative narrative of the entire tale, the opera house fire in which Pellegrina lost her voice, took place during a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* just as Pellegrina in the role of Donna Anna sang the "Crudele" aria to Don Ottavio. Further, the climax of the Baron's inset narrative of seduction is subverted throughout the episode by Rosalba's talk of Don Juan. In "The Dreamers," Lincoln Forsner comments on the banality of the Baron's seductions:

> It appeared from his talk that all his ladies had been of exactly the same kind, and that kind of woman I have never met. With himself so absolutely the hero of each single exploit, I wondered why he should have taken so much trouble—and he was obviously prepared to go to any length of trouble in these affairs—to obtain, time after time, a repetition of exactly the same trick.

This observation compares to what Bernheimer calls Rosalba's "insistence on the substitutability of her sex partners" (337). Whereas the male Don Juan's depersonalizing pursuit of women holds a central place in the European literary imagination, the notion of a female Don Juan who correspondingly depersonalizes male individuality (and thus identity) is far more problematic. Barbey's story strives to punish the female who dares to obliterate male identity in this way, while Dinesen's sets out to explore what the existential possibilities of a female sexuality that objectifies men might be.

In both texts the women present a conundrum and are repeatedly asked questions which they sphinx-like refuse to answer. In Barbey's story the questions are "M'aimes-tu?" ["Do you love me?"] and "Estce à moi, cet enfant?" ["Is this child mine?"] bringing together the linked male anxieties of fidelity and paternity. Bernheimer notes,

> The voice Mesnilgrand considers natural speaks to a man of his right to possess a woman, control her sexuality, and inscribe her in his genealogical story. By placing her body outside this patriarchal scheme, Rosalba throws the scheme

into confusion: Paternity becomes a mere fiction, a matter of her arbitrary naming.

Dinesen's male characters are equally concerned with validating their own existence through winning the love of the female. Olalla/Rosalba/Pellegrina's unwillingness both to maintain one stable identity—"I will not be one person again"—and her unwillingness or inability to recognize the men who pursue her at the end of the story undermines their unproblematic masculine identities and turns them into what Dinesen refers to as "dreamers" instead. In a devastating rhetorical gesture, Pellegrina Leoni asks them—the men who thought they had won her love—who they are, as though she had never met them before.

In the beginning of "The Dreamers," Lincoln Forsner introduces the story of Pellegrina Leoni by saying "It all goes to teach you how I was, twenty years ago, taught … to dream, and of the woman who taught me." Similarly, at one point when Barbey's narrator breaks out of his inset narrative about Rosalba and his listeners at the dinner of atheists to reflect on the troubling characteristics of Rosalba, the frame narrator interjects: "Avec ce qu'il venait de dire, il avait, le croira-t-on? transformé en rêveurs ces soldats qui avaient vu tous les genres de feux, ces moines débauchés, ces vieux médecins, tous ces écumeurs de la vie et qui en étaient revenus" ["It seemed as though his words had transformed into dreamers all these soldiers who had been under fire of every sort, these debauched monks, and old doctors, and brought back to them visions of their old life"]. Whether or not this reference is the direct source for Dinesen's meditation on dreamers fifty years later, the suggestion that the knowing woman functions as an important catalyst for and provocation of masculine identity is strong.

Here again, then, in the case of Rosalba is an instance of Dinesen rewriting a misogynistic nineteenth-century tale in a way that calls into question male paranoia about women's sexual knowledge. Dinesen subversively assigns value to the experiences of the female character that is not present in the hypotext while maintaining meaningful resonance with the female characters' fruitless struggles against patriarchal oppression in the original texts. Barbey's Rosalba is particularly troubling and relevant to the self-reflective nature of Dinesen's literary project because her horrifying mutilation and possible murder are so

intricately linked to an act of writing. Barbey's Rosalba openly embraces desire and seeks multiple sexual partners. She is caught in the act of writing to an unspecified lover (Barbey implies that it may be the narrator Mesnilgrand) by Major Ydow, who seals her genitals with his sword and the blue and silver sealing wax—notably the colors associated with the Virgin Mary—she used on the envelope of the love letter she has just written. He tells Rosalba "Sois punie par où tu as péché, fille infame!" ["Be punished where you have sinned, miserable woman!"]. Given that Dinesen was particularly preoccupied with creating a professional persona for herself as a writer and storyteller and that she explicitly linked her storytelling to the art of seduction and her ability to seduce one man in particular, Denys Finch Hatton, the fact that in Barbey's text sealing wax—an important part of nineteenth-century written documents—is used by Major Ydow to silence Rosalba creates a compelling parallel between sexuality and writing. Bernheimer notes, "Barbey reflexively links the very possibility of narrative control and closure to the successful repression, even obliteration, of the female sexual body" (330). I suggest that Dinesen's concern in "The Dreamers" is the exact opposite: she attempted to create an open and porous narrative form that resists control on multiple levels through the "female sexual body" that writers like Barbey and Stevenson sought to repress.

Barbey leaves open the question of whether Rosalba survived the mutilating act, and it is perhaps this opening in the text—this generative locus of other possible narratives about Rosalba—that inspired Dinesen to contemplate the possibilities of a female with multiple identities. It is an example of Dinesen simultaneously writing with and against the grain of Barbey's text. Certainly there is a metaphorical connection between Rosalba's body during the scene of mutilation and the scar that Dinesen's Rosalba—in all her permutations—carries: Barbey's narrator tells us "son beau corps à nu, tordu, comme un serpent coupé, sous son étreinte" ["her beautiful, naked body twisted like a wounded snake beneath his grasp"]. This small visual link to the distinctive snake-like scar compounded by the other similarities between the two texts is too much to dismiss as coincidence. Given Dinesen's well-documented predilection for biblical language and narrative, the linking of the image of the snake and the problem of women's knowledge appears to hearken back to the original

narrative about male anxiety in response to the knowing female, the story of Adam and Eve.

**CONCLUSION**

The series of intertextual resonances I have attempted to point out between Dinesen's "The Dreamers," Stevenson's "Olalla," and Barbey's "À un dîner d'athées" raises the question of why Dinesen chose to construct a pastiche of those two tales in particular given the large body of gothic fiction with which she was familiar. I think the answer can be deduced, at least in part, in Mira Jama's first story, which appears in the introductory frame. In the story, a Sultan seeks "a true virgin, such as had never heard of men." The sultan's hopes are dashed when he catches her looking out her window at an attractive young water-carrier, and he has the two buried alive in a coffin "broad enough to make a marriage bed." This brief story, in which a woman gains knowledge and is put to death for it, sets the scene for each of the four inset stories contained by Dinesen's frame and resonates with both Stevenson's and Barbey's hypotexts. For at the heart of both Stevenson's and Barbey's stories lie patriarchal terror in the face of female sexuality. Susan Hardy Aiken calls "The Dreamers" "a proliferation of mutually displacing accounts wherein 'woman' *is* the indecipherable ever-elusive 'story'—remembered in/as a kind of dream text, at once product and producer of multiple male-authored narratives" (53, emphasis original). This strategy of displacement subverts the patriarchal anxiety—represented by the British officer's fear of the supposedly inhuman nature of sexuality and Major Ydow's concerns about fidelity and paternity—that demands women's ignorance and suppression of sexuality. Dinesen offers her readers an alternative world populated by knowing women who ultimately, if ambivalently, elude patriarchal attempts to master them.

Given this sophisticated use of intertextuality, is Dinesen a postmodernist writer as Grethe Rostbøll and Morten Kyndrup suggest? Dinesen's strategy is, I think, too directly linked to a dialectical model of patriarchal versus feminist constructs of female identity to be considered postmodernist. Yet, on the other hand, the fact that the female identities that Dinesen ultimately constructs vigorously refute knowable, epistemological readings does show strong affinity with the postmodernism of a half century later. In this respect, it is not the self-conscious intertextuality in response to nineteenth-century male writers that Dinesen employs but rather the resulting free play of identity that she suggests as an alternative that connects her first collection of stories to later postmodernist developments. The fact that Dinesen chose "lowbrow" Gothic texts, such as du Maurier's *Trilby,* Barbey's *Les diaboliques,* and Stevenson's "Olalla," as sources of inspiration for her highly complex and intellectual tale, "The Dreamers," is intriguing, suggesting a rejection of the classicism and formalism of her high modernist contemporaries. Dinesen's intertextual practice demonstrates an acute sense of the absurd, with its keen awareness of the fine line between the sublime and the philistine in the romantic tradition. While this anticipates postmodern critiques of the conventional distinctions between high and low culture, this critique is also a central element of late modernism. Keeping in mind the fact that intertextual rewriting has existed throughout literary history, as Linda Hutcheon reminds us (18), I find that in her particular intertextual play Dinesen creates a radical, ontological questioning of female identity that fits in well among her contemporary late modernists, rather than anachronistically placing her among the postmodernists.

**Source:** Ellen Rees, "Holy Witch and Wanton Saint: Gothic Precursors for Isak Dinesen's 'The Dreamers,'" in *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 3, Fall 2006, pp. 333–48.

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# Greek Drama

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 550 BC

The art of drama developed in the ancient Greek city-state of Athens in the late sixth century BC From the religious chants honoring Dionysus arose the first tragedies, which centered on the gods and Greece's mythical past. In the fifth century BC, Greek audiences enjoyed the works of four master playwrights; of these, three—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—were tragedians. The early works focused on the good and evil that exists simultaneously in the world as well as the contradictory forces of human nature and the outside world. All three tragic playwrights drew their material from Greek myths and legends; they each brought new developments to the art form. Aeschylus, whose *Oresteia* trilogy examines the common tragic themes of vengeance and justice, brought tragedy to the level of serious literature. Of the scores of plays Sophocles wrote, only seven survive into modern times, and of these, the greatest one is *Oedipus the King*. The last great tragedian, Euripides, questioned traditional values and the ultimate power of the gods. In his *Medea*, Euripides explores the choices that humans make under difficult situations. Both Sophocles and Euripides wrote plays about Antigone; the one by Sophocles survives; the one by Euripides survives only as a fragment. While the playwrights handled this mythical story differently, it provided both of them with a way to explore moral conflicts between loyalty to the state and loyalty to one's religious beliefs. C. M. Bowra pointed
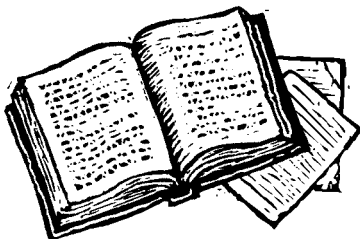
out in his book *Classical Greece* that "Greek tragedy provides no explicit answers for the sufferings of humanity, but it … shows how they happen and how they may be borne." Indeed, Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* expresses the paradigmatic tragic course of a noble man who through impulse and pride commits evil acts, falls from high station, and exacts punishment on himself. The myth of Orestes, as seen in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* trilogy and Euripides's *Orestes* introduces other major themes in Greek tragedy, namely justice (divine, personal, and communal) and vengeance.

Comedy most likely also developed out of the same religious rituals as tragedy. Aristophanes was the greatest writer of comedies in the early period known as Old Comedy. He used biting satire in plays such as *The Birds* and *Lysistrata* to ridicule prominent Athenian figures and current events. Later comedy relied less on satire and mythology and more on human relations among the Greek common people.

Greek drama created an entirely new art form, and over the centuries, the works of these ancient Greek writers influenced and inspired artists in various media, philosophers, psychologists, and other thinkers. Greek drama, with its universal themes and situations, continues to be relevant for modern audiences.



*Sculpture of a Greek theater mask* (Sculpture, Castle of St. Peter, Bodrum, Turkey, photograph. © Chris Hellier / Corbis)

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Aeschylus (c. 525 BC–c. 456 BC)

Aeschylus was born about 525 BC, probably in Eleusis. He was the earliest of the best-known ancient Greek tragic dramatists. He lifted the dramatic presentations from a choral performance to a work of art. He also added a second actor on stage, allowing for dialogue, and reduced the number of the chorus from about fifty to about fifteen. With Aeschylus, tragic drama was presented through action, not through recitation. Aeschylus took part in the City Dionysia (a festival in Athens for the god Dionysus, involving a procession to the Acropolis, a sacrifice of bulls with an accompanying feast, and dramatic competitions), probably for the first time in 499 BC, and he won it for the first time fifteen years later. His masterpiece is the *Oresteia* trilogy, which was produced in 458 BC Aeschylus's work was affected by contemporary

politics, especially the Greco-Persian Wars that raged through his homeland. Chad Turner notes how *The Suppliants*, probably Aeschylus's second play, reflects the playwright's increasing political awareness. Aeschylus's plays are of lasting literary value because of their lyrical language, intricate plots, and universal themes. He wrote about ninety plays, of which seven have survived. Aeschylus died about 456 BC in Gela, Sicily.

### Aristophanes (c. 450 BC–c. 385 BC)

Aristophanes was born about 450 BC, possibly on the island Aegina. His plays are the only examples of Old Comedy (comedy that focuses largely on political satire rather than human relations, the focus of New Comedy) that have survived in their complete form. Aristophanes's themes and work generally reflects the social, literary, and philosophical life of Athens, and many of his plays were inspired by events of the Peloponnesian War. Eleven of his approximately forty plays survive. Among the most well-known are *The Birds* and *The Frogs*. His appeal comes from his witty dialogue, his satire, and the inventiveness of his comic scenes. Many

of his plays are still produced on the modern stage. Aristophanes died about 385 BC in Athens, Greece.

### Crates (c. 449 BC–424 BC)

Flourishing in the mid-fifth century BC in Athens, Crates is considered the founder of Greek New Comedy. According to Aristotle, Crates abandoned traditional comedy—which centered on invective—and introduced more general stories that relied on well-developed plots. Crates was also the first to stop using iambic rhythm. Only fragments of his work survived to modern times, but he is known to have authored at least nine plays, including *Wild Beasts*, *Daring Deeds*, and *Neighbors*.

### Cratinus (c. 520 BC–423 BC)

Cratinus was regarded in antiquity as one of the three great writers of the Old Comedy period. Only fragments of his twenty-seven known plays survive, but they are enough to show that his comedies, like those of Aristophanes, seem to have been a mixture of parodied mythology and reference to contemporary events. For example, Athenian leader Pericles was a frequent subject of Cratinus's ridicule. Cratinus died about 423 BC

### Epicharmus (c. 530 BC–c. 440 BC)

Epicharmus was born about 530 BC He is seen as the originator of Sicilian, or Doric, comedy. He is credited with more than fifty plays, but only a few lines survive. Thirty-five titles are known, including *Agrostinos* and *Marriage of Hebe to Hercules*. Many of his plays were mythological burlesques: He even satirized the gods. His lively style made his work more akin to New Comedy than the Old Comedy of his time. He died about 440 BC

### Eupolis (c. 445 BC–c. 411 BC)

Along with Cratinus and Aristophanes, Eupolis was regarded in antiquity as one of the three great writers of the Old Comedy period. His first play was produced in 429 BC, but only fragments of his plays survived to modern times. Eupolis focused his satire on Athenian demagogues, wealthy citizens, but also concerned himself with serious subjects, such as how Athens could dominate Sparta in the ongoing Peloponnesian War. He was friends with Aristophanes, but their relationship broke down as they each accused the other of plagiarism. Eupolis died about 411 BC while he was still a young man, likely fighting in the war.

### Euripides (c. 485 BC–406 BC)

Euripides was born about 485 BC in Attica (the region of central Greece that has Athens as its capital). One of the three great tragedians, in 441 BC he won his first victory at the City Dionysia, in which he competed twenty-two times. Nineteen (including one play of disputed authorship) of his ninety-two plays survive. His most famous plays are *Medea*, produced in 431 BC; *Hippolytus* (428 BC); *Electra* (417 BC); *Trojan Women* (415 BC); *Ion* (c. 411 BC); and *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Bacchae* (both in 405 BC, posthumously).

Like his fellow tragedians, Euripides designed the tragic fate of his characters to stem from their own flawed natures. The gods look upon his characters' suffering with apparent indifference. His plays are usually introduced by prologues and often end with the providential appearance of a god, an action known as *deus ex machina*. The prologue usually is a monologue that explains the situation and the characters with which the action begins; the *deus ex machina* includes a god's epilogue that reveals the future fortunes of the characters. Euripides died in 406 BC in Macedonia.

### Menander (c. 342 BC–c. 292 BC)

Menander was born about 342 BC In modern times, he is considered to be the supreme dramatist of New Comedy (comedy that focuses on human relations), but, during his lifetime, he was less successful. Of his more than one hundred plays, only eight won prizes at Athens' dramatic festivals. He produced his first play in 321 BC The only play of his to survive intact is *Dyscolus*, which won a festival prize in 317. The Roman writers Plautus and Terence adapted many of Menander's works; thus, like other great dramatists of Ancient Greece, he influenced the development of European drama from the Renaissance into modern times. Menander died about 292 BC

### Phrynichus (c. 420 BC)

Phrynichus was an Athenian poet of the Old Comedy period and a contemporary of Aristophanes and Eupolis. He began producing plays in 430 BC and won two victories in the City Dionysia. Those two plays are *Monotropos* and *Muses*.

### *Sophocles (c. 496 BC–c. 406 BC)*

Sophocles was born about 496 BC in Colonus, near Athens. He is one of the three great tragic playwrights of Ancient Greece. He first won the City Dionysia in 468 BC, defeating Aeschylus. He went on to write a total of 123 tragedies for this annual festival, winning perhaps as many as 24 times and never receiving less than second prize. Of his seven extant plays, his most well-known is *Oedipus the King*, which was performed sometime between 430 BC and 426 BC This play became a paradigm for Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. It also provided the prototype for the family plots in countless literary works created across the centuries. Sophocles also made important dramatic innovations. He reduced the size of the chorus and added a third actor onstage. He is noted for his use of irony and his complicated web of puns, many of which cannot be conveyed in modern languages.

Sophocles was a prominent Athenian; he served as a treasurer in the Delian League (the confederation of Greek states with Athens as the leader that formed in 478 BC, soon after the defeat of the invading Persians under Xerxes in order to ensure continued freedom), was elected as one of ten military and naval commanders, and served as one of ten members of the advisory committee that organized the financial and domestic recovery of Athens after its defeat during the Peloponnesian War at Syracuse in 413 BC Sophocles died in 406 BC in Athens.

### *Sophron (c. 430 BC)*

Sophron of Syracuse lived and wrote in the early to mid 400s BC He wrote rhythmical prose mimes in the Doric dialect that depict scenes from daily Sicilian life. Plato was fond of Sophron's work and carried it with him. Sophron is believed to have influenced the work of Greek poets Theocritus and Herodas.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Antigone

Sophocles's *Antigone* (441 BC) depicts the title character's defiance of the king of Thebes and his edicts. Antigone's brother has died in his rebellion against the king, Creon, who is also his uncle, and Creon has forbidden proper burial rites to be carried out for him. The play's conflict is between Antigone and Creon, whose differences center on



## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- *Oedipus Rex*, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini, came out in 1967. It stars Silvana Mangano and Franco Citti and is in Italian with English subtitles.

- *Medea*, starring Judith Anderson and Colleen Dewhurst and directed by José Quintero, appeared in cinemas in 1959. As of 2008, it remained available on Ivy Classics Video (1991).

- George Tzavellas's adaptation of *Antigone*, starring Irene Papas and Manos Katrakis, came out in 1962.

- The opera *Oedipus Rex* came out in 1992. It features music by Igor Stravinsky and a libretto by Jean Cocteau. It is available on videodisk.

opposing beliefs about authority; Antigone affirms family loyalty and divine over civic law, whereas Creon asserts the power of the monarchy and the subordination of the individual to the authority of the state.

### Bacchae

Many critics regard the *Bacchae* (c. 405 BC) as Euripides's masterpiece. In this play, the god Dionysus arrives in Thebes to introduce his cult. King Pentheus resists, so Dionysus causes the women, including Pentheus's mother, to fall into a frenzied state. When the women come across Pentheus, they believe him to be a wild animal, and they kill and dismember him. Dionysus considers his terrible revenge justified, thus showing his own lack of morality. The play demonstrates how the ecstatic side of the Dionysiac religion needs reason and self-control for balance.

### The Birds

Along with *The Frogs*, *The Birds* (414 BC) is widely considered to be one of Aristophanes's masterpieces. It exemplifies the utopian theme in

*1736 copper engraving of Greek actors wearing masks* (© Bettmann / Corbis)

Greek literature. The ruler of Athens, Peisthetaerus, wants to escape the war that has engulfed Greece, and he has persuaded the birds to join him in building a new city that will hang in the sky between human and divine dominions. Peisthetaerus comes to rule over even the gods. *The Birds* satirizes Athens' imperial goals, and some critics believe that it foretells the city's impending loss to Sparta in the Peloponnesian War and its subsequent decline. *The Birds* is longer than any other ancient Greek drama—comedy or tragedy—and demonstrates the prowess of Aristophanes.

## Dyscolus

*Dyscolus* (The Grouch), Menander's prize-winning play, was first produced in 317 BC While the play tells about a young man's efforts to marry, it focuses on the curmudgeonly figure of the girl's father, Knemon, whose misanthropy has led him to abandon his parental responsibility. This early play is relatively simple, but it is the only one of Menander's plays for which a complete text exists in modern times, and it shows his ability to create surprise in the final act.

## The Frogs

Many critics consider *The Frogs* to be one of Aristophanes's masterpieces. It mixes humor and serious matters regarding contemporary politics, literary criticism, gods, and religion. It won first prize at the City Dionysia when it was first produced in 405 BC and was unusually honored by being given a repeat production. In *The Frogs*, Dionysus, the god of drama, goes to the underworld to bring Euripides back to Athens. In Hades, Dionysus witnesses a drama competition between Euripides and Aeschylus; Euripides represents the modern age, while Aeschylus represents the elite and the glory days of the past. As a result of the competition, Dionysus decides to take Aeschylus back to the land of the living with him instead of Euripides, believing that Aeschylus is better able to restore moral, political, and martial strength among Athenians.

## Lysistrata

Arisophanes's comedy *Lysistrata* was written in 411 BC, a few years after the Athenian army was defeated in Sicily in the Peloponnesian War. *Lysistrata* depicts the women of Athens, in conjunction with the rest of the women in Greece—including the Spartan enemies—go on a domestic and sexual strike in order to force their husbands to stop fighting. Aristophanes thus used women, who historically took no part in political or military life, to attack the long-lasting war. This relevant play is frequently produced in modern times.

## Medea

*Medea* (431 BC) is one of Euripides's best-known plays. It depicts Medea's revenge on her unfaithful husband; she kills their sons. The play depicts her internal struggle between her sense of personal injury and her love for her children, and it enacts a popular theme of Greek tragedy, vengeance. Despite Medea's horrible actions, Euripides evokes sympathies for Medea, who, for most of the play, has the support of the women of Corinth. Euripides leveraged the political strife between Sparta (of which Corinth was an ally) and Athens in writing this play. Critic Daniel Mendelsohn observes that the year *Medea* was first produced was also the year civil war broke out. *Medea* took third prize at that year's dramatic competition.

## Oedipus at Colonus

*Oedipus at Colonus* (produced c. 401 BC, posthumously), Sophocles's final play, finds the old, blind Oedipus at the sacred grove at Colonus, a village near Athens. He has spent the past years in exile, rejected by his family with the exception of his two daughters. Now, however, his sons and his brother-in-law turn to him to help them protect the city of Thebes. The play is noted for its melancholy and lyricism. Sophocles also invests in Oedipus both spiritual and moral authority. Some critics have read the play biographically, as Sophocles's poetic last will and testament.

## Oedipus the King

*Oedipus the King*, first presented by Sophocles about 427 BC, is one the most important tragedies in Western literature. It depicts the downfall of Oedipus, king of Thebes, who discovers that he unwittingly has killed his father and married his mother. When Oedipus realizes what he has done, he blinds himself, abandons his throne, and leaves Thebes. Oedipus has fulfilled his preordained fate, which he foolishly assumed he could avoid, and once he discovers the reality of his actions, he owns his guilt and pays for it with integrity and fortitude. Aristotle used this play as a model of tragedy in his work of literary criticism, *The Poetics*. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud made use of the story of Oedipus in coining the term *Oedipal complex* to express man's usually suppressed desire to replace his father in order to marry his mother.

## Oresteia

Aeschylus's *Oresteia* is the only trilogy that survived from Ancient Greece into modern times. First performed in 458 BC, it consists of *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi* (The Libation Bearers), and *Eumenides* (which refers to the "kindly ones," the avenging furies who seek vengeance on Orestes). It tells the story of the cycle of murder, vengeance, punishment, and justice acted out within the royal house of Atreus. The *Oresteia* is widely considered to be one of the great works of Western literature. It is remarkable for its brilliant union of poetry, song, dance, and music as well as its depiction of the development of the Athenian democratic jury system.

## Prometheus Bound

*Prometheus Bound* was presented as one part of a trilogy in 472 BC In the play, Prometheus defies Zeus by stealing fire from the gods and giving it to mankind. Zeus chains Prometheus to a huge rock as punishment. The struggle of the play derives from the clash of wills between the powerful king of the gods, Zeus, and larger-than-life heroic Prometheus, who stubbornly refuses to share the secret knowledge concerning Zeus's ability to hold onto his power. Prometheus came to be an archetypal figure of defiance against tyrannical power, one that was especially meaningful to the Romantic poet William Blake. Some scholars doubt Aeschylus's authorship of *Prometheus Bound*.

## THEMES

### *Tragedy*

The first forms of Greek drama were tragedies. "The theme of all tragedy is the sadness of life and the universality of evil," wrote noted scholar Paul Roche in *The Orestes Plays of Aeschylus*. "The inference the Greeks drew from this was *not* that life was not worth living, but that because it was worth living the obstacles to it were worth overcoming." Through suffering, the tragic hero is able to learn and grow.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the great Greek tragedians, brought distinctive themes and perspectives to their works. Aeschylus transformed tragic drama into great literature. His plays focused on the plights, decisions, and fates of individuals who were intrinsically intertwined with their community and their gods. In Aeschylus's works, gods controlled the actions of mortal men and women. Self-pride caused humans to defy the will of the gods, which led to punishment. A Sophoclean tragedy generally revolved around characters whose "tragic"—or personal—flaws caused them to suffer. The tragedy climaxed as the main character recognized his or her errors and accepted responsibility and its accompanying punishment. Of the three tragedians, the characters of Sophocles are generally considered to best reflect the true state of human experience. Euripides differed from the earlier playwrights both in his belief that the world operates by chance rather than by the will of gods and in his treatment of his mythic characters as if they were people of his own time. These characters, subject to the same political and social pressures as fifth-century Athenians, were in charge of their

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Read or review the masterpieces of Greek tragedy and Greek comedy. How are these plays alike? How are they different? Which do you think most represents Greek culture in the fifth century BC?

- Compare and contrast the features of Old Comedy and New Comedy. Which of these forms seems more relevant to modern drama? Explain your answer.

- Read Aristotle's *Poetics* and apply his analysis of tragedy in evaluating a play of your choosing.

- Read Plato's *Republic*, which discusses his ideas about tragedy and its place in society. Out of what philosophical ideas does Plato's argument arise? How valid is his argument?

- Find out more about life in Ancient Greece in the fifth century BC Based on your research, explain why and in what different ways Greek tragedies and comedies were meaningful to fifth-century audiences.

- Select a play by Shakespeare and explore how its form and subject matter demonstrates the influence of Greek playwrights.

- Find out more about the Peloponnesian War, which Aristophanes took as the backdrop for some of his plays. How do you think the ongoing strife might have affected Athenian society, and how are these social effects reflected in Aristophanes's comedies?

- Find out more about the rise of Athenian democracy. Then study Sophocles's *Antigone*, to see how these new ideas about government are handled in the play.

own destinies. Their tragic fate arises from their own inability to deal with the difficulties that the gods placed upon them or from their own passions. The tragedies of Euripides often questioned traditional and widely accepted social values.

## Comedy

Comedy was the other major form of Greek drama. Greek comedies often made fun of people, particularly politicians, military leaders, and other prominent figures. Victor Ehrenberg noted in *The People of Aristophanes* that "In no other place or age were men of all classes attacked and ridiculed in public and by name with such freedom." Greek comedies were varied productions, ranging from the intellectual to the bawdy. Some comedies were satirical, some slapstick. They included such devices as verbal play, parody, metaphor, and allegory. Aristophanes, the most noted comic playwright, used satire to make fun of the leaders and institutions of his day. He often placed them in absurd situations, such as the one in *The Birds*, in which the heroes try to build "Cuckoo City," a peaceful community in the sky.

Greek comedy is divided into three periods. Old Comedy—the first phase of ancient Greek comedy—emerged during the fifth century BC Primarily known through the surviving work of Aristophanes, it is sometimes referred to as Aristophanic comedy. The high-spirited satire of public figures and events characterize these plays. Though they are filled with songs, dances, and buffoonery, they also include explicit political criticism as well as commentary on literary and philosophical topics. The plays of Aristophanes parody tragedy. Middle Comedy, dating from the closing years of the fifth century BC to nearly the middle of the fourth century BC, represents the transition from Old Comedy to New Comedy. Comedies from this period make good-humored attacks on classes or character types rather than individuals. The playwright Menander introduced the New Comedy in about 320 BC Like Old Comedy, it satirized contemporary Athenian society, but the ridicule was far milder. New Comedy also differed from Old Comedy because it parodied average citizens—fictitious characters from ordinary life—rather than public figures, and it had no supernatural or heroic elements. The plays of New Comedy often focus on thwarted lovers and concealed identities and contained a host of stock characters, such as the cruel father, the clever slave, and the conceited cook.

## Struggle and Rebellion

Greek tragedies depicted struggle and suffering deriving from conflict typically between the state and individuals, between human law and divine law, or between free will and fate. In many Greek tragedies, the hero is the person who rebels

against the established order of things. Sophocles's *Antigone* depicts some of these struggles. Antigone defies her uncle Creon, king of Thebes, when she performs burial rites for her brother. In doing so, Antigone obeys her religious beliefs and expresses her familial loyalty and disobeys the royal decree that her rebellious brother may not be buried. As punishment for her disobedience, her uncle sentences her to death. At the end of the play, Creon, who has placed his decree above the command of the gods, is himself punished through the suicides of his wife and son. Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* reports what happens when individuals think they can escape their divinely ordained fate. Oedipus's parents—Laius and Jocasta—attempt to thwart the oracles that tell them their son will murder his father and marry his mother. As the myth and the play bear out, despite their efforts to circumvent fate, Oedipus fulfills this prophecy.

### The Common Man
Both tragedies and comedies dignify the common man. Members of Greek royalty and upper classes create a world filled with adultery, incest, madness, and murder, and it is the shepherds, craftspeople, yeomen farmers, and nurses who provide a stable environment amidst this debauchery. Sophocles and Euripides endowed these secondary characters with common sense and sensitivity. In Sophocles's *Antigone*, for example, the men serving in Creon's guard offer their king advice and even disagree with him. Comedy uses the common man in a different way than tragedy does. Comic writers introduced stock characters, such as the orphan, the young lover, and the master of the house as protagonists instead of relying solely on imperial characters; their stories, too, were as worthy of being told. Menander's plays particularly emphasized a civilized world in which the rules of humanity prevail.

### Mythology and the Gods
Early Greek drama, both tragedy and comedy, drew from the stories of mythology and legend. These myths illuminated universal problems, ones that could pertain to situations plaguing fifth-century Greece as well as to past events. The ancient Greeks believed that tragedy should deal with illustrious figures and significant events, thus the pantheon of gods is ever-present and, often, omniscient. Aeschylus's plays, for instance, show the justification of the gods' ways in relation to humankind or the comprehension of the form of justice meted out by the

gods. The gods might punish the characters, as Zeus punishes Prometheus in *Prometheus Bound*, or they might settle the seemingly insurmountable conflicts the characters face, as when Athena decrees that the Furies must give up their torment of Orestes in the *Oresteia*. The tragedians took the basic premise of their stories from mythology but transformed them for dramatic intent, infusing the heroes, both male and female, with human qualities and relating their themes to the present day. The religion of the Greeks, what in modern times is called mythology, provided drama with paradigmatic plots and universal subjects, allowing the dramatists to comment on topical events without limiting their scope to contemporary events and personalities.

The gods also played a prominent role in Old Comedy. Cratinus's *Dionysalexandrus* is a mythological burlesque. It retells the story of the judgment of Paris (Alexander), with variations. Aristophanes's work parodies tragedy. In all, the Greek gods and goddesses take a central role in the lives of dramatic characters. However, mythology in drama was on the wane. The defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War contributed to the sense of disillusionment that the ancient Greeks felt with their legendary heroes and gods, and with the rise of the New Comedy, writers moved away from mythological subjects toward common subjects of human relationships and family life.

### Love
Love as a dramatic theme was first introduced in the comedic plays. The New Comedy plots emphasize romantic intrigue, such as a young man's efforts to win the bride of his choice. Plays of the New Comedy often end in marriage. Menander's plays might introduce perverse complications. In *The Arbitrators*, the problems arise when a newly married woman bears a child shortly after the wedding. The husband accuses her of being unfaithful; however, unbeknownst to him, her husband previously raped her at a festival. The play ends happily, with the husband's remorseful speech.

## STYLE

### Structure
As set out by Aristotle in his *Poetics* in 350 BC, tragedy generally follows a set sequence of events. First, the *hamartia* takes place. This is the tragic error committed by the hero, and it usually is committed unwittingly. Oedipus's act

of killing Laius and marrying Jocasta is the *hamartia* in *Oedipus the King*. The unexpected turn of events that brings this error to light is known as the *peripeteia*, and the hero's recognition of this error is the *anagnorisis*. According to Aristotle, the *peripeteia* and the *anagnorisis* are most effective when they occur at the same time. They often come about when the true identity of one of the characters becomes known. This is the case for Oedipus, who discovers the identity of his biological father and recognizes then that his wife is his biological mother; thus his situation is reversed, moving swiftly from happiness to misery. Last comes the catharsis, the release of the emotions of fear and pity that the tragedy has aroused in the audience.

Old Comedy also had a distinct structure. The first part is the introduction or prologue, in which the plot is explained and developed. The play proper begins with the *parados*, the entry of the chorus, followed by the *agon*, or contest, which is a ritualized debate between two main characters, a character and the chorus, or two halves of the chorus. Next comes the *parabasis*, in which the chorus speaks to the audience about the political and social events of the day and also criticizes well-known Athenian citizens. Following a series of farcical scenes, the play concludes with a banquet or wedding. While Old Comedy followed a formal design, it had little conventional plot, instead presenting a series of episodes, which, when taken together, illustrated a serious political or social issue. New Comedy, however, articulated the plot much more clearly and featured characters who devised intrigues and tricks to achieve certain goals.

### Chorus

The Greek chorus played a crucial role in Greek plays. Members of the chorus—twelve to fifteen actors—remained on stage throughout the entire play and periodically recited poetic songs in unison. Overall, the chorus observed and interpreted the actions of the play, reacted to characters and events, and even probed the characters with questions and gave advice. However, the chorus took on additional responsibilities in the hands of different playwrights. In some plays, the chorus helped advance the plot. In other plays, it introduced major themes. "The chorus complements, illustrates, universalizes, or dramatically justifies the course of events," writes Michael Grant in *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*; "it comments or moralizes or mythologizes upon what happens, and opens up the spiritual dimension of the theme or displays the reaction of public opinion."

However, the role of the chorus changed over time and in the hands of the three great tragedians. For Aeschylus, the chorus played a more central role. In the *Suppliants*, the chorus is actually the protagonist, while in *Agamemnon*, the play's themes find clearest expression in statements recited by the chorus. In Sophoclean drama, the chorus could be interpreted as a group of characters with a distinct point of view. In some of Sophocles's plays, as in *Ajax* and *Electra*, the chorus is most closely attached to the title character. In other plays, namely *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, the chorus is made up of city elders who present their opinions on the events they are witnessing. By the time of Euripides, the chorus had taken on a far less central role. According to Rex Warner writing in *Three Great Plays of Euripides*, in the works of Euripides, "The chorus perform in the role of sympathetic listeners and commentators, or provide the audience with a kind of musical and poetic relief from the difficulties or horrors of the action."

Comedy also made use of the chorus. In Old Comedy, the chorus might take on a slightly different role. For instance, members of the chorus often stirred up trouble among characters. By contrast, the New Comedy used the chorus primarily as a small band of performers who served to entertain the audience or provide musical interludes between scenes.

### Satyr Plays

Satyr plays were a blend of tragedy and comedy. The underlying themes of the plays were usually of a serious nature, but their plots and tone were absurd and designed for humorous effect. They featured obscene visual and verbal humor as well as characters called satyrs, which are half-man, half-animal, and Silenus, a mythical horseman. Satyr plays were presented after the tragedies at the theatrical competitions and presented a humorous or farcical version of the tragedy that had just been witnessed. Satyr plays were shorter than tragedies, had their unique choral dance, and used more colloquial speech. Like tragedies, satyr plays drew their themes and subjects from mythology. Because Euripides's *Cyclops* is the only satyr play that has survived in its entirety, little information is known about them, however.

### Deus Ex Machina

Literally meaning "god from the machine," *deus ex machina* was the entry of a god or gods at the end of the play to save the protagonist. The *machina*, a staging device, was a crane that flew in the gods or heroes at the end of the play. Euripides and Aristophanes both frequently employed a *deus ex machina* to facilitate the ending. Euripides's gods would explain in an epilogue what happened next or would remove the protagonist. For example, the *deus ex machina* was used in *Medea* to bring Helios, the sun god, to save Medea from the wrath of Jason as well as to allow her to take the bodies of their sons, thus depriving her husband of even the solace of their proper burial.

### Unity

Ancient Greek tragedies upheld what Aristotle later named the unities of time, place, and action. Unity of time required that the action of the play take place in twenty-four hours or less; unity of place required that the setting consist of only one location; and unity of action required each event cause the following event without extraneous action or subplots. However, some critics note that Aristotle's rule regarding the unity of time was not strictly followed. For example, Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* opens on the morning that the Trojan War ends in Asia Minor, yet by the end of that day, Agamemnon has returned some five hundred miles from the conflict, to Greece, where he is murdered by his wife. Aristotle believed that observance of the unities contributed to the intensity of the audience's experience in viewing the play, particularly the cathartic response.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Other Forms of Tragedy

Aside from the tragedy of the ancient Greeks, great tragedy in the West has been created notably in three other periods and places: England, from 1558 to 1625; seventeenth-century France; and Europe and the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Like Greek theater, Elizabethan drama arose out of religious ceremonies. *Gorboduc*, by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, the first formal tragedy in English, was performed in 1561, but Christopher Marlowe, who wrote in the late 1500s, was the first tragedian worthy of the Greek tradition. Shakespeare produced his five greatest tragedies in the first years of the 1600s. However, tragedy as a dramatic form began to decline after Shakespeare. During the 1600s, though, dramatists in France were also attempting to bring back the ancient form of Greek tragedy. Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine represent the best of the French neoclassical period. These playwrights closely followed the Greek models and Aristotelian unities and drew characters and situations from Ancient Greece. Modern tragedy began with Norway's Henrik Ibsen, Sweden's August Strindberg, and Russia's Anton Chekhov. In the United States, however, few plays presented the full dimensions of tragedy. Some critics have called Eugene O'Neill the first American to write tragedy for the American theater; O'Neill sought to create true tragedy because he believed that the meaning of life—and its hope—lay in the tragic.

### The Greek Theater and the Staging of Plays

The ancient Greek theater was an outdoor area consisting of a large semi-circular dancing floor on which the action took place (called the orchestra); a "scene building" (*skene*, from which the modern word *scene* derives) facade behind the orchestra to which painted scenery could be attached; and a semicircular auditorium around the orchestra made of carved stone steps on which anywhere from ten to twenty thousand spectators could sit. People from all social classes attended the Greek plays.

Plays began with the entrance of the actors and the chorus, accompanied by musicians, through the two entrances on either side of the orchestra. The performers moved and gestured in unison, only breaking formation when they reached their assigned places in the orchestra. Then the story began to unfold, and the members of the chorus moved from place to place or across the stage and back as they reacted to the play's events and characters. The actors who were distinct from the chorus wore elaborate masks that depicted recognizable types, for example, old men or young women. These masks allowed the same actor to play multiple roles in different scenes and also let men play women's parts. The theatrical costumes were brightly colored, which aided in character recognition as well. For example, royalty wore purple.

All the action took place in outdoor settings, either natural or urban ones.

## Opera

Opera developed out of the Greek tragedies. This musical form was created in Florence, Italy, at the end of the sixteenth century when a group of scholars, poets, and musicians, called the Camerata, discovered the important role that music played in ancient tragedy. Members of the Camerata collaborated and performed two shows based on mythological stories of Daphne and Eurydice, in 1597 and 1600, respectively. Both performances combined drama, music, and spectacle into what they believed was a recreation of Greek tragedy. The operas were an immediate success, and, in the early 1600s, this new type of performance spread throughout Italy and to France, Austria, Germany, and England. By 1607, Claude Monteverdi's masterpiece, *Orfeo*, established the fundamental form of the European opera that would remain virtually unchanged for the next three hundred years.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### The City Dionysia

Drama arose out of feasts held in honor of the Greek god Dionysus. By the eighth century BC, the Greeks had developed elaborate rituals in his honor, which included poetry recitations and a ceremony called the *dithyramb*. Over time, the *dithyramb*, which was a special form of verse about Dionysus that was accompanied by song and dance, became the highlight of the festival, and it developed to include tales of other gods and heroes. Beginning about 535 BC, Athens began to hold annual festivals known as City Dionysia. This festival included a dramatic competition of *dithyramb* and *rhapsodia*—Homeric recitation contests. The poet Thespis was the first winner of this contest. His play included *dithyramb* and *rhapsodia*, but he expanded these traditional presentations to include a chorus as well. Thespis thus developed a new art form that later became known as theatrical plays.

The performance began with a procession made up of the playwrights, wealthy citizens who funded the festival, choruses, actors, and important public officials. This parade wended its way through the streets of Athens on the first day of the competition. The procession entered the theater, and then the public sacrifice of a bull to Dionysus took place. The competition opened with the *dithyrambic* contests, and the three tragedies were performed in the ensuing days, each followed by a satyr play. Magistrates responsible for theatrical productions during the City Dionysia were given the responsibility of producing comedies about 487 BC, though volunteers probably produced them there for some years before that. The comedies were presented at night, after the tragedies. A panel of ten judges selected the top winners.

The City Dionysia remained an integral part of Athens' culture throughout the city's Golden Age. Taking place at the end of March, it was a major holiday attraction. Greeks from other city-states were welcome to attend the competition or enter plays in it.

### The Age of Pericles

Democracy was born in Athens in the late sixth century BC, after a long period of dictatorship. To prevent a dictatorship from taking shape once again, the populace developed a set of strong laws. Athenian males, excluding slaves, voted on the city's political and economic affairs. The city's assembly made all legislative and electoral decisions.

The defense of the city was managed by ten generals, elected on an annual basis; Pericles was frequently elected as one of these generals and held the post almost every year from 443 to his death in 429. He first came to prominence in 463 and dominated Athenian politics from 447 BC until his death in 429. Pericles sought to increase the Athenian empire and bolster the city's power throughout Greece. His ambitions led Athens into the Peloponnesian War.

The rise of democracy plays prominent roles in the tragedies. The *Oresteia*, for example, reflects the transformation of Athens from the code of tribal vengeance to the rule of communal, or state, law. According to some critics, Creon, the king-tyrant of Thebes in *Antigone*, was modeled at least in part on Pericles and was intended to serve as a warning to Pericles and the Athenian people about the dangers of dictatorship and putting too much power in the hands of one person.

### The Peloponnesian War

By the mid-fifth century BC, Athens had built an empire that included many of the Greek city-states. However, it did not rule its empire as

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **500s BC:** During this century, Athens becomes the dominant power among the Greek city-states and achieves its greatest economic prosperity and cultural flowering. The Golden Age of Greece is that period in which Athens emerges as the center of the arts.

  **Today:** Athens, the capital of Greece, dominates Greek political, cultural, and economic life. About four million people, some 40 percent of the population, live in the city's metropolitan area. Modern Athens contains many ruins, the most famous of which are located on the Acropolis, the high place in the middle of the city and the location of the famous temple of Athena, the Parthenon, and other famous structures, such as the Erechtheum with its Porch of the Maidens.

- **500s BC:** The Greeks believe in a pantheon of twelve gods who live atop Mount Olympus. The gods are seen as powerful beings who do not readily overlook any slights to their honor. Some actions that most offend the gods are a lack of hospitality, lack of proper burial for family members, human arrogance, and murderous violence.

  **Today:** The ancient Greek religion held sway until about the fourth century AD, when Christianity spread to the region. Today, all but a small minority of Greeks are members of the Church of Greece, or the Greek Orthodox Church.

- **500s BC:** Around 508 BC, Cleisthenes overthrows the aristocrats who rule Athens and turns the city into a direct democracy. An assembly called the Council of Five Hundred—chosen from local government units—makes the laws, and a court system in which people are tried by a jury of citizens is implemented. In the mid-fifth century BC, Pericles opens public offices to all male citizens and provides that officeholders be paid, thus making it possible for non-wealthy men to serve in government.

  **Today:** Greece is a parliamentary republic. Parliament consists of three hundred deputies, and its members are elected for four-year terms by direct, universal, and secret ballots. The prime minister holds considerable power but must be able to command the confidence of the parliament.

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democratically as it did its own city-state. Other Greek cities within the Athenian Empire grew discontented and began to turn to Sparta, Athens' long-standing rival, for protection. In 431 BC, Sparta and its allies declared war on Athens, a war which came to involve most of the city-states. The war lasted for an entire generation, bringing great loss of life, including the death of Pericles. In 404 BC, Athens surrendered, and the ensuing years were ones of instability for Greece. Aristophanes used the backdrop of the Peloponnesian War in many of his plays. Though many of the scenes were very funny, he sought to convey the lesson of the absurdity of the war.

## Greek Women

The Greek tragedies depict strong, independent women, but in ancient Athens, this was a rare role for women to play. Women were unable to participate in politics and government; they could not vote or hold office. They rarely were even seen outside the home, except at such events as festivals, marriages, and funerals. They could not marry without the sanction of their male guardian. Only men could initiate divorce, and this was relatively easy for them to accomplish.

However, the tragedians in their plays create women who defy such social standards and the laws that uphold them. Antigone is one such

*Ruins of a Greek theater and Roman amphitheater near Cyrene, Libya* (© Roger Wood / Corbis)

character, choosing to ignore the decree of the king when she decides to bury her brother. Antigone's sister, Ismene, reminds her of their subordinate status—"We must remember, first, that we were born women, who should not strive with men"—but Antigone ignores this warning and follows her own conscience. Medea is another character who flouts contemporary standards. At the beginning of *Medea*, she openly speaks out against the unfairness of this system to the women of Corinth. Throughout the drama, she emerges as a completely dominating figure.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Greek drama has been very important for the ancient Greeks, later literary development, and modern audiences. Aeschylus, the earliest Greek tragedian, laid the foundation for an aesthetic of drama that would influence plays for well over two thousand years. As E. Christian Kopf stated in "Aeschylus" from *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 176: *Ancient Greek Authors*, "In the twentieth century Aeschylus's plays, especially his trilogy known as the *Oresteia* (458 BC), are widely considered to be

masterpieces containing some of the greatest poetry ever composed for the stage."

The artistic effects of Greek tragedy—the earliest form of drama created—were felt almost immediately. Aristophanes's *The Frogs*, produced in 405 BC, compares the work of Aeschylus and Euripides. Athenian philosophers began to analyze Greek drama as its period of greatness drew to an end. Plato initiated the history of criticism of tragedy with his speculation on the role of censorship in *The Republic*, written about 380 BC Fearing the power of tragedy's language to excite emotions that might be harmful to social order, he recommended that tragedians submit their works to a philosopher ruler for approval. John J. Keaney summarizes Plato's beliefs in *Ancient Writers*:

> Particularly repugnant to his own religious views are such literary statements as those stating that the gods are responsible for human evils, that they appear to men in various disguises, that they are untruthful.

Aristotle was one of the earliest known critics of Greek drama. In his *Poetics*, written about 334 BC, Aristotle defined a perfect tragedy as imitating actions that excite "pity and fear," which ends in bringing about a cathartic effect. Aristotle also emphasized plot over character. "Most important of all," he said, "is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation not of men but of an action and of life." In several chapters of his *Poetics*, Aristotle analyzed Greek tragedies, finding commonalties in structure, characterization, and plot devices. He also found Euripides to be the "most tragic of dramatists."

The Roman poet Horace discussed in his *Ars Poetics* (Art of Poetry) the Greek tradition of having dramatic and forbidding events, such as Medea's murder of her two children, take place offstage instead of being performed onstage. He transformed this tendency into a dictum on decorum. Horace believed that tragedy was a genre with its own style. For example, a theme for comedy may not be expressed in a tragedy. Such stylistic distinction lasted throughout the century, as noted in Italian writer Dante's "De Vulgari Eloquentia" ("Of Eloquence in the Vulgar"), written between 1304 and 1305.

Margarete Bieber wrote in *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* that Greek theater was "so rich and many-sided that each later period of European civilization has found some aspect of it to use as an inspiration or model for its own time." Indeed, Greek plays enjoyed enormous popularity in the Roman Empire, and nearly all the plays performed there were imitations or loose translations of Greek dramas. In the second century BC, Plautus and Terence, the most important writers of Roman comedy, were influenced by the Greek New Comedy. When European writers returned to drama, after the medieval period ended, they, in turn, were influenced by Plautus and Terence. Thus the stock characters that were originally created by the Greek comedians continued to thrive.

In addition to experiencing a reawakening of an interest in Roman comedies, Renaissance audiences also began to stage Greek tragedies. From the 1500s on, plays by the three great tragedians were translated and performed in such countries as France, Italy, and Germany.

Contemporary drama is greatly influenced by Greek drama. Many playwrights, such as Eugene O'Neill, have reworked the ancient tragedies. Numerous tragedies as well as comedies continue to be presented on the modern stage. Jeffrey Henderson noted in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* that audiences throughout the world enjoy Aristophanes's "memorable poetry, style, and fantasy." He also pointed out that these comedies "remain highly useful to historians of classical Athens for their power to illuminate the political vitality and intellectual richness of that extraordinary era."

Tragedies remain successful for different reasons, namely their universal themes, which render them relevant to audiences. Charles R. Walker stated in his 1966 study *Sophocles' "Oedipus the King" and "Oedipus at Colonus"* that "*Oedipus* and other Greek plays have begun to speak to the modern world with the authority of living theater." Toward the end of the twentieth century, Karelisa V. Hartigan, writing in *Greek Tragedy on the American Stage*, upheld this view:

> The theme or message of the plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides has consistently been deemed important, because the issues addressed by the writers of fifth-century BC Athens continue to be current, continue to have a relevance for twentieth-century America.

# CRITICISM

## Rena Korb

*Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide*

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Aristotle's *Poetics* is the first critical work focusing on tragedy as an art form. Written about 380 BC, the *Poetics* provides an extensive analysis of the genre.

- Eugene O'Neill is considered to be one of the few modern American tragedians. His *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1932), a trilogy, is a reworking of the *Oresteia* trilogy. It is set in Puritan New England during the Civil War. O'Neill wanted to create a modern psychological tragedy that used the mythology and legends of Ancient Greece.

- Several post–World War II French writers have attempted to revitalize the Greek tragedy through more contemporary plays. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Flies* (1943) is based on *Eumenides*, the final play of the *Oresteia* trilogy. Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (1942) is based on Sophocles's play of the same name. In both plays, political ideals and rebellions are used instead of religious ideals and actions.

- Opera arose out of ancient Greek tragedy. Many of the greatest operas, such as Claudio Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, are based on the plays and myths of Ancient Greece.

- Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872) argues that Greek tragedy arose out of a fusion of Apollonian and Dionysian elements. Apollonian elements represent measure, restraint, and harmony, and Dionysian elements represent unrestrained passion. Nietzsche also believes that Socratic rationalism and optimism brought about the end of Greek tragedy.

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*variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, Korb discusses the themes of justice and vengeance in Greek tragedy.*

Greek tragedies all raise questions about humankind's existence and its suffering. One of

> **EURIPIDES PRESENTS A VERY DIFFERENT PICTURE OF JUSTICE THAN HIS PREDECESSORS IN THE GREEK TRAGIC TRADITION. JUSTICE IS NO LONGER A MOTIVATING THEME BUT AN IRONIC ONE."**

their most insistent concerns was the elusive nature of justice, particularly divine justice, and the intrinsically linked concept of the validity of revenge. The ancient Greeks believed that the gods begrudged human greatness and caused people who were too successful to make poor choices of action. Often, these actions revolved around excessive pride, or hubris. Thus the terrible undoings that befell these prideful people could be seen as just punishment. Each of the three great tragedians raised such issues, but as they held unique perceptions of the world and the way they wanted to portray it, they were also unique in the depiction of justice.

Aeschylus inherited a belief in a just Zeus and hereditary guilt. Both of these threads can be found in his surviving tragedies. His plays sought to justify the gods' ways to the Greek people. Aeschylus's *Persians* depicts how Xerxes and his invading Persians are punished for their own offenses. Xerxes has been driven by his desire for dominance to go beyond what the gods have fated for him—control of Persia, not of Greece as well. Thus he is punished for his attempts to disrupt the cosmic order, and his defeat transforms him from the godlike man seen at the play's beginning to a mere mortal, dressed in tatters instead of royal finery, seen at the end of the play.

*Prometheus Bound*, one play in a trilogy, depicts divine justice specifically, as Zeus punishes Prometheus, who has saved humankind by sharing fire with them. He is chained to a craggy peak, sent to the underworld, and fed upon by a vulture every day. Aeschylus's text demonstrates Prometheus's heroic status as he submits to his prolonged, and seemingly unjust, punishment. The text glorifies Prometheus, who emerges as a martyr. That he eventually reconciles with Zeus (in the last play of the *Promethiad* trilogy, *Prometheus Unbound*, now lost) seems to prove that his extreme punishment was undeserved.

In other plays, Aeschylus uses more complex relationships and events to investigate the theme of justice. The ancient Greeks believed in the idea of hereditary guilt, and Aeschylus's plays evince this theory. Often it is not the unjust who are punished, but their descendants. The *Oresteia* is an ideal play to study the themes of revenge and justice; in this trilogy, these themes are intrinsically linked together. The human desire for vengeance is what drives the need for a prevailing justice.

In the first play of the trilogy, *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra murders her husband upon his return from the Trojan War. She kills Agamemnon in revenge for his sacrifice of their daughter at the beginning of the expedition against Troy, as well as to punish him for taking a mistress. After the deed is done, she stands over the body and insists to the chorus that justice has been accomplished. However, Apollo orders Orestes, the son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, to avenge his father's death and murder his mother. After he does so, the chorus sings a song of thanksgiving, celebrating the victory of justice. However, the third play of the trilogy finds Orestes pursued by the Furies, underworld avenging powers whom Clytemnestra has cursed upon him. Eventually, Orestes is brought to trial at the court of Athens, attended by the goddess Athena, who, when the vote of the jury is evenly split, votes to acquit him and provides a sanctuary where the furies may rest. Only then is the cycle of bloodshed and vengeance in the house of Atreus brought to an end. So, justice can now be found in the courts, aided by the intervention of Athena, rather than through the actions of family and tribal members seeking vengeance.

Sophocles was the next great tragedian. Charles Segal wrote of Sophocles in *Ancient Writers*, "While retaining Aeschylus' mood of deep religious seriousness, Sophocles deals with the question of divine justice and the problem of suffering in a more naturalistic way." Because his focus remains on the human world rather than the world of the gods, the issues of justice are more human-centered. Many critics and scholars believe that Sophocles most closely relates the truest state of human experience, thus the decisions made by Sophocles' characters rest more upon their mortal shoulders, not upon the shoulders of the gods.

*Electra* condenses the plot of the *Oresteia* into one play, which focuses on the daughter's desire for justice and vengeance for the death of Agamemnon. Isolated in the palace after her father's murder, Electra remains the sole voice raised against allowing the crime to go unpunished and unnoticed. She lives for only one thing—the return of Orestes so he can avenge the murder. When she learns the (false) news of his death, she attempts to enlist the help of her sister in the murder of Clytemnestra, but when her sister refuses, she resolves to carry out the matricide by herself. Although Orestes shows up at the last moment and carries out the murder while Electra waits outside the house with the chorus, Electra's single-minded purpose shows the consuming power of the desire for vengeance and a form—albeit a criminal one—of justice.

Sophocles's masterpiece, *Oedipus the King*, shows a different way that justice can be attained—through self-punishment. In this play, Oedipus has unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. Oedipus—left to die as a baby by his real father, rescued by a shepherd from a nearby kingdom, and adopted into the royal family of that kingdom—committed these crimes against the laws of nature without realizing what he was doing. Despite his lack of moral culpability, when Oedipus discovers what he has done, he blinds himself. While the play ends on a note of despair, Oedipus's action can be construed in a positive light, since he has administered punishment to himself and brought about justice for ill deeds. Instead of committing suicide, as his wife/mother does, Oedipus chooses a more extreme form of self-punishment, "For no one else of mortals except me can bear my sufferings."

Euripides presents a very different picture of justice than his predecessors in the Greek tragic tradition. Justice is no longer a motivating theme but an ironic one. In *Hippolytus*, the goddess Aphrodite takes revenge on Hippolytus because he refuses to worship her. She is not acting out of a respect for justice but out of spite. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus, scorned by Pentheus, causes a group of women, including Pentheus's mother, to murder and dismember him, while they were in a state of frenzy. Unlike the gods in the plays or Aeschylus and Sophocles, the gods in Euripides's plays cannot be appealed to for justice, nor will they help promote it, as Athena did in the *Eumenides*. Instead, in these two plays, Euripides shows their personal injustice, which has been

*Ruins of a Greek theater in Taormina, Italy* (© *Michael Maslan Historic Photographs / Corbis*)

seen earlier but never caused by such pettiness and self-indulgence.

In Euripides's play *Medea*, justice and vengeance take a shocking form. To punish her husband for forsaking her, Medea raises the idea of murdering their children. Her passion for revenge is so strong that, despite a long monologue in which she questions this choice, Medea decides this is the right action to take. Medea's inner conflict is what raises her to the status of tragic heroine. She closes her inner debate with these words: "Though I understand what sort of evil I am going / to do, still, heart is stronger than what I have / thought out, this heart that causes humankind's / greatest evils." Medea thus recognizes that the action she is taking is governed by the need for human vengeance, not by the desire to correct injustice. Also interesting is that, though the children suffer for the wrongdoings of their parents, it is not because of inherent guilt, so Medea reverses the idea of hereditary guilt that was such a crucial part of the *Oresteia*.

Euripides also has his own rendition of the *Oresteia*, the play *Orestes*. Orestes's revenge is of a dual nature: it is sanctioned by Apollo, who commanded the murder of Clytemnestra, thus it represents divine vengeance; it is also vengeance of a personal and heroic nature, because he also kills Clytemnestra to recover his birthright. However, because Euripides places greater emphasis on the individual's own choice of action than on his or her preordained fate laid out by the gods, Orestes's actions are viewed more as revenge than as justice. As the play begins, it is Orestes who must face the demands of justice, the justice of the city. As Christian Wolff wrote in *Ancient Writers*, "It is as though the heroic and divinely sanctioned mode of revenge were being put on trial by the human community."

In *Greek Tragedy on the American Stage*, Karelisa V. Hartigan noted that part of the appeal of the plays *Medea* and *Electra* is the theme of revenge. "The theme of Euripides's text has not seemed to trouble either those onstage or those in the audience overly much," she wrote. Indeed, modern audiences bring their own points of view to these plays, and looking through the eyes of feminism, some critics see Medea's act of revenge as stemming from Jason's "victimization" of her. A play such as Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, according to Hartigan, is less attractive to modern audiences because the title character takes no personal revenge against those who cause his suffering. Greek

tragedy continues to be relevant to modern audiences because the themes it presents are universal, crossing boundaries of time and place.

**Source:** Rena Korb, Critical Essay on Greek Drama, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## Chad Turner

*In this essay, Turner argues that the* Supplices*, in contrast to Aeschylus's earlier play* The Persae*, blurs ethnic and ethical distinctions between Greeks and non-Greeks through its inversions of the roles various groups portray.*

Scholars have described suppliant dramas as typically comprising three essential agents: a persecutor, a victim, and a protector. Malcolm Heath suggests that suppliant dramas use this structure to prompt their audiences toward "moral judgments and guiding reactions of sympathy and antipathy." In the *Supplices* of Aeschylus, the Danaids suggest to Pelasgus that the roles of persecutor, victim, and protector in their suppliancy belong to the Aegyptids, the Danaids and the Argives, respectively. I will argue, however, that a number of clues in the *Supplices* suggest that over the course of the Danaid trilogy, the participants in the suppliant drama act in ways that resist and ultimately reject these initial categorizations. The persecutor-victim-protector schema finally translates into Danaids-Argives-Aegyptids. This perversion of supplication's usual schema is symptomatic of other inversions found in the play. If in the *Persae* Aeschylus constructs an ethnic and, more importantly, an ethical polarity between Greek and Barbarian, then the Danaid trilogy might be read as a palinode of sorts to that earlier play. For while many of the *Supplices'* characters assert just such a rigid contrast between Greek and non-Greek, the text repeatedly undermines this reading, and instead blurs the ethnic and ethical distinctions between the two.

The Danaids' claim of victimization axiomatically depends upon the justness of their suppliant cause. The suppliant may be in the right by virtue of striving toward a socially accepted goal (e.g., burial of the dead, as in Eur. *Supp.*, or ritual purification, as in Aesch. *Eum.*), or, more vaguely, by simply suffering hardship from a position of weakness (e.g., as in Soph. *OC;* Eur. *Hcld.*). The Danaids fail to meet either of these criteria. Consequently, their assumption of the suppliant's role is invalid. Critics have essentially proposed two alternatives for the basis of the Danaids' plea for asylum. Many have argued

> PITTED AGAINST THE VERY DEFINITION OF BARBARISM, THE DANAIDS AND THEIR ARGIVE HOSTS SEEM TO CEMENT THE GREEK-BARBARIAN POLARITY BY INVOKING THAT VERY HELLENIC INSTITUTION, SUPPLICATION."

that they specifically flee marriage with their cousins—perhaps motivated by a fear of incest, or of marriage with violent barbarians, or else fearing for their father's life. Others argue that the Danaids flee marriage as an institution. The evidence, however, suggests that they harbor an absolute aversion against marriage, instilled in them by their father, who had learned from an oracle that he would be murdered by one of his sons-in-law.

A handful of passages virtually demand that the Danaids reject marriage as an institution. This much seems clear from the exchange that begins at 996–1009. Danaus entreats his daughters to beware of young men who would take advantage of their maidenhood:

> [ . . . ]
> I beg you, do not shame me,
> having the bloom that is to be admired by men.
> Delicate fruit is not at all easily guarded.
> Both beasts and men ravage them, both winged
> beasts and those on foot. Why indeed?
> Thus Cypris heralds fruit dripping with love,
> and against the fair-formed charms of maidens
> everyone approaching shoots a charmed
> arrow from the eye, vanquished by desire.
> Let us not suffer those things for which
> there has been great labor, for which the
>    great sea
> was plowed by oar,
> let us do no shame for us, pleasure for our
>    enemies . . .

He concludes his speech: [ . . . ] ("Only keep this command of your father, honor modesty more than life."). The Danaids respond at 1015–17:

> [ . . . ]
> Be confident in our youth, father. For unless
> the gods plan something new, we will not
> turn the course of our former intent.

Danaus' warning and his daughters' response are telling in that they directly follow the Argives' repeated assurances of protection. As the threat of an Aegyptid marriage is suspended, Danaus must fear the possibility of any marriage whatsoever. The Danaids respond by confirming that their virginal convictions remain intact: they will not sway from their "former intent." In their commentary H. F. Johansen and E. W. Whittle assert that here the Danaids merely assure their father that they will continue to resist an Aegyptid marriage—"it need not apply to a respectable marriage" with Argive men. Such an interpretation is unconvincing. The most natural implication of this passage is that the Danaids' avoidance of all marriage was a prior constant [. . .] previously challenged by the Aegyptids, and presently in no danger of wavering in the presence of potential Argive suitors. Johansen and Whittle are correct to note that Danaus does seem suspicious that his daughters might yet succumb to the temptations of marriage. One should not, however, assume that his fear of their sexual activity necessarily indicates a pro-marriage stance on their part.

The exchange between the Danaids and the secondary chorus in the exodos also strongly suggests that the Danaids harbor an absolute rejection of marriage. At 1030–3 the chorus sing:

> [. . .]
>
> May chaste Artemis look upon
> this band with compassion, and may
> wedlock not come through constraint of Cytherea.
> May that prize be my enemies'.

At 1034–42 the secondary chorus counters this stance, extolling the reverence due to marriage:

> [. . .]
>
> Yet this well-intended song does not neglect
>   Cypris,
> for with Hera she is almost as powerful as Zeus,
> the god of varied wiles is honored
> with solemn rites. Accompanying their dear
>   mother
> are Longing, and Persuasion, to which enchantress
> nothing is denied. A portion of Aphrodite is
>   also
> given to Harmony, whispering paths of the
>   Loves . . .

The secondary chorus concludes with the pronouncement "The ending of marriage has accompanied many women before" [. . .]. These generalized statements defending marriage as such would be completely superfluous were the issue for the Danaids limited simply to an Aegyptid marriage. Similarly, the secondary chorus' later calls for moderation at 1059 and 1061 would suggest that the Danaids hold a correspondingly extreme antipathy toward all marriage. As a suppliant cause, this absolute rejection of marriage and all that goes with it—family, fertility, the underpinnings of the *oikos* and ultimately the *polis*—is hardly on a par with burying the dead or seeking protection from tyranny. The latter two were values deeply entrenched in Athenian society, whereas perpetual virginity on a massive scale was antithetical to it.

The Danaids, then, enlist Pelasgus' aid in a dubious cause, and their exchange at 340–44 suggests that Pelasgus knows it:

> [. . .]
>
> King: How can I be pious toward you?
> Chor.: Do not give us back to the demanding
>   sons of Aegyptus.
> King: You say heavy things, to undertake a
>   new war.
> Chor.: But Justice protects her allies.
> King: If indeed she shared in the business from
>   the start.

Pelasgus, then, doubts the validity of the Danaids' suppliant status. Are they, as suppliants by definition must be, victims clinging to a just cause? Repeatedly, the Danaids argue affirmatively. They characterize their request with a form of the word [dike] or [themis] fifteen times. And yet, the Danaids never argue the strictly legal merits of their abstinence from marriage. Pelasgus requests that they do just that, but they resort instead to strident histrionics:

> [. . .]
>
> King: If the sons of Aegyptus rule over you by
> the laws of your city, claiming to be the
> closest of kin, who would wish to oppose
> them? It is necessary to flee according to your
> own laws at home, how they have no authority
> over you.
> Chor.: May I never become subject to the
>   powers
> of men!

The legality of the entire matter has prompted extensive debate. Johansen and Whittle offer the most sensible analysis:

> The Egyptian law assumed by Pelasgus corresponds closely enough to Athenian law and practice respecting girls' control and marriage by their male next of kin for the legal position outlined in *Supplices* to have been easily understandable by Aeschylus' audience . . . Danaus is not represented in *Supplices* as being legally

next of kin and [kyrios] of his own daughters. It is assumed ... that these rights are already enjoyed by the Aegyptiads; that they do not depend on the contingency of Danaus' death is further suggested by his twice mentioning that contingency without any reference to the legal position.

As tragic suppliants, then, the Danaids are atypical in their embodiment of a dubious cause. Moreover, they fail to act the part of helpless victims in their relationship with their would-be protectors at Argos. J. Gould notes that supplication is "symbolically aggressive, yet unhurtful." By speaking from an avowed position of powerlessness, Gould suggests, the suppliant appeals to the [aidōs] of the would-be protector. The condition of aidōs implies a "reciprocity of behavior and attitude." In the *Supp.*, we find the Danaids have reversed the usual power dynamic between suppliant and protector, and all reciprocity is lacking. While there is often an implicit warning of divine sanction should a suppliant be refused, the Danaids amazingly threaten to be their own agents of retribution if the Argives disregard their supplication. On its own merits, the Danaids' cause fails to persuade Pelasgus to help; as late as line 452, he demurs from assuming the role of protector to the self-proclaimed suppliant victims: [ . . . ] ("Indeed, I shrink from this quarrel.") For the first half of the drama, the Danaids' improper suppliant cause fails to arouse a feeling of [aidōs] in Pelasgus. Why, then, does the king finally relent? This reversal, as so many have noted, comes as the result of threatened suicide at 455–67. Faced with a "pollution beyond exaggeration" [ . . . ] brought on by the Danaids' mass suicide, Pelasgus agrees to champion their cause.

The significance of this threat has never, I think, been fully appreciated. Gould correctly recognizes that in Greek literature "The first and most obvious thing to note about the behaviour of the suppliant is that he goes through a series of gestures and procedures that together constitute total self-abasement." The suppliant in literature, Gould goes on to suggest, assumes the position of a slave in relation to the supplicated. By threatening to inflict a terrible pollution on Argos, however, the Danaids instead effectively assume the role of vengeful deities in relation to the supplicated; rather than professing to be in a position of weakness below Pelasgus, they threaten to take a position of power over him. This arrangement cannot be termed a reciprocal demonstration of [aidōs]. Rather, because the Danaids cannot reasonably expect that Pelasgus be [aidoios] toward their stance against marriage, they extort his aid and rely upon his feelings of [aidōs] toward the Argive people. Unable to persuade Pelasgus as powerless victims of Aegyptid persecution, they assume the role of potential persecutors against the victimized city of Argos; the usual power structure between the suppliant and the supplicated has been reversed. While the Danaids' transformation from victim to persecutor is clearly begun in the *Supplices*, the victimization of Argos was likely only fully realized in the remainder of the trilogy. Peter Burian has cited the axiom that in Greek tragedy, a city granting refuge to a suppliant receives some benefit. We find this dramatic rule adhered to in Sophocles' *OC*, Euripides' *Hcld.* and *Supp.*, and Aeschylus' own *Eum.* At lines 625–709, the Danaids invoke at length blessings for their Argive protectors. For some time scholars have recognized the ironic foreshadowing in this ode. As a result of granting the Danaids asylum, Argos will not receive joyous blessings, but rather suffer tremendous anguish. For example, we know that at some point later in the trilogy, the Danaids murder their cousins. As the audience doubtlessly knew to expect this, they could not but see the irony in the Danaids' prayer, "May no manslaying ruin come upon this city, rending it asunder" [ . . . ] Also fairly certain is the advent of a war between the Argives and Aegyptids, despite the Danaids' repeated prayers to the contrary.

On the basis of these fairly certain examples of ironic foreshadowing, we may extrapolate two more. I follow Alan Sommerstein and others in assuming that after the forecast Argive-Aegyptid war, Danaus succeeds the fallen Pelasgus to the throne specifically as a tyrant, rather than a king. This difference in their modes of leadership prefigures their contrasting attitudes toward their Argive subjects. As many have remarked, Pelasgus demonstrates a concern for the Argive *demos* beyond even his constitutional requirements as king. I would argue that two excerpts from the Argive benediction ironically foreshadow the abuses of Danaus' future tyranny. In the second antistrophe, the Danaids foreshadow the murder of the Aegyptids specifically as a function of the bad governmental policy by which Danaus will soon rule Argos:

[…]

May the state be regulated well,
the state of those who honor great Zeus,
most of all as the guardian of the guest-right …

Then in the fourth strophe the Danaids go on to pray:

[…]

May the people who rule the *polis*
guard without fear its honors,
a prudent government taking common counsel.
And may they give honest justice to strangers—
before arming Ares—
without pains.

The opposite likely takes place: whereas King Pelasgus emphatically ruled by means of a "prudent government taking common counsels," the tyrant Danaus will not; whereas King Pelasgus championed the Danaid *xenoi* to save his people from the pollution of fifty suicides, the tyrant Danaus will not hesitate to bring pollution upon Argos by ordering the homicide of fifty Aegyptid *xenoi*. In this ode we find compelling allusions to the further victimization of Argos.

Thus far I have examined the Danaids' and the Argives' shifting roles within the persecutor-victim-protector schema of the drama. It remains to examine how the Aegyptids might complete the transformation of this dramatic form by evolving from the role of persecutors to that of protectors. This transformation would emerge almost entirely within the character of Lynceus, the only Aegyptid to survive his wedding night. Certainly, in his apparently happy union with Hypermestra, Lynceus would seem to have abandoned the role of persecutor. If I am correct to suggest that Danaus and his daughters have usurped the role of persecutor against the victimized people of Argos, might we not expect Lynceus to occupy the vacant role of protector?

Again, the uncertainties of reconstructing the trilogy make any remarks extremely tentative, but Aeschylus' tendency toward foreshadowing will render them at least plausible. We have already noted the likely tyranny of Danaus in the remainder of the trilogy. His tyranny, I have followed others in arguing, reaches full bloom when he orders the murder of the Aegyptids, inflicting a terrible pollution upon Argos. D. J. Conacher has suggested an ironic forecast of this pollution and its eventual expiation at lines 260–7. When introducing himself to the Danaids, Pelasgus embarks upon a digression about the name of his kingdom:

[…]

The plain of the this land was named Apian
long ago, for a mortal surgeon.
For Apis, coming from the ends of Naupactus,
the seer and healer son of Apollo cleansed
this land of manslaying monsters, that the
earth sent up, defiled by pollution of ancient
blood … a hostile co-habitation of teeming
  serpents.

Conacher writes of the passage, "[We] should ask, perhaps, whether the King's reference to ancient 'blood pollution … surgeries and deliverances' … performed on this land may not be an ironic anticipation of similar events to come."

I agree with Conacher that Pelasgus' digression does foreshadow the eventual purification of the Aegyptid murders. I would only add that the agent of the original purification, Apis, suggests Lynceus as the agent of the purification to come. Though Apis here is a Greek, there was also a mythic tradition that made Apis an Egyptian physician who came to Greece or else an Argive king who settled in Memphis. Although they detect no foreshadowing in the passage, Johansen and Whittle suggest Aeschylus here "perhaps establishes a link between [Greece and Egypt] from the mere identity of name." The duality of Apis in myth is suggestive of Lynceus, an Aegyptid who is Greek through his descent from Io, and who in the mythic tradition founds a royal line at Argos with Hypermestra. Who better to save Argos from pollution than its new king? By deposing the tyrant Danaus and rescuing Argos from this second pollution, Lynceus discards the role of persecutor for that of protector; in so doing, he completes the trilogy's reassignment of roles in the persecutor-victim-protector schema initially suggested by the Danaids' supplication.

Francis M. Dunn writes, "When a play begins with a suppliant scene, it usually does so in order to present a moral or political crisis in clear, unambiguous terms." The *Supplices* of Aeschylus evinces no such agenda. Instead, we find an unsympathetic, menacing group of victims; we see the beginnings of a victimized would-be protector city; and we have reason to suspect a reformed persecutor who, with a heroic flourish, saves the day. Why? To what end might Aeschylus have decided to so thoroughly confuse the usual structure of tragic supplication? The typical suppliant plot would seem to be an ideal narrative vehicle for clearly differentiating

heroes from villains, right from wrong. It is therefore not surprising that the Athenians would employ the suppliant plot in its furtherance of the Greek-versus-Barbarian ideals during and after the Persian Wars. A united Greece led by Athens upheld the distinctly Hellenic values of *dike*, *eusebeia*, and *sophrosyne* against the barbaric Persian forces of *bia*, *asebeia*, and *anomia*. Greek artisans imputed a timelessness to this polarity by the employment of metaphors featuring mythical Amazons, Giants, and Centaurs. As part and parcel of their protection of Hellenic values, the Athenians prided themselves as the defenders of Heracles' suppliant children against Eurystheus, as well as the advocates for the burial of the Argive dead at Thebes on behalf of their suppliant mothers. These were among the mythic exploits recounted in *epitaphioi logoi* to delineate the righteousness of Athens in contrast with the barbaric East and even with the rest of Greece.

On the very basic level of plot, the conflict of Aeschylus' *Supplices* seems to mirror that of his *Persae*: invaders from the barbaric East threaten the values of the Hellenic West. The Danaids themselves impute this structure by asserting their Greek identity early in the drama, and castigating the barbarity of the Aegyptids frequently thereafter. The menacing threats of the Egyptian herald near the end of the play seem to confirm the Danaids' aspersions, especially when contrasted with the democratic monarchy of Pelasgus. Pitted against the very definition of barbarism, the Danaids and their Argive hosts seem to cement the Greek-Barbarian polarity by invoking that very Hellenic institution, supplication. Edith Hall has demonstrated that in the *Persae*, Aeschylus constructs a polarized schema whereby Greek is systematically differentiated from Persian both ethnically and ethically. In the *Supplices*, various characters impute a similar polarity between the Danaid fugitives and their Aegyptid pursuers. Employing an ethical vocabulary very much evocative of language in the *Persae*, the Danaids present themselves as agents of *sophrosyne*, *themis* and *dikê*, harried by perpetrators of *asebeia*, *bia*, and *hubris*. Inasmuch as Hellenic and Athenian virtues are found to be identical in tragedy, the Danaids' sponsorship by the emphatically democratic monarch Pelasgus furthers their identification with Hellenic *ethê*, while the threats of the Aegyptid herald at the close of the *Supplices* would seem to confirm the Danaids' claims of Aegyptid

barbarity. Indeed, at 914–5 Pelasgus himself characterizes the conflict as one between Greeks and barbarians: "Being a barbarian, you toy too much with Greek women, and erring greatly you've got nothing straight in your mind" [...]

In the *Persae*, Aeschylus articulates the polarity between Greek and barbarian in absolute terms, imputing both complete heterogeneity between the two cultures, as well as complete homogeneity within each. The complexity with which Aeschylus treats the suppliant plot adumbrates a larger pattern of confusion that disrupts the popularly held dichotomy between Greeks and barbarians in the fifth century B.C.E. Instead of the *Persae*'s stark dichotomies, the *Supplices* confounds the divide between East and West. Ethnically and ethically, the *Supplices* confuses the criteria by which the *Persae* had differentiated right from wrong. Although the barbarian status of the Aegyptids is not for them the central issue—marriage is—the Danaids construe the question of marriage into a question of Greek versus Barbarian. Ironically, framing the conflict in these terms casts further doubt onto the righteousness of the Danaid cause. Though the *Persae* is set at Susa, the dominant geography of the drama comprises the cities and territories that made up the Delian League by 472. In the *Supplices* Aeschylus offers a similar vision of Greece's mythic past. The Argos that serves as the setting of the *Supplices* is not the same Argos that we find in the *Oresteia*. At 254–59, Pelasgus describes the boundaries of Argos:

> [...]
>
> Over the entire land through which the hallowed Strymon
> courses, toward the setting of the sun, I am ruler.
> I mark as my borders the land of the Perraebi, west of
> Pindus, near the Paioni, and the Dodonian mountians
> The boundary of the running sea is their border. I also
> rule over those lands near them.

Thus the Argos of Pelasgus comprises virtually all of mainland Greece. As in the *Persae*, we moreover find this Panhellenic representation substantially reconfigured specifically to resemble Athens. The speech wherein Danaus recounts the Argive vote to honor the Danaids' supplication makes a number of allusions to the procedures of the Athenian assembly: to the language of decrees, to voting by a show of hands, to the punishment of *atimia*; Danaus even makes

punning references to Athenian *demokratia* [...] In the *Supplices*, all of Greece is Argos and Argos, Athens. Although the Danaids try to insinuate themselves in this Hellenic world while portraying the Aegyptids as the barbarian Other, various textual markers below, however, suggest that the distinction is not so steadfast.

Because they honor the Danaids' suppliant status, Pelasgus and the Argive people find themselves at odds with the Aegyptids. The confrontation between Pelasgus and the Egyptian herald has all the trappings of the Greek-Barbarian dichotomy found in the *Persae*. When Danaus first sees the Egyptian flotilla approaching, he remarks on the Aegyptids' black skin [...] His daughters wonder at the Aegyptids' "great, black army" [...] Next, in the space of some eighty lines, Danaus and his daughters alternately call the Aegyptids crazed [...] impious [...] murderous [...]; monstrous [...], oppressive and hubristic [...] In Aeschylus' hands, it appears the Aegyptids might as well be Xerxes' Persians.

Such a conflict might well be expected from the author of the *Persae*, with issues of right and wrong clearly defined along a convenient West-East axis. As in his treatment of supplication, however, Aeschylus here, too, injects difficulty into a formerly simple ideology. One element of that difficulty lies in the mixed heritage of the Danaids. Upon their entrance, the Danaids identify themselves as the Other:

> [...]
> May Zeus Protector willingly grant
> our ship this journey, seized from the
> finely sanded mouths of the Nile.

Yet this Otherness is not absolute. They claim ultimately Greek parentage:

> [...]
> [Danaus ... achieved] landing at the
> land of Argos, whence our race boasts
> to descend, from Zeus' touching and
> breathing upon a cow driven mad by
> the gadfly.

Nevertheless, the Danaids to all outward appearances are barbarians. The maidens themselves speak of their barbarous speech [...], and Pelasgus is immediately struck by their foreign appearance upon meeting them:

> [...]
> Whence comes this foreign company
> we address, luxuriant in barbarous robes
> and veils? Not the Argive clothing of
> women, nor from the other places of Greece.

Ethnically, then, the Danaids appear to be Egyptian despite their Argive ancestry. Hence, Pelasgus goes on to liken their appearance to Libyans, Ethiopians, and Amazons. In the *Persae* one mark of barbarian Otherness is language. Here, too, the Danaids often appear a group of 'Them' Egyptians rather than 'Us' Greeks. They are keenly aware of this, characterizing themselves as "foreign-sounding" [...]. We find in the Danaids' speech all the markers of barbarian speech found in the *Persae*: repetition and alliteration, anaphora, and exotic cries. Even in noting their foreign speech, the Danaids sound foreign: [...] ("You understand well, earth, my foreign speech."). According to *LSJ*, Karbanos is a foreign loan-word equivalent to barbaros. The overt ethnicity of the Danaids therefore mitigates Pelasgus' summary of the conflict as one pitting barbarian men versus Greek women.

The actions of the Danaids and Aegyptids alike further baffle any attempt to schematize the moral landscape of the drama's conflict. Let us grant for a moment the essential Greekness of the Danaids, all appearances to the contrary. It is on the basis of this premise that they fled to Argos, and on which Pelasgus allows them to plead their suppliant cause. Given their eagerness to take refuge in the Greek world, it is remarkable the extent to which Danaus and his daughters will assume the ethics of the barbarian culture from which they flee. Above we saw many ethically barbarian markers attributed to the Aegyptids: *asebeia*, *hubris*, *bia*, and *anomia*. Despite their claims to a Hellenic identity, the Danaids and their father also exhibit many qualities that, at least, are antithetical to the Hellenic culture, and at worst, are associated with the barbarian. We have already examined the evidence for the Danaids' general aversion to marriage, noting moreover its opposition toward the contemporary Greek culture. The Danaids' eventual violation of *xenia* in murdering their cousins is an especially un-Greek act with strong connotations of violent barbarism. Notable examples of barbarous violations of *xenia* in myth include the *Odyssey*'s Laestrygonians and Cyclopes; the Thracian king Diomedes, who fed his guests to his flesh-eating horses; Procrustes, who maimed travellers who lay in his bed; and another Thracian king, Polymestor, who murders the son of Priam and Hecuba. These actions of the Danaids greatly muddle the familiar polarity between

Greek West and barbarian East. Whereas the *Persae* exalted Greek values shared by all, the *Supplices* dramatizes Greek values suddenly in question.

One of the less obvious manifestations of the Danaids' barbarian nature lies in their manipulation of supplication. As we have already determined, the Danaids' assumption of suppliant status involves a fair amount of manipulation: they are less than forthcoming about the legality of their cause; and they virtually extort the aid of Pelasgus through threats of mass suicide. Edith Hall argues that Danaus is responsible for most of this manipulation: "In Aeschylus' *Supplices* the length and detail of Danaus' prescription to his daughters for their appeal to the Argives [176–203] indicates that the audience is supposed to take note of his calculated 'stage management' of the scene." Hall does well to point out that Danaus' coaching typifies what would become the characterization of the wily Egyptians in later comedy and oratory. Also salutary is her quotation of an Aeschylean fragment (fr. 373 N2): [ . . . ] ("Egyptians are terribly good at weaving wiles"). The suggestion that the fragment belongs to the Danaid trilogy is attractive. The basic sequence of action in the Danaids' supplication runs thus: a manipulative assumption of the suppliant role forces a ruler to grant asylum; this protection of the suppliant's rights results in great harm for that ruler and/or others. We find the same pattern of action in those tragedies where a more overtly barbarian character claims the role of suppliant, only to effect great violence. In Euripides' *Medea*, the eponymous barbarian persuades a wary Creon to honor her supplication, with dire results for the king and his family. Hecuba in her name-play likewise assumes the role of a suppliant to facilitate an act of violence against Polymestor. In Aeschylus' *Supplices*, the Danaids' supplication has similar consequences.

Logically, our reevaluation of the Danaids within the Greek-Barbarian polarity would demand the same for the Aegyptids. On the face of it, they seem very much to reprise Xerxes' armies in the *Persae*: described in uniformly barbarian terms, they invade the shores of Greece, demanding submission under threat of war. The Danaids suggest that their struggle against the Aegyptids is one of *dike* versus *hubris* [ . . . ] Yet just as there is much that is barbaric about the

Danaids, there is much that is Hellenic in these barbarians. Although never represented as Greek, the Aegyptids alone pursue a marriage that a contemporary audience would have regarded as quite proper. Moreover, we have seen how Pelasgus' historical digression at 260–7 seems to predict the ascension of the Aegyptid Lynceus as a sort of inverted Gigantomachy, wherein a civilizing hero travels from East to West, defeating the violent monsters born in Greece. The likely ascension of King Lynceus at trilogy's end would signal the demise of Danaus' tyranny and a return to Pelasgus' brand of "democratic" monarchy, as I intend to argue elsewhere. The story of Harmodius and Aristogiton could not claim to be more representative of what it meant to be Greek in the fifth century BCE.

On the surface, the *Supplices* presents the conflict between the Danaids and Aegyptids as the structural equivalent of that between Greeks and Persians in Aeschylus' *Persae*. To conclude, I would like to suggest briefly why the historical developments between 472 and 463 might have thwarted a mere reprisal of the earlier play's Panhellenic chauvinism. The subjugation of Naxos and Thasos c. the mid-460's represented a blurring of the Delian League's original ideology, constructed along a clear West-versus-East axis. From 479 to 476 the sequence Marathon-Salamis-Plataea-Mycale-Eion connoted an unwavering Athenian righteousness and the *koinonia* of Panhellenic freedom. Conversely, the later sequence Naxos-Eurymedon-Thasos revealed Greek fragmentation and an Athenian sense of righteousness that tailored itself according to circumstance. Athens and the League now preferred the reduction of weak Hellenic *poleis* over their liberation from Persian mastery. A mere two years after the production of the Danaid trilogy, Athens would secure an alliance with Argos, a former Medizer; such a move would have been unthinkable in 472. The *Supplices* likewise imparts ambiguity on formerly certain Hellenic values and institutions. Although they try to assume the position of helpless Greeks under assault by barbarous Egyptians, Danaus and his daughters nonetheless exhibit a number of troubling barbaric attitudes. Instead of celebrating the spread of Hellenic power from West to East, evidence suggests that this trilogy details a dynastic power-struggle moving from East to West: the Greek king Pelasgus gives way to the putatively Greek tyrant Danaus, who in turn gives way to the barbarian Lynceus. Paradoxically, however, it is this outward movement toward barbarism that

will secure the Hellenic values so grievously compromised in the *Supplices*. Marriage wins out over extreme virginity, the rights of suppliants and guests find their proper limits, and thinly disguised democratic values triumph over Persian-styled despotism. The Danaid trilogy, it seems, completely reverses the Greek-Barbarian polarity found in the *Persae*. It would be odd, indeed, if the political changes between 472 and 463 did not have some bearing on Aeschylus' transformation as a political thinker during those same years.

**Source:** Chad Turner, "Perverted Supplication and Other Inversions in Aeschylus' Danaid Trilogy," in *Classical Journal*, Vol. 97, No. 1, October/November 2001, pp. 27–50.

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# Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance was a period between World War I and the Great Depression when black artists and writers flourished in the United States. Critics and historians have assigned varying dates to the movement's beginning and end, but most tend to agree that by 1917 there were signs of increased cultural activity among black artists in the Harlem area of New York City and that by the mid-1930s the movement had lost much of its original vigor. While Harlem was the definite epicenter of black culture during this period and home to more blacks than any other urban area in the nation in the years after World War I, other cities, such as Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, fostered similar but smaller communities of black artists.

The movement came about for a number of reasons. Between 1890 and 1920, the near collapse of the southern agricultural economy, coupled with a labor shortage in the North, prompted about two million blacks to migrate to northern cities in search of work. In addition, World War I had left an entire generation of African Americans asking why, given that they had fought and many had died for their country, they were still afforded second-class status. By the end of the war, many northern American cities, such as Harlem, had large numbers of African Americans emboldened by new experiences and better paychecks, energized by the possibility for change. A number of black intellectuals, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1917
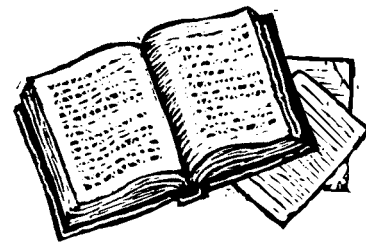
Locke, were making it clear that the time had come for white America to take notice of the achievements of African-American artists and thinkers. The idea that whites might come to accept blacks if they were exposed to their artistic endeavors became popular.

To this end, magazines such as the *Crisis*, published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and *Opportunity* featured the prose and poetry of Harlem Renaissance stars Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston. Major New York-based publishing houses began to search for new black voices and print their poems, short stories, and novels. White intellectual society embraced these writers and supported—financially and through social contacts—their efforts to educate Americans about their race, culture, and heritage through their art. Ultimately, however, the financial backing began to run dry in the early 1930s with the collapse of the New York stock market and the ensuing worldwide economic depression. The Renaissance had run its course.



*Zora Neale Hurston* (AP Images)

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Countee Cullen (1903–1946)

Born May 30, 1903, in Louisville, Kentucky (although a few accounts claim Baltimore or New York City), Countee Cullen is believed to have been reared by his paternal grandmother, who died when he was fifteen. He was then adopted by the Reverend Frederick Cullen, later the head of the Harlem chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and introduced to the lively intellectual and cultural life of New York. He received an undergraduate degree from New York University and a master's degree from Harvard University.

Cullen, a writer of both poetry and prose, believed that art should be where whites and blacks find common ground. In 1925, his most well-known work, *Color*, was published to nearly universal praise. In the 1930s, he turned to teaching and eventually began producing his plays. Cullen received numerous awards for his work, including a Guggenheim fellowship in 1928. He died of uremic poisoning January 9, 1946, in New York City.

### W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963)

William Edgar Burghardt Du Bois, or, as he is more commonly known, W. E. B. Du Bois, was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, February 23, 1868. Trained as a sociologist, Du Bois received his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from Harvard University. He condemned racism in the United States and was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He wrote numerous books on race issues and worked as a university professor.

In addition to his support of young writers during the Harlem Renaissance, Du Bois's 1903 sociological examination of African Americans, *The Souls of Black Folk*, helped create the atmosphere in which many of the Renaissance writers and artists could flourish. He coined the phrase "talented tenth" to denote the group of highly educated, culturally adept, and politically astute blacks who would lead the rest of the race into better lives. By the early 1930s, Du Bois became disillusioned about life in the United States, and his political beliefs forced him to resign from his NAACP position. His politics led to membership in the Socialist Party, and he experienced confrontations with the U.S. government on

several occasions. After joining the Communist Party in 1960, Du Bois moved to Ghana, where he died on August 27, 1963.

### Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882–1961)

Jessie Redmon Fauset was born in Snow Hill, New Jersey, April 27, 1884, the daughter of a minister. She was the first black woman to graduate from Cornell University, received a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. In addition to writing novels, poetry, short stories, and essays, Fauset taught French in the Washington, D.C., schools and worked as a journal editor. It was in this last capacity that she encouraged many of the more well-known writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

While her reputation as an editor of other writers' works has tended to outshine her reputation as a fiction writer, many critics consider the novel *Plum Bun* Fauset's strongest work. In it, she tells the story of a young black girl who could pass for white but ultimately claims her racial identity and pride. She wrote three other novels, with mixed reviews, but many readers of that period's writings believe that Fauset's strengths lay in nonfiction. Fauset died of heart disease April 30, 1961, in Philadelphia.

### Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

James Langston Hughes, or just Langston Hughes as he was commonly known, was a writer of poetry, short stories, novels, plays, song lyrics, and essays. His frank portrayals of the black community around him often provoked sharp comments from African-American literary critics. Hughes's retort, that he was simply depicting life as he saw it, did not impress the critics who believed that he should present black life in the best possible light to help improve the plight of African Americans.

Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, on February 1, 1902, to a father who was a rancher, a businessman, and a lawyer, and a mother who worked as a teacher. Hughes's background was varied and colorful: By the time his first poetry book, *The Weary Blues*, came out in 1926, he had spent time as a cook, waiter, truck farmer, college student, nightclub doorman in Paris, and sailor, and he had lived in numerous American cities and foreign countries. He died on May 22, 1967, in New York City of congestive heart failure.

### Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960)

Zora Neale Hurston, the daughter of a preacher and a seamstress, was born January 7, 1891, in Eatonville, Florida. Hurston quit school at age thirteen to care for her brother's children but later attended a Baltimore high school, thanks to a generous patron. Her undergraduate and graduate studies in anthropology at Barnard College and Columbia University influenced her novels, plays, and two published collections of African-American folklore.

Hurston fought against a common belief that the poverty often associated with black American culture made it less valuable. She continually encouraged blacks, especially those of the educated middle class, to recognize their rural cultural heritage. Many criticized her writing as bawdy and her most famous work, the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as simplistic and reactionary. Other readers, ultimately the majority, praised the book as offering positive self-affirmation for African Americans.

Hurston also worked as a maid, a staff writer for Paramount Studios, a librarian at the Library of Congress, and a theater professor, and she received Guggenheim fellowships in 1936 and 1939. On January 28, 1960, she died in Fort Pierce, Florida.

### James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938)

While James Weldon Johnson did produce literature during the Harlem Renaissance period, he is noted for his civic leadership and support of young black writers. Born on June 17, 1871, in Jacksonville, Florida, Weldon was at various times a poet, novelist, editor, lawyer, journalist, educator, civil rights leader, songwriter, translator, and diplomat. He received undergraduate and graduate degrees from Atlanta University and did graduate work in creative literature at Columbia University.

Johnson's work as a newspaper owner attracted the attention of such luminaries as W. E. B. Du Bois. Johnson's only novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, is remembered for its realism, and his groundbreaking study of black music, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, educated many Americans about the fact that black music encompassed more than minstrel shows; this book paved the way for his depiction of black sermons as poetry in *God's Trombones*. During the 1920s, Weldon served as the head of the NAACP and edited a critically

acclaimed collection of verse entitled *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. He died following a car accident in Wiscasset, Maine, on June 26, 1938.

### Nella Larsen (1891–1964)

Nella Larsen was born in Chicago, Illinois, on April 13, 1891; her father was black West Indian and her mother was Danish. This mixed heritage became the foundation for her novels *Quicksand* and *Passing*, in which the heroines struggle with the challenges of being neither black nor white. Many critics have said that *Quicksand*, winner of a Harmon Foundation Prize in 1928, was one of the period's best novels. Larsen's education included time at Fisk University in Nashville, the University of Copenhagen, as well as librarian and nursing schools in New York. In 1930, Larsen was the first African-American woman to receive a Guggenheim fellowship.

A series of incidents, including a mistaken charge of plagiarism and her divorce from physicist husband Elmer S. Imes, caused Larsen to leave literary society and spend the final twenty years of her life working as a nurse in Manhattan hospitals. She died March 30, 1964, in New York City of heart failure.

### Alain Locke (1886–1954)

Alain Le Roy Locke, born September 13, 1886, in Philadelphia, was the son of two schoolteachers. He received a doctorate from Harvard in 1918, after studying philosophy at Oxford University, where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He also studied at universities in Paris and Berlin. Some critics credit Locke with bringing about the Harlem Renaissance in earnest with the 1926 publication of *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, his compilation of the best early-twentieth-century African-American literature.

Locke believed that the best chance for blacks to become accepted in the United States lay in exposing white communities to the work of black writers and artists. He also encouraged black artists to look to their history and culture for inspiration. In addition to serving as the chairman of the Howard University Department of Philosophy for more than forty years, Locke published and edited other books on African-American music, history, and poetry. He died in New York City on June 9, 1954, after a long illness.

### Claude McKay (1889–1948)

Claude McKay (born Festus Claudius McKay) was born September 15, 1889, to a farming couple in the British West Indies—what later became Jamaica. McKay reveled in British poetry and learning about European philosophy while in school. After he began to write his own poetry, however, one of his teachers encouraged him to stop imitating the English style and develop his own voice—a suggestion he embraced.

In 1912, he left Jamaica to enroll at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, thanks to a monetary award for his book of poetry, *Songs of Jamaica*. He made his way to New York City by working as a laborer. McKay's poetry became more militant as he experienced racism and began publishing in the *Liberator*, a magazine run by a well-known American Communist, Max Eastman. In 1928, after traveling around the world for a number of years, including trips to the Soviet Union, McKay published his provocative and controversial first novel, *Home to Harlem*. During the 1920s, McKay also participated in Communist Party activities in the United States. He died of heart failure in Chicago on May 22, 1948.

### Jean Toomer (1894–1967)

Born in Washington, D.C., on December 26, 1894, into a racially mixed family, Jean Toomer spent his early years living in primarily white, well-to-do neighborhoods. When he was a teenager, the family suffered a financial setback and began living as an average black family, sending Jean to an all-black high school. He attended a number of universities but decided on being a writer during his year at the City College of New York. For one year, between 1921 and 1922, Toomer worked as the principal of a rural black school in Georgia, an experience that gave him a chance to investigate his black roots.

Toomer wrote some of the most experimental and progressive literature of the early twentieth century. His first novel, *Cane*, published in 1923, combines poetry and prose and is considered a masterpiece of *avant-garde* writing (writing that is considered at the forefront for the period or somewhat experimental). He also published plays, and numerous journals printed his essays and short stories. Toomer died in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, on March 30, 1967.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Cane

Jean Toomer's *Cane* is a three-part novel comprising both poems and short stories. Published in 1923, the work was hailed as a revolutionary exploration of black city and rural life in early twentieth century America.

Toomer's experimentation with style, structure, and language reflects the influence of the numerous *avant-garde* writers and artists (those whose work is considered groundbreaking or somewhat experimental) he met while living in the Greenwich Village section of New York City. The book received much praise from the critics for its efforts to break from typical realism and for its exciting use of language but garnered little popular success. While Toomer went on to write essays and plays, *Cane* was his only published book.

### Color

In 1925, Countee Cullen published his first collection of poems, *Color*, to high praise. Cullen's work, including the poetry in *Color*, was known for its beauty and lyricism, despite featuring incidents of racism. Alain Locke referred to Cullen as "a genius" in his review in *Opportunity*, published not long after the release of Cullen's collection, comparing Cullen with the poets A. E. Houseman and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Both black and white readers eagerly awaited Cullen's first book; in fact, his poetry especially that found in his first collection was so popular that many blacks of the day knew Cullen's verses by heart. The best-known poem from this collection is "Heritage," in which Cullen considers the meaning of Africa to himself and African Americans. The collection won a Harmon Foundation award in 1925.

### God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse

James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* was published in 1927. This collection of poetry established Johnson as one of the literary stars of the period and reflected the style and rhythm of the preaching that the author heard in African-American churches. Countee Cullen, reviewing the collection in *The Bookman*, called Johnson's work "magnificent." Many critics noted that Johnson does not use dialect in this poetry collection, and generally the response to the poet's decision was favorable.



# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- In 1984, Francis Ford Coppola directed *The Cotton Club*, a movie starring Richard Gere, Diane Lane, and Gregory Hines, about the famous jazz nightclub in Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s. The film was distributed by Orion Pictures Corporation.

- In 1937, Claude McKay's novel *Banjo* was made into the film *Big Fella*, distributed by British Lion Film Corporation.

- The Langston Hughes short story "Cora Unashamed" was made into a television film of the same name in 2000, distributed by the Public Broadcasting Service.

- *Rhapsodies in Black: Music and Words from the Harlem Renaissance* is a boxed set with four CDs featuring various artists of the period reading and performing their works and music. Langston Hughes, for example, reads his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and Duke Ellington performs "The Cotton Club Stomp." In addition, some contemporary artists participate in the recording: rapper Ice-T reads Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die." The set was released in 2000 by Wea/Rhino.

- Langston Hughes's first collection of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, is celebrated on a CD of the same name, featuring Hughes reciting his poetry and the legendary jazz musician Charles Mingus performing music that recreates the atmosphere of a Harlem blues club. The CD was originally released in 1958 and as of 2008 was available on the Uni/Verve label.

- In 2005, Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was made into a TV movie of the same name. The movie teleplay was written by Suzan-Lori Parks and underwritten by Oprah Winfrey. Darnell Martin directed and Halle Barry starred as Janie Starks. As of 2008 it was available on DVD from Buena Vista Home Entertainment.

*Langston Hughes* *(© Corbis)*

## Home to Harlem

Claude McKay's novel *Home to Harlem* was published in 1928, the first in a series of three novels that many critics see as a trilogy of black life in America. The story centers on the relationship between two black men, Jake and Ray. Jake is an AWOL soldier, intent on returning to Harlem and the good times he remembers there. Ray is his opposite—a highly educated man who has completely lost touch with his culture. Through their conversations and actions, McKay shows two ways of responding to the racial prejudice in the United States during the 1920s. Ray experiences an intellectual angst and leaves for Europe, while Jake remains in Harlem, happy with his life and friends but intent on maintaining his pride.

*Home to Harlem* was the first bestselling book by a black writer in the United States. The novel was such a commercial success that it was reprinted five times in two months. Many readers were attracted by the book's racy image of jazz-age Harlem; McKay writes of prostitutes, nightclubs, and boozy parties. However, many critics—especially those black critics who believed that positive representations of African Americans would help rid the nation of its racial problems—condemned McKay's novel for its bawdy images of black life in Harlem.

## The New Negro: An Interpretation

Many historians and critics of the Harlem Renaissance credit the 1925 publication of Alain Locke's anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, with fueling the explosion of energy among black artists and writers in the 1920s and 1930s. The collection includes poetry and prose from such Renaissance stars as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay. The high quality of the anthology's work attracted the attention of literary critics of the day and alerted the public to the talents of a previously unknown group of writers. The book also served to alert black writers that they were not alone by exposing them to other writers' efforts and by building an atmosphere of inspiration.

The anthology received excellent reviews, including positive comments from W. E. B. Du Bois. Locke felt strongly that a group of African-American artists and writers could bridge the gap between white and black communities, and the publication of *The New Negro* was an effort to start that process.

## Quicksand

Nella Larsen wrote two novels addressing the issue of light-skinned blacks living as whites, *Quicksand* and *Passing*, but *Quicksand*, published in 1928, was the first and better received. In *Quicksand*, Larsen tells the story of a woman of mixed ancestry, much like herself, who feels comfortable in neither black nor white society.

Critics were impressed with the rich psychological background Larsen gave her characters, as well as with the novel's use of symbolism. In addition, many readers were happy that a black writer, while still tackling sensitive issues of race and culture, had chosen to place most of the story in a relatively genteel setting, as opposed to many other novels that depicted impoverished black society. With the publication of *Quicksand*, many intellectuals involved in the Harlem Renaissance took positive notice of Larsen, including W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, and predicted her continued success as an author. The novel won the Harmon Foundation's bronze medal in 1928.

## Their Eyes Were Watching God

Critics consider *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Zora Neale Hurston's best fictional work. The 1937 novel (late in the period but still considered a Harlem Renaissance work) is informed by the extensive work Hurston did collecting black folktales throughout the 1920s and 1930s. It tells the story of a black woman struggling to assert her identity—both as an African American and as a woman—in the southern United States around 1900.

The critical reception of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was mixed; some readers praised its accurate portrayal of small-town black life, while others, such as Richard Wright, accused Hurston of pursuing racial stereotyping to please white audiences. Overall, the novel was underappreciated when it was first published and viewed as an escapist piece of fiction. It gained considerable respect, however, in the last half of the twentieth century as a feminist tale of empowerment and fulfillment.

## "Titee"

Alice Dunbar-Nelson wrote short stories and poetry, much of which is available online. Her short story "Titee" was published in her collection, *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories* (1899). Her fiction features local color—that is, characters drawn from the real life of her home in New Orleans. "Titee" is about a black schoolboy in the Third District of New Orleans. He is not very good at schoolwork but knows every corner and face of his neighborhood. A growing boy who eats as much as he can, one day he suddenly starts eating very little. Some days later, he is discovered to be missing from home. His family finds him by the railroad tracks with a broken leg but he will not let them take him home. He instead takes them to visit an old man living in a cave to whom he has been bringing food twice a day. The Old Man then receives charitable aid and the boy's leg heals. By Dunbar-Nelson's account, Titee behaves no differently than before.

## The Weary Blues

*The Weary Blues*, Langston Hughes's first published collection of poetry, released in 1926, contains both traditional lyric poems written on classical subjects and poems about being black in America in the early twentieth century. Some of the strongest verses, in fact, reflect Hughes's love for blues and jazz music by imitating the cadences of popular tunes heard in Harlem nightclubs and on the streets.

Though a few of the poems in this collection were written when Hughes was a teenager, many critics still saw in the volume a special energy and vigor; indeed, many of these poems remain the author's best known and well loved pieces, such as "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Many black critics, however, were uncomfortable with Hughes's less traditional rhyming schemes and, concerned that Hughes was furthering the negative image of African Americans, disliked his portrayals of unsophisticated blacks and their day-to-day lives. They referred to him as a "racial artist," or an artist who relies too heavily on his identity as an African American. Other critics praised his successful integration of musical styles in his poetry and language, especially in the title piece, "The Weary Blues," which captures the tone of a piano player performing in a nightclub. Hughes's experimental style was both respected and condemned by various readers and critics.

## THEMES

As many critics have noted, the literature from the Harlem Renaissance displayed a wide variety of themes and topics; in fact, some have blamed this lack of cohesion for its supposed failure to maintain its momentum much past the early 1930s. However, there were a handful of themes and issues that commonly appeared in many of the writers' works.

### Race and Passing

The issue of skin color is central to many of the novels, stories, and poems of the Harlem Renaissance. For example, a quick examination of the titles included in Cullen's first collection of poetry, *Color*, indicates that he is very conscious of his race and its defining connotations in America: "To a Brown Girl" and "Black Magdalens" are two of the titles in the collection. In another one of the collection's poems, "The Shroud of Color," Cullen writes of his race and of the experience of being a second-class citizen because of his skin color:

> Lord, being dark, forewilled to that despair
> My color shrouds me in, I am as dirt
> Beneath my brother's heel.

In addition, many of the period's authors refer to a phenomenon known as passing—a

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Many of the period's prominent writers studied at Columbia University in New York City. Research the histories of Columbia University and other American universities during the first twenty years of the twentieth century. What were the policies of various institutions regarding admitting black students? What were the choices for blacks who wished to attend college during the 1920s and earlier in the century? Present your findings in an essay.

- Churches played a key role in the lives of many Harlem residents. In addition to holding Sunday services, some churches, such as the Abyssinian Baptist Church, organized community centers, helped feed the poor, and operated homes for the elderly. Investigate the growth of churches in Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s and how many developed into influential and powerful organizations.

- Many critics note that, while the Harlem Renaissance ended during the early 1930s, African-American writers did not stop producing work. Research the important black writers of the 1940s and 1950s, such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison. Acquaint yourself with themes these writers dealt with, their styles, and so on. Discuss in a short essay any similarities or differences you see between this literature and the literature of the Harlem Renaissance.

- Some historians and critics have argued that the present time is another "renaissance" for black artists, entertainers, and writers, similar in a number of ways to the Harlem Renaissance. Consider the two periods and create a chart showing the similarities and differences between the two as regards politics, social institutions, major cities involved in the arts, and the artistic achievements themselves.

light-skinned black person living as a white person. In Larsen's *Passing*, the heroine faces tragedy when her white husband becomes aware of her African-American background. In another of Larsen's books, *Quicksand*, the mixed-race heroine struggles to find a place in society where she can feel comfortable and welcomed. She feels restricted when she attempts to settle in black society but experiences dissatisfaction and discontent while passing as a white woman.

## African Heritage

Many of the period's authors highlighted their African heritage. Some viewed Africa in a romantic light, as an ancient place of origin and therefore a prime source of artistic insight. For example, Hughes, in his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," refers to the thousands of years of African experience inside him when he writes:

> I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
> I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

One of Cullen's best-known poems, "Heritage," celebrates the rich cultural legacy being discovered by many of the Renaissance artists. In the poem, he ponders the meaning of Africa to himself and to other American blacks.

In his anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, Locke encourages young black artists and writers to look for inspiration in their own African heritage—as separate from the dominant white American-European heritage. The book closes with an essay by Du Bois suggesting that American blacks reach out to blacks in Africa and around the world, initiating a Pan-African movement. In fact, *The New Negro* and other books published during the Renaissance were decorated with African-inspired motifs and designs.

## Conflicting Images of Blacks

One of the most difficult issues writers dealt with during the Renaissance was how to portray African-American life. On one hand, many writers and intellectuals had a keen desire to illustrate black society only in the most positive fashion, writing stories filled with middle-class, educated characters working to become successful in a white-dominated America. On the other hand, many believed that white perceptions of black society should not matter and that all sides of the African-American experience should be exposed and celebrated in the literature. Adding

to this dichotomy was the concern that the more sensationalist or primitive images of blacks in literature were the ones that sold—especially to white readers.

Many black intellectuals condemned, for example, the first and only issue of the literary magazine *Fire!!*, published by Wallace Thurman. The issue contained stories and poetry by some of Harlem's most famous young writers, but much of what they were writing about did not fit the positive image of the race that black thinkers such as Du Bois and Benjamin Brawley considered appropriate. In fact, after reading the issue, which included pieces about prostitution, homosexuality, hatred of whites, and conflicts between lower-class black men and women, Brawley allegedly burned his copy. Thurman was and continues in the 2000s to be a controversial figure; critic Granville Ganter argues that Thurman's work and influence was larger than the Harlem Renaissance, placing him in the international bohemian arena. Hughes responded to the idea that black writers should be circumspect in what they produce in his 1926 article "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," proclaiming, "If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter.... If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter, either."

One writer who was often condemned by members of the black intelligentsia for portraying blacks in a negative fashion was McKay. His novel *Home to Harlem* upset many who believed that his story, set amid the nightclubs and speakeasies of Harlem, catered to the image many whites had of blacks as savages who, even when dressed in fine clothes, were ready to succumb to their baser urges at a moment's notice. Some black critics also charged Hurston with writing stories that were unnecessarily bawdy and crude, but she argued that her work accurately reflected the folktales she collected in black rural areas.

# STYLE

## Use of Dialect and Colloquialisms
There was no consensus on the use of black or rural dialect in the work of Harlem Renaissance writers; some authors used it liberally while others shunned it entirely. Hurston used dialect in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to reflect the

atmosphere and tone of the language she heard when collecting folktales. For this, Richard Wright later condemned the novel and claimed that she was painting a negative and stereotypical image of blacks for white readers.

Johnson used dialect verse and misspellings in some of his poetry but decided to discard these techniques when writing his collection of rural sermons turned into verse, *God's Trombones*, considered to be, far and away, his best work. He is reported to have said that dialect restricted what he wanted to do in *God's Trombones*. The sermons maintain the rhythm and pacing of speech he admired in black preachers but are delivered in a more sophisticated manner. For example, the poem-sermon entitled "The Creation" is written in standard English but maintains the cadence of powerful oratory:

> Then God himself stepped down—
> And the sun was on his right hand,
> And the moon was on his left;
> The stars were clustered about his head,
> And the earth was under his feet....

## Use of Music
Many of the Renaissance poets experimented with the cadences of popular music in their work, but none was as well known for this technique as Hughes. He used blues and jazz beats in much of his poetry, recreating the sounds and music he heard in the clubs and on the streets of Harlem. Hughes's poetry not only incorporates the rhythms of familiar music but also covers topics common to many blues songs: economic hardship, failed romance, loneliness, and sexual desire. In the poem "The Weary Blues," Hughes writes of a piano player performing at a club and uses the technique of repetition, a familiar technique in many blues songs.

## Urban and Rural Settings
Because many of the Harlem Renaissance writers moved to the cities from rural areas, both settings were critical components of their work. For example, Toomer's book of poetry, stories, and a play, *Cane*, includes a section devoted entirely to characters in rural Georgia, with images of trees and sugar cane. In the second section, the action takes place in Washington, D.C., and is filled with images of streets, nightclubs, houses, and theaters. Hurston set most of her stories in rural towns, in accordance with her lifelong effort to collect black rural folktales.

The move between rural and urban is also critical to many Renaissance novels. In McKay's *Home to Harlem*, the primary locale of the story is Harlem. But each of the novel's protagonists comes from someplace else: Jake is assumed to be originally from the rural South, and Ray is Haitian. Larsen's novel *Quicksand* follows a mixed race woman who travels from her job at a black southern college to various large cities around the world in search of a place she can truly call home. She ultimately ends up living in rural Alabama, feeling suffocated.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Visual Arts during the Harlem Renaissance

Visual arts made a strong statement during the Harlem Renaissance, creating images based on newly developed consciousness about heritage and culture. For example, in her article on Harlem Renaissance art and artists in *Print*, Michele Y. Washington notes that black artists' interest in Egypt as part of Africa and their heritage contributed to many of the motifs in the Art Deco style becoming widespread during the 1920s and 1930s.

Aaron Douglas, one of the period's leading artists, used images of African masks and sculpture in his geometric, art deco-style drawings. He served as an apprentice to Winold Reiss, the German artist whose geometric and angular drawings were featured on the original cover of Alain Locke's *The New Negro*. Douglas became the premier illustrator for the period's magazines and books and also created large murals on the walls of various Harlem nightclubs.

Many of the leading Renaissance artists had formal art training but used vibrant and energetic African images to break away from the more traditional forms of European art. Like Douglas, many of these artists collaborated with black writers to decorate the covers and pages of their published poetry collections, novels, and magazines.

### The Renaissance in Other American Cities

While the energy of the explosion of African-American literature, music, art, and politics was focused primarily in Harlem, other cities also experienced their own versions of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and 1930s. Artists and writers located in cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., were producing valuable and exciting work.

Locke, for example, maintained his contact with Howard University in Washington, D.C., as the chairman of its Department of Philosophy for more than forty years. A number of writers got their start in the nation's capital, including Toomer and Rudolph Fisher, and Hughes often spent time there. Chicago was not only a hotbed of musical energy during the 1920s and 1930s, but writers such as Frank Marshall Davis wrote while living there. And, though he wrote just after the period of the Renaissance, Richard Wright relied heavily on his own Chicago experiences in his work.

### Music during the Harlem Renaissance

Music saturated Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s, whether at the numerous Protestant churches, where age-old and new spirituals comforted the congregations, or at the neighborhood's hundreds of speakeasies, nightclubs, and theaters, where jazz and blues tunes stimulated dancers well into the early morning hours.

Of all the styles of music in Harlem, the district is probably best known for its jazz. Black bandleaders such as Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, and Duke Ellington made jazz the neighborhood's (and the nation's) most popular musical style in the 1920s and 1930s, even though many people—including numerous black intellectuals—found its rhythms too harsh and bawdy. But the rage for jazz would not die, and patrons crowded Harlem's countless clubs nearly every night to hear the dynamism and spontaneity that are the hallmarks of jazz.

In 1926, the Savoy Ballroom opened, and its reasonable cover charges encouraged people of all races and economic levels to spend the evening dancing and listening to excellent jazz. While many well-known musicians performed there, the Savoy was also a place where unknowns could see if they had the talent to compete. Jazz and blues singers Bessie Smith and Ella Fitzgerald got their starts at the Savoy.

### Black Aesthetic Movement

The black aesthetic movement was a period of artistic and literary development among African Americans in the 1960s and early 1970s. This was the first major African American artistic movement after the Harlem Renaissance and was

closely paralleled by the civil rights and black power movements. The black aesthetic writers attempted to produce works of art that would be meaningful to black audiences. Key figures in black aesthetics include one of its founders, poet and playwright Amiri Baraka, formerly known as LeRoi Jones; poet and essayist Haki R. Madhubuti, formerly Don L. Lee; poet and playwright Sonia Sanchez; and dramatist Ed Bullins. Works representative of the black aesthetic movement include Amiri Baraka's play *Dutchman*, a 1964 Obie award-winner; *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, edited by Baraka and playwright Larry Neal and published in 1968; and Sonia Sanchez's poetry collection *We a BaddDDD People*, published in 1970. The black aesthetic movement was also known as the black arts movement.

## Post-Aesthetic Movement

The post-aesthetic movement was an artistic response made by African Americans to the black aesthetic movement of the 1960s and early '70s. Writers since that time have adopted a somewhat different tone in their work, with less emphasis placed on the disparity between black and white in the United States. In the works of post-aesthetic authors such as Toni Morrison, John Edgar Wideman, and Kristin Hunter, African Americans are portrayed as looking inward for answers to their own questions, rather than always looking outward to the world. Two well-known examples of works produced as part of the post-aesthetic movement are the Pulitzer Prize-winning novels *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### The Great Migration

The Great Migration involved huge numbers of African Americans moving from the rural southern United States to northern industrial cities during the first few decades of the twentieth century in search of better jobs. This shift in population helped foster the cultural richness that became known as the Harlem Renaissance.

For most of the nineteenth century, the southern United States, like most of the rest of the country, was primarily an agricultural society. By the end of the nineteenth century and the

beginning of the twentieth century, the northern economy began to shift to a more industrial base. The southern economy became stagnant, which provided a strong impetus for black (and white) farm workers to consider moving north, where the jobs were. Southern blacks considered a move to the north as a step toward economic independence and a better life in a region of the country where they believed they might be treated more fairly.

In addition to the worsening southern economy, blacks were attracted to the north by the fact that during World War I, the United States began limiting the number of immigrants allowed in the country. This created a labor shortage in the north just at a time when the factories were expected to increase production to fulfill orders in support of the war effort. Companies that had rejected the idea of hiring blacks were forced to recruit them actively, even sending labor agents into the South to find workers and offer training in areas such as shipbuilding. Soon, family members were returning to their southern homes from New York, Detroit, Chicago, and other urban centers, telling stories of better jobs and higher salaries. Between 1916 and 1919, about half a million blacks moved to the North; roughly one million blacks made the trip in the 1920s. Between 1910 and 1920, New York City's African-American population jumped 50 percent.

### The New Negro

"New Negro" was the term white Americans had used to refer to a newly enslaved African. However, during the first few decades of the twentieth century, the phrase denoted an African American who was politically astute, well educated, and proud of his cultural heritage—the very opposite of a slave. Booker T. Washington's view of a New Negro was outlined in his 1900 book, *A New Negro for a New Century* and encompassed education, self-improvement, and self-respect.

During the Harlem Renaissance, Locke used the term in the title of his anthology of African-American poetry and prose, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Locke believed that African-American writers and artists should participate in the leadership of their people and should be involved in showing white America a new vision of blacks as productive and creative forces to be reckoned with. The New Negro, in Locke's estimation, should be an African American who asserted himself or herself economically, politically, and

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **1920s–1930s:** Harlem is well known for its entertainment venues, including the Savoy Ballroom, the Cotton Club, and the Apollo Theater. National acts regularly play at these stages, including Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, and Lionel Hampton.

  **Today:** After closing in the 1970s because African American acts had access to better-paying venues, the Apollo is now a national historic landmark owned by a nonprofit organization that books such international stars as Luther Vandross, B. B. King, hip-hop artists, and unknown musical hopefuls seeking national exposure.

- **1920s–1930s:** Claude McKay publishes his novel *Home to Harlem*, the first bestselling book in the United States written by an African American. Major New York publishing houses search for the next black writer who

  will satisfy the reading public's sudden interest in African-American voices.

  **Today:** Popular black authors are no longer a novelty. Works by Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. regularly appear on the national lists of bestselling books.

- **1920s–1930s:** Lynchings and racially motivated murders of blacks are not unusual. In 1920, an estimated 33 blacks are lynched; in 1930, an estimated 24 blacks die from lynchings.

  **Today:** According to national hate crime statistics collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, three racially motivated murders of African Americans and 462 racially motivated aggravated assaults against African Americans occurred in the year 2000.

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culturally. In his role as the disseminator of the New Negro philosophy, Locke organized a series of traveling African-American art exhibits and helped launch a national black theater movement.

### Red Summer of 1919

In the years immediately following World War I, relations between blacks and whites were strained. White war veterans returning to northern cities felt threatened by the increased population of blacks and their stronger economic position—at least when compared to the prewar years. Many blacks returned from the war wondering why, after fighting for their country and receiving commendations for their bravery from the French, they were still treated as second-class citizens at home. Southerners sensed a heightened level of self-confidence among the blacks visiting their families from their jobs in northern cities. Economic pressures hit the general American population after the war when the government lifted price controls and unemployment and inflation rates jumped.

During the summer and early fall of 1919, 25 race riots erupted across the nation, in Chicago; Charleston, South Carolina; Omaha, Nebraska; Washington, D.C.; and other cities. In the space of six weeks, 76 lynchings were reported; a dozen of the lynchings were perpetrated on black men still wearing their service uniforms.

Johnson coined the term "Red Summer" while investigating these incidents for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Racial tensions were exacerbated by the nation's postwar fear of the newly formed Bolshevik, or "red," regime in Russia. Many efforts by blacks to improve their economic and political status were met with white suspicions that they were as "radical" as the Russian Bolsheviks.

### Life in Harlem during the
### 1920s and 1930s

Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City, became the preeminent black urban enclave in the United States early in the twentieth century,

when thousands of blacks migrated northward primarily from southern and rural regions. Previously, the area had been a wealthy white neighborhood, but economic hard times and skyrocketing real estate values at the start of the twentieth century created a situation in which clever entrepreneurs began leasing vacant rooms in white-owned buildings to black newcomers to the city. Harlem's black population in 1914 was about fifty thousand; by 1930 it had grown to two hundred thousand.

The neighborhood also attracted black intellectuals, artists, and others interested in participating in Harlem's increasingly vibrant cultural environment. Black political organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League, established offices in Harlem, as did major black newspapers such as *The Messenger* and *The New York Age*. Marcus Garvey, leader of the "back-to-Africa " movement, set up his Universal Negro Improvement Association in Harlem. Garvey and others energized Harlemites with their messages of black pride and self-sufficiency.

Harlem also became an entertainment capital early in the century. Musical performers moved to Harlem, drawn by the atmosphere and the hundreds of nightclubs and other venues where the jazz sound was wildly popular. Performers Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, and others played to appreciative crowds at nightspots like Smalls's Inn and the Savoy Ballroom. But not only locals patronized the free-spirited nightclubs that began to give Harlem a wild reputation; whites from other parts of New York City "discovered" Harlem and made it the place to be on a Saturday night. Ironically, some of the nightclubs were off-limits to blacks, including the famous Cotton Club, until 1928 catering to a wealthy white clientele intent on experiencing the "exotic" Harlem atmosphere.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The criticism on the Harlem Renaissance movement tends to focus on its impact on black literature and on the African-American community. In fact, many critics, while acknowledging that the current energy in black literature and music does have its foundations at least partly in the Harlem Renaissance, hold that the movement came up

short in terms of staying power. Andrea Stuart, writing in *New Statesman*, questions whether the Harlem Renaissance has had any lasting impact on the lives of ordinary black Americans. "The legacy of the Harlem Renaissance remains a profoundly romantic one for the black bourgeoisie," Stuart comments. But, "on the streets, where the great majority of black culture is made, its echoes are only faintly heard," she claims.

Amritjit Singh notes in his book *The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance: Twelve Black Writers* that the artists involved in the Harlem Renaissance failed to develop a "black American school of literature" for a variety of reasons. The most critical reason, he argues, is that the artists themselves "reflect the spirit of the times in their refusal to join causes or movements" and were interested less in the societal problems of blacks than in their own individual problems. Margaret Perry, in her book *The Harlem Renaissance: An Annotated Bibliography and Commentary*, generally agrees with this concept, noting that the writers of this period "failed to use their blackness to fullness and with total honesty in order to create that unique genre of American literature one called black or Afro-American."

While acknowledging the shortcomings of the Harlem Renaissance as noted by numerous current critics as well as by the era's participants, George E. Kent believes that the movement has still provided American literature with some very "fundamental" accomplishments. He argues in *Black World* that "the short story in the hands of [Jean] Toomer, Eric Waldron, and Langston Hughes became a much more flexible form," and that, while no Harlem Renaissance author created a truly new form of the novel, these writers did provide stories that "occasionally stopped just short of greatness." Kent also praises the playwriting of the period, though it received little Broadway exposure.

Other readers of the period's literature have noted its influences. Kenneth R. Janken addresses the deep affection black intelligentsia had for French culture during the early part of the twentieth century and how this both contributed to the movement and prevented them from seeing the limitations of the French social model. He comments in *The Historian* that, while the Harlem Renaissance certainly was indebted to French intellectuals for much of its philosophy about racial equality and recognition of an African diaspora, it viewed the position of blacks in French

*The Lafayette Theatre in Harlem* (© *Corbis*)

society through rose-colored glasses. Harlem Renaissance writers "could not thoroughly critique the French colonial system...that continued to exploit the majority of Africans," Janken notes.

Many critics have depicted the Harlem Renaissance as a period of great hope and optimism, but Daylanne K. English disagrees. In *Critical Inquiry*, he argues that, upon closer examination, the opposite is true. "The Renaissance writers were, in fact, preoccupied by the possibility and the picturing of various modern, and only sometimes racially specific, wastelands," notes the author.

Nathan Huggins, in his well-respected 1971 book *Harlem Renaissance*, questions the exclusiveness of the movement to the nation's black population and posits that black and white Americans "have been so long and so intimately a part of one another's experience that, will it or not, they cannot be understood independently." He argues that the creation of Harlem "as a place of exotic culture" was as essential to whites as it was to blacks. Locke's declaration of the New Negro reflected America's continuing fascination with remaking oneself and was, in truth, "a public relations promotion," Huggins asserts.

African Americans had to be presented in a better light, in a way the majority of whites could accept and blacks themselves could internalize. "Even the best of the poems of the Harlem Renaissance carried the burden of self-consciousness of oppression and black limitation," he notes.

Aderemi Bamikunle also examines how whites affected the work of Harlem Renaissance writers. He asserts that the white connection with black writing has a long history, going back to the mid-1800s, when white abolitionists found and published black authors who would write "according to a particular genre," specifically, the slave narrative. Bamikunle points to the comments many black writers made during the Harlem Renaissance about the struggle to appeal to both a black and a white audience. "For blacks who felt a strong obligation towards the black race there was bound to be conflict between that obligation and the constraints of writing within a white culture," he argues.

The Harlem Renaissance was not an exclusively male event, and some critics have chosen to highlight black women's roles in the achievements of the period. While Cheryl Wall, writing in *Women, the Arts, and the 1920s in Paris and New York*, admits that no female black writer working during the 1920s and 1930s came close to the talent and skill exhibited by many of the era's leading male writers, she adds that black women "were doubly oppressed, as blacks and as women, and they were highly aware of the degrading stereotypes commonly applied to them." For this reason, she believes, black women poets often wrote more restrained poetry and prose than their male counterparts.

## CRITICISM

### Susan Sanderson

*Sanderson holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, Sanderson looks at how the Harlem Renaissance writers succeeded in creating a literature of pioneering.*

The literature of the Harlem Renaissance was produced by a generation of writers steeped in ideas illuminated most clearly by Howard University philosophy professor and intellectual Alain Locke. Locke first referred to the concept of the New Negro in an article in the March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic*, a special issue of the journal entitled *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*.

In one of the issue's articles, which he expanded later that year into the introduction for his anthology of the best African-American writing, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, Locke defines the New Negro as one who has thrown off the age-worn stereotypes of the subservient and docile black. For generations of white Americans, he notes, blacks have been "something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be 'kept down,' or 'in his place,' or 'helped up,'...harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden." In place of the "Old Negro" comes the New Negro, "vibrant with a new psychology" reflecting that "a new spirit is awake in the masses." Locke expected this new and talented group of African-American artists—many whose work appeared in *Survey Graphic* and later in his anthology—to recreate and improve the image of the race through their art, in hopes that blacks would finally become appreciated by white society.

This was a tall order for barely more than a handful of people. The economic and social conditions of most black Americans at the turn of the century and after World War I were somewhere between deplorable and less-than-adequate. Though their work could not undo hundreds of years of racism and second-class status, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance did succeed in giving a voice to a generation of black pioneers: blacks who followed a grand American tradition by leaving impoverished and difficult conditions for the promise of a better life. Their migratory route was within the United States, primarily from the rural south to the industrial north, and they created strong and vibrant cities and neighborhoods built on their dreams.

In fact, Houston A. Baker, Jr., in his book *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, argues that Locke's anthology is similar to "the valued documents from which we grasp iconic images and pictorial myths of a colonial or frontier America." Locke succeeded, according to Baker, in writing "our first *national* book, offering...the sounds, songs, images, and signs of a nation."

Most American students can recite from memory the stories of immigrants leaving their homelands and coming to the United States in hopes of finding something more—whether the story is about the Pilgrims fleeing religious persecution or others leaving a homeland inflamed

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- W. E. B. Du Bois was one of the black intellectuals involved in launching and encouraging the Harlem Renaissance. David L. Lewis's Pulitzer Prize–winning biography of Du Bois, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (1994), provides readers with a highly detailed narrative of the great thinker and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the years preceding the Harlem Renaissance.

- Black visual artists experienced an explosion in ideas and energy during the 1920s and 1930s similar to that experienced by writers. *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (1997) covers the accomplishments of African-American painters, sculptors, photographers, actors, and singers working during the period. The book, edited by Richard J. Powell and David A. Bailey, includes 150 color plates and 100 black-and-white drawings.

- Starting in 1910, the NAACP published *The Crisis*, a popular magazine that was responsible for giving the up-and-coming writers of the Harlem Renaissance the exposure and experience they needed to develop their talents. *The Crisis Reader: Stories, Poetry, and Essays from the NAACP's "Crisis" Magazine* (1999), edited by Sondra Kathryn Wilson, is a collection of writings drawn from the publication primarily during the 1920s.

- Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association championed the rights of black Americans but believed that blacks would never achieve equality in a white-dominated country such as the United States. This controversial leader, whose philosophies launched the "back to Africa" movement in the early years of the century and affected the thinking of many black intellectuals and others during the Harlem Renaissance, is examined in the biography *Marcus Garvey* (1987), edited by Mary Lawler and Nathan Huggins.

- George S. Schuyler was a black writer who lived during the Harlem Renaissance and took great pleasure in satirizing and lampooning many of its leaders, artists, and philosophies. Those who read his work in the 1920s and 1930s found him to be harsh and sometimes unfair but always interesting and readable. Critics writing during the 1960s and 1970s were less enthusiastic and condemned him as a reactionary conservative. Schuyler's 1931 novel about a black man who decides to use a formula that will make him white, *Black No More*, caused a sensation. It was reprinted in 1999.

with war or devastated by famine or poverty. Even after sailing across oceans, those immigrants participated in the nation's strong tradition of internal migration to move to the western United States, the next state, or the next town when opportunity presented itself. But African Americans at the turn of the century were, for the most part, the children and grandchildren of a people forcibly brought to America rather than offered the opportunity to migrate. That opportunity has always been, in a sense, one of the defining characteristics of being American; as a people, we have always counted on being able to pick up and start over in another place. Only after the official end to slavery in the United States were African Americans able to participate in this very American activity.

The Great Migration, roughly from the 1890s through the first half of the twentieth century, saw literally millions of blacks moving from their southern homes to northern urban centers in search of decent jobs and a life free from fear. Between 1885 and 1905, there were more lynchings in the nation than there were

> **THOUGH THEIR WORK COULD NOT UNDO HUNDREDS OF YEARS OF RACISM AND SECOND-CLASS STATUS, THE WRITERS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE DID SUCCEED IN GIVING A VOICE TO A GENERATION OF BLACK PIONEERS."**

legal executions. In many parts of the South, tenant farming and sharecropping—systems in which the farmers often found themselves in perpetual debt to the landowners—had depleted the soil's fertility and kept the price of cotton low through the beginning of the twentieth century. Working at other jobs, after their crops had failed, left blacks frustrated at their low wages and limited opportunities. Black men's voting rights were often denied through poll taxes and literacy tests. Like other Americans before them, blacks began a migration that changed the face of the nation. For example, New York City's African-American population jumped 50 percent between 19 10 and 1920.

Of course, the north was no paradise. Very often, blacks received low wages and were treated just as poorly as they had been back home. When World War I finished, and white soldiers returned to their northern cities wanting jobs, blacks were often the first employees fired.

The fact remained, however, that blacks in huge numbers had taken a step to redefine themselves by choosing where they would live and how they would live. They were at the same time participating in another great American tradition: that of re-envisioning oneself and one's people through stories. Locke's proclamation of the New Negro was a clear indication of this, and his publication of black poetry, fiction, and essays in his anthology was the literal retelling of those stories.

Nathan I. Huggins, writing in his book *Harlem Renaissance*, notes that white Americans have forever desired to cast themselves as new and improved, primarily to separate themselves from their Old World origins. This separation, of course, has always been paired with a corresponding desire to associate oneself with the Old World by taking pride in the cast-off ancestral country. The changes in black society at the beginning of the twentieth century and the development of the Harlem Renaissance, according to Huggins, afforded blacks a similar opportunity to take part in this "intense and national sport" by declaring that the New Negro had been born and was ready to acknowledge his ties to, and appreciation of, ancestral Africa.

The writers of this era were creating the literature of pioneers, people of a new land, and in doing so writers worked to develop the stories that would tell the rest of the world (and white America) what defined them, what made them proud, and what troubled them. Countee Cullen's poem "Heritage," included in Locke's special *Survey Graphic* issue, is a love song to ancestral Africa, for example, but tempered with a sense of regret and caution. He desires to be swept up in the continent's heat and passion but realizes that as someone who is "civilized," he must tell himself to "Quench my pride and cool my blood." Zora Neale Hurston stays closer to home in her subject matter but still recalls the land of her forebears (the rural South, from where so many blacks had migrated) in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston follows Janie, a black woman living in rural Florida, and her lifelong search for fulfillment and identity as a woman.

Claude McKay, through his poems and his fictional characters, often wrote about the plight of African Americans in an angry and defiant fashion. Also included in the special *Survey Graphic*, McKay's poem *White Houses*, challenges the racist attitudes and practices of whites against blacks. He opens the poem noticing that "your door is shut against my tightened face," and he is "sharp as steel with discontent" in the next line. But by the end of the poem, McKay warns himself to avoid becoming involved in "the potent poison" of the white man's hate. In his novel *Home to Harlem*, McKay casts two opposites as protagonists: Ray, who, like McKay, is a well-educated black but uncomfortable with Harlem's festive atmosphere and struggling to fit into either white or black society; and Jake, a black man who leads an untroubled life filled with party-going. Eventually, it becomes apparent that Ray's association with whites, specifically through his bourgeois education, has damaged his identity as a black man, and he flees the new world of Harlem for the Old World of Europe.

A question remains, however, if one looks upon these writers as the voices of migrants and pioneers. Pioneers are usually pictured as a hopeful

*A scene on the streets of East Harlem* *(© Corbis)*

lot; indeed, much of Locke's language in describing the New Negro in the *Survey Graphic* special issue is optimistic: he uses words such as "genius," "vibrant," and "metamorphosis," and comments that these young writers "have all swung above the horizon." But Daylanne K. English raises a good point in her *Critical Inquiry*, when she argues that "Renaissance writers were, in fact, preoccupied by the possibility and the picturing of various modern, and only sometimes racially specific, wastelands." Indeed, looking at the work of McKay and others, the energetic and optimistic pioneers of the Harlem Renaissance may have realized that, despite Locke's belief that art would mend racial fences, some tough times lay ahead. Their words, according to English, seem to testify to "a clear and widespread sense of urgency, even of anxiety and despair." This combination of hope and anxiety about the future, in fact, is apparent in Langston Hughes's "The Dream Keeper":

> Bring me all of your dreams
> You dreamers.
> Bring me all of your
> Heart melodies.
> That I may wrap them
> In a blue cloud-cloth

Away from the too rough fingers
Of the world.

Indeed, the voice sounded by the writers of the Harlem Renaissance offered a sense of both hopefulness and caution to those who would listen. Black writers would continue to work and produce fine results—Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison in the 1940s and 1950s, Maya Angelou and Alice Walker in the century's latter years—but Locke's hope that the best and the brightest of the black pioneers could wash away the sins of a nation never came about.

**Source:** Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on the Harlem Renaissance, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## Granville Ganter

*In this essay, Ganter argues that the transgressive sexuality and bohemian lifestyle of Harlem Renaissance author Wallace Thurman offer a framework for understanding Thurman's writings.*

Despite his dynamic output as an author and critic of the Harlem Renaissance, Wallace Thurman has not often inspired critical admiration. Several generations of scholars have lamented the alcoholic excess of his lifestyle and the indecent content of his writing. From the beginning of his career, Thurman's disinclination to celebrate his black heritage caused considerable anxiety among leaders of the New Negro movement. In his review of Thurman's first novel, *The Blacker the Berry*, W.E.B. Du Bois expressed his regret at Thurman's apparently "self-despising" racial outlook and complained that Thurman seemed to "deride blackness." Although later critics have acknowledged Thurman's energy and promise, Du Bois's verdict is still echoed today.

The moralistic tones of the case against Thurman tend to invoke puritanical assumptions about sex and race that continue to have powerful influence in the twenty-first century. Because assessments of the Harlem Renaissance have been often shaped by parochial—and laudable—beliefs that oppressed races, classes, and sexual orientations should celebrate their communities as a matter of pride, the bohemian aspirations of Thurman's role in the Renaissance have been underappreciated, if not outright rejected. Although Thurman broke many social taboos during his short brilliant career, one of his most challenging characteristics was his acerbic intractability. Thurman was neither a picture

**AS AN ARTIST, THURMAN BELIEVED THAT THE DESIRE TO PLAY WITH ALTERNATIVE IDENTITY WAS ONE'S TICKET TO *PASS* THE BOUNDS OF SOCIAL CONFORMITY AND PROCEED INTO THE CREATIVE WORLD OF THE MIND, AN ARTISTIC ACTIVITY AS REWARDING FOR THE WRITER AS FOR THE DRAG QUEEN."**

of heterosexual virility nor was he exclusively gay. Combined with his lukewarm interest in promoting African American identity, Thurman has not found a comfortable place amidst the progressive identity politics of post-1960s literary scholarship. In contrast to fay Richard Bruce Nugent, who has been welcomed by contemporary gay scholars, Thurman remains a wallflower, neither self-consciously black enough, nor gay enough, to serve as a Renaissance poster-boy, although his literary output dwarfs Nugent's. As George Hutchinson has argued persuasively, several recent generations of scholars have balked at the complex *inter*racial and *inter*ethnic politics of the Renaissance for lack of an adequate American discourse about hybrid identity. As a result, writers like Thurman, who actively sought to challenge the nationalist, racial, and sexual isolationisms of his day (and regrettably, ours), have yet to receive kindly treatment for their iconoclasm.

As many of his literary peers recognized, Thurman looked to Europe for aesthetic inspiration, not just America. Culturally stifled while growing up in Salt Lake City and Boise, Thurman apprenticed himself as a young writer to European artists of the Decadent movement. Identifying with figures such as Baudelaire, Huysmans, Wilde, and Gorky, Thurman imagined himself as part of an international avant-garde devoted to exploring the creative possibilities of the modern, the artificial, and the prohibited. In 1928, he wrote to a friend that he saw his generation as "Columbuses. . . . discovering things about themselves and about their environment which it seems to them their elders have been at pains to hide" (Van Notten 141–42).

One of Thurman's patrons, Alain Locke, recognized the decadent, Frenchified spirit of the 1890s behind Thurman's work, but he did not think it black enough, or decent enough, to advance the political goals of the Renaissance (Locke 563).

In particular, Thurman's omnivorous sexuality, an important facet of many writers associated with the *decadisme* in Europe, has not yet received a sympathetic examination. By most accounts, Thurman was bisexual, if not homosexual. He also had white and black lovers of different sexual orientations. There is no shortage of complaint about Thurman's behavior. Dorothy West, a younger contemporary of Thurman's, suggests he was a homosexual tortured by simultaneous desires to be a full-blooded "male" and a father (West 80). Although West seems unable to conceive that healthy bisexual or homosexual people could want to have children, most of Thurman's peers were also perplexed about his sexual conduct.

Recently, however, scholars interested in the homoerotic aspects of Harlem life have begun to explore the ways in which queer sexuality inflected the literature of the period, both in terms of content (homosexual characters and themes) and style (writing techniques that seem characteristic of queer sensibilities). Thurman may have been *queer* in the strictly erotic sense of the term. He engaged in homosexual behavior. However, Thurman's sexual conduct was also *queer* in the sense that he didn't operate by the norms of strictly homosexual or heterosexual culture. Whether Thurman was hetero or homosexual is difficult to say. He was, however, indisputably bisexual. Thurman's resistance to easy characterization, usually invoked as an impediment to his personal development or genius as a writer, is a key to his work. Thurman was an explorer. As I shall argue, Thurman's bohemian sexuality may be seen as a metaphor for the breadth of his imaginative vision as a writer and artist.

Despite her concerns about his complex sexual identity, Dorothy West acknowledges that Thurman often claimed he wanted to do everything once before he died. In his literary criticism, Thurman asserted that the artist's duty was to be polymorphously open to all forms of human experience. He felt that the genius of literary artists was documented in their openness to the unusual. Bisexuality was another facet of Thurman's polymorphous imaginative sensibility. For Thurman, writers' imaginative *queerness* lay in their cosmopolitan ability to pass comfortably into another identity, be it sexual, racial, or cultural. Thurman sought to materialize this transgressive imaginative sensibility in both his fiction and nonfiction.

The intimate relationship between Thurman's sexuality and his art is apparent in a letter he wrote to a friend and literary collaborator, William Rapp, in 1929. Thurman was going through a divorce at the time and his wife, Louise Thompson, had accused him of homosexuality. He wrote to Rapp to explain a story that Thompson had circulated among his friends concerning a homosexual proposition Thurman accepted when he first came to New York City. Although the letter's exculpatory remarks can be read as divorce propaganda, both its content and its stylistic shift from third to first-person narrative bear a striking resemblance to Thurman's short story, "Cordelia, the Crude." In his letter to Rapp, Thurman writes,

> In 1925 a young colored lad anxious to make a literary career came to New York. He had little stake which was soon gone. He found no job. He owed room rent and was hungry (not offered in extenuation of what is to follow but merely a statement of the facts.) One night he got a job as relief elevator operator, just for one night. He worked. The next night he returned hoping to work again. Failing he returned homeward. At 135th St. he got off the subway, and feeling nature's call went into the toilet. There was a man standing in there. The man spoke. He did more than speak, making me know what his game was. I laughed. He offered me two dollars. I accepted. Two plainclothesmen, hidden in the porter's mop closet rushed out and took the two of us to jail. Night court. I was fined twenty-five dollars or three days. The man got six months. He was a Fifth [A]venue hair dresser. He had been picked up before, and always of course as the aggressor. I gave a fake name and address, then sent a special delivery letter to the only friend I had in New York. He borrowed money, gave it to a minister friend who came down and got me out after I had spent 48 hours in jail. Only two people thus knew it. The minister took great interest in me. And to my surprise I discovered that he too belonged to the male sisterhood and was demanding his pound of flesh to keep silence. I cursed him out, told him he could print it in the papers if he dared and saw him no more. Meanwhile of course he had told his scandal. By some quirk of fate it reached Louise just at the time she was fighting me for a money settlement. She told Ernst. He verified the story, and

they threatened to make charges t[h]at I was homosexual, and knowing this and that I was incapable of keeping up my marital relationship [and] had no business marrying. All of which Louise knew was a lie. The incident was true, but there was certainly no evidence therein I was a homosexual and Louise also knew that tho there had been sexual incompatibility it had been her fault not mine. Tues May 7 [1929]

One of the most significant aspects of the letter is that Thurman refuses to have his sexuality defined by someone else. Thurman confesses to engaging in an act of homosexual prostitution but denies that it is "evidence therein" of his homosexuality. Like James Baldwin, he admits to homosexual practices but not necessarily to being identified as a homosexual (Ross 505). Rather, he describes himself as a young man who is unusually open to new experience. He laughs at the thought of bargaining sexual favors for cash. The homosexual element of the situation does not seem to faze him, either. Upon hearing the terms of the proposition, Thurman inscrutably writes, "I accepted." Whether motivated by physical desire, financial need, youthful curiosity, or some combination of incentives, Thurman doesn't explicitly say. Throughout the letter, however, he seems concerned about his reputation and anxious to prove that he had heterosexual desires as well. Although the letter could be interpreted as evidence of Thurman's closeted homosexuality (and most Thurman scholars have tended to summarize the letter's contents in this way), it is also explicit documentation of Thurman's sexual polyvalence.

In literary terms, the letter is also significant because it suggests the close relationship between Thurman's life and fiction. Later in the letter, he asks Rapp if his story sounds like a novel. The question is not merely rhetorical. Three years earlier, in his short story, "Cordelia, the Crude," he had told a similar tale. Both Thurman's letter and short story begin with a tone of objective realism, apparently adopted from Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, which shows the matter-of-fact transformation of an urban ingénue. As in his letter, Thurman's short story begins with little in the way of judgement of its protagonist, describing Cordelia Jones from an objective, third-person point of view as a restless girl who desires to escape the restrictions of her homelife. She goes to a theater where she is dimly aware that women are being propositioned by young men. Halfway through the story, the narrative shifts to the first person when a young man takes up the story as he meets Cordelia in the theater. Cordelia takes the man to a flophouse, but the narrator suddenly loses his nerve, shoves two dollars in her hand, and flees. At the end of the story, the narrator meets Cordelia again at a rent party where it is apparent she has become a prostitute. The similarities of Thurman's autobiographical letter to the story are probably explained by Thurman and Rapp's recent collaboration on the play, *Harlem,* which was an adaptation of Thurman's story "Cordelia," and which had just debuted a few months earlier.

One of the curious things about the resemblances among the three narratives (Thurman's letter, "Cordelia," and the play, *Harlem*) is that Thurman wrote the fictions first. In his letter to Rapp, his life conforms to his art. What makes this connection doubly interesting, however, is that Thurman initially wrote the autobiographical fictions from a woman's viewpoint.

Thurman's use of a female protagonist to represent his own experience in "Cordelia" and *Harlem* is particularly significant because the protagonist of his first novel, *The Blacker the Berry*, is also a woman. There are several explanations for why Thurman was drawn to female protagonists in his early work. On one level, Thurman seems to have wanted to write a black *Sister Carrie* or *Madame Bovary,* both of which focused on the plight of women to illustrate the curious modern collision of urban reality with sentimental fiction. In *The Blacker the Berry*, Emma Lou Morgan's first name evokes Flaubert's tragic protagonist, Emma Bovary, whose discomfort with provincial life, brought on by reading too many fanciful romances, leads her to stray from her marriage. Chasing a desire "to live and to die" in Paris, and unable to find spiritual redemption, she eventually drinks poison. Emma Lou's life experience also suggests the plot of the first half of *Sister Carrie,* where Carrie ingloriously becomes the mistress of a salesman while wandering the streets of Chicago looking for respectable work. Secondly, it seems likely that Thurman's ill-fated heroine was a direct reply to Jessie Fauset's hard-working protagonist, Joanna Marshall, in *There Is Confusion* (1924). If Thurman felt that Fauset's brand of realism had erred by attempting to normalize the victories and defeats of black middle-class experience, Thurman's Emma Lou Morgan was a study in what might happen to an earnest Fauset character in the hands of an unkind god. Finally, on a third level, Dorothy West speculates that a female protagonist allowed

Thurman to distance himself from his novel's auto-biographical material. At the same time that Thurman attempts to separate himself from Emma Lou's experiences, however, he also identifies with them. As Thurman declared in both his fiction and non-fiction, the imaginative burden of artists is to investigate the broadest domains of human thought and feeling. Thurman's use of female protagonists is both a deliberate test of his artistic powers and an attempt to envision the world from another person's point of view.

Thurman's identification with women's experience is suggested in part by his reference to homosexuals in *Infants of the Spring* as "uranians." The term, coined by the German jurist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, refers to homosexuals as people with women's souls trapped in men's bodies, or the reverse. In a series of pamphlets written between 1864 and 1870, Ulrichs proposed that the human embryo could develop a female soul at the same time its physical development took a male path, or vice versa (Symonds 162). This theory explained why some women seemed to have a masculine temperament and some men a feminine one. Although Ulrichs sketched a complicated sexual taxonomy from this premise, he referred to people who experienced hybrid development in the egg, *Urnings* or *Uranians*, from the term "uranos" in Plato's *Symposium*, meaning "heavenly." Uranianism was a popular theory among turn-of-the-century homosexuals because it did not explain gay or lesbian sexuality in degrading language.

Thurman's use of the term uranian is also revealing in light of Edward Carpenter's claim that uranians made great artists. Along with John Addington Symonds, Carpenter was a key English popularizer of Uranian theory. Carpenter's book, *The Intermediate Sex* (1906), argued that uranians were often society's great artists and teachers because their hybrid nature made them much more sensitive to the entire spectrum of human emotions. Thurman's choice of female protagonists may indicate his belief that he could feel as women felt, and that a female persona heightened the sense of marginality he wished to explore in his characters.

As a journalist, Thurman had long voiced his belief that fiction writers were obliged to reach beyond the boundaries of their own personal lives in choosing characters for their art. In a book review of I.A.R. Wylie's *Black Harvest*, Thurman applauded the white female author for successfully portraying the psychology of the male mulatto protagonist, Jung Siegfried. Although Thurman regretted that more blacks had not chosen to write about their own experience, his review steadfastly upheld the right of literary artists to cross all sexual and cultural boundaries in the pursuit of their craft.

Thurman's defense of a writer's act of imaginatively *passing* into the experience of a different person gives an additional significance to the concept of racial passing in his work. Part of Thurman's defense of authorial freedom was rooted in a specific debate carried on in the columns of the *Crisis* between February and November 1926 about how black Americans should be represented in fiction. Rejecting the propagandist philosophy of Du Bois's program of racial uplift, Thurman's literary journal, *Fire!!*, took an avant-garde approach toward fostering social equality. Rather than describe black culture as it ought to be, Thurman felt it should be described as it really is (Van Notten 118–19). For Thurman, documenting Harlem life meant describing rent parties, discrimination among blacks, unusual sexual choices, and, in some cases, people's dissatisfaction with their own skin color. In the middle of the *Crisis* debates, May 1926, Thurman chided Walter White for the moralistic conclusion of his novel *Flight* where White's passing protagonist, Mimi, decides to give up passing and return to black culture. Not only did White miss the opportunity to explore the tragic potential of his main character, Thurman argued, but such behavior was not always the truth. As if in response to White, a black artist in Thurman's later novel, *Infants of the Spring,* declares that "thousands of Negroes cross the line every year and I assure you that few, if any, ever feel that fictional urge to rejoin their own kind. That sort of nostalgia is confined to novels." Another of Thurman's characters in *Infants,* Aline, later decides to pass for white, moves downtown, and never comes back.

Thurman's strong views on the issue of passing rankled his race-pride patrons, and they also explain why he has been largely eschewed by queer-friendly literary scholars interested in identity politics. For example, while Amy Robinson's study of the linkage between racial and sexual passing in Harlem Renaissance literature is ostensibly committed to working toward a more inclusive society, her essay ironically categorizes people as simply homosexual, white, or black. She argues that both types of *passes* (passing for white; passing for straight) are best understood as practices of reading and

performance rather than indications of ontological essence. The title of her essay, "It Takes One to Know One," refers to a triangular relationship between the passer, the hetero/white community, and the homosexual/black insiders, where a successful *pass* requires the consent of the underprivileged group, which has the eyes to *see* such a performance take place and to take pleasure in that silent knowledge. On one hand, Robinson's performative schema of *identity* is an attempt to move away from homophobic and racist ideologies which mark often hetero- or white-normativity. However, by invoking reductive communities of interest (black is Black and homo is Homo), Robinson reproduces two grave problems of identity politics for literary analysis. First, she extrapolates the experience of *some* members of subordinated groups who share *some kinds* of primary interest in their own community for the community's identity as a whole. This logic of representation is highly necessary for the success of political movements. As a literary credo, however, it tends to promote a conformist ethos, which is precisely what Thurman objected to as a writer concerning the variety of sexual and racial differences. And second, her emphasis on *properly reading* performance celebrates a climate of scrutiny and surveillance no less intrusive than the oppressive ideologies she is ostensibly trying to dismantle. To her credit, Robinson concedes the dangers of her thesis toward the end of the essay when she admits that the pleasures of detecting a pass have always been "qualified" at best. She does not, however, elaborate on the important aesthetic yield of her dramaturgical analysis: the question is not simply whether one has been detected; it is whether the performance of passing was any good.

For Thurman himself, the main question with passing was not moral (i.e., should it be done? what would it mean for our community?)—it was aesthetic: was it done *well*? As an artist, Thurman believed that the desire to play with alternative identity was one's ticket to *pass* the bounds of social conformity and proceed into the creative world of the mind, an artistic activity as rewarding for the writer as for the drag queen. Unfortunately, many critics of *The = Blacker the Berry* have found Thurman's portrait of Emma Lou Morgan unsatisfying (Williams; Perry). Even one of Thurman's closest friends, Richard Bruce Nugent, asked Thurman why "he had made himself into a woman in the novel" (Van Notten 224). Nugent told him

that he did not know enough about women to be successful. According to Eleonore Van Notten, Thurman's biographer, "Thurman's reaction was an ineffectual attempt to evade the question. He replied that few people were aware of the autobiographical links between himself and [Emma Lou] Morgan."

Reviewing *The Blacker the Berry* for examples of authentic femaleness creates its own dubious value system, but Thurman works hard to convey the details of a dark-skinned woman's experience, focusing on her restricted employment opportunities and her heroic attempt to stay looking pert on the interview trail. In many scenes he also draws attention to Emma Lou's sense of social claustrophobia and physical confinement. Interestingly, Thurman evokes a sense of enclosure which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have associated with novels authored by women, and which also figures prominently in the conclusion of Nella Larsen's Harlem Renaissance novel, *Quicksand*. Assuming that Nugent was right, and that Thurman's characterization of Emma Lou draws extensively upon Thurman's own dark-skinned experience, Thurman is envisioning his life in terms of women's literary history as well as contributing his own ethos to that tradition.

Thurman even frankly addresses Emma Lou's awakening sexual desire as she spies men on the street corner: "She began to admire their well formed bodies and gloried in the way their trousers fit their shapely limbs, and in the way they walked, bringing their heels down so firmly and noisily on the pavement." When Emma Lou first falls in love, Thurman spends two pages describing her attraction to her lover's physique and her appetite for the touch of his tongue. It is difficult to say whether these images of desire are feminine or gay. In either case, however, the feelings are closeted, either from the perspective of Thurman's autobiographical reticence, or Emma Lou's reluctance to acknowledge her "clashing" sexual desires.

Thurman's portrait of Emma Lou's suppressed desire on the street may be related to the kind of queer sensibility Joseph Boone has described in his study of gay urban modernism, *Libidinal Currents*. Examining the relationship between literary form and homosexual content in Richard Bruce Nugent's Harlem Renaissance short story, "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," Boone argues that there is a fusion of urban space,

sexual desire, and modernist syntax in Nugent's work. The text itself begins to manifest the life-world of gay Harlem or Greenwich Village, the narrative taking on tropological elements of "cruising": taking abrupt turns, pausing, circling, and coyly showing off. Thurman's novel makes similar thematic use of the city around Emma Lou, but, as a dark-complexioned female, her subaltern desires are thwarted by social prohibitions of a different sort. Emma Lou's employment and housing opportunities are dependent upon keeping up proper appearances, a sense of confinement which is the inverse of Nugent's uncloseted desire and simultaneously a reflection of Thurman's desire to control his own public image.

In his second novel, *Infants of the Spring,* Thurman's primary characters are male but his concern with the imaginative *passing* of the artist is even more explicit. Aside from being a record of the social climate of the Harlem Renaissance, *Infants* is Thurman's diagnosis of the art the period produced. As many scholars have remarked, Paul Arbian represents one of the more talented figures of the novel, but the novel is also filled with several different examples of bad artists. One of the novel's artists is Bull, whose central trait is a primitive virility. Although no one expects Bull to have any talents above the waist, he surprises the clan at Niggeratti Manor by showing off his portfolio of women's portraits. His sketches are "painstaking, vigorous, and cleancut":

> But Bull's women were not women at all. They were huge amazons with pugilistic biceps, prominent muscular bulges and broad shoulders. The only thing feminine about them were the frilled red dresses in which they were all attired.

As an artist, Bull's problem is that he can't see beyond his own masculine identity. Thurman credits Bull with better talents than Pelham Gaylord, whose aesthetic shortcomings are expressed in his twofold abuse of his subjects: not only does Pelham symbolically abuse the young girl who lives upstairs by drawing a misshapen portrait of her, but he later violates her physically and is accused of rape. In contrast to Pelham, Bull is technically capable (both as a lover and a draughtsman), but he lacks the ability to imagine something that isn't himself, what Keats once described in a letter as Shakespeare's "Negative Capability." Bull's sexual and artistic talents are too egotistical. For example, when Bull muscles in on one of Raymond's girlfriends, Lucille,

Raymond is shocked that she could be attracted to such a "cave man." For Thurman, good artists and lovers share a sensitivity to others' experience.

The most talented artist in *Infants of the Spring* is the openly bisexual Paul Arbian, a dramatization of Thurman's real-life friend and alter-ego, Richard Bruce Nugent. Like Nugent, Paul's wide-ranging sexual tastes are reflected in his multiple talents as painter, performer, and writer. When asked to explain the paintings of brightly colored penises that decorate his walls, Paul responds:

> That's easy. I'm a genius. I've never had a drawing lesson in my life and I never intend to take one. I think that Oscar Wilde is the greatest man that ever lived. Huysmans' Des Esseintes is the greatest character in literature, and Baudelaire, the greatest poet. I also like Blake, Dowson, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Poe and Whitman.

When his companion answers, "That's not telling me anything about your drawings," Paul replies, "Unless you're dumber than I think, I've told you all you need to know." Although several of the artists that Paul cites are well known for their nonconformist sexuality, he is also declaring that he prefers artists who question the boundaries of the acceptable. Identifying with Blake's attack on the mind-forged manacles that bind human desire, with the grotesque limit experiences of Poe, and with the visionary utopianism of Whitman, Paul situates himself within an artistic legacy famous for its iconoclasm as much as its technical expertise.

Paul's invocation of the unholy trinity of Wilde, Huysmans, and Baudelaire also points to a specifically decadent modernism based in exploration of the supra-natural or abnormal world. Baudelaire describes *decadence* as a perverse aesthetic of going against-the-grain: "To apply to pleasure, to the sensation of being alive, the idea of the hyperacuity of the senses, that Poe applied to pain. To effect a creation through the pure logic of contrarity. The path is already marked in the opposite direction ('a rebours')" (qtd. in Weir 85). Paul Arbian thrives on this decadent aesthetic of contrarity. As Paul's friend, Raymond, remarks, the mere decoration of Paul's room, painted in shocking red and black, is doubly perverse. On one level, the colors are a garish choice, very much like the colors with which Huysmans' Des Esseintes decorates his own home in *A Rebours* (Huysmans' tribute to Baudelaire, variously translated

as *Against the Grain* or *Against Nature*). On another level, Paul's gaudy taste deliberately mocks bigoted expectations that blacks will "go in for loud colors" because his flamboyance both flaunts his racial identification and burlesques it at the same time.

Like Huysmans' Des Esseintes, the denizens of Thurman's Niggeratti Manor take pleasure in what they ostensibly should not. The crucial point, however, is not that Thurman's decadents are truly corrupt; they simply appear to be so from the perspective of staid Victorian morality. The purpose of their unorthodox pleasures is not a celebration of evil, but the discovery of new forms of art, which, after all, is a fundamentally romantic quest. Decadents strive for ratified forms of beauty that others cannot yet see. The experience, as Wilde puts it, is like awakening to a dream. After Dorian Gray reads Huysmans' *A Rebours,* he feels that "Things which he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed" (qtd. in Baldick 5).

The scene in which Paul recounts his romantic dream explicitly links these visions of decadent aestheticism with sexual enlightenment. In the dream, apparently modeled on Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," Paul declares that he became

> aware of a presence. An ivory body exuding some exotic perfume. Beauty dimmed my eyes. The physical nearness of that invisible presence called to me, lured me closer ... I reached out and clutched a silken forelock. Involuntarily my eyes closed and I was conscious of being sucked into it until there was a complete merging. For one brief moment I experienced supreme ecstasy.

Paul shocks the more conservative members of Niggeratti Manor with this story because he cannot remember whether his lover was male or female, and he does not seem to care. The specific sex is of no importance to him; all that matters is the pleasure of merging. When they ask him which sex he prefers, he replies: "I really don't know. After all there are no sexes, only sex majorities, and the primary function of the sex act is enjoyment. Therefore, I enjoyed one experience as much as the other."

Paul's sexual freedom, however, also has a specifically racial significance. As none of the novel's characters seems to notice, Paul's story also describes an interracial union: his dream lover is ivory white. The dream appears to anticipate the consummation of the interracial affair between Raymond and Steve Jorgenson, Raymond's Scandinavian bedmate, both of whom also pursue heterosexual affairs. As in real life, where Thurman had a long term love affair with Harold Jan Stefansson and yet married Louise Thompson, the fluid sexuality of Thurman's artistic protagonists gestures toward an idealized sphere of affiliation that transcends the political and social prejudices of race and sex.

The contrast between Paul's sexual utopia where artists, sexes, and races merge, and the segregated realities of American life is brilliantly demonstrated in another dream sequence toward the end of the novel. Distressed by the flight of his lover, Stephen, and the imprisonment of Pelham, Raymond collapses in the street. He drifts into a soothing, womb-like dream of kisses, undulating waves, and billows, very similar to the erotic utopia dreamed by Paul Arbian. As his consciousness returns, he hears a voice callously mutter, "How's the coon?" A female voice responds, "He's coming out of it. Must be epileptic." This passage grimly suggests that Raymond's interracial ideals may remain out of reach in the near future. The last laugh, however, evoked in the dark-humored, dramatic irony of the scene, belongs to the decadent artist, Thurman. As in James Baldwin's novel *Another Country*, which proposes that the interracial and bisexual affairs of its bohemian characters take place in a literal and metaphoric *other country*, Thurman's novel puts his artists in stark relief to the world around them.

Thurman's urbane awareness of the disjunction between bohemian idealism and racial prejudice in America is similar to the work of Maxim Gorky, whom Thurman invokes in one of the novel's two epigraphs. There are two sides of Gorky that appear in Thurman's work. The first is the polemical author of *Mother* (1906), the champion of Russia's rural poor and the principles of socialist realism. In *Mother,* Gorky's characters often represent, and speak for, *Ideas.* Some of the dialogues in Thurman's *Infants* manifest Gorky's soapbox tendencies. The second Gorky, less well known, is a stylist of striking imagery and economy. Inspired by the originality and "weird creativity" of the Russian Decadents and Symbolists (Dewey vii), Gorky's descriptions of his rural upbringing are spellbinding and grotesque, such as the blood foaming from his foundling-brother's

mouth after an accident, or the fascination with which he watches his grandparents' house burn in *My Childhood*. Gorky drew on such autobiographical memories in his 1925 novel, variously translated as *Decadence* or the *Artamonov Business*. Available to Thurman in English translation by 1927, the novel chronicles three generations of the Artamonov family textile business leading up to the Bolshevik revolution. Like Thurman's *Infants,* Gorky's novel becomes more and more cynical toward the end, reflecting Gorky's growing disillusionment with the communist ideals of 1917. At its conclusion, Gorky seems to celebrate neither the triumph of the revolutionaries nor the achievements of the industrialists; the blood of the parents seems to have been shed in vain. Similarly, Paul's suicide at the end of *Infants* does not fulfill his promise as a writer, nor does it provide the Negro Renaissance with a masterwork. All that is left is Paul's blood-soaked drawing of the spectacle of Niggeratti manor, crumbling at its foundations and ablaze with the white searchlights of America's expectations.

It is not known whether Thurman read *Decadence*, but *Infants of the Spring* also has clear similarities to Gorky's portraits of himself as a bohemian student. In both *My Universities* and *Fragments from My Diary* Gorky focuses his narratives around the eccentric tramps, writers, and peasants who inspired him. Encounters with these bizarre characters constitute the tissue of Gorky's autobiographies. As Thurman reminds us in the epigraph to *Infants,* Gorky identifies with people "not quite achieved, who are not very wise, a little mad, 'possessed.'" It is such people "on the lunatic fringe," *Infants*' central character Raymond asserts, "who take the lead in instituting new points of view, in exploring slightly known territory." In both these authors' work, the value of eccentricity is the attempt to assay the unknown, and it results as often in inspirational failure as in practical success.

Thus, in Thurman's work (and in the decadent writers he admired), failure can carry the positive value of having gone to the limit. Modern scholars of the Harlem Renaissance complain that *Infants* has not much of a plot and ends with an uninstructive nihilism (Perry). Robert Bone goes so far as to claim, "it was the canker of Bohemianism, in Thurman's eyes, which threatened to nip the new Negro movement in the bud." These assessments tend to misrepresent both Thurman's literary pedigree, as well as his sexual and artistic aspirations. First,

Victorian measurements of plot development and self-culture are inappropriate measures of Thurman's decadent and early modernist sensibility. Paul's suicide must be pathetic and nihilistic: anything less would be a concession to the moralistic literature Thurman was at pains to criticize. Second, as the novel emphasizes several times, the genuinely bohemian characters are the only ones whose work promises to amount to anything: Raymond declares that "it's going to be Pauls we need, not Pelhams." Ultimately, the destruction of Paul's magnum opus in a deluge of blood and bathwater is an eloquent tribute to Huysmans's decadent romanticism, not its rejection. In Thurman's eyes, the problem with the Renaissance was not that artists like Paul died young or that their work did not last: it was the inability of their immediate followers to live up to the promise of those vanguard talents.

Thurman's transgressive sexuality thus provides a framework for understanding his fascination with liminality and passing in a context which does not ritually condemn him for self loathing or racial sedition. Rather, it allows us to see that *indeterminacy* is what makes Thurman's work so rewarding and challenging. As Langston Hughes memorably described him, Thurman was "a strange kind of fellow, who liked to drink gin, but *didn't* like drinking gin, who liked being a Negro, but felt a great handicap; who adored bohemianism but thought it wrong to be a bohemian."

Second, acknowledging the European and decadent aspects of Thurman's work puts him in literary company where his value as a writer is not judged *solely* by his contribution to the advancement of black American racial dignity. Thurman may not have been a race leader worthy of NAACP approval, but his work continues to be read both popularly and in the academy.

Finally, Thurman's decadence highlights the inadequacy of approaching his work from a rigidly national framework. Given the content of his writing and his mentors, it is important to situate him in a transforming, international bohemian literary movement, stretching from the Romantics, to the Decadents and the Beats, and to rap music. This is a crucial point for getting beyond nationalist discussions of the Harlem Renaissance as a *failure* (or Thurman's place in it). As George Hutchinson argues, by imagining American culture as *both* white and

black (and among other things, not necessarily wholesome), we can begin to see the lasting contributions of the Harlem Renaissance without faulting it for failing to rapidly overturn the effects of centuries of racial discrimination. Perhaps, by returning to writers like Wallace Thurman, the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance is just unfolding.

**Source:** Granville Ganter, "Decadence, Sexuality, and the Bohemian Vision of Wallace Thurman," in *MELUS*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Summer 2003, pp. 83–104.

## *Margaret Perry*

*In the following essay, Perry profiles novels and novelists of the Harlem Renaissance.*

There were no novels by Harlem Renaissance writers of major importance in general American literature during the 1920s. All of the black writers were in the massive shadow of literary luminaries such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Sinclair Lewis. There were novels of major and minor importance, however, among black writers; every principal writer produced at least one novel during the years 1924–1932. The release of artistic expression gathered momentum beginning in 1924 when *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* announced creative writing contests and Jessie Fauset and Walter White published their first novels. In 1927, for instance, the black literary output was an unchecked flow of poetry and prose that wound in and around periodicals and publishing houses on the eastern literary scene. Rudolph Fisher had six short stories which appeared throughout the year, Cullen edited a collection of poetry by Negroes, *Caroling Dusk*, and two of his own books of poetry, *Copper Sun* and *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* appeared. Hughes's second book, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, gave the black press an out let for denouncing a movement that could not now be stopped. On the other hand, the publication of James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones* drew praise from the critics even though he anticipated a chorus of rebuke fro m them because he consciously avoided dialect. One may safely assert that in the year 1927 dialect was declared dead. (One important exception, of course, was the work of Sterling Brown.)

The prevailing notion of the fiction of the Harlem Renaissance writers during the 1920s was that it exaggerated the more offensive qualities of low-life in the black ghetto—drink, sex,

> **THE PREVAILING NOTION OF THE FICTION OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE WRITERS DURING THE 1920S WAS THAT IT EXAGGERATED THE MORE OFFENSIVE QUALITIES OF LOW-LIFE IN THE BLACK GHETTO—DRINK, SEX, GAMBLING, VIOLENCE, AND EXOTIC BEHAVIOR. THE TRUTH IS THAT THE LITERATURE SPANNING THE PERIOD OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE, ROUGHLY FROM 1923 THROUGH 1932, FOCUSED ON *EVERY* ASPECT OF BLACK LIFE."**

gambling, violence, and exotic behavior. The truth is that the literature spanning the period of the Harlem Renaissance, roughly from 1923 through 1932, focused on *every* aspect of black life. The portrayal of low-life was part of the trend toward freeing readers from seeing the black person as a problem; it was also an attempt to portray blackness with a candor that the newer writers felt had been lacking in the literature of the past. In fiction, several angles of black life were explored in order to emphasize the harsh injustice of prejudice, the basic human worth of the black race, the bourgeois life of blacks, the irrepressible spontaneity and vitality of the race, and the search for a common heritage, so that, in the words of Countee Cullen, blacks would not have to sing:

> What is last year's snow to me,
> Last year's anything? The tree
> Budding yearly must forget
> How its past arose or set—
>
> . . .
>
> *One three centuries removed*
> *From the scenes his fathers loved,*
> *Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,*
> *What is Africa to me?*

The overall controlling symbol of blackness formed the basis for the major themes explored in the fiction and poetry of the Harlem Renaissance writers. In various plot modes and poetic outpourings, the themes of passing, miscegenation, the "tragic mulatto," the Negro's struggle for self-assertion, violence (mostly white), forms of prejudice (white against black, black against

black), and the vitality of the Negro were recurrent in the works of these young writers. Some of the works were in the form of propaganda; some offerings bordered on or succumbed to the cult of exoticism; still other works presented a realistic portrayal of Negro life. The novel, of course, was the perfect vehicle for exploring all of the concerns which the Negro writer wished to portray and explicate.

The mediocre novels written by Negroes (e.g., Herman Dreer, Mary Etta Spencer) who preceded the Harlem Renaissance novelists were not immediately replaced by examples of high art. After all, the oral tradition was still the most potent influence on the black artist. The unique need felt by some to propagandize through fiction also hindered other writers from recognizing and employing the better tools of fiction. The body of Harlem Renaissance novels, therefore, is unevenly chiseled, but the primary aim of all Negro novelists, regardless of their style or thematic preoccupation, was to act as truthful interpreters of the black race for the reading public. No longer would there be the fiction of distortion, created by writers who lacked knowledge of the black world or who actually believed in the existing black stereotypes. The Negro novelist of the past, Chesnutt and Dunbar included, had sometimes succumbed to the same easy habits of the white writers in portraying the Negro in caricature. A conscious attempt was made during the 1920s and early 1930s to rid readers of the idea that the black character was a little less than human or so pious and patient in the face of oppression that he achieved an otherworldly sanctification that strained credibility. The one character that the Harlem Renaissance writers seemed unable (or, perhaps, unwilling) to purge from their postbellum literary heritage was the "tragic mulatto." Of course, it can be argued, without straining too greatly, that this type was a real part of the everyday world the Negro writer of the 1920s knew.

To grasp the intent of the various writers and to understand how they attempted to articulate their concerns through artistic expression, individual novels must be examined. The working out of themes and the crystallization of black life and culture were abundant in the novels of the following writers: Rudolph Fisher, Claude McKay, Nella Larsen, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes, whose works will be discussed in this chapter. The

novels of Wallace Thurman, Jessie Fauset, Walter White, W. E. B. Du Bois, Arna Bontemps, and George Schuyler will be discussed in the next chapter.

Rudolph Fisher was a literary craftsman who understood and practiced such arts of fiction as control over plot, characterization, tone, and language, and who had a natural poise in exposition. Fisher was as at ease writing novels as he was writing short stories, although the short stories are of greater artistic quality. Fisher is one of those writers about whom one would like to speculate, "If only he had lived longer"; even so, his accomplishments by 1934 (he died in December of that year) were far from negligible. His first novel, *The Walls of Jericho*, for instance, contains one of the most amusing yet cynical scenes (the Merritt-Cramp conversation) in modern literature. He was the first black writer to have a creditable and absorbing mystery published in America (*The Conjure-man Dies*). As a stylist, Fisher had no peer among the nonexperimental Harlem Renaissance writers. This skill, however, led to his most notable weakness—a clever adroitness that makes his satire somewhat strained in some instances, and, related to this, a feather-light style that sometimes blurs his dramatic impact.

*The Walls of Jericho* (1928) is a study in black realistic fiction, for Fisher follows closely the dictum of Henry James in giving his novel an "air of reality" (as opposed to representing life) through his concern with mimesis rather than theme and form. (This is stated merely for contrast, not in terms of exclusion; Fisher was certainly concerned, as a stylist, with form, and as a man caught up in the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance, he was not oblivious to the importance of theme and motif.) An early commentator on the Harlem Renaissance wrote about Fisher:

> [His] realism does not go searching after exotic places, but walks the streets of Harlem with its lowly. His interest dwells upon transplanted southern country folk who, having reached the city, have not yet had bound upon their natures the *aes triplex* of city sophistication. They are simple, funloving folk, sometimes religious, more usually superstitious, leaning ardently toward the good but not too zealously to be sometimes led astray by bewildering temptations.

There is a plot and subplot in *The Walls of Jericho*, where all strata of Negro society in New York City are represented—the uneducated

lower classes (but not the poverty-stricken), the gamblers, the middle class, and the so-called upper class. The hero, Ralph Merrit, a lawyer by profession, can be counted among the few in this last category. He is, in the words of the common Negro, a "dickty," and he receives little support or sympathy at the opening of the book where it is revealed that he has bought a house in a white neighborhood just bordering on Harlem. Despite this move, the extremely pale (but kinky-haired) Merrit has none of the pretensions often present in Negroes of his class, even though it is assumed that he does by the characters Fisher presents in contrast to him—Shine (Joshua Jones), and Jinx and Bubber (Fisher's black Damon and Pythias). As a matter of fact, Merrit's reason for moving into the white neighborhood is not obvious. As he explains:

> All of you know where I stand on things racial—I'm downright rabid. And even though . . . I'd enjoy this house, if they let me alone, purely as an individual, just the same I'm entering it as a Negro. I hate fays. Always have. Always will. Chief joy in life is making them uncomfortable. And if this doesn't do it—I'll quit the bar.

Side by side with the story of Merrit is the romance between Shine and the Negro maid, Linda. She works for Miss Cramp, a bigoted neighbor of Merrit, who sees herself as an enlightened benefactor of the downtrodden and misguided. Miss Cramp takes on causes the way sticky tape picks up lint, and her interest is as short-lived as lint-covered adhesive is useful. Her arrogant notions of racial superiority are mitigated only by her evident obtuseness and sheer ignorance. Such a restricted, narrow mind is beyond repair, as her name implies: she stands as a symbol of the blind, bigoted do-gooder who clutters the world with unproductive activities and confused motives. She is also unfortunately a victim of Fisher's penchant for caricature; the light touch he applies to Miss Cramp lessens the magnitude of what she really symbolizes. Still, it is possible that her name will become as meaningful to the literate reader as the name Babbitt, thereby enriching the descriptive language of America.

The work companions, Shine, Jinx, and Bubber, provide the book with comic characters and also furnish the reader with an insight into staple personalities in black society—persons who are (or, perhaps, were) rarely seen outside of Harlem (at l east, in their true character) and therefore remain a mystery to the white world. To citizens of Harlem, the prototypes of Jinx and Bubber were in evidence daily. They add as much to an air of reality as do the places described in the various scenes. Both men conform analogically to the black joker hero and, in a more tenuous fashion, to the trickster hero.

Thematically, Fisher was concerned with the idea of black unity and the discovery of self. He uses the Bible story of Joshua to reinforce his concern for the black man's search for his true nature that will permit him to disengage himself from the deceptions of the past. Every man is Joshua, facing a seemingly impenetrable wall:

> No man knows himself till he comes to an impasse; to some strange set of conditions that reveals to him his ignorance of the workings of his spirit; to some disrupting impact that shatters the wall of self-illusion. This, I believe, is the greatest spiritual battle of a man's life, the battle with his own idea of himself.

It is such knowledge that draws divergent segments of the black population—the Ralph Merrits and the Joshua Joneses—into a unity that can do battle with the white enemy inside the walls of Jericho.

Fisher's second book, *The Conjure-man Dies* (1932), is the first black detective novel published in the United States. The book was an important addition to the literature of the Harlem Renaissance because it exhibited again Fisher's abiding interest in his race and the formulation of ties with the African homeland. Fisher believed that Harlem was a natural setting for the mystery novel:

> Darkness and mystery go together, don't they? The children of the night—and I say this in all seriousness—are children of mystery. The very setting is mystery—outsiders know nothing of Harlem life as it re ally is . . . what goes on behind the scenes and beneath the dark skins of Harlem folk—fiction has not found much of that yet. And much of it is perfectly in tune with the best of mystery tradition—variety, color, mysticism, superstition, malice and violence.

The semicomic Jinx and Bubber appear in this book also. They liven the action and the conversation, contributing some touches of comic relief to the peculiar, mysterious atmosphere. They were Fisher's favorite characters, "who," as he said, "having shared several adventures with me before, have become very real to me."

Fisher was also fascinated by the technique of constructing a mystery novel—the mingling of fact and fiction, and the opportunity to commence what was to have become, had Fisher lived, a corpus of detective novels known as the Dart-Archer series. In discussing *The Conjure-man Dies*, Fisher stated: "An archer, of course, is a bowman, one who shoots an arrow. Dart is another word for arrow. Dr. Archer and Detective Dart, therefore, stand in the relationship of a bowman and his arrow; the vision of the former gives direction and aim to the action of the latter." The book also gave Fisher a grand chance not only to vivify Harlem as a place of clubs and cabarets but to portray it as the home of the ordinary black folk who supply most of its color and movement.

When Claude McKay died in 1948, it was noted that "it was a request of Mr. McKay that his funeral service be held in Harlem, where he spent so much of his active life." McKay spent the years between 1922 and 1934 out of the United States , but the memory of Harlem and all that it meant to him, both symbolically and sensually, never faded from his mind, even when he had lost some of his younger fervor for its haunts.

McKay was damned as a novelist by Du Bois and others (even James Weldon Johnson did not like *Home to Harlem*) who felt that McKay exploited the theme of Negro primitivism and leaned too heavily on the effects of exotic descriptions of lowlife. The formless aspect of his narratives was also disconcerting. This was so even though he included, for example, a subtitle, "A story without a plot," on the title page of the novel *Banjo*. The formlessness, therefore, was clearly intentional.

One of McKay's assets was his unambivalent attitude toward race: he was a black man and he was proud of it. He wasn't interested in assimilation, although he had a forceful streak of the European aesthete in him which he neither exalted nor damned. He once wrote: "Whatever may be the criticism implied in my writing of Western civilization I do not regard myself as a stranger but as a child of it, even though I may have become so by the comparatively recent process of grafting. I am as conscious of my new-world birthright as of my African origin, being aware of the one and its significance in my development as much as I feel the other emotionally." This dualistic sentiment did not mean

that he was not conscious of the problem his color presented. One must not forget McKay's own admission that "my main psychological problem . . . was the problem of color. Color-consciousness was the fundamental of my restlessness." McKay was satisfied with his own understanding of himself and his dual heritage; what saddened and often exasperated him was the lack of understanding he found among whites who could not envision how a man as civilized as McKay could refuse to accept the European, Anglo-Saxon value system. This dualism, a problem not to be solved by a simple statement incorporating the idea that the black race had a respectable past, one different from whites but equal to it in terms of the values that were transmitted from one generation to the next, was simply one more result of the white man's refusal to legitimize black experience. As McKay saw it, then, the problem really wasn't his alone; the white person had to share the responsibility for placing McKay, and others like him, in two world s. And when one exists in two worlds, one can hardly be completely loyal to either of them. McKay understood this, but many of his critics, he surmised, did not.

A spiritual and intellectual cleavage existed as well between McKay and the black bourgeois writers of the Harlem Renaissance. McKay was keenly aware of the inner struggles of the younger black writers. Thus, he portrays his concern about every aspect of blackness, the black soul, and the "new Negro" through Ray, who becomes his spokesman in both of his vagabond novels. These same concerns are also a part of his autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937).

When *Home to Harlem* appeared in 1928, McKay was accused of being too greatly influenced by Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*. McKay defended himself against this unsubstantiated charge when his book first appeared; later, in his autobiography, he explained:

> Many persons imagine that I wrote *Home to Harlem* because Carl Van Vechten wrote *Nigger Heaven*. But the pattern of the book was written under the title of "Home to Harlem " in 1925. When Max Eastman read it he said, "It is worth a thousand dollars." Under the same title it was entered in the story contest of the Negro magazine *Opportunity*. But it did not excite the judges. *Nigger Heaven* was published in the fall of 1926. I never saw the book until the late spring of 1927, when my agent . . . sent me a copy. And by that time I had nearly completed *Home to Harlem*.

This explanation ought to be accepted not only because it seems convincing but also because both novels are each so different that the question of Van Vechten's influence becomes academic.

*Home to Harlem* is a vagabond novel, full of color, noise, and vitality, rounded out by a touch of intellectualism and social criticism. The story is loosely structured around the search by Jake,x the primary character, for the "tantalizing brown" whom he enjoys on his first night in that home of homes for the black man, Harlem. Jake is home from the war—the white man's war—an *AWOL* with a taste for English-made suits, an uncomplicated sensualist who lives each day to its fullest. He is the archetypal primitive who will never succumb to the restraints of Puritan American civilization. At the end of the novel, he finds his girl (who, by the way, left him the &dollar;50 during that first joyful night) and discovers her name which, quite appropriately, is Felice ("Joy"). While the movement from beginning to end is episodic and disjointed, the novel is successful in: (1) its portrayal of life in Harlem's cabarets, rent parties, pool rooms, and other dives of the more lowly; (2) its exposure of the mentality and weaknesses of bourgeois life; (3) its exploration of the problems of the Negro intellectual (i.e., a person overly cultivated in norms alien to his origins and, therefore, an unhappy disaffected individual); and (4) its examination of the nature and place of sex in the black world.

It is an antithetical world which McKay paints, a world rendered in disjointed sentences, slang, and elliptical Negro phrases that ring with authenticity. There may be a little exaggeration, but McKay's contrast of a world within a world requires some overstatement. The antithesis is also internal, for his aim in presenting characters like Ray and Jake is not to juxtapose opposing elements of society but, more important, to give two sides of the contradictory nature of man: sensual man vs. sensible man.

This kind of probing is an important element in McKay's novel *Banjo* (1929). Ray is also a key character in this book, and Jake is replaced by his counterpart, the Banjo of the title. The book is peopled with men and women who inhabit the fringes of "respectable" society. They live around the waterfront in Marseilles where their existence is a combination of the grim, the grimy, and the happy-go-lucky. The most important segments of the book deal with Ray's tirades against the black American for his aping of whites and discursive conversations that explain McKay's sentiments about the Harlem Renaissance. Here, for instance, is Ray talking to a Martiniquan student:

> 'In the modern race of life we're merely beginners. If this renaissance we're talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we'll have to get down to our racial roots to create it.'

> 'I believe in a racial renaissance,' said the student, 'but not in going back to savagery.'

> 'Getting down to our native roots and building up from our own people,' said Ray, 'is not savagery. It is culture.'

> 'I can't see that,' said the student.

> 'You are like many Negro intellectuals who are bellyaching about race,' said Ray. 'What's wrong with you all is your education. You get a white man's education and learn to despise your own people . . .

> 'You're a lost crowd, you educated Negroes, and you will find yourself in the roots of your own people.'

From such episodes, something can be learned about McKay as Ray's attitudes waver from bitterness to tenderness to moral confusion. At the book's end Ray retains some of his ambivalence, although he makes a positive choice to remain, at least for a time, in the sensual world. His decision, then, is made with an air of one who is still experimenting with notions of how to live one's life.

McKay's last novel, *Banana Bottom* (1933), is not within the basic time or thematic scope of this book and will not be discussed. In one critic's view it "is the first classic of West Indian prose." The West Indian tone and mood prevail in McKay's collection of short stories, too, although the Harlem stories have greater artistic strength. *Gingertown* (1932) contains twelve examples of McKay's short fiction. The Harlem tales, in particular, give an intimate and vivid portrait of Renaissance Harlem. For example, "Brownskin Blues," a story of another Mary Lou (Thurman's), is about a woman whose black skin leads to tragedy. "Mattie and Her Sweetman" portrays the life of an older woman who is supporting a young man. In both of these stories, crude as they are, McKay exhibits control over his characterizations and the setting. "High Ball" is another of his successful tales, in terms of theme and characterization; the

protagonist, Nation, is sympathetically and realistically portrayed (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of this story). In this story McKay explores a virulent form of race prejudice and expresses one aspect of the black man's struggle for self-assertion. Curiously, the West Indian tales are the weakest in the book, but they are written with such a lyrical nostalgia that the stories have a unique, seductive quality.

McKay's importance in the Harlem Renaissance is undisputed, even though he was physically absent from the United States during its height. His almost obsessive concern with the nature of contradiction in the black man's character compelled him to write fiction and poetry which embrace many of the earmarks of Harlem Renaissance literature.

McKay, like Cullen, was unable to fulfill his potential, although the body of McKay's work is not unimpressive. What seems to be lacking in his work is a certain breadth which he might have displayed if he had continued in the direction in which he started when he wrote *Banana Bottom*. In it he seems to have turned to another level of expression, the orthodox novel, but he ceased producing significant artistic literature at this point in his life. Stephen H. Bronz assesses McKay in this perceptive summation of his role in the Harlem Renaissance:

> Because McKay was not fully a member of any one group, and because of his radical education and outspoken personality, he set the outer limits of the Harlem Renaissance. No other important Negro writer in the 'twenties protested so fiercely and single-mindedly against prejudice as did McKay in his sonnets of 1919. And no other important Renaissance figure disregarded possible effects on the Negro public image so fearlessly as did McKay in his prose fiction. From his Jamaica n days to his strange conversion to Catholicism, McKay forever spoke his mind, sometimes brilliantly, sometimes clumsily, but always forthrightly. In so doing he did much to make the Harlem Renaissance more than a polite attempt to show whites that Negroes, too, could be cultured.

Robert Bone places Nella Larsen, along with Jessie Fauset, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Walter White, in the class of "The Rear Guard," that is, "novelists [who] still wished to orient Negro art toward white opinion. They wished to apprise educated whites of the existence of respectable Negroes, and to call their attention—now politely, now indignantly—to facts of racial injustice."

Nella Larsen was a descendant of two widely different racial and cultural backgrounds: her father was a West Indian Negro and her mother was Danish. Larsen's own origins and the subsequent unfulfilled life she led as the wife of an adulterer (whom she finally divorced) provided her with the material for her life's work. Certainly she followed the admonition to young writers to "write what you know about" in her first novel, *Quicksand*. The theme of the tragic mulatto is merged with what Bone describes as the basic metaphor of the novel which is "contained in its title [and] supported throughout by concrete images of suffocation, asphyxiation, and claustrophobia." The story of Helga Crane, daughter of a black man and a Danish woman whom he deserted, is obviously patterned on Larsen's early life. Supported by a sympathetic uncle after her mother's death, Helga grows up with all the bourgeois inclinations of the black middle class. Deep within her, however, is a desire to repudiate the ethic of the bourgeoisie. "The woman as bitch," resting latent within Helga, causes her final doom as she settles into the "quicksand" of a mediocre domesticity. The downward, symbolically circular path to this suffocating pit (her marriage and the South) moves via a series of sharply etched episodes that reveal Larsen's skill at characterization. She shows that she is well aware of the "craft of fiction"; there is vividness, truth (especially in her revelations of a woman's inner life), and an ability to create scenes of encounters among people even though she fails to be entirely convincing in her ending. However, even Percy Lubbock, in *The Craft of Fiction*, notes that an author may lack some part of the craft and still succeed.

Clearly, the plot is subordinate to the characterizations. Helga Crane moves from the stultifying atmosphere of a southern Negro college to New York, via a brief stay in Chicago where she is scorned by her sympathetic white uncle's new wife. Thus, rejected with finality by the American branch of her family, Helga settles in Harlem where she finds temporary contentment. Helga's life is a series of only evanescent fulfillments, for she is plagued with a restlessness that has deeper causes than Miss Larsen bothers to penetrate. It is in Harlem that Helga cultivates and develops her "black" soul. Her embracing of this blackness is emotionally incomplete at this juncture, however. At the beginning of her life in Harlem she reflects:

Everything was there [in Harlem], vice and goodness, sadness and gayety, ignorance and wisdom, ugliness and beauty, poverty and richness. And it seemed to her that somehow of goodness, gayety, wisdom, and beauty always there was a little more than of vice, sadness, ignorance, and ugliness. It was only riches that did not quite transcend poverty. 'But,' said Helga Crane, 'what of that? Money isn't everything. It isn't even the half of everything. And here we have so much else—and by ourselves. It's only outside of Harlem among those others that money really counts for everything.'

This passage foreshadows a reverse in Helga's attitude; for when she moves from the black world into the white one of her rich relatives in Denmark she momentarily relinquishes the moral superiority of her black universe:

She liked it, this new life. For a time it blotted from her mind all else… To Helga Crane it was the realization of a dream that she had dreamed persistently ever since she was old enough to remember such vague things as day- dreams and longings. Always she had wanted, not money, but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things.

Helga Crane, a nervous and somewhat complex character, is one of the more interesting creations found in the Harlem Renaissance novels. For one thing, she is one female of the bourgeois who displays a desire to be sexually fulfilled. In her decision to reject the physical and social comforts of the white (or, as Harlem Renaissance writers termed it, Nordic) world for the warmth and vitality of the black one, Helga fits the Renaissance's persistent pattern. By fitting into this mold and accepting her blackness, Helga begins to understand what motivated her father's desertion:

For the first time Helga Crane felt sympathy rather than contempt and hatred for that father, who so often and so angrily she had blamed for his desertion of her mother. She understood, now, his rejection, his repudiation, of the formal calm her mother had represented. She understood his yearning, his intolerable need for the inexhaustible humor and the incessant hope of his own kind, his need for those things, not material, indigenous to all Negro environments.

At this point Helga finds release from false values and commences the backward journey into her true black self. She selects religion to carry her back into the bosom of blackness. The portrait of Helga from this point to the end becomes blurred and confusing. After her "conversion," she turns to Pleasant Green, a greasy, sweaty, mediocre preacher; despite the Oedipal implication of the search for a father, this major move is unconvincing. One explanation for the confused motivation near the end of the book may be that she tired of writing in the midst of describing Helga's Copenhagen experiences. Suddenly, it seems, Helga gives up living and accepts an existence that will limp along in a wearisome, depressing manner.

The reader is left with an inkling that Larsen decided to make Helga forget that part of her past that made her fight for the things she wanted. The author, in an attempt to rescue herself artistically from the book's weak ending, inserts a scene which may provide a clue to what she intended. Helga requests a reading of Anatole France's "The Procurator of Judea." Just as Pilate let himself forget the momentous event of his condemnation of Christ, so Helga, it appears, in requesting to hear this ironic tale, seems to be telling the reader that she is simply going to forget the past. Larsen's skillful use of this device, however, does not compensate for the unsatisfactory religious motivation Helga is given for becoming Mrs. Pleasant Green in the first place.

Nella Larsen's second novel, *Passing* (1929), is written in that hasty, seminonchalant style that put her a notch above some of her black peers of this period in terms of simple narrative technique. Therefore, even though the narrative moves smoothly in *Passing*, the story itself is inconsequential. The ending is melodramatic and, again (surely a Larsen weakness), unconvincing. One is not sure whether Larsen intends the reader to view Clare Kendry's death as suicide (intentional? accidental?) or murder (intentional? accidental?). It is entirely possible that she wanted this confusion to persist forever in the reader's mind, but this certainly does not give the book any artistic complexity that might intrigue the imagination.

One important feature of Larsen's work that is clearly evident here, as it is in *Quicksand*, is her awareness of female sexuality. The latent desire for sexual fulfillment that Helga satisfies with her marriage to the gross preacher is akin to Clare's attraction to her friend's husband. In both cases, the black man either symbolizes or brings sexual gratification, thereby reinforcing the Renaissance view that it is the black, and not the white, race that is fertile, vital, full-bodied, and rich in humaneness.

Miss Larsen never fulfilled the promise of her early successes, and she disappeared from the literary scene after an unpleasant exposure and accusation concerning plagiarism.

A date, or time itself, perhaps, is meaningless within itself; that added element, amplification, is needed to give significance to a date. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* is a case in point: this single novel by James Weldon Johnson was published under a pseudonym in 1912. Its inclusion in a study of the Harlem Renaissance, however, is relevant because of its plot and treatment of racial prejudice in a mode that parallels other novels of this period. Moreover, its reissue in 1927 demonstrates that Johnson's contemporaries also saw the novel as akin to the Harlem Renaissance literature. This book forcefully upholds the notion that Johnson can be promoted as being a precursor of the Harlem Renaissance. The 1927 edition contained an introductions by Johnson's good friend, Carl Van Vechten.

Despite its deceptive title, this book remains one of the most accomplished pieces of lengthy fiction written by a Negro during the first four decades of the twentieth century. It is a dispassionate picture of what it was like to grow up nearly white in the racist society of the early part of this century. The prejudice against blacks was blatantly illogical and so rampant that no excuses were needed. The protagonist of Johnson's novel, knowing the truth of "label a mulatto white and the world's view of him adopts the label," finally succumbs to the advantages of uncomplicated day-to-day living as a "passer." Even so, at the novel's end, he states: "I cannot repress the thought that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage."

The melancholy of Johnson's protagonist, as well as his cowardice, are not romantic poses. In this novel Johnson implants a psychological motif which appears again and again in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, namely, the belief that the Negro who abandons his people also forsakes a richness that cannot be replaced by the superficial freedom which passing into the white world accords. This motif appeared, for example, in nearly all of the works of Jessie Fauset, Walter White, Claude McKay, and Nella Larsen and was certainly implied in Rudolph Fisher's work and in Countee Cullen's one novel.

*The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* is a mingling of realism and irony. The realism is of the simplest kind: Johnson portrays in rich, convincing detail several strata of Negro life in the South and the East. The irony is perhaps unintentional: the whole narrative is, first, one of understatement and, second, one in which the hero's life changes direction radically after one episode—the loss of money for college—which the author intimates as being the "irony of fate." Irony operates rather successfully, too, when we realize that the hero's decision to pass, after his seemingly objective review of both sides, fails to give him the happiness he had expected. Dispassionate objectivity may lead to nowhere, the author seems to say.

Briefly, the novel follows the life of an unnamed light-skinned protagonist who, upon leaving the South at an early, undisclosed age, is reared in genteel, middle-class comfort in Connecticut. He does not discover the fact or meaning of being a Negro until he is ten, when an embarrassing classroom situation forces this fact upon his sensitive nature. Even then, his life is relatively calm, and he successfully completes his adolescence, aloof from most of his classmates but not entirely isolated. The hero, musically talented, proceeds southward to enter Atlanta University. His money is stolen during his first day there; but rather than explain his unhappy circumstances to the university administrators, he gives up college life and commences his life of wandering and his search for self. The conflict that wars within begins to emerge at this point: he wishes to become the best sort of Negro, to present to the world the Negro's musical heritage, and, the easier wish to satisfy, to gratify himself as just another man in the world, to enjoy the normal, even routine joys experienced by the middle- or upper-middle-class white American. As the title of the book suggests, the "hero" finally chooses the last goal. The story follows his wanderings from work in a cigar factory, to piano playing in a club, to travels in Europe with his rich employer, and to the United States again where he collects Negro folk songs. But he now abandons his race, not simply for love of a white woman but also because of the contradictions of his nature. On the one hand, as he says, "I have been only a privileged spectator of their [Negroes] inner life," and on the other, "I am possessed by a strange longing for my mother's people."

As evidenced by the society Johnson describes as well as the duality of the protagonist's nature, the novel can be said to be within that tradition of duality dominant in American fiction. The tradition is clear in the protagonist's inner contradictions and the struggles of good and evil within him, demonstrated in his circumstances, his actions, and, most dramatically, his inner turmoil which makes him realize that he has sold his birthright "for a mess of pottage." This intermingling of black and white taints the hero's moral character much as his physical being was tainted in the belief of American society that such an offspring, the product of racial intermingling, was a corrupted version of the human species. Through the act of passing, the protagonist assumes the role of one who has failed once again to demonstrate personal integrity. There is a continual relinquishing of values portrayed through the actions of the protagonist; for instance, the acquiescence to the easier way out of a dilemma (not going to college), or his lack of shame when confronted with a lapse in his moral character (the chasing and tormenting of a black boy from his school). And, of course, his "passing" is his greatest act of moral cowardice.

There is a quality of the *bildungsroman* in Johnson's work, although the forays into black propaganda and the hero's remaining air of perennial questioning of his chosen path in life weaken the impression that Johnson perceived the book on this level. Indeed, in his autobiography he is curiously reticent about discussing his book in a literary sense and seems more concerned with emphasizing that *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* was fiction rather than the story of his life.

Although the writers of the Harlem Renaissance were not oblivious to the influence of the black man's religion in shaping his character, they rarely used religious settings for their novels. The prominent exception, Countee Cullen, is not surprising, inasmuch as he was the adopted son of a minister. Cullen's single novel, *One Way to Heaven*, was published during the waning days of the Harlem Renaissance (1932), but it bears the marks of a Renaissance novel. It is, in Cullen's words, a "two toned picture" which explores the lives of the upper and lower strata of Negro life in Harlem during the 1920s.

Cullen wrote to his good friend, Harold Jackman, and talked of Flaubert: "I would give years of my life to learn to write like that [re *Madame Bovary*] . . . I suppose Flaubert devoted his entire life to mastering words and studying human emotions. Art such as his takes a lifetime to develop." Cullen, though never a Flaubert, achieved a polish in language and an emotional depth in *One Way to Heaven* that clearly can be traced to his admiration of the great masters. It is one of the better novels of the Harlem Renaissance period.

The novel's two stories are frequently interwoven, but it is still primarily a novel with two different stories, one in contrast with the other because two different realms of Harlem life are explored. Indeed, some readers may consider this narrative mode the major weakness of the novel. To be fair to Cullen, between the significance of the title and the focusing upon Sam Lucas at the beginning and the ending, it seems that the Sam-Mattie love story is the primary one.

The opening scene is laid in a church where an evangelist is speaking during a "watch meeting" night. Sam Lucas, a one-armed con man, enters with the intention of performing his faked act of conversion. It is the eve of a new year, with the evangelist out to catch wayward souls and Sam Lucas out to get the most out of his highly practiced art. He strides to the altar and presents his razor and cards as symbols of his conversion. A young lady in the audience, moved by his action, submits to the "spirit" and is truly converted. Thus, their relationship starts on a compromised basis because of his deceit and her subsequent naïveté in believing that religion, which has brought them together, will shape their future life together. They marry, although Sam encounters difficulties unknown to him before in the wooing and winning of Mattie. This is evident in the following scene, which also serves to illustrate the sacred and profane aspects that form a leitmotif in the novel:

> They walked along in a silence which was mainly fear of themselves, fear of the fierce desires at the roots of their beings . . . Sam had forgotten the services of the church as soon and as lightly as he had stepped across its threshold out into the sharp January sun. All that he was concerned with now was the woman at his side . . . . He wished he knew how to tackle her; for he felt that she was like some new and strange being, unlike the other women he had known. Those others had been like himself, creatures of action and not of speech . . . . He knew when a flippant word meant 'Leave me be.' But this girl . . . She seemed near at hand, as

close as if they were linked together by a strip of flesh, yet inaccessible, as if getting religion and joining church had suddenly grown walls about her and shut her away from the world. Her eyes smiled at him, but their message was . . . 'Speak to me' and 'Tell me things.' The palm of his hand was moist with panic.

After marrying, Sam has a hard time keeping up the deception about his new-found religion. He cheats on Mattie, moves out to be with his woman, but returns to Mattie in the end when he is suffering from pneumonia. Just before he dies, he pretends to believe again and Mattie is happy. Cullen suggests that Sam's last act of deception secures his salvation because it is sacrificial.

Mattie is employed as a maid for the Harlem socialite Constancia Brandon, a witty, pretentious, and extravagant woman who mocks as she is mocked. The sycophants who hang about her salon are much more savagely portrayed because they are unaware of the fragility and senselessness of the putative Negro "society." Constancia is well aware of the cracks in the Negro psyche, but she possesses, in addition to intelligence (she is a Radcliffe graduate), common sense and a love for those Negro strengths and unique qualities that enrich life. (The truth or falsity of this premise is not the point, either in this novel or in any of the others that promote the idea of black vitality.) At one point, Constancia states:

> I often think the Negro is God Almighty's one mistake, but as I look about me at white people, I am forced to say so are we all. It isn't being colored that annoys me. I could go white if I wanted to, but I am too much of a hedonist; I enjoy life too much, and enjoyment isn't across the line. Money is there, and privilege, and the sort of power which comes with numbers; but as for enjoyment, they don't know what it is.

As viewed through Constancia, then, blacks are implied to be basically superior to whites in terms of warmth, compassion, humaneness, and ability to enjoy life despite social restrictions and persecution. It is obvious, also, that Cullen admired his Constancia: she outshines Mattie and Sam so outrageously that the reader is left wishing that Cullen had written two books instead of one.

The desire to portray all strata of Harlem social classes weakens the book because the characterizations never achieve full dimensions. The failure to present Harlem in depth is a pity,

for one is struck by Cullen's facility with language in his descriptive or narrative passages. His dialogue is natural, too, even though it seems forced in some of the scenes with Constancia. On a deeper level, Cullen demonstrates an awareness of the uses of symbol and metaphor, and he displays a feeling for the sort of literary complexity absent in some of the other Harlem Renaissance novels.

The symbols of the razor and cards, pervasive throughout the book, are manifestations of the evil that Sam professes to have abandoned. The salvation theme is also developed through the symbols of cards and razor and concurrently through the use of dark and light imagery and colors. For instance, red has the dual symbolism of salvation and sin (e.g., the "blood of the Lamb" and red lips). In the case of the red kimona that Sam offers Mattie, the color reflects the shame Mattie shares in joining with Sam, the overt sinner. White functions in the traditional mode to symbolize purity, but black is employed to epitomize beauty instead of dark deeds and foul acts.

Like the razor, Sam, too, is an instrument: he is an instrument of salvation. Heaven has sent Sam to Mattie and she reclaims him for this divine abode. Sam is an instrument of salvation because his final act is presented ultimately as an act of sacrifice rather than of pure chicanery. Without Sam's ruse Mattie would be doomed; she would be barred from the salvation she earnestly seeks.

If there is a single metaphor for Cullen's book it lies in the title: one way to get into heaven is through a type of personal salvation that results from well-meaning deception. Mattie is fooled by the pretense, the "trickster" act of Sam, but Sam, in a roundabout, theological sense, is possibly saved as well. He pretends to hear music and to see bright lights in order to convince Mattie that he has had a vision. Before he dies, "he could feel Mattie's hand tremble on his forehead. Aunt Mandy stood transfixed and mute. He knew that for them he was forever saved." Thus, with careful attention to the details of Sam's vision, Cullen brings to an orderly conclusion the chaos of troubled souls. The fact that Cullen begins and concludes his work with the lives of Sam and Mattie is evidence that they were meant to be the primary focus of Cullen's story. Therefore, Cullen should have concentrated on it. The novel would have

been strengthened by greater attention to these confused, common folk, especially since it is their story that supplies the novel with its thematic title.

It was another poet, the most enduring and well-known survivor of the Harlem Renaissance, who wrote perhaps the most appealing and least controversial novel during the waning of the Renaissance. It was during his student days (in his mid-twenties, however) at Lincoln University that Langston Hughes started writing his first novel, *Not Without Laughter* (1930). Although the book was favorably reviewed, Hughes later expressed disappointment with his character portrayals. Here he was perhaps not the best judge, for his characterizations are one of the strengths of this frankly nostalgic novel. Despite weaknesses in the structure and an obvious simplicity in Hughes's interpretation of the lives he describes, the book was warmly applauded by some reviewers whose opinions are worth quoting:

> It is written with understanding, tolerance and beauty, it lays special claim to the attention of those who love life and its mirroring in fiction.

> It is significant because even where it fails, it fails beautifully, and where it succeeds— namely, in its intimate characterizations and in its local color and charm—it succeeds where almost all others have failed.

> Its strength lies in this simplicity, in its author's unflinching honesty, and in his ability to make the reader feel very deeply the problems of his characters.

Even Martha Gruening, in her article berating the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, gives tribute to Hughes:

> [It] is not only uniquely moving and lovely among Negro novels but among books written about America. It is affirmative in a sense in which no other book by an American Negro is, for it is the story of a Negro happily identified with his own group, who because of his identification tells what is essentially, despite the handicaps of poverty and prejudice, the story of a happy childhood.

Hughes explains what he was attempting to do in *Not Without Laughter* in his autobiography:

> I wanted to write about a typical Negro family in the Middle West, about people like those I had known in Kansas. But I thought I had been a typical Negro boy.... We [his family] were poor—but different. For purposes of the novel, however, I created around myself what seemed to me a family more typical of Negro life in Kansas than my own had been.

Reality through nostalgia was a primary concern, then; and to treat the novel as one with a complex theme and motive is to do the book an injustice.

The story centers on the life of Sandy as he grows up in a small town in Kansas (Stanton). His mother, Annjee, is married to a no-account, good-looking mulatto named Jimboy. Annjee's mother, Aunt Hager, a version of the mammy prototype, says of him: "Who ever heard of a nigger named Jimboy, anyhow? Next place, I ain't never seen a yaller dude yet that meant a dark woman no good—an' Annjee is dark!"

Sandy has two aunts, Tempy and Harriett. Tempy has risen in the world and has all the shallow veneer of the "nouveau bourgeois." In reality, she is unsure of herself, although she makes it clear how she is to be treated and, in receiving this phony respect, remains isolated from her warm-hearted, unpretentious family. Tempy and others in her "class" know how tenuous their role is, for they "were all people of standing in the darker world—doctors, schoolteachers, a dentist, a lawyer, a hairdresser.... One's family as a topic of conversation, however, was not popular in high circles, for too many of Stanton's dark society folks had sprung from humble family trees and low black bottoms."

Sandy's other aunt, Harriett, epitomizes the uninhibited, sensuous, generous woman—the sort of person, as Hughes says, who never "soiled" her mind by too much thinking. She hates the stultifying atmosphere of her home because Aunt Hager is obsessed by religion and its sometime by-product, sin. Harriett displays toward her mother an impatience that erupts in venomous verbal spats. At one point she tells Aunt Hager:

> I don't want to be respectable if I have to be stuck up and dicty like Tempy is.... She's colored and I'm colored and I haven't seen her since before Easter... It's not being black that matters with her, though, it's being poor, and that's what we are, you and me and Annjee, working for white folks and washing clothes and going in back doors, and taking tips and insults. I'm tired of it, mama, I want to have a good time once in a while.

Later, she shouts this shocking statement to her mother: "Your old Jesus is white, I guess, that's why! He's white and stiff and don't like niggers!"

In the end it is Harriett (by this time a night club singer) who intercedes in Sandy's behalf to aid him in the first steps towards achieving both his and Aunt Hager's dream of completing his schooling. Sandy's mother is not enthusiastic about education for the boy; work that pays enough to keep one alive is all that she considers necessary. But Harriett, even though rejecting Aunt Hager's way of life for herself, reminds Annjee, "Why, Aunt Hager'd turn over in her grave if she heard you talking so calmly about Sandy leaving school—the way she wanted to make something out of this kid."

The fictional canvas is rich in characterization and in its portrayal of a racial milieu little known at that time in our social history. The style of Hughes's prose is unrestrained and casual, tinged at times with an air of nostalgia and naïveté. The book is weakened by its episodic structure and by its incomplete, faltering characterization of the protagonist, Sandy. The novel sometimes seems to be more a novel about Aunt Hager, for she overwhelms the imagination and is presented in full dimension. Still, Hughes dissected "the ways of black folk" with a skill that he, and others, underestimated. In choosing the mode of the realistic novel, in fusing it with the ambiance of the black folk tradition, Hughes wrote a book that is as charming as it is honest.

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# Humanism

Humanism is an educational and cultural philosophy that began in the Renaissance when scholars rediscovered Greek and Roman classical philosophy and has as its guiding principle the essential dignity of man. Humanism was the intellectual movement that informed the Renaissance, although the term itself was not used to describe this discovery of man until the early nineteenth century. Humanist thinking came about as a response to the scholasticism of the universities. The Schoolmen, or scholastics, valued Aristotelian logic, which they used in their complicated method of defending the scriptures through disputation of isolated statements. Humanists accused the scholastics of sophistry and of distorting the truth by arguing philosophical phrases taken out of context. By contrast, humanists researched the historical context and lives of classical writers and focused on the moral and ethical content of the texts. Along with this shift came the concept that "Man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras), which meant that now Man was the center of the universe instead of God. In turn, the study of man and human acts on Earth led humanists to feel justified in entering into the affairs of the world, rather than leading a life of monastic asceticism, as did the scholastics.

The first humanist Francesco Petrarch coined the term "learned piety" (*docta pietas*) to indicate that a philosopher may love God and learning, too. The common thread among all Renaissance
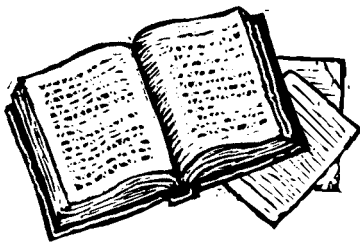
humanists was a love of Latin language and of classical (Greek and Roman) philosophy. The humanist interest in authenticating classical texts would become the field of textual criticism that still thrives in modern times. Humanism, too, thrives in the early 2000s, although it has been transformed to encompass humanitarian concerns such as providing aid to those who are suffering. Secular humanists at the beginning of the twenty-first century reject religion and turn their attention to charitable works and an ethical, meaningful life.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Irving Babbitt (1865–1933)

Irving Babbitt was born August 2, 1865, in Dayton, Ohio. He studied at Harvard University and at a school in Paris, taking degrees in classics and Sanskrit. He taught romance languages and French literature, eventually settling into a professorship at Harvard. Babbitt introduced the study of comparative literature to that institution and, while there, developed his ideas which would form the New Humanism movement that lasted from 1910 to 1930. Babbitt began his humanistic work with a critique of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Enlightenment philosopher noted for his influence on Romanticism. Babbitt and his ideas were controversial but also influential. He was denounced by contemporaries such as Ernest Hemingway and Sinclair Lewis, but he was also an important influence on a young T. S. Eliot, a student of his. Babbitt died on July 15, 1933, which effectively brought the New Humanism movement to an end, although interest in Humanism continued into the late twentieth century.

### Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529)

Baldassare Castiglione was born on December 6, 1478, at Casatico near Mantua, Italy. An Italian diplomat, knight, and courtier, Castiglione served in the court of Urbino for a good part of his life, observing and taking part in its elegance. He wrote a fictional dialogue intended to represent the best of court life in his *Book of the Courtier* (1528). This book was highly influential, setting the standard for behavior among the elite. It included rules regarding how to comport oneself with a casual nonchalance and how to give the impression that one's learning and grace are natural talents, effortlessly expressed. He explains, "Therfore that may be said to be a



*Desiderius Erasmus* *(Public Domain)*

very art that appeereth not to be art, neyther ought a man to put more diligence in any thing then in covering it: for in case it be open, it loseth credit cleane, and maketh a man litle set by" (as translated by Sir Thomas Hoby, 1561). Castiglione died at the height of his fortune on February 2, 1529.

### Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466–1536)

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam was born in October of 1466 or 1467, an illegitimate child whose parents died of the plague. He was put into a monastery, where he was prepared for the priesthood. However, Erasmus became a scholar and one of the first humanists and did not join the priesthood. He initially supported the Reformation but abandoned the movement when it led to religious conflict. Influenced by Valla's *Book of Elegances*, a Latin grammar, Erasmus studied Latin classics of the pagan authors of Ancient Greece and Rome. He also became interested in education, partly in reaction to his own brutal treatment at the hands of his early schoolteachers, and he wrote a collection of sayings, *Adages*, for use as a Latin textbook. Erasmus proposed that schools follow the education precepts of classical Roman Quintilian (c. 35–c. 99), to train orators by focusing first on their

personal integrity, then on their persuasive skills. To this end, Erasmus suggested that students practice extemporaneous writing to encourage candor, thus departing from the traditional school model in which the schoolmaster read from a single text while students copied the *lectura* (reading) word for word. With his great faith in the power of words, Erasmus considered religious feeling to stem from a direct reading of the scriptures, which he felt had a nearly magical ability to influence people to follow the example of Christ. Like Luther, whom he at first admired, Erasmus felt that the key to religious feeling was the change of heart that could occur when a person reads the scriptures, not from unthinking obedience to the rituals of a corrupt church. Erasmus was a humanist in his belief that humans can achieve piety through their own endeavors and in his passion for Latin rhetoric. He combined humanist scholarship with reformist ideology. Erasmus died July 12, 1536, in Basel, Switzerland.

### Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499)

Marsilio Ficino was born in Florence, Italy, on October 19, 1433, and began his student life as a scholastic, studying the traditional Aristotelian philosophy. However, he had a religious epiphany during which he decided that Plato's philosophy was a divine revelation designed to prepare the pagan world for the arrival of Christ. Ficino's somewhat antithetical beliefs were symbolized in two votive candles he kept in his room: one in front of a picture of Plato and another in front of an image of the Virgin Mary. He studied Greek and read and translated into Latin the complete works of Plato as well as the works of the Neoplatonists, Greek Platonic scholars (primarily Plotinus) of the third century AD The Neoplatonists expanded Plato's philosophy to describe a system in which humans live in a state of "sleep" in this world and must go through several phases to reach a state of hyperconsciousness, the final stage achieved by the soul, which is beyond the level of reasoning.

During the forty years that he spent translating Plato and the Neoplatonists, Ficino held informal lectures for interested scholars at his home in Florence, which became known as the Platonic Academy. Ficino's gatherings and written works helped to spread Plato's ideas among the humanists. He himself, however, was not a true humanist, since his interests lay in the philosophy of Plato; he ignored the philological

aspects that preoccupied most of the true humanists, and he did not pay scrupulous attention to authenticating his sources, as most of the other humanists did. Ficino had an interest in the occult and magic. He also studied the Jewish mystical book called the Cabala (written in Hebrew) and the hermetic tracts of the Egyptians as well as the (lost) works of Pythagoras. His enthusiastic belief that these works held divinely inspired ancient secrets that passed through Plato proved infectious to his followers. Ficino has been accused of elitism because his brand of Gnostic Christianity gave his followers a sense of superiority, since it required a great amount of study to become initiated into its secrets. Ficino died in Corregio on October 1, 1499.

### Sir Thomas More (c. 1478–1535)

Sir Thomas More was born around February 7, 1478, in England. He authored the satire *Utopia*, an imaginary state loosely based on ideas from Plato's *Republic*, among other classical sources. This work was written early in More's life, before he became lord chancellor and then became embroiled in the king's "great matter," wherein King Henry VIII granted himself sovereignty over the Church of England so that he could command that the Church condone his divorce of Catherine of Aragon, allowing him to marry Anne Boleyn and try to beget a male heir with her. More foresaw that this crisis in English history would inevitably lead to a schism between church and state and so refused to provide the public support that Henry wanted. Henry charged More with treason and ultimately had him beheaded.

More was a avid proponent of humanist ideas, having befriended Erasmus on one of his visits to England. More used his significant skills in Latin oratory to defend the study of classical Greek other secular literature against scholasticism. He felt that studying the ancient classics better promoted knowledge and virtue than did the traditional fare of scholasticism, with its emphasis on disputation of minor points of theology. Nevertheless, More remained very much a medieval thinker and scholar, steeped in scholastic learning, despite his liberal acceptance of the new humanist ideas. Even though, as befits a humanist, More eschewed monastic study and happily entered the world of politics, statesmanship, and law, he was a product of the scholastic form of education, since he relied upon the skills he learned in scholastic disputation. Convicted

of treason on false evidence, More was beheaded on July 6, 1535. He was widely admired for his sincere religious piety, especially after his martyrdom.

### Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374)

Francesco Petrarch was born July 20, 1304, in Arezzo, Italy. Known as the "Father of Humanism," Petrarch promoted the study of works by Cicero (106–43 BC) and Virgil (70–19 BC) as models of Latin eloquence. He actively sought new manuscripts of their work, along with those by other classical Roman writers such as Quintilian and Seneca, and his travels across Europe uncovered a number of hitherto lost works by Cicero and others. Petrarch valued Cicero for his ideas about morality, oration, and the purpose of education as a means to train good citizens. It was Petrarch who identified the decline of the Roman Empire as a historical event, and he defined the period of history after its fall as a "dark age," or a "Middle Age" between the golden era of antiquity and the current "rebirth" of antiquity in Petrarch's own time. By this it was meant that ancient texts were once again valued for their unique contribution to human history. Petrarch is perhaps best known for his sonnets inspired by a mysterious woman he calls simply "Laura," who did not return his love. Petrarch died on July 18, 1374, in Arquà, Italy.

### Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494)

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was born February 24, 1463. He was a brilliant student who gave up his share of the Mirandola ancestral property in order to pursue his education by traveling to the major universities of Europe. Like Ficino, Mirandola became enamored of the mystical Jewish Cabala, and he once bought a number of fake Hebrew manuscripts purported to contain ancient secrets. He sought to construct a universal religion derived from Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and he believed that Platonist philosophy could be reconciled to their common ideas. When he returned from his educational saga, he wrote nine hundred theses on a wide variety of topics and challenged any and all scholars to join him in Rome to dispute them. No one came, for the Church determined that some of his propositions were heretical. He had to flee to France for a time until it was safe to return. Pico della Mirandola says in his opening to the theses, which came to be known as *Oration*

*on the Dignity of Man* (1496), that "nothing in the world can be found that is more worthy of admiration than man." His work served as a manifesto for the humanist movement in that it promulgated the idea that man should take his rightful place as the center of the universe yet also exhorted man to give up worldly aspirations and physical pleasure to seek peace through the contemplation of God. Pico della Mirandola died November 17, 1494.

### Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498)

Girolamo Savonarola was born on September 21, 1452. He was a charismatic monk from Ferrara, Italy, who preached fiery sermons in Florence on the subject of proper piety. An accomplished orator and rhetorician, Savonarola quickly became famous for his sermons and drew large crowds. Even though Savonarola was not a humanist himself, he influenced the work of Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, who were in Florence when he was preaching there. His sermons called for a "bonfire of the vanities" in which were burned all heretical books, images, and objects of vice. Savonarola was charged with heresy by the Church; he was excommunicated, then tortured, hanged, and burnt at the stake on May 23, 1498.

### Lorenzo Valla (c. 1405–1457)

Lorenzo Valla was born in Rome, Italy, around 1405. He was a philologist who disputed the validity of the claim that the Emperor Constantine (306–337), who converted to Christianity and made Constantinople into a haven of Christian ideology, had donated half of his empire to Pope Sylvester for curing him of leprosy. Valla's argument rested on linguistic evidence, the first argument of its kind. Among other evidence, he proved the donation document a forgery by exposing anachronisms (words that did not exist in the fourth century) in the Latin text. Valla also wrote *Elegantiae* (or *Book of Elegances*), a Latin grammar that sought to improve the quality of spoken and written Latin, with over three thousand examples of correct Latin usage (elegances). Valla, along with Petrarch, promoted a revival of classical Latin in its purest form; Renaissance philologists considered the classical period as a golden age of the Latin language that was followed by a period of degeneration when vernacular languages flourished and Latinists lost their interest in the pure forms of the language. Valla's legacy to

Humanism was to initiate the field of textual criticism, which studies the authenticity of texts and seeks to correct errors that occur in manuscripts as they are copied. Valla died in Rome on August 1, 1457.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Adages

Published in 1500 by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, the *Adages* (*Adagia*) initially comprised more than three thousand proverbs from Greek and Roman antiquity. Erasmus added to the collection in the 1508 and 1515 editions. This befits the spirit of the *Adages*, for in it Erasmus speaks of the importance of the richness (*copia*) of using the right number of adages in speaking. The introduction gives specific advice on how to polish these gems and use them to enhance speech. He says, "And so to interweave adages deftly and appropriately is to make the language as a whole glitter with sparkles from Antiquity, please us with the art of rhetoric, gleam with jewel-like words of wisdom, and charm us with tidbits of wit and humour." The book became one of the most influential of the Renaissance period, since it both preserved the wisdom of the ancients and served as a how-to book on oration.

### Analects of Confucius

The *Analects of Confucius* is a book that collects the wisdom and deeds of Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BC). Confucius is the oldest known humanist philosopher. The *Analects* were compiled after his death by his disciples and have been a significant influence on moral and proper behavior in Southeast Asia for more than two thousand years. While evidence indicates that the *Analects* were altered in small ways over time to reflect changes in the political and social climate, the primary humanistic message remains intact. The *Analects* opens with the Chinese character for "learning," demonstrating the importance Confucius put on study of the world around one as well as personal reflection. His teachings advocated valuing human life over material objects and learning sound judgment, both fundamentals for what would later be known as Humanism.



*Frontispiece of Sir Thomas More's* Utopia, *illustrating an imaginary island* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.)

### Book of the Courtier

Published in 1528 by Italian knight, diplomat, and courtier Baldassare Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier* (*Il Cortegiano*) describes the perfect gentleman and lady. It consists of a dialogue among typical courtiers, discussing how to behave with grace. A group of courtiers led by the Duchess of Urbina describes the perfect gentleman and his talents, which include hunting, swimming, leaping, running, playing tennis, and playing music, and avoiding envy. The perfect gentlewoman is also described. For both, looks are important, but the end result of one's toilet should give no hint of effort, such as excessive plucking of hairs or using too much makeup. Grace consists of "a certain recklessness," or *sprezzatura*, which involves acting gracefully without seeming to "mind it." It means that one avoids seeming curious or angry. Talent in speaking and writing is also paramount, and

the group goes into a lengthy discussion about the use of oratorical figures of speech and the need to shun antiquated sayings. The final chapter describes courtly love. Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* was soon translated into other languages for use at courts across Europe and in Japan.

## Book of Elegances, or Elegances of the Latin Language

Begun circa 1435 by Lorenzo Valla (an Italian humanist, philosopher, and literary critic) and published in 1444, this anthology of three thousand exemplary Latin phrases became a standard text throughout Europe for training students in Latin philology (the study of words or language). Within one hundred years of its writing, the huge and costly *Book of Elegances* had been printed in sixty editions.

## Familiar Letters

Francesco Petrarch, over a period of many years beginning in 1325, wrote a series of letters addressed to writers from classical Greek and Roman antiquity, such as Cicero, admiring his oratorical qualities; Homer or imitators of Homer, including the talented Virgil; and Socrates. He speaks with these figures from the past about his own critics as if he were writing to his contemporaries and personal friends. Among the letters, too, is one "To Posterity" in which he describes himself and his life and works in an early version of the informal autobiography. Speaking to posterity, he refers to himself in the past tense, as in this example: "I possessed a well-balanced rather than a keen intellect, one prone to all kinds of good and wholesome study, but especially inclined to moral philosophy and the art of poetry." Other letters were addressed to contemporaries: Giovanni Boccaccio, who was a friend, and Tomasso de Messina, a philosophical enemy and supporter of Scholasticism to whom Petrarch writes of his distaste for Aristotelian logic and preference for the works of Plato.

## Oration on the Dignity of Man

In 1486, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola had completed seven years of classical education at various universities in Europe. He independently came up with the idea to formulate a universal religion comprising the essential elements of the existing major religions. He put together some of his ideas in nine hundred theses on a wide variety of topics that he wanted to dispute with other scholars in Rome, but the debate did not occur because the Church claimed that some of his propositions were heretical, and Pico della Mirandola had to flee to France for safety. The opening oration to the theses, which came to be known as *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (published posthumously in 1496), describes man as not being constrained by the laws of nature, such that man, through free will, may determine his own limits and nature. Further, it places mankind at the center of the universe; Pico della Mirandola says that "nothing in the world can be found that is more worthy of admiration than man." The opening oration has been called the manifesto of Humanism. Although Pico della Mirandola was not a true humanist, since he held on to the Aristotelian concept of forms, a scholastic ideology, his work galvanized humanist thinking in the way that it pulled together the best of Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Arabic philosophies, expressing the intellectual freedom and dignity of humankind.

## Utopia

Sir Thomas More wrote *Utopia* while on an extended diplomatic mission to Bruges and published his work in 1516. It is the story of the mythical island called No Place (*Utopia*), where the people get along through their virtue, reason, and charity. The vices of greed and jealousy have been engineered out of the society by ordaining that everyone wear the same clothes and that houses be exchanged every ten years. More based his allegory of England on Plato's *Republic*, among other classical (and biblical) sources. More's *Utopia* is a celebration of the potential for human virtue and pleasure on Earth and thus a seminal work of humanist literature.

## THEMES

### *Education*

Education is an important facet of Humanism. Not only did the humanists revere learning, but they disseminated their ideas through a radical change in educational methods. Humanism was primarily a movement in opposition to the traditional mode of education, called Scholasticism, of the medieval period. Scholasticism had been a new style of learning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which accepted as a maxim that God

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- In many ways, the economic and social setting of fourteenth-century Florence, Italy, made it the perfect place for the birth of Humanism. Florence was a center of trade, and powerful families trained their sons to become ethical, successful merchants. What is the relationship between the society in Florence and the development of a new way of thinking about humanity and its role in the world?

- The early humanists were devout Christians, yet the humanist movement has evolved to one that is frankly opposed to religious ideology, and many modern humanists are atheists. Research the ideas of the Renaissance humanists as compared to those of modern Humanism. How do you account for this substantive change in philosophy?

- All religions play a role in reinforcing moral behavior and attempt to explain the purpose of human life. The major religions—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam—share these goals. Study one or more of the major religions and compare the methods of approaching these goals with the methods proposed by humanists. What underlying principles are shared by all of these belief systems?

- The rise of Humanism accompanied exciting changes in art, such as the invention of perspective and the development of portraiture. In addition, artists studied human physiognomy in order to portray human figures more realistically. Did these artists subscribe to humanist thinking? How did humanist ideas find expression in art? What role did patronage play in the development of the new artistic style of the Renaissance or the new humanist way of thinking?

existed and that God's Truth was a given that did not need to be proved. The Schoolmen (as the scholastics were called) merely had to refute attacks on the Truth, in a sort of legalistic argumentation style that derived from their understanding of Aristotelian logic. It took the form of arguing over minute details, according to seventeenth-century philosopher Francis Bacon. The flaw in scholastic thinking was that it relied too much on statements taken out of context and then disputed. Texts were treated as authorities, and each statement was disputed as either false or true, with no consideration for the context of the statement or the circumstances under which it was written. Instead, individual and unrelated statements were gathered into books of wise sayings. For example, a standard text was called the *Book of Sentences* (1472) by Peter Lombard, in which opinions by various writers were arranged by topic. St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* is also compilation of opinions removed from their original context. Because individuals and their complete theories were not as important as their individual statements, scholastic education had devolved into argumentation over minutiae, seriously considering such questions as how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Scholars wanting to prove such a point would pick through the available statements in works like the *Book of Sentences* to find those that supported their own ideas. Rhetorical skill was disdained by scholastics as inclined to appeal through emotions, rather than the intellect.

Scholasticism came into being because of the recognition in the medieval period that people must be trained to understand and accept Christian theology. The scholastics believed that humans were lost and could only be redeemed through God's grace, not through their own efforts, and that they should revere God. Therefore, monasteries, schools, and itinerant teachers flourished during the so-called Dark Ages, spreading the word of Christianity using the scholastic method of education. This method consisted of the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, along with the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The goal of these studies was to support the study of theology. Of the few classical philosophers whose ideas supported Scholasticism, Aristotle is primary. Aristotle said that theoretical knowledge could be substantiated by beginning with core principles and deriving further truths from them, as one proceeds in mathematical reasoning. His form of syllogistic reasoning (deductive reasoning from established premises or principles) lies at the heart of Scholasticism.

By contrast, the humanists, or as they were sometimes derogatorily called, the *Umanista* (little grammar teachers), chose the curriculum of the study of humanities, or the liberal arts. The humanists sought to understand a writer's complete theory. They also looked at ancient writings in their historical contexts, in order to discover the nature of the writer as well as the historical import of his words. Humanists, too, studied grammar and rhetoric but did so in order to identify and master eloquence in Latin expression. In addition, they studied history, poetry, and moral philosophy. Humanists opposed scholasticism because of its limited scope, since isolated statements taken out of context could be easily misunderstood and misrepresented. They also objected to the Aristotelian method of deductive logic, that is, inference from a general to a specific statement, on the same grounds, that it could easily be distorted. Humanists preferred Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy over scholastic logical disputation.

### Revival of Classical Learning

The humanists of the early Renaissance initiated a revival in appreciation for ancient classical Greek writers. While the scholastics included the thoughts of Aristotle in their learning, the humanists leaned toward those of Plato. However, they transformed his ideas to fit with Christian ideology as well as with some of the ideas in Gnosticism and Judaism. In this, the humanists participated in a long tradition of philosophical thought known as Neoplatonism. In the third century AD, Plotinus, perhaps the most well-known of synthesizer and proponent of Neoplatonic thought, merged Platonic ideas with the goal of personal salvation that came about through Christianity. In other words, Plotinus took an essentially philosophical idea and merged it with religious ideology. Neoplatonism started with Plato's doctrine of innate knowledge, the concept that the human soul has true knowledge that will be awakened through proper questioning. This idea fit well, according to some humanists, with the idea of personal salvation, a tenet of Christianity. Neoplatonism also adopted Plato's distinction between knowledge and opinion, as elucidated in his *Republic*. In Neoplatonic thought, the only way to find God (or the One) in the physical world is to shun worldly life through ascetic privation in order to contemplate pure ideas and thus rise to oneness with the divine mind. Neoplatonists were inclined toward mysticism, and they approached theology through analogy and metaphor rather than logic. The humanists adopted Neoplatonist thinking because it emphasized human intellect and contemplation and because it seemed to provide a spiritual link between the ancients and Christian theology. They believed that classical philosophers were divinely inspired to write their philosophies to pave the way for Christianity.

## STYLE

### Love of Language

As the humanists discovered neglected or lost classical manuscripts and distributed them through printing, they developed a discerning taste for those classical writers who expressed their thoughts in the most elegant forms of Latin. They also discovered errors in transcription as they compared different versions of the same text. Philology, the love or study of language, grew out of the humanist desire to perfect their translations of ancient texts and to write textual commentaries on their newly discovered texts. Writing in Latin themselves, they sought to express themselves in the most elegant forms of this language. Thus, ancient Roman writers such as Cicero and Caesar became models of Latin prose, replacing the medieval Latin of scholastic Latin grammars. In many ways, philology lies at the heart of the humanist movement, since it engendered a focus on the historical context in which ancient texts were written as well as on textual criticism. In fact, the early humanists invented the concept of textual criticism. Philology is central to historical study because it is a valid means of authenticating records of historical events and thinking.

### Oratory

Rhetoric and oratory—in Latin—were important skills to the humanists. They disapproved of the scholastic style of disputation, which they considered a show of superficial knowledge as opposed to true wisdom or virtue. The scholastic method of disputation involved searching through texts to find statements to use as evidence to support a given opinion, even to the point of taking statements out of context. The scholastic method of teaching Latin and rhetoric was through rote memorization, with corporal punishment for poor performance. Students learned how to imitate the classical Latin writers but often had no idea of the

meaning of the words they said. In contrast, the humanists wanted their students to follow Cicero's three duties of the orator: to teach, to please, and to move (appeal to emotions). Humanist oration was not a recitation but a speech that considered the audience as well as the choice of material. In addition, humanists wanted their students to learn the subjects so that they would speak with authority. They followed the adage to teach students to "Grasp the subject, the words will follow." To do so would lead students to acquire real understanding of subjects, and this knowledge would help them make good decisions and become better citizens. This method is consistent with another of Cicero's rules, which proposes that students not try to master "absolute truth" but look to their own virtue instead. Thus the teaching of oratory was linked to character education. Erasmus wrote several works designed to help students acquire a mastery of Latin. His *Adages* contained thousands of worthy sentiments elegantly phrased in Latin. He also wrote a work called *Formulas for Friendly Conversation* (printed in 1518) to help students converse rather than simply repeat Latin sayings. Ultimately, advanced students of Latin would need to master skills of "oratorical abundance" or *copia.* By this was meant the ability to speak at length on a topic, to layer speech with numerous pertinent sayings, and to choose adages that fit the occasion. The latter skill is referred to by Shakespeare's Hamlet when he tells the troupe of actors visiting his castle to "suit the action to the word, the word to the action." That Shakespeare echoed the humanist program of oratory is testimony to the extent to which their program of oratory and rhetoric had filtered into public schools such as the one that Shakespeare attended in his small town of Stratford-upon-Avon in the sixteenth century.

### Biography

The humanist interest in biography and auto-biography stems from the father of Humanism, the Italian poet and scholar Francesco Petrarch. Petrarch deplored his own age and felt that classical Roman times and people were more virtuous than his. He became obsessed with reading works of ancient Roman writers in the original Latin. He also searched for lost manuscripts so that he could piece together a society that he felt was far superior to fourteenth-century Italian society. When he found collections of personal letters written by his favorite classical writer, Cicero, he pored over them, trying to get to know the man and the culture that produced

him. Petrarch even wrote fictional letters to some of his best-loved Roman writers, in which he praised the classical period and talked about his dissatisfaction with his own time. Then Petrarch wrote a set of biographies, which he called *Of Illustrious Men* (*De viris illustribus*) (1338). These twenty-four sketches are a model of classical scholarship and insight into human behavior. His friend Boccaccio wrote a parallel work on the lives of over one hundred women, called *Famous Women* (*De mulieribus claris*) (1362). Little did either of these two scholars and literary geniuses know the impact their obsession with classical Rome and Greece would have on posterity in fostering the genre of biography, which would remain popular for centuries.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### The Enlightenment Period

Some historians say that the humanist movement that began in the Renaissance did not fully flower until the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, also called the Age of Reason. During this period, human faith in science and rational thinking spread beyond the intellectual elite, who included most of those who espoused Humanism during the Renaissance. With a larger literate population and a booming middle class that could afford to own books, the intellectual thinkers and philosophers of the eighteenth century influenced their societies with their ideas that human reason was supreme and that religion based on superstition and meaningless ritual should not dictate human behavior. Some Enlightenment thinkers were actually atheists; however, many simply eschewed formal religion in favor of the concept of a supreme being whom man could not prove definitively. A group of French thinkers known as the *philosophes*, including Denis Diderot (1713–1784), Charles Montesquieu (1689–1755), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), and Voltaire (1694–1778), among others, prepared an *Encyclopédie* (1751–1780) to contain all human knowledge, rationally arranged. Religion was notably missing and in fact was treated as superstition. In one of his essays, Voltaire made the scandalous proposition that religious differences should be tolerated: Since God could not deny heaven to classical thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Solon, how could he deny it to men of other

contemporary religions? Many of the contributors to the encyclopedia were imprisoned for their heretical views. Nevertheless, the massive *Encyclopédie* stood as a testimony to the doctrine of man's essential supremacy. The Enlightenment thinkers and philosophers were also fascinated by how humans acquire knowledge and, with religion losing its authority as a moral standard, morality. Many of them wrote treatises on the mind, including David Hume (1711–1776), who considered human feeling as the source of ethical behavior. Hume also claimed that since God exists only as an idea in the mind, he does not exist. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) proposed that humans make ethical decisions based upon the pleasure principle: that in seeking to avoid pain, each human makes ethical decisions that contribute to the common good. In Germany, Immanual Kant (1724–1804) proposed that all moral actions be measured against a kind of golden rule that said that an action was moral if it could be applied categorically to all, which was another form of locating morality in the human mind rather than in divine revelation. In the American colonies, Thomas Paine (1737–1809) accused religion of inspiring the worst moral behavior, saying that "The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries that have afflicted the human race, have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion." The role of the Enlightenment period, in regard to Humanism, consists in taking the humanist faith in humanity a step further—toward questioning and even rejecting organized religion. It was a period of the triumph of intellectual reasoning over religious belief, and it affirmed the idea of virtue on Earth for the sake of pleasure on Earth. In this thinking lay the seeds of the humanist work of the next century, that of social consciousness and reform.

### Modern Secular Humanism

The social reformist thinking of the nineteenth century was an outgrowth of Renaissance and then Enlightenment Humanism. Belief in the Great Chain of Being with its divinely ordained hierarchies in each category, including among various kinds of people, legitimized imperialism with the idea of "civilizing" undeveloped nations abroad and contributed to the sense of social responsibility that eventually developed into better living and employment conditions at home, where working-class people led "lives of quiet desperation" (Thoreau, 1854). Robert Green Ingersoll (1833–1899) wrote "A Humanist Credo," in which he defined this responsibility:

> We are satisfied that there can be but little liberty on earth while men worship a tyrant in heaven. We do not expect to accomplish everything in our day; but we want to do what good we can, and to render all the service possible in the holy cause of human progress. We know that doing away with gods and supernatural persons and powers is not an end. It is a means to an end—the real end being the happiness of man.

Later humanist ideology evolved from a program that focused on social reform to one that embraced humanitarianism in general, and this form of Humanism dominated the twentieth century. According to humanist Corliss Lamont, Humanism is "A philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy." Several manifestos were composed and signed by leading scholars, scientists, and writers indicating their support of a form of Humanism that eschews organized religion and embraces human responsibility for realizing human potential, which includes such ideas as opposing nuclear war, promoting pro-choice on the abortion question, promoting organ donation at death, and accepting euthanasia under certain circumstances. With such a wide range of issues to support, Humanism of the twentieth century and into the 2000s, also called Ethical Humanism, does not advocate any particular combination of them but rather subscribes to the notion of situational ethics, of making moral decisions on a case-by-case basis following the underlying humanist principles of respect for human dignity, faith in science and technology, freedom, and respect for nature. These principles have no regard for religious mythology but instead focus on human life on Earth. Paul Kurtz explains in his *Humanist Manifesto I and II* that "Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stem from human interest and need . . . we strive for the good life here and now." Secular humanists are those who are religiously devoted to the principles of Humanism. They are to be distinguished from religious humanists, such as the Quakers, who do not use this term but who are devoted to humanitarian concerns as an integral part of their religion and who eschew rituals, costumes, and dogma in their faith. There have been many notable people who claimed

Humanism or Secular Humanism as their personal doctrine. These include the atheist American lawyer Clarence Darrow (1857–1938); the German-born American psychoanalyst Eric Fromm (1900–1980); British biologist and grandson of Aldous Huxley, Julian Sorrell Huxley (1887–1975); pacifist and leading English philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872–1970); scientist and Science Fiction writer Isaac Asimov (1920–1992); French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980); scientist Carl Sagan (1934–1996), German-born scientist Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965); Spanish-born philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952); Chinese-born writer Lin Ytang (1895–1976); and philosopher Corliss Lamont (1902–1995), among many others. The challenges faced by humanists of the twenty-first century, who include philosopher Paul Kurtz, feminist historian Riane Eisler, social journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, feminist writer Alice Walker, science fiction writer Kurt Vonnegut, former United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan, just to name a very few, involve dealing with globalization and ecological concerns.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### The Renaissance

The Renaissance constituted a major shift in focus from God to man. It started in the middle of the fourteenth century, after the bubonic plague (Black Death, 1347–1377) killed almost one-third of the population of Europe. Although the economy suffered, the remaining population earned higher wages and quickly filled in the gaps in the market. A renewed interest in classical literature, language, and philosophy fed the intellectual movement of the Renaissance: Humanism. Humanism was responsible for raising man to a level of dignity and intellectual importance that actually threatened the viability of the Church. As humanists worked to integrate pagan classical philosophy with Christian, Jewish, and Gnostic theology and mysticism, they developed the notion that man can achieve redemption through faith, independent of the grace of God. This change accompanied a growing awareness of and discomfort about the extensive corruption of the clergy. The practice of selling indulgences began to be questioned by an emerging and somewhat educated middle class that did not share the traditional values of

the ruling elite. Knowledge and ideas were more widely available due to the invention of the printing press (1457–1458) and a gradual urbanization of society. The Catholic Church still maintained its political, social, and economic power, but the Protestant Reformation was questioning its theology, and a new branch of Christianity was in its formative phase. A Counter Reformation helped to refine Church procedures and reduce corruption, but the schism between competing models of individual salvation led to the formation of Protestant denominations. Although the Church sanctioned persecution of witches and instituted the Inquisition as a backlash against the Protestant Reformation, Europe was divided along religious lines, and nations such as England went back and forth between Catholicism and Protestantism until leaders were able to stabilize society and appoint a national religion or manage to incorporate a policy of religious toleration. In this hotbed of social and philosophical turbulence, a new mode of critical thinking allowed for significant discoveries in science. New respect for individual achievement, the scientific revolution that allowed open scientific inquiry, and an established wealth led to the revolutionary discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton and set the stage for innovations in art such as the application of the golden mean in architecture, the use of perspective in drawing and painting, and the realistic modeling of musculature in human sculpture. Niccolo Machiavelli explored human psychology to develop a theory about the role of power in politics that became the basis for modern political realism. In drama, playwrights such as Shakespeare portrayed intimate psychological studies of the human mind as it undergoes a crisis. In these and other ways, the Renaissance surpassed the achievements of classical Greece and Rome that it had rediscovered.

### Italian City-States

The birth of Humanism occurred in the Italian city-states during the fourteenth century, when Francesco Petrarch decided to devote himself to the study of Latin (and later, Greek) and to search for ancient lost manuscripts of classical Rome and Greece. The Italian city-states were a perfect breeding ground for a new ideology because they were not as committed to Scholasticism as were the urban areas of the rest of Europe. Whereas universities in other parts of Europe taught theology, the universities in the

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1100–1400:** The most devout Christians, the monks and nuns, lead lives of quiet piety, cloistered away from the cares of the world.

  **1450–1600:** Pious men begin to realize that piety can be practiced here on Earth, so many humanist scholars, who are at the same time highly religious, invest themselves in making society a better place to be.

  **Today:** Religious men and women devote themselves to the betterment of the underprivileged here on Earth as do the humanists.

- **1100–1400:** Religion is a common aspect of life. People of other religions are sometimes treated as strangers, infidels, or unbelievers and are persecuted.

  **1450–1600:** As Christianity splits into Catholicism and Protestantism, religious persecution continues, now between the two branches. Persecution of Jews, Muslims, and people who practice neither Catholicism nor Protestantism is also rampant.

  **Today:** Religious tolerance is a hallmark of a liberal society. There are still places in the world that persecute people of other religions, and their intolerance has become one of the key challenges of the twenty-first century.

- **1100–1400:** Both scholars and clergy accept Christian teachings as presented by the Catholic Church.

  **1450–1600:** Humanist scholars and clergy begin to feel skepticism about some Catholic teachings and therefore develop the ideology that people can seek revelation on their own. Their ideas are considered heretical.

  **Today:** Secular humanist scholars flatly deny any credence to religious belief. Secular Humanism itself serves as a kind of religious belief in human dignity.

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Italian city-states taught law and medicine. In the rest of Europe, society depended upon the clergy at the universities to educate the sons of the elite in established Christian doctrine so that they would be able to compete for positions at court. However, the Italian city-states were either self-governing (Florence and Venice) or run by a patriarchal family, like the Medici, and so needed only to teach young men how to use language and writing to conduct business and city matters. Italy was a locus of trade, which required that merchants be conversant in law and the cultures of the many merchants from other kingdoms who traveled there to trade. In Florence, no university existed until an institution was chartered in 1321. Instead, young men of elite families were trained to their trade in schools that contracted annually with a teacher to present a prearranged curriculum. This fluidity made it easier for the city-states to shift to the new humanist way of thinking, since there was not a philosophically or theologically oriented university faculty devoted to the promotion of a particular philosophy or doctrine. The practicality of a merchant trade culture demanded that students acquire an ethical foundation that would make them good businessmen. Furthermore, the city-state schools taught their students skill in politics and rhetoric, so that they could serve in the republican form of government and also make good heads of their family households.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 brought an influx of expatriate Greek scholars to Italy. These scholars found work teaching the young elite of the wealthy merchants in the city-states, spawning interest in the study of Greek language and literature, so that studies of ancient Greek literature in the original language contributed to humanist thought.

### The Reformation
The Reformation was a reaction to the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, which was raising money by selling indulgences (pieces of

paper promising that the purchaser would have all of his earthly sins excused in heaven). The Reformation was a theological movement, led by Martin Luther, who in 1517 attached ninety-five theses (criticisms of the Church) to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg. He was promptly excommunicated. However, his ideal of religious revelation through personal experience of the Bible and God through faith rather than through religious works was an idea that took hold among the growing middle class. Although scholarly humanists eventually withdrew their support from what they could see was an attack on the Church itself and not just on its corruptions, the reformist movement succeeded in creating an alternate branch of Christianity known as Protestantism. The Reformation became a political conflict as nations began to emerge from the fiefdoms of the medieval period and the leaders of these nations, such as King Henry VIII of England, saw in the Reformation potential for making inroads into the formidable power of the Church. The Church's power to generate revenue exceeded that of the crown through money gained from services related to birth, first communion, marriage, and death. The Church also wielded authority equal to and greater than that of the crown, with its threat of excommunication, which was believed to guarantee condemnation to hell after death. The Reformation was questioning the validity of that power, in light of extensive corruption among the clergy and even within the Vatican itself. Henry VIII took advantage of the weakening of Church authority and in 1538 dissolved the wealthy monasteries, taking their treasuries into his own coffers. He further weakened papal authority in England when, through his Act of Supremacy (1534), he assumed authority over the Church in England.

### Printing

Johannes Gutenberg, German inventor of the printing press using movable type, produced a 1,282-page Latin Bible between 1453 and 1455. By 1465, two German printers had set up shop in Italy, where they produced a Latin grammar and a work of Cicero, in addition to the more popular fare of devotional books and the lives of the saints. By the middle of the fifteenth century, lost classical texts were being rediscovered by Petrarch and his disciples and Boccaccio and Salutati, among others. With the rapid proliferation of printing presses in major cities, the opportunity for a profitable business arose, and the cost of books dropped so that each student in a school could own his own Latin grammar and one or two important books instead of having to copy texts as the teacher recited them aloud. In addition, the professionalization of printing resulted in a greater reliability of the texts; not only were the texts being published amended by diligent humanist scholars, but large printing jobs reduced the number of textual variants. The impact of printing on Renaissance culture was significant. New ideas spread more quickly to a populace whose literacy was increasing exponentially as schools multiplied and, due to the availability of new books, were increasingly effective.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The early humanists were attacked by the Schoolmen (scholastics) and other clergy as lacking true faith. They were denounced as pagans and were considered heretical. However, the humanists in fact were quite devout. Indeed, leaders, such as Erasmus, never deviated from Catholicism, even though they disparaged Church corruption. These humanists are known as Christian humanists, for they did not question faith itself. Nevertheless, Erasmus was vilified by traditional churchmen throughout his life. Renaissance poet Sir Philip Sidney struggled to synthesize religious faith and humanism in his life and work, as argued by Steven R. Mentz in his examination of Sidney's incomplete text, the *New Arcadia*. Businessmen were skeptical of the humanist curriculum and did not want their sons to waste time studying nonessential topics such as poetry and philosophy. The humanist commitment to public service eventually won over those who feared that humanist study was impractical. Another means of defense happened accidentally. Many humanists found employment with the new print shops, setting type and proofreading copies. They soon discovered that they could carry out their disputes over points of philosophy quite effectively through this new medium instead of staging a formal public debate. Ultimately, their participation in the fledgling industry spurred its success, and in turn, the humanists benefited by reaching a wider audience through their printed essays, tracts, and letters.

During the eighteenth century, humanist thinkers tended to embrace the idea of empirical
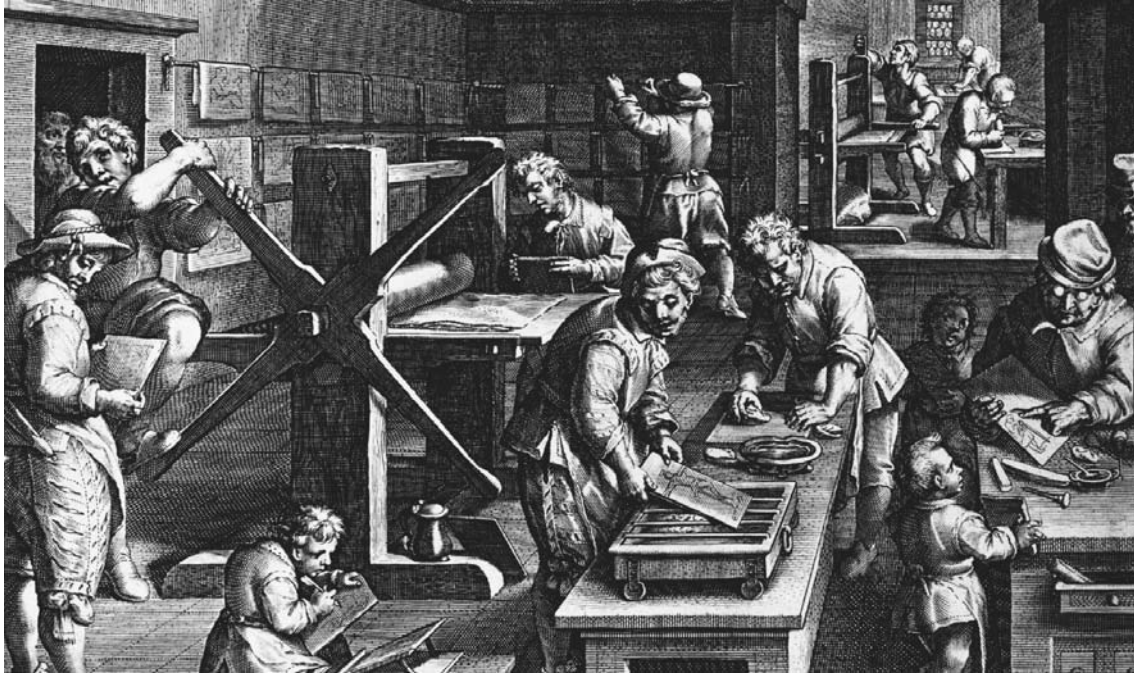
*Illustration of a sixteenth-century print shop* (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection | Corbis)

science developed during the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. At the same time, scientists naturally gravitated toward a system of belief that could be developed by reason and produced measurable and predictable results. The combination led humanists further from religious belief, and atheism became a part of Humanism. As Howard Radest explains in his book, *The Devil and Secular Humanism*, "The point of separation [between religion and Humanism] was the Enlightenment; the impulse to separation was modern empirical science." Radest sees the roots of modern secular Humanism as stemming primarily from the Enlightenment period, with its emphasis on the "Rights of Man," with only distant roots coming from the Renaissance. This is because modern Secular Humanism is openly atheistic (a concept foreign to Renaissance thinkers) and has been criticized for this by religious fundamentalists. When the first "Humanist Manifesto" was released to newspapers in 1933, it was met with a huge public outcry against its atheistic principles; Humanism was seen as a dangerous trend away from core religious values. In fact, many outspoken religious conservatives today blame humanists for modern consumerist culture because they see humanists as technocrats, quick to sacrifice nature

for the sake of human gain. They decry Humanism as a religion without a god and without a moral framework. Humanist Paul Kurtz defends his beliefs in his book, *In Defense of Secular Humanism*, in which he reminds detractors that Humanism does rest upon a set of ethical principles. Whether a given humanist subscribes to Kurtz's particular view of Humanism, modern humanists take on current, difficult ethical issues, such as the teaching of evolution in schools, abortion rights, and the right to euthanasia. As humanist Jeaneane Fowler declares, "Humanism has no creed, but many convictions."

## CRITICISM

### Carole Hamilton

*Hamilton is an English teacher at Cary Academy in North Carolina. In this essay, Hamilton explores how Humanism continues to thrive as an attractive belief system in the postmodern world.*

Postmodernism, the belief that reality is a social construct in which each person creates his or her own personal truth, has declared the "end of history" following Nietzsche's declaration of the "death of God." According to postmodernists,

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
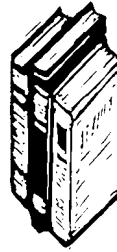
- Renaissance art shows the ideals of the period. One important fresco by Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio, 1483–1520), "The School of Athens" painted in 1510–1511, captures the spirit of Humanism, with its group portrait of the great philosophers, scientists, and artists of the classical period and the Renaissance. Aristotle and Plato are depicted in the center with such contemporary artists as Michelangelo and Raphael himself also included.

- The way to convey perspective was discovered by Renaissance painters. The visual illusion of depth conveyed on a flat surface, perspective allowed painters to place their subjects in a realistic, seemingly three-dimensional context. Painters of the Renaissance were fascinated by perspective and by the logic it gave to their depiction of scenes. Notable works that show perspective are "The Holy Trinity" by Masaccio (Tommaso di Giovanni di Simone Guidi, 1401–1428) and "Dead Christ" by Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506). Portraits were another fashion of the Renaissance, stemming from the humanist belief in the essential dignity of man.

- Of the many classical works that laid the groundwork for Humanism, several remain relevant in the 2000s and are frequently studied. Plato's *Republic*, which describes the ideal state, inspired many humanist thinkers. The *Republic* explores the facets of the ideal state through a dialogue conducted by Socrates.

- Besides researching classical writers and writing to them in fictional letters, Petrarch wrote lovely sonnets, consisting of fourteen lines, the first eight of which state a problem that the final six lines resolve. The Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnet rhymes a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a in the octave, and the sestet may rhyme c-d-e-c-d-e or c-d-e-d-c-e. Most of Petrarch's sonnets are written to "Laura," a real or fictional woman who did not return his love.

- Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons* is thoroughly researched and captures the essence of early humanist Sir Thomas More as he struggles with his own conscience in opposing the king's separation from the Catholic Church and decision to head a new Church of England.

- For twentieth-century portrayals of humanist ideology, any episode of humanist Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* will provide two lessons based on humanist values: one personal and one societal.

- *African American Humanism: An Anthology* (1991), edited by Norm R. Allen, presents evidence that African-American writers such as Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston carry on the tradition of humanist ideals in their work. As an alternative, read Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) about a young girl's longing for independence, or Wright's *Native Son* (1940), or *Black Boy* (1945). Richard A. Wright proposes in his work *African Philosophy* (1979) that African Humanism stems from Greek sources.

there is no possibility for a single, all-encompassing, objective belief. Everything is subjective, open to interpretation. This entails, according to postmodern French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, the "end of narrative," or explanatory stories, as well. Lyotard claims that the "grand narrative," or universalizing belief system, "has lost its credibility." This means that for postmodernists, neither religious nor scientific "stories" can be relied upon as Truth. Instead, they say, humans act as they want to act, according to self-interest, and then rationalize their actions by espousing the tenets of a handy belief system. Some point to fundamentalist beliefs, whereas others claim to be inspired by reason or science. These belief systems provide principles that justify their actions.

> INSTEAD OF RELYING ON DOGMATIC STATEMENTS THAT MUST BE DEFENDED AGAINST COMPETING IDEOLOGIES, HUMANISM HAS, OVER TIME, CHANGED ITS COURSE TO STAY CONSISTENT WITH HUMAN NEEDS."

Humanists, too, have been rationalizing their position by attaching it to long-held values. Because it espouses popular principles, Humanism has survived and shows every sign of flourishing in the future. This is because the humanist grand narrative has shifted over the centuries, responding to changes in the market of human beliefs. In doing so, Humanism has maintained its viability in a way that can carry it into future generations.

A survey of three of the most influential manifestos of modern Humanism demonstrates how the grand narrative of Humanism has evolved, making it attractive to followers and allowing it to address the problems of the age, specifically those that threaten human life and dignity. The humanist manifesto of 1933 attaches its agenda to the value of science. In doing so, the modern humanists who signed the 1933 humanist manifesto rejected all forms of supernatural belief, making a clear break with religion that their Renaissance founders could neither envision nor support. The 1933 manifesto outlines in no uncertain terms that "the end of man's life [is to] seek development and fulfillment in the here and now." It is a manifesto that discourages sentimentalism and seeks "social and mental hygiene" instead. This manifesto was written after the end of World War I, during the time of military build-up between France and Germany. It was the period of the Lost Generation, who had lost faith in God as well as in human virtue. Many people were stunned by the loss of life and the devastation of the world war; they saw life on Earth as bleak and unfulfilling, yet they longed for a meaningful purpose for their lives. The 1933 manifesto served as a call to the social conscience of a disaffected populace. It had an appeal to a world inclined toward agnosticism, the belief that humans are not capable of proving whether God exists or not. In this it succeeded by suggesting that it was admissible to seek happiness here on Earth.

The "Humanist Manifesto II" of 1973 shows another shift in the phrasing of the grand narrative of Humanism, this time moving it closer to the realm of a scientific rather than a religious foundation. The new manifesto espouses complete faith in science as the dominant ideology, which now extends to technology. Humans not only understand the world better, they now have the means to control it. This concept is consistent with the Renaissance faith in man, and the Renaissance humanists also were comfortable with technology to the extent that they used the new printing press as a means to distribute their ideas. However, modern Humanism places technology in the center of its faith. The "Humanist Manifesto II" came on the heels of a successful space program and the sense that the Cold War could be evaded through nuclear deterrence. Ironically, this manifesto calls for an end to "the use of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons," while expressing a complete faith in technology as "a *vital key* to human progress." This manifesto also declares atheism as a definitional aspect of Humanism. Religious belief is not just a point of skepticism but is vilified as dangerous because it does not partake of reason. The early humanists would have been shocked by this change in their beliefs. However, they would have been gratified by another change: the emphasis on social responsibility. And, they might have been intrigued by this manifesto's expression of hope for global governance, a new thought for Humanism. The only idea that remains consistent with early Humanism is the privileging of human dignity as a central belief.

Coming just seven years later, "A Secular Humanist Declaration" of 1980 contains sentiments quite similar to "Humanist Manifesto II." However, the demands for the future are more specific, and the underlying ideology has shifted, again. "A Secular Humanist Declaration" appeals to democracy as a necessary component of morality. This is the first instance of a political agenda for Humanism. It specifically addresses current policies of secular politics, from allowing evolution to be taught in schools to the tax status of nonprofit secular human rights associations. No such political concerns appear in the earlier manifestos. Clearly, the

political uncertainly of the late seventies had left its mark on humanist thinking.

The shift in Humanism from its Renaissance basis in Christianity to one that is atheistic and focused on secular politics is progressive because belief must be organic enough to adapt to the changing social environment. Instead of relying on dogmatic statements that must be defended against competing ideologies, Humanism has, over time, changed its course to stay consistent with human needs. The humanist rhetoric about reason and scientific method is really a way of saying that Humanism intends to adapt to what is empirically true. Although it appears to rely on claims to transcendent principles, the nature of its abiding principles is fluid. One of these abiding principles is the commitment to preserving human life and human dignity. Thus, despite the evolution in rhetorical appeals to God, and then to reason, science, and democracy, the real beliefs of Humanism still have not changed. They are expressed in Thomas Paine's statement, "All mankind are my brethren; to do good is my religion."

The looseness of the word "good" in Paine's statement is a necessary aspect of humanist thought, which allows humanists to participate in the situational or conditional ethics required by the twenty-first century. While fundamentalists attempt to coerce followers through attempts to limit access to or to discredit competing ideologies, Humanism holds onto the crucial little narratives and lets the grand narrative evolve as it may. Humanists today concern themselves with the ecosystem, with globalization, and with human rights, all issues that threaten human life, human worth, or human dignity. They also recognize and accept the postmodern distrust of consensus, seeing that universal consensus would be another form of absolutism. In this sense, most contemporary humanists partake of pragmatist philosophy, which says that ideas are measured not by their universal truth but by their practical results. In *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pragmatist Richard Rorty suggests that "we simply give up the philosophical search for commonality" because "moral progress might be accelerated if we focused instead on our ability to make the particular little things that divide us seem unimportant." Rorty advocates removal of all grand narratives from the humanist rhetoric. Another humanist, Frederick Edwords, in his essay "The Humanist Philosophy in Perspective,"

also acknowledges the necessity to stay flexible, saying that scientific knowledge, moral choices, and social policies "are subject to continual revision in the light of both the fallible and tentative nature of our knowledge and constant shifts in social conditions." Edwords admits that giving up the hope for a universal truth is risky, but he asserts that today's humanists

> have willingly sacrificed the lure of an easy security offered by simplistic systems in order to take an active part in the painstaking effort to build our understanding of the world and thereby contribute to the solutions of the problems that have plagued humanity through the ages.

These and other forward-thinking humanists realize that an ideology needs nothing more than the sense that an action is right and good because it benefits humanity, and that making these choices is not thereby made simple or formulaic.

Although they oppose indoctrination of any form, humanists today push for educational reforms that emphasize character education, moral virtues, and critical thinking skills. They want students to learn about evolution and other hotly contested subjects and then to decide for themselves. In this, humanists face opposition from fundamentalist religious groups. It appears that once again Humanism is facing off against organized religion in the arena of education. To do so, according to Rorty, is both inevitable and a necessary function of humanist educators, since, "the real function of the humanist intellectuals is to instill doubts in the students about the students' own self-images, and about the society to which they belong." The destabilizing effect of teaching a humanist curriculum is also necessary for the evolution of humanist thought, for, as Rorty continues, teachers "help ensure that the moral consciousness is slightly different from that of the previous generation." Allowing for change and adaptation in the future makes an idea viable and strong, and it accommodates the human need to express free will by making a choice among a competing market of ideas.

The reason that today's humanists accept the need for an evolving agenda and a changing source of authentication is that they recognize the postmodern truth that humans make decisions and then justify them through theology and philosophy. Michael Werner confirms this view in his article "Humanism and Beyond the Truth" when he says

*Detail of Raphael's* The School of Athens *showing Plato, Aristotle, and other classical and Renaissance figures* *(Fresco by Raphael, c. 16th century art. © Ted Spiegel / Corbis)*

we are not so much rational animals as much as we are rationalizing ones. Our overdeveloped powers of cognition are more often used to confirm our prejudices, maintain our power and control, and shield us from confronting our own irrational inconsistencies.

It seems clear that taking away the scaffolding of Humanism's grand narrative has had no effect on the ultimate objective of humanist thinking. Humanists continue to strive, as Felix Adler declared, to "Act so as to encourage the best in others, and by so doing you will develop the best in yourself." For today's humanists, faith takes the form of trusting that the philosophy of Humanism will evolve. As Annette Baier explains in her book, *Postures of the Mind*, "the secular equivalent of faith in God is faith in the human community and its evolving procedures." This trust amounts to faith in the postmodern condition to change and evolve. Today's postmodern humanists practice a "faith" that doing good for other humans now and in the future has its own value, one that does not require further justification. Bertrand Russell said that "The great use of a life is to spend it for something that outlasts it." Moral progress, as practiced by postmodern humanists, is a matter of gradually

increasing the good of human worth, through acts that look beyond self-interest. Today's humanists know that the "death of God" and the "end of narrative" do not have to lead to the end of man.

**Source:** Carole Hamilton, Critical Essay on Humanism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Steven R. Mentz
*In this essay, Mentz analyzes Sir Philip Sidney's* New Arcadia*, arguing that Sidney uses the three shipwrecks to explore how reason and faith facilitate understanding the human condition.*

The *New Arcadia* begins with shipwreck. Sir Philip Sidney's narrator, in one of the Renaissance's most famous literary descriptions, portrays "a sight full of piteous strangeness: a ship, or rather the carcase of the ship, or rather some few bones of the carcase hulling there, part broken, part burned, part drowned—death having used more than one dart to that destruction." Amid the wreckage float mutilated corpses and a "great store of very rich things." This scene, when juxtaposed with the text's other shipwrecks, reveals a fictional structure through

> THE *NEW ARCADIA* SUGGESTS THAT HUMAN REASON CAN BE TRUSTED ONLY SO FAR, BUT IT REPLACES 'WISDOM' WITH A COMBINATION OF REASON AND A PARTIAL PERCEPTION OF EXTRAHUMAN PROVIDENCE."

which Sidney explores the relative merits of reason and faith in understanding human experience. As one might expect from an incomplete text, the *New Arcadia* does not yield any simple conclusions, but its elaboration of the ancient topos of shipwreck shows Sidney's understanding of reason and faith to be neither as Neo-Platonic nor as Calvinist as some critics have assumed. In three scenes of shipwreck, Sidney treats faith as superior to reason but sees the two as interactive, a position which allows him to qualify the Reformation's attack on this-worldly values with his hopes for human intellect.

Investigating this topic brings one face to face with the unsettled status of humanist reason and Protestant faith in Sidney studies. Where critics once held that Sidney—"that rare thing, the aristocrat in whom the aristocratic ideal is really embodied," as C. S. Lewis called him—embodied Renaissance humanism, recent work has emphasized Sidney's eclectic nature. The question has become not whether Sidney was a humanist, but which strain—civic, Neo-Platonic, Erasmian, Stoic, Ciceronian, hybrid—best fits him. Critical opinion has shifted from John Danby's confident description of Sidney's "conjunction of the Christian and the Nichomachean ethic" to studies that emphasize "contradiction and irresolution." Recent studies have made it clear that the tradition of describing Sidney as a "Platonist Protestant" does not do justice to his intellectual range and critical rigor. Arthur F. Kinney, who makes Sidney a centerpiece in his study of "humanist poetics," calls him "a man of contradictions" who not only embraced humanism but also produced "a considered reexamination of the precepts and practices advocated by Tudor humanists." Richard Helgerson further claims that the *Arcadia* represents a retreat from humanist principles, even though Sidney's first readers denied this. Wesley Trimpi has

pointed out that Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, often called Neo-Platonic, appears animated by a rejection of Neo-Platonic analysis of poetry in favor of a Ciceronian/Aristotelian approach. At every turn, Sidney's attacks on intellectual folly counterbalance his hopes for human reason; every "erected wit" has its "infected will."

Research on Sidney's Protestantism has advanced an alternate focus for his career, but Sidney's religion appears no less contradictory than his humanism. Politically, Sidney was part of the faction of the earl of Leicester and Francis Walsingham, who advocated an alliance with Dutch Protestants and sympathized with Calvinist doctrine. The notion that Elizabethan theology contained a "Calvinist consensus" regarding grace and election, however, has been challenged by revisionist historiography since the 1980s. Although the Book of Common Prayer took a semi-Calvinist position on the Eucharist, and godly preachers such as William Perkins and Arthur Dent were popular both on the pulpit and in print, the English Reformation appears ideologically very mixed in recent scholarship. When considering the four strains of English Protestantism that Penry Williams sees as influential during the late Tudor period—reformers such as Edmund Grindal, anti-Presbyterians such as John Whitgift, proto-Arminians such as Lancelot Andrewes, and advocates of reason and natural law such as Richard Hooker—it has been standard practice to link Sidney to the reformers. (The poetic tribute to Grindal in Spenser's *Shepheardes Calendar*, a text dedicated to Sidney, emphasizes the point.) In the *New Arcadia*, however, Sidney appears less hostile to human reason than many reformers. Sidney's fictional defense of reason never becomes as explicit (or anti-Puritan) as Hooker's, but he strains against the orthodox reformed position. Sidney had no doubts about the superiority of faith to reason, but he refused to discount reason entirely.

Absolute Providential control was a tenet of Protestantism from which Sidney never wavered. Sidney's shipwrecks provide a fictional counterpoint to the project of his friend, the Huguenot theologian Philippe de Mornay, in the treatise *De La Vérité de la religion chrestienne* (1581): making divine Providence appear reasonable to human minds. For Mornay,

> Prouidēce [*sic*] is nothing els but a wise guyding of things to their end, and that euery reasonable mynd that woorketh, beginneth his worke for some end, and that God (as I haue said

afore) the workemaister of all things, hath (or to say more truely) is the souereine mynd, equall to his owne power: doth it not follow that God in creating the worlde, did purpose an end?

The crucial term, for Mornay and Sidney as Protestants, and for Sidney as a writer of romance, is "end." A purposed end imagines God as a Supreme Author, maneuvering the history of humankind according to His elaborate plotline. The end of the story redeems its beginnings. For Sidney's fictional characters, this problem becomes literal, as repeated shipwrecks make their "ends" seem likely to be death by drowning.

The tautology at the heart of Mornay's definition of Providence opens the door for Sidney's literary experiment. Mornay's God, "the workemaister of all things," controls events in the world, but His "end" is irrevocably aloof from human experience. God is "the souereine mynd, equall to his owne power," but He is only "reasonable" in His own terms. Human reason cannot grasp the divine mentality. In a pre-Christian fiction, however, Sidney is released from religious orthodoxy into an arena of intellectual freedom. His pagan surrogates rely on human mental ingenuity without the saving crutch of faith. The *New Arcadia*, by combining a pagan setting with disembodied determinist control, creates a haven for reasoned speculation into theological truisms.

Sidney's concern with the status of reason in a fallen world, as Åke Bergvall has noted, has made him "a focal point for a broader investigation of the interaction between humanism and reformation." Observing that a hard line between human reason and divine power was defended by Desiderius Erasmus as well as Martin Luther and Jean Calvin, Bergvall suggests that Sidney demonstrates the compatibility of humanism and Protestantism. By exploring the shipwrecks in the *New Arcadia*, I hope to complicate Bergvall's valuable observations. I believe that his notion of "compatibility" goes too far; the relationship Sidney explores is more fraught and combative. In fact, Bergvall's reading of the *Arcadia*—that it "warn[s] against the dangers accompanying the trespass over" the boundary between the "two Kingdoms"—fails to recognize how shipwreck problematizes that very boundary.

Even the most emphatic reformed spokesmen, as Bergvall observes, did not dismiss reason outright. Rather, Luther, Calvin, and their followers valued reason so long as it kept "within . . . boundaries." According to Calvin, reason by itself is "suffycyente for ryghte gouernaunce," but should not presume to judge questions of "personal ethics" or "moral law." Luther, in his debate with Erasmus, emphasizes the complementary point: "Human Reason . . . is blind, deaf, stupid, impious, and sacrilegious with regard to all the words and works of God." Despite the appeal (for modern as well as Renaissance humanists) of Erasmus's working together (*"synergos"*) between human will and divine power, early modern Protestantism strictly limited reason's value. Sidney, while rejecting Erasmian compromise, was not content to let the barrier between human and divine remain impenetrable. The *New Arcadia* uses shipwreck to interrogate this barrier from a mortal perspective.

Examining the heroes' attitudes toward shipwreck reveals that, for Sidney, unlike Luther, reason is only partially blocked from the divine. Reason is valuable because it can reject false explanations, intuit a notion of Providential control, and then recognize its limits. To be sure, this modest hermeneutic accomplishment does little to alleviate terror on a sinking ship. It does, however, clarify the relation between reason and faith in Sidney's fiction. The two kingdoms are not absolutely separate, and reason can recognize the point at which it must give way and not claim more knowledge than it possesses.

Sidney's narrator offers no explanation for the opening wreck. His only conclusion is negative; he warns against false interpretations. This refusal to misunderstand typifies human reason at its most valuable. The sea is not entirely to blame: "And amidst the precious things were a number of dead bodies, which likewise did not only testify both elements' [the sea's and the storm's] violence, but that the chief violence was grown of human inhumanity . . . which [blood] it seemed the sea would not wash away that it might witness it is not always his fault when we condemn his cruelty." Sidney's narrator rejects the assumption that the wreck was caused by divine wrath or caprice. "[H]uman inhumanity" is a contributing cause, and human causes should be sought before divine ones. This modest but rational approach forestalls misinterpretation without advancing a coherent explanation. Neither weather nor poor sailing are to blame; it is "a shipwreck without storm or ill-footing." The

cause remains a mystery of the deep, which is not cleared up for some three hundred pages.

The fishermen who accompany Musidorus offer a rival interpretation, broadly comparable to Protestantism in its deference to divine power. The fishermen are pagans, but like rigid reformed believers they believe the wreck's cause must be purely supernatural: "assuredly . . . it was some God begotten between Neptune and Venus that had made all this terrible slaughter." They see no role for human malice. Full of "superstition," the fishermen "ma[ke] their prayers" instead of throwing Pyrocles a line. Their pagan naiveté, however, should not obscure their possible insight into the wreck. The fishermen are not wrong to seek a supernatural explanation; they simply invoke the wrong supernatural vocabulary. Their interpretation can be taken as an extreme version, or a pagan parody, of Calvinist predestination.

In contrast to these alternatives is Sidney's ideal understanding of shipwreck, a model always out of reach for his characters, the biblical wreck of Saint Paul (Acts 27–8). When Paul and his companions fear for their lives during "a tempestuous wind," Paul is granted a saving vision: an "angel of God" comes to him and says "Fear not, Paul . . . and, lo, God hath given thee [safety for] all them that sail with thee" (Acts 27:14, 23, 24 [AV]). Paul and his companions take heart in divine revelation and thereby conquer their fears. Sidney's heroes, unfortunately, do not ship with Saint Paul; in fact, they predate him. The assurance Paul receives from the angel they can only struggle to reach with unaided reason. Like Pamela refuting Cecropia, they must derive the core of Christianity without angels or sacred texts. The challenge of shipwreck in the *New Arcadia* is duplicating the results of Paul's faith without receiving his vision.

Sidney's romance begins by juxtaposing the fishermen's faux-Calvinist submission to divine power against the narrator's claims for "human inhumanity." Reconciling these points of view becomes one of the text's central interpretive challenges. Shipwrecks recur at two other crucial junctures in the plot. These moments are scattered within the expanse of the *New Arcadia,* but I believe that Sidney intends them to be read against each other. All three wrecks initiate important narrative transitions. Wrecks drive the two young princes to Asia Minor (initiating

the adventures of book 2) and later to Arcadia (for book 1), and a final wreck brings Euarchus to them for the denouement (book 5). These episodes are structurally identical: shipwreck wrenches control from the heroes' hands, and Sidney's plot shifts direction.

Taken together, the shipwrecks subject Sidney's heroes to trials in which relying on the virtues of dry land—especially humanist reason—becomes a weakness rather than strength. Looking at Pyrocles, Musidorus, and Euarchus as shipwrecked sailors inverts the standard hierarchy in which Euarchus is a model king, Musidorus a prince-in-training, and Pyrocles a youth who cannot contain his desires. (This reading has been challenged recently, but still claims impressive advocates.) Pyrocles, whose reason falls most abjectly to his passion, gains the most insight from shipwreck; Musidorus remains largely baffled, and Euarchus learns nothing at all. This new hierarchy among these heroes implies a critique of reason and ethical rectitude; these virtues are valuable in crises such as shipwreck only to the extent that they recognize and accept human dependence on extrahuman forces.

Since the details of Sidney's revision will never be known, it is uncertain which shipwreck he wrote first. I shall examine the wrecks in order of increasing comprehension by the primary hero involved, starting with Euarchus's failure to understand his wreck, then moving to Musidorus's politicized oversimplification of the wreck off Asia Minor, and last to Pyrocles' partial explanation of the opening mystery, the wreck that brings the princes to Arcadia. This three-part reading may appear schematic, but it has the virtue of exposing a basic structural feature of Sidney's romance. In these episodes Sidney develops a positive interplay between the resources of reason and the demands of faith. None of the princes understands Providence, but by refusing false explanations Pyrocles perceives more than his father or cousin. Acknowledging powers that he cannot explain leads him to a middle position between the rationality of the narrator and the superstition of the fishermen. He uses reason to move toward partial recognition of divinity, which is as far as reason can take him.

## I. "AN EXTREME TEMPEST": EUARCHUS AND THE FAILURE OF REASON ALONE

Euarchus's shipwreck, one of the few revisions Sidney made to book 5, presents the simplest handling of the topos in the *New Arcadia.*

It portrays the limits of unaided reason. This wreck replaces Euarchus's sudden decision in the *Old Arcadia* to make "a long and tedious journey to visit his old friend and confederate the duke Basilius." A meeting that once arose from Euarchus's fellow-feeling for a neighboring head of state is now caused by God's storm. Book 5 needs Euarchus to step into the power vacuum Basilius's apparent death has left in Arcadia, but it is not his political acumen that gets him to the troubled kingdom.

The tempest that redirects Euarchus's ship is simple and inexplicable: "[Euarchus] had in short time run a long course when on a night, encountered with an extreme tempest, his ships were so scattered that scarcely any two were left together." In the phrase, "encountered with an extreme tempest," not very different from the *Old Arcadia*'s "terrible tempest," Euarchus's navy and his earthly kingdom disappear, leaving the king a solitary adventurer on the "unhappy coast of Laconia"— exactly where the young princes were cast away in book 1. Once again, shipwreck shifts a Greek prince from political adventures (the princes' exploits in Asia Minor, Euarchus's defeat of Byzantium) to interpersonal ones (the princes' love affairs, Euarchus's judging of the Arcadian crisis). Euarchus, however, fails to realize that the game has changed. His attempt to apply rigorous justice and reason to the Arcadian crisis will nearly cause disaster.

Euarchus is an ideal king in Macedonia, but events in Arcadia expose him as overly dogmatic. His errors stem from his inability to make the cognitive leap shipwreck requires. He trusts human reason and forgets superhuman control. The first four books of the *New Arcadia* idealize him, but always in a political context, on dry land. Musidorus describes him as the perfect king: "For how could they choose but love him, whom they found so truly to love them? . . . In sum . . . I might as easily set down the whole art of government as to lay before your eyes the picture of his proceedings." Like Xenophon's Cyrus, Euarchus represents the political duty that Sidney's generation felt it owed the Elizabethan state.

Scattering Euarchus's navy and casting him ashore in Arcadia turn the ideal king into an untutored romance hero. Viewing his character this way can clarify one of the critical controversies surrounding book 5, in which the ideal legislator appears willing to execute his own son. Numerous recent critics have pointed out flaws

in Euarchus's justice. While Pyrocles and Musidorus use their shipwrecks to start new phases of education, Euarchus enters Arcadia believing his rational code is all he needs to know. I concur with critics who see book 5 as criticizing Euarchus, but even Stephen Greenblatt's conclusion that the trial shows that "wisdom can be hopelessly inadequate" fails to account for Sidney's interweaving of human reason and divine power. Wisdom alone is inadequate, but the text does not quite abandon its reader to the hopelessness Greenblatt and others have suggested. The *New Arcadia* suggests that human reason can be trusted only so far, but it replaces "wisdom" with a combination of reason and a partial perception of extrahuman Providence. The lesson Euarchus misses is the lesson of Paul's tempest: do not judge what you cannot know. Recognition of divine control, which is (barely) comprehensible to human reason, can supplement the rational humanism that Greenblatt and others rightly see book 5 criticizing.

Euarchus's problem is his limited point of view. He cannot understand shipwreck because it is not subject to rational interpretation; he is an excellent prince, but a poor theologian. A political triumph added to the *New Arcadia* further highlights this disjunction. Before leaving Macedonia, Euarchus provides an example of statecraft at its best, discouraging a rebellion by the Latines. He preempts their violence with a show of force and maintains his kingdom equitably for all. His tactics, however, impersonate the tempest that will later cast him ashore: "[Euarchus] by many reasons making them see that though in respect of place some of them might seem further removed from the first violence of the storm, yet being embarked in the same ship, the final wreck must needs be common to them all." This attempt to make a tempest part of a political program inverts the status of storms in Sidney's text. Euarchus's metaphor of the ship of state cannot accommodate the topos that makes a shipwreck an occasion for supplementing human reason with the direct manifestation of divine will. Understanding this aspect of shipwreck falls to younger heroes than Euarchus.

## II. "CRUEL WINDS": MUSIDORUS'S POLITICAL ERRORS

Learning from shipwreck is not easy for any of Sidney's heroes. Musidorus, like Euarchus, fails to do so because he cannot escape politics.

Unlike Euarchus, however, Musidorus recognizes the mystery of shipwreck. When he narrates his adventures to Pamela, he interprets the shipwreck off Asia Minor as a cruel act of fate:

> [W]hen the conspired heavens had gotten this subject of their wrath upon so fit a place as the sea was, they straight began to breathe out in boisterous winds some part of their malice against him, so that with the loss of all his navy, he only with the prince his cousin were cast a-land far off from the place whither their desires would have guided them. O cruel winds, in your unconsiderate rages why either began you this fury, or why did you not end it in his end?

Musidorus fails to see that the "cruel winds" of the "conspired heavens" make possible his adventures with Pyrocles in Asia Minor, which not only advance his education but also comprise the narrative of his courtship of Pamela. Musidorus sees only the "boisterous winds" and their "malice," rather than the Providential plot they advance. He does ask "why" the storm strikes him, and this acknowledgment of ignorance exceeds his uncle's self-sufficiency. He recognizes the role of supernatural forces. He is no more open to reevaluating shipwreck, however, than Euarchus.

Tailoring his speech to appeal to Pamela, the politically minded heir to the Arcadian throne, Musidorus makes politics his governing metaphor. For Musidorus, the sea can be only loyal subject or traitor. When he and Pyrocles set sail, "The wind was like a servant, waiting behind them so just, that they might fill the sails as they listed; and the best sailors, showing themselves less covetous of his liberality, so tempered it that they all kept together like a beautiful flock which so well could obey their master's pipe." The pastoral relation between shepherd and flock subtends this fantasy of perfect transparency between power and service, of a "beautiful flock" who love to "obey their master's pipe." Musidorus describes a world he can control. Playing on a metaphor common in Tudor poetry, Musidorus and the fleet "consider the art of catching the wind prisoner to no other end but to run away with it." Conventionally "catching the wind" is an image of futility, but for this crossing of the Mediterranean, it works just fine.

As readers no doubt expect, Musidorus's idyll falls apart. The storm that arises shatters the fleet:

> For then the traitorous sea began to swell in pride against the afflicted navy under which, while the heaven favoured them, it had laid so calmly, making mountains of itself over which the tossed and tottering ship should climb, to be straight carried down again to a pit of hellish darkness; with such cruel blows against the sides of the ship (that, which way soever it went, was still in his malice) that there was left neither power to stay nor way to escape. And shortly had it so dessevered the loving company which the day before had tarried together, that most of them never met again but were swallowed up in his never satisfied mouth.

Musidorus shows some awareness that the ideal service of wind and sea has been the result of heavenly favor, but his vocabulary mingles the language of traitors and faithful servants with the "pit of hellish darkness." The pit is a more nearly Christian image than the fishermen's Neptune and Venus, but Musidorus interprets divine hostility in the same simplistic way they had. He omits any role for "human inhumanity," or mortal error. The "traitorous sea" is his ultimate villain.

As so often in Sidney, paired images, in this case the calm and the storm, serve as an interpretive test. Musidorus reads the shift from calm to storm in political terms, and this method precludes seeing the storm as part of a divine plan. The storm, as even Musidorus knows, is not a traitorous servant, but an unknowable power: "[T]he ship wherein the princes were (now left as much alone as proud lords be when fortune fails them) though they employed all industry to save themselves, yet what they did was rather for duty to nature than hope to escape." That he feels himself left alone "when fortune fails" exposes Musidorus's failure to understand predeterminism, in which fortune (or Providence) never fails. Musidorus and his cousin remain trapped, waging a continual struggle "rather for duty than hope to escape." The alternative Musidorus never considers is that shipwrecks may be beneficial, not malicious, as he thinks, or even capricious, as the fishermen believe.

Musidorus rails against "the tyranny of the wind and the treason of the sea" as he describes fetching up on Asian shores. In these terms, the cost of the storm is immense. The fleet is destroyed, and Leucippus and Nelsus, brothers who have loyally served the princes, must sacrifice themselves for their masters. The ship's rib, on which the four float, provides a keen metaphor for difficult political decisions in a world of

scarce resources. The rib will only float two, so the servants must give way to the masters or become traitors. The servants do not present their sacrifice in zero-sum terms, but their deaths suggest that the politics of Musidorus's wreck are strikingly cold-blooded: either servants or masters must die. Musidorus accepts their sacrifice as a matter of course, explaining that he and Pyrocles had ransomed them from captivity. The servants' ultimate fidelity, however, further undercuts Musidorus's insistence on "treason" as a governing metaphor.

The shipwreck divides the two princes, and Pyrocles washes up in hostile Phrygia, while Musidorus arrives in friendly Pontus. Pyrocles' fate in Phrygia, as Musidorus narrates it, takes him from oceangoing storms to a land-locked one: "And in this plight, full of watchful fearfulness, did the storm deliver sweet Pyrocles to the stormy mind of that [Phrygian] tyrant." The tyrant's "stormy mind" reprises Musidorus's flawed interpretation: he reads storms as political acts, tyrannies of wind and sea. The princes' political education—the new task to which this shipwreck brings them—begins with Pyrocles being held captive in Phrygia and Musidorus maneuvering for his release outside. Musidorus remains bound by political reason. Pyrocles, by contrast, refuses Musidorus's explanations when he describes the subsequent wreck off Arcadia. His refusal to pronounce decisively is as close as any Arcadian prince gets to understanding how shipwreck operates in their world.

### III. "THAT LITTLE ALL WE WERE": PYROCLES AND THE CHALLENGE OF HUMAN WEAKNESS

Sidney matches each prince's weak point with the subject of his narrative. Thus Musidorus, whose strengths are active and political, narrates a mysterious shipwreck, which, if interpreted better, might reveal the need to accept supernatural control. Pyrocles, by contrast, narrates a shipwreck which is not as obviously a product of supernatural power. At the end of book 2, Pyrocles finally explains the mysterious opening disaster. This shipwreck poses a special challenge for him because his gentle nature recoils from Plexirtus's treachery. Unlike Musidorus, he condemns not disloyal service but the entire gruesome episode:

> But while even in that little remnant, like the children of Cadmus, we continued still to slay one another, a fire which (whether by the desperate malice of some, or intention to separate, or accidentally, while all things were cast up

and down) it should seem had taken a good while before, but never heeded of us (who only thought to preserve or revenge) now violently burst out in many places and began to master the principal parts of the ship. Then necessity made us see that a common enemy sets at one a civil war; for that little all we were (as if we had been waged by one man to quench a fire) straight went to resist that furious enemy by all art and labour: but it was too late, for already it did embrace and devour from the stern to the waist of the ship; so as labouring in vain, we were driven to get up to the prow of the ship, by the work of nature seeking to preserve life as long as we could: while truly it was a strange and ugly sight to see so huge a fire, as it quickly grew to be, in the sea, and in the night, as if it had come to light us to death.

With the simile of Cadmus's children, Pyrocles laments "human inhumanity" more than Plexirtus's treachery. Calling the battling mariners "that little all we were" emphasizes the crisis's symbolic role as a microcosm of human experience. Pyrocles refuses Musidorus's political metaphor. The fire still "master[s]" and "devour[s]" the ship, but Pyrocles does not name it or the sea a traitorous servant. He remains unwilling to pass judgment, on the fighting men or even on the fire itself, which paradoxically appears "as if it had come to light us to death."

Plexirtus's evil captain exposes the nihilistic apex of his master's treachery when "with a loud voice [he] sware that if Plexirtus bade him, he would not stick to kill God himself." The captain transforms "human inhumanity" into a fantasy of superhuman power. With a heresy exceeded only by Cecropia's atheism, he wants to invert the mechanism of shipwreck and strike a human blow against divinity. As Pamela shows in her debate with her aunt, pagan reason can deduce that (some kind of) God exists, without scriptural revelation. Pyrocles replies to the captain in the only words he speaks aloud during the episode: "Villain . . . dost thou think to over-live so many honest men whom thy falsehood hath brought to destruction?". He recognizes that the captain's violence is based on "falsehood," even if he has no straightforward truth with which to replace it.

Amid this chaos, Pyrocles and Musidorus distinguish themselves by abstaining from violence. Pyrocles describes their refusal as a moral victory: "For my cousin and me, truly I think we never performed less in any place, doing no other hurt than the defence of ourselves and succouring them

who came for it drave us to: for not discerning perfectly who were for or against us, we thought it less evil to spare a foe than spoil a friend." Compared to the zero-sum game that forces Leucippus and Nelsus off the ship's rib, Pyrocles' reticence is striking. Even as the melee progresses to the point where "no man almost could conceive hope of living but by being last alive," Pyrocles refuses the role of judge and executioner. Pyrocles' careful distinctions cede judgment to extrahuman dispensation: he will not decide who is to live or die, but resigns the choice to fortune and fire. He knows by his reason to abandon reason.

Accepting his fate does not force Pyrocles into passivity. From the text's first image of him clinging to the ship's mast, he always struggles to preserve himself. The narrator's initial description of this moment, however, seems misleading: "For holding his head up full of unmoved majesty, he held a sword aloft with his fair arm, which often he waved about his crown as though he would threaten the world in that extremity." While "unmoved majesty" captures Pyrocles' combination of semipassive resignation with unabated effort, the gesture need not be a threat against the world. The narrator's narrow focus on "human inhumanity" interprets everything as a struggle between antithetical forces. Pyrocles, when he renarrates the scene, makes it clear that the fewer violent actions he performs, the better. He recognizes that his best victory will be the avoidance of error. The interpretive problem—why does Pyrocles wave his sword?—embodies the larger mystery of the wreck. Rather than striking out blindly, Pyrocles calls attention to himself and his plight while waiting for rescue.

When Pyrocles narrates the scene, he reveals that he was not, in fact, threatening the world. He slays the evil captain, but he never bewails his fate, nor does he rail against the treachery of wind and water as Musidorus does. Rather, after killing the captain, he sits patiently on the mast: "there myself remained, until by pirates I was taken up." Pyrocles balances on the cusp of active struggle and passive resignation. He sends the captain, who has proven himself evil, "to feed fishes," but then gives himself over to the pirates. Throughout the episode, he never loses hope. He cannot know that shipwreck is part of a Providential plan, but he refuses to act on any motivation he knows to be erroneous.

Pyrocles' refusal to draw conclusions about the shipwreck is a partial victory. His resigned hope approximates the imperfect knowledge of shipwreck that the reader has at the text's opening: these disasters are mysteries and opportunities, occasions for the divine Author to surprise with the circuitry of His story. Pyrocles will not judge individual sailors in the shipboard melee, nor will he judge the way he arrives in Arcadia. He cannot reach the Christian solution available to Sidney and his peers, but he refuses error. The image of Pyrocles atop the mast epitomizes his interpretive high point: he maintains hope in a plan of which he knows nothing. The conclusion of the romance, had Sidney lived to write it, would presumably have requited this patient endurance.

**IV. ENDS HUMAN AND DIVINE**

The happy endings of literary romance parallel but do not precisely mirror the Providential "end" that Mornay describes. Theologically, the end of salvation comes to the elect in the next world, while a romance presents an idealized ending in a (fictional) human world. Romance condenses the Christian overplot into a human drama. In absolute terms, the fiction miniaturizes the Christian telos, giving Sidney a scale model for his experiment. Sidney may have feared that a conventional ending would trivialize his theology. Much of the revision of the *Arcadia* appears a sustained attempt to reinforce his text's seriousness. Even an updated version of the ending of the *Old Arcadia* might have slighted the revised version's more somber tone. Sidney's literary dilemma, which he never solved, was how to write a human triumph for his heroes that would not minimize the unreachable insights toward which they have been striving.

In bringing together reason and faith, the shipwreck scenes in the *New Arcadia* explore how difficult it is to cling to Providence in the face of human catastrophe. The princes' struggle to comprehend shipwreck's causes of divine fiat and "human inhumanity" echoes Sidney's struggle to bring together reason and faith in his world. Accepting Mornay's notion of Providence as God's "end," Sidney found in Greek romance a world that operates under an analogous dispensation. He used Heliodoran fiction as a human model to approximate God's design. In both schemes, danger (shipwreck/the Fall) opens the door for the complex workings of Providence to create an unlooked-for triumph (the happy marriage/Christian revelation). Learning to accept shipwrecks, and even to thrive in a world suffused

with them, becomes Sidney's literary analogy for imagining the interrelation of human reason and divine Providence. The unfinished text gestures toward a mutual accommodation between reason and faith.

The final irony is that the *New Arcadia*, unlike most romances, has no end. The fragmentary revision leaves the literary Providential ending incomplete. Speculation about Sidney's reasons for breaking off the revision, or his plans had he lived to continue it, are ultimately fruitless, but in religious terms the rupture makes perfect sense. Heliodorus's pre-Christian *Ethiopian History* imagines the happy ending of romance as a theological triumph on mortal soil: the hero and heroine become high priest and priestess, and the nation of Ethiopia eschews human sacrifice forever. For a Protestant such as Sidney, however, placing divine grace inside a literary fiction exceeds the province of mortal artistry. The final end rests in divine hands. Sidney's abandonment of the revision and subsequent early death ceded the *New Arcadia*'s "end" to God and posterity alone.

**Source:** Steven R. Mentz, "Reason, Faith, and Shipwreck in Sidney's *New Arcadia*," in *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Winter 2004, pp. 1–18.

## Lauro Martines

*In the following essay excerpt, Martines examines the origins of Italian Humanism and describes its five interrelated disciplines.*

### HUMANISM

The velocity and extent of change in the cities of late medieval Italy had a profound effect on consciousness. Especially susceptible were the dominant political and social groups who made the fundamental decisions. In the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a new awareness gradually dawned upon them, an awareness or redirection most effectively articulated by their literary and educational spokesmen. In one of its manifestations this awareness was humanism. We may therefore look upon humanism as a phase in the history of consciousness—the consciousness of the men who fashioned the destinies of the Italian cities. Seen in this light, the true burden of the historian of humanism is to identify the link between humanism and the values, moral and ideological, of the dominant social groups within the cities. The point of the succeeding pages will be to do this.

> THE SYLLABUS OF HUMANISM HAD FIVE INTERRELATED DISCIPLINES: GRAMMAR, RHETORIC, POETRY, HISTORY, AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY. BY CULTIVATING THESE SUBJECTS, THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY HUMANISTS ALTERED THE COURSE OF INTELLECTUAL HISTORY."

Changes of consciousness gave rise to changes in the methods and scope of education. Between about 1250 and 1400, church schools lost their exclusive control over education for the laity. Florence and other cities saw the establishment of private schools run by and for laymen. The schoolmasters were often professional notaries, and their schools were designed to teach the elements of Latin and commercial arithmetic to the sons of tradesmen, urbanized noblemen, and merchants who trafficked on an international scale. Strictly utilitarian in its aims—for Latin was the language of contracts and formal diplomatic dispatches—this development was the first phase in a gradual but basic change in the aims of education.

At the level of university instruction, the late fourteenth century witnessed the beginning of a new current, with the lecturing in Florence of men like Giovanni Malpaghini (1346–1417), who taught rhetoric, poetry, and moral philosophy, and Manuel Chrysoloras (d. 1415), who taught Greek to an audience of adult enthusiasts. In the fifteenth century, the vanguard in course offerings at the universities was held by the humanistic subjects—rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. But the next phase of far-reaching educational change at a more basic level really began around 1400, with the founding of small but select schools run by humanists: that of Roberto de' Rossi (1355?–1417) at Florence, of Gasparino Barzizza (1359?–1431) at Padua, of Guarino Guarini (1374–1460) at Venice, Verona, and Ferrara, and of Vittorino da Feltre (1373–1446) at Mantua. In these schools Christianity was taken so much for granted—indeed, Vittorino had his pupils attend daily Mass—that the major classical writers could occupy the heart of study. Henceforth the *studia humanitatis*—"the

humanities"—provided the substance for the most innovative and vigorous wave in primary and secondary education.

Human, humane, the humanities: these words are no more than a remote echo of what the nouns *humanista* and *studia humanitatis* meant in fifteenth-century Italy. We must not confuse vague twentieth-century notions with their more precise Renaissance forebears.

Italian humanism put man where it was both most flattering and most dangerous to be: at the center of active inquiry. The first modern treatise on painting (*Della pittura*, 1435), composed by the humanist Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472), directs painters to determine the sizes of objects in the picture space by the scale of the human figures there represented. Alberti's statement of this "law" conveyed an attitude of discovery. "Man is the measure." Protagoras had long since asserted the same thing, but after the achievements of Alberti and his circle neither painting nor sculpture was to recover from that perception.

In its most general and genuine sense Italian humanism was education for practical and worthy living; but it was education based on the study of the classical Roman and Greek writers. Florentine, Venetian, and other Italian humanists believed that classical literature held the rich and communicable remains of a momentous civilization, that it expressed a viewpoint centered on the value of man's activities in the world. This recognition was combined, as we shall see, with a keen appreciation of the secularity of time, the historical nature of time. There was no necessary conflict between these attitudes and Christianity, but the fact that the classical world was mainly pre-Christian was not entirely beside the point.

It is astonishing to note how many humanists were either members of the legal profession or career officials in government chancelleries, and just as many were born into professional or intensely political families. Three of the most celebrated—Petrarch (1304–1374), Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), and Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494)—were sons of, respectively, a notary, a canon lawyer, and a civil lawyer. Four others of great preeminence—Coluccio Salutati (1336–1406), Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), Pier Candido Decembrio (1392–1477), and Giovanni Pontano (1426?–1503)—were leading municipal, papal, and royal secretaries. In Venice nearly all of the most able humanists were drawn from the political partriciate.

These facts are mentioned in order to show that the humanist enterprise proceeded under the direction of, and in keeping with the values of, men brought up for practical activity in the urban community, whether in politics, the rough-and-tumble world of municipal administration, the law courts, the business of drawing up contracts (then the stock-in-trade of the notary), or the counting house. Immersed in practical affairs and oriented toward the accomplishment of everyday ends, such men had an urgent sense of time, a recognition of man's inescapable place in the world, and a sense of his achievements and possibilities. Thus the great appeal for them—or at least for the learned among them—of Aristotle's emphasis on action in his *Ethics*; and the even greater appeal of Cicero, with his emphasis not only on action and knowledge ("the true praise of virtue is in action") but also on eloquence, felicity, and force of verbal expression. Evidently, in the context of the evolved city-state, the orator easily came to represent the ideal fusion of action with wisdom, of will with contemplation.

Appropriately, in the history of modern Europe, the first great private libraries of classical works were built up by men of the sort described above: e.g., Niccolò Niccoli (1364–1437) and Antonio Corbinelli (1377?–1425), the sons of wealthy Florentine wool merchants; Giovanni Corvini (d. 1438?), political secretary to the last Visconti Duke of Milan; or rich citizens who stood at the forefront of public life, like the Florentines Palla Strozzi (1372–1462) and Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464). No less than the most celebrated humanists, these men applauded the ardent search for the neglected manuscripts of ancient works, a pursuit first strikingly taken up in the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

Why did the break with medieval habits of thought not come sooner, in the thirteenth century, when Italian cities were at the peak of their economic and political vitality? The answer seems to be that the break was retarded by the very condition of urban experience: in this case the raw atmosphere of new cities populated by rustics, large numbers of illiterate noblemen, and tradesmen struggling to survive or to amass enormous fortunes. Since the traditional forms of orientation and feeling must often have seemed inappropriate, it must be that the

experience of the urban populace—or whatever was novel in that experience—could not easily generate its own finished forms of expression over a short period of time, except perhaps in song. Particularly resistant in this regard was the fund of experience belonging to the new class of merchants and urban administrators, who eventually gave rise to humanism and provided the audience for it. In some respects their experience *had* to conflict with the prevailing modes of apprehension and cognition, which better suited a feudal society and an ecclesiastical intelligentsia. The intellectual tradition, after all, condemned all interest as usury. Temporal lordship was assigned heavenly essences. Government was often seen as punishment for sin. "Getting and spending" were regarded as inferior a priori to the gallant professions of arms, prayer, and contemplation.

Ideas of unity, hierarchy, and order; an overriding emphasis on authority, essences, and metaphysical reality—these provided the framework and foci for twelfth-and thirteenth-century thought. In a sense the entire fourteenth century, at all events in the world of the city-state, marks a decisive drift away from the more static and hierarchical assumptions of the late Middle Ages. But even Marsilius of Padua (c. 1275–1342), the most inquiring political thinker of the fourteenth century, was unread by his Italian contemporaries: his basic presuppositions were too much in conflict with established opinion concerning the temporal authority of the church. In the early fifteenth century, one of the most sophisticated conceptions of the unity of Christian society, that elaborated by the French thinker Jean Gerson (1363–1429), was still governed by a strict notion of the interlocking relationship between heavenly and earthly hierarchies. And within this scheme man had a fixed place.

Italian humanism worked a radical break with this tradition of thought. It put man at the center of intellectual and artistic inquiry but gave him no fixed nature, no metaphysical trappings or underpinnings. It focused on his humanity and his potential, and offered temporal glory rather than salvation. It therefore emphasized the study of history, recognizing that man lives in a changing temporal continuum; and it laid great emphasis on the study of moral philosophy (hence, on the dilemma of choice), having stripped man of his fixed nature. Humanism assigned vast importance to rhetoric—the art of persuasion and eloquence—for the practice of this art (i.e., effective and graceful verbal expression) combined action and wisdom, taught a certain control over the emotions (of others and so of one's own), and underlined man's reliance upon the immediate social and civil community. Finally, humanism turned philology—the rigorous historical and grammatical study of language and literature—into its primary intellectual tool, thus opening the way to a better understanding of the literature of antiquity.

In short, it was by means of philology that the humanists approached the classical world, maintaining critical detachment from it, and at the same time sharpening their sense of identity and of their own creative role in the hammering out of a new age. Paradoxically, therefore, the intensive study of classical literature was a process of self-realization. The humanists looked to antiquity to affirm the vitality, value, and experience of the present. In this way the old modes of thought were revolutionized: the impact of accumulated experience was finally able to determine the direction of intellectual and artistic development.

The syllabus of humanism had five interrelated disciplines: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. By cultivating these subjects, the fifteenth-century humanists altered the course of intellectual history.

1. *Grammar* meant, first, the study of Latin and then, ambitiously, Greek. It was a commonplace of Renaissance educational theory that all serious preparation for civil life began with the study of Latin grammar. In its highest form, grammar was indistinguishable from philology, for it entailed not only a mastery of the elements of grammar, of syntax, diction, usage, and orthography, but also a true understanding of their development: that is, a grasp of their precise place in the history of the language. This obviously meant a thorough-going familiarity with the history of literature. In this sense grammar was both a tool and a way of life; it opened all the doors of the intellect, but its mastery was the fruit of an austere schooling.

Lorenzo Valla was the outstanding philologist and in some ways the most brilliant humanist of the fifteenth century. Born in Rome in 1407, the son of a North Italian papal lawyer, Valla published his first work, *A Comparison of Cicero and Quintilian* (now lost), at twenty. He taught rhetoric at the University of Pavia in the

early 1430s, thereafter drifting to Milan, Florence, and Genoa. In 1435 he settled in Naples, where he became secretary to King Alfonso of Aragon and Naples. In the 1430s and 1440s he brought out a variety of remarkably provocative works—philological, philosophical, and historical. Intellectually he was intensely combative: swift, arrogant, and courageous. Transferring himself to Rome in 1448, he served in a secretarial capacity under Popes Nicholas V and Calixtus III, and died there in 1457. His major philological work, *On the Graces of the Latin Language* (1435–1444) is a combined critical and historical grammar, as well as a handbook of rhetoric and style. It is marked by an astonishingly able grasp of the history of the Latin language. With Valla the possibilities of historical criticism receive a virtuoso demonstration, and in his perspicacity we have one of the first unmistakable examples of the modern historical sense. Nor did he hesitate to address his philology to Holy Scripture and church documents, as in his *Notes on the New Testament* (1449) and his learned harangue on *The Falsity of the Alleged Donation of Constantine* (1440).

2. *Rhetoric* or eloquence—the art of graceful but forceful persuasion—could obviously not be learned until the rules of grammar had been mastered. Cicero and Quintilian, the classical Roman rhetoricians, were taken to be the models in this realm, the princes of oratory. The choice of the word *oratory* is deliberate: it emphasizes that aspect of rhetoric pertaining to action, to a job of doing. For in their writings the humanists turned and returned to the practical and useful nature of eloquence, most especially in connection with its utility for civil or community service. In his humanistic treatise *Concerning Excellent Traits* (ca. 1402), addressed to a son of the lord of Padua, Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370–1444) observes that "speaking and writing elegantly affords no little advantage in negotiation, be it in public or private affairs . . . but especially in the administration of the State." And in a short essay on literary education, *De studiis te litteris liber*, (ca. 1425), one of the most distinguished of all humanists, Leonardo Bruni (1372?–1444), holds—almost casually—that knowledge should have an application: "The high standard of education referred to earlier can only be achieved by one who has seen much and read much . . . but to make effective use of what we know we must add the power of expression to our knowledge."

These were views which found a ready audience in the intense social world of the city-state, particularly among the more alert and ambitious members of the governing classes.

3. *Poetry* helped to complete the individual; it enlarged his vision and added to his humanity. From it he could draw a fund of examples and enhance the force and variety of his own speech. The preferred poets were Virgil and Homer, then Seneca, Ovid, and Horace; but the vernacular poets, Dante and Petrarch, were by no means neglected. Carlo Marsuppini (1398–1453), first secretary of the Florentine republic from 1444 to 1453, translated the first book of the *Iliad* into Latin verse. He was followed in this effort by a major poet who was also the leading philologist of the second half of the century, Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494). At sixteen, Poliziano had translated books II–V of the *Iliad* into Latin verse, an accomplishment which brought him into Lorenzo de' Medici's entourage.

The most talented of all humanist poets, Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374), is sometimes called "the father of humanism" (as if such a designation made any historical sense). The son of a Florentine notary who suffered political disgrace and exile, Petrarch spent his life abroad, studied law for a time but soon rejected it for a life of writing and reflection. After taking minor religious vows, which gave him financial independence, he traveled widely and found patronage at Avignon, Rome, Milan, Padua, Venice, and elsewhere. Of particular interest for the fortunes of humanism—apart from his *De viris illustribus* (lives of famous Romans) and his stinging self-analysis in the *Secretum*—are Petrarch's Latin letters, known as the *Familiares*, which exhibit his boundless admiration for the world of antiquity, a longing to read Greek, a love of Cicero, familiarity with the history of ancient Rome, and an abandoned attachment to the elegance of classical Latin literature.

4. *History* was in some respects the unifying discipline of humanism. An affirmative view of the ancient world was, primarily, what the humanists had in common. When they united this view of the past with their study of the literature antiquity, they invented philology and brought historical scholarship into being. Yet we must not think that their attitude toward history presupposed an abstract approach. They looked at the past in terms of specific men and

events, and their impulse to study history had a limited ground: here. . . .

**Source:** Lauro Martines, "The Italian Renaissance," in *The Meaning of Renaissance and Reformation*, edited by Richard L. DeMolen, Houghton Mifflin, 1974, pp. 27–70.

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    Arangno's book provides humanistic arguments to contemporary issues such as abortion rights and whether and/or where to teach Intelligent Design.

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    This work is an overview of the historical context of Humanism from the Renaissance to modern times.

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    This work is a defense of modern Humanism as a philosophy with an account of its historical traditions and its ethical beliefs.

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    Margolin compiles a survey of humanist literature, its proponents, and its connection to educational systems in Europe.

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> Trinkaus provides a comprehensive biographical account of Petrarch's life and works.

# *Imagism*

Imagism flourished in Britain and in the United States for a brief period that is generally considered to be somewhere between 1909 and 1917. As part of the modernist movement, away from the sentimentality and moralizing tone of nineteenth-century Victorian poetry, imagist poets looked to many sources to help them create a new poetic expression.

For contemporary influences, the imagists studied the French symbolists, who were experimenting with free verse (*vers libre*), a form that used a cadence that mimicked natural speech rather than the accustomed rhythm of metrical feet or lines. Rules of rhyming were also considered nonessential. The ancient form of Japanese haiku poetry influenced the imagists to focus on one simple image. Greek and Roman classical poetry inspired some of the imagists to strive for a high quality of writing that would endure.

T. E. Hulme is credited with creating the philosophy that would give birth to Imagism. Although he wrote very little, his ideas inspired Ezra Pound to organize the new movement. Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" is often cited as one of the purest of his imagist poems. Amy Lowell took over the leadership role of the imagists when Pound moved on to other modernist modes. Her most anthologized poems include "Lilacs" and "Patterns."

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1909
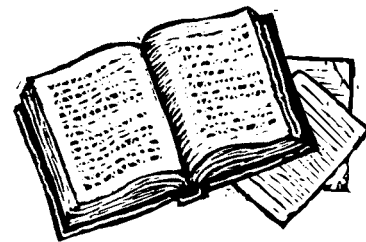
Other important imagist poets include Hilda Doolittle, whose poem "Sea Poppies" reflects the Japanese influence on her writing, and whose "Oread" is often referred to as the most perfect imagist poem; Richard Aldington, who was one of the first poets to be recognized as an imagist and whose collection *Images of War* is considered to contain some of the most intense depictions of World War I; F. S. Flint, who dedicated his last collection of imagist poems, *Otherworld: Cadences* to Aldington; and John Gould Fletcher, whose collection *Goblins and Pagodas* is his most representative imagistic work.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Richard Aldington (1892–1962)

Richard Aldington was born on July 8, 1892, in Portsmouth, Hampshire, England, to Jesse May and Albert Edward Aldington. He attended University College in London but did not complete his degree, due to the loss of family funds.

In 1912, Aldington met Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle, and from this meeting, the Imagism movement was born. In the same year, Aldington published his first imagist poems in *Poetry*.

The following year, Aldington traveled to Paris and Italy with Doolittle, and on October 18, 1913, they were married. Shortly after, Aldington became the editor of the imagist publication *Egoist*, a position he would hold until 1917. His poems appeared in *Des Imagistes* (1914) as well as the second imagist anthology, *Some Imagist Poets* (1915). He completed his first book, *Images (1910–1915),* also in 1915.

Aldington enlisted in the army in 1916. His most reflective responses to this experience are included in his collection of poems *Images of War* (1919) and his novel, *Death of a Hero* (1929). During the remainder of his writing career, Aldington published a wide variety of books, including biographies, translations, novels, and short stories. In 1941, he published his memoirs, *Life for Life's Sake*.

Aldington was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his *The Duke* (1943). He also received the Prix de Gratitude Mistralienne for his *Introduction to Mistral* (1956). He died on July 27, 1962, in Lere, France.



*Ezra Pound* (*Archive Photos | Getty Images*)

### Hilda Doolittle (1886–1961)

Hilda Doolittle (who published under the initials H. D.) was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on September 10, 1886, to Helen (Wolle) and Charles Doolittle. She attended Bryn Mawr College for one year.

When she was twenty-five years old, Doolittle went abroad, during which time she renewed her relationship with Ezra Pound, through whom she met Aldington. Pound encouraged Doolittle's writing and sent her poems to the magazine *Poetry*, identifying them with the initials "H. D.," a signature that Doolittle embraced.

After the dissolution of her marriage to Aldington, Doolittle became pregnant from a brief love affair with another man and gave birth to a daughter in 1919. She named her Perdita. After her daughter's birth, Doolittle became seriously ill and was nursed back to health by Annie Winifred Ellerman, a writer who went by the name Bryher and who would become Doolittle's longtime companion throughout the remaining years of her life. It was Bryher who arranged for Doolittle to be psychoanalyzed by Sigmund Freud during 1933 and 1934. Doolittle's "Tribute to Freud" refers to this period.

Doolittle's early collections of poems include *Sea Garden* (1916), *Hymen* (1921), and *Heliodora and Other Poems* (1924). In 1927, Doolittle published a complete play in verse, *Hippolytus Temporizes*, her attempt to approximate her favorite Greek dramatist/poets. One of her most often quoted imagist poems is "Oread."

In 1960, Doolittle was the first woman to receive the Award of Merit Medal for poetry from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. On September 27, 1961, Doolittle died of a heart attack in Zurich, Switzerland. Her body was buried in her family's cemetery plot in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

### John Gould Fletcher (1886–1950)

John Gould Fletcher was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, on January 3, 1886. He was the son of John Gould (a banker and broker) and Adolphine (Kraus) Fletcher. He attended Harvard University, but he left without obtaining a degree.

Having inherited his father's estate early in life, Fletcher did not have to worry about earning money. Instead, he devoted himself to the study of literature. He eventually traveled to England, where he met Ezra Pound and the other imagist poets.

Shortly after meeting Pound, Fletcher became alienated from him due to Pound's criticism of his poetry. At the same time, Amy Lowell took an interest in Fletcher's work, encouraging him and helping him to find publishers. In exchange, Fletcher introduced Lowell to his theory of the free verse of French poets. According to Glenn Hughes, in his *Imagism and the Imagists*, "Lowell was greatly impressed by both the theory and its results," and she began to use Fletcher's ideas in her own poetry. After learning that Fletcher could not find an English publisher for his *Irradiations: Sand and Spray* (1915), Lowell took Fletcher's manuscript and found a publisher in the States, where it was well received.

Fletcher produced many more collections. *Goblins and Pagodas* (1916) reflects his return to the United States, during which time he revisited his childhood home and then Boston, where he became enthralled with Japanese art and produced his *Japanese Prints* (1918). This work was his attempt to write poems likened to Japanese haiku, a form that influenced many of the imagist poets. After his *Breakers and Granite* (1921), in which he takes a fresh look at the United States after many years of living in Europe,

critics classified Fletcher's work as post-imagist. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *Selected Poems* (1938). On May 10, 1950, Fletcher drowned himself in a pool near his childhood home.

### F. S. Flint (1885–1960)

Frank Stuart Flint was born on December 19, 1885, in Islington, England. His family was poor, and by the age of thirteen, he had to drop out of school and go to work. A few years later, he was able to afford night classes, during which he gained an interest in the French poets and the use of free verse, which would influence his writing. Flint made the acquaintance of T. E. Hulme, a poet and philosopher, and together they planted the theoretic seeds for the movement that would eventually be called Imagism.

Flint's first collection of poems, *In the Net of the Stars* (1909), did not embody the full characteristics of imagist poetry, but they did reflect more realistic images and were written in a more natural, contemporary voice than those of his contemporaries. Flint's poetry went through a drastic change over the years, as reflected in his next collection, *Cadences* (1915), which included only imagist poetry. His most ambitious collection was *Otherworld: Cadences* (1920), his last collection of poems. Ford Maddox Ford states (in J. B. Harmer's *Victory in Limbo: Imagism 1908–1917*) that of the imagist poets, only Doolittle and Flint "have the really exquisite sense of words ... and insight that justify a writer in assuming the rather proud title of imagist." Flint died on February 28, 1960, in Berkshire, England.

### Amy Lowell (1874–1925)

Amy Lowell was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, on February 9, 1874, to Katherine (Bigelow), an accomplished musician and linguist, and Augustus Lowell, a businessman and horticulturist. From both sides of her family, Lowell enjoyed the benefits of the leisurely life of a Boston aristocrat. Not known for her academic accomplishments during her private school education, she nonetheless continued to pursue knowledge through self-education after graduating from high school in 1891.

In 1910, when she was thirty-four years old, Lowell had four of her sonnets published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In 1912, she funded the publication of her first volume of poetry, *A Dome of*

*Many-Coloured Glass*, which some critics felt relied too heavily on the nineteenth-century romantic tradition, an unpopular form at that time.

During this same year, Lowell met Ada Dwyer Russell, an actress with whom she would share the rest of her life. The poem "A Decade" focuses on Lowell and Russell's relationship, written to celebrate their tenth anniversary together.

During the summer of 1913, after having read Doolittle's poems in the magazine *Poetry*, Lowell went to London to meet Doolittle in person. It was through her association with Doolittle and the other imagist poets that Lowell transformed her own poetry, changing her tight nineteenth-century format to one in favor of technical experimentation and innovation. She eventually became a major sponsor for the imagist movement. Lowell's interests in the movement eventually clashed with Ezra Pound, then considered the leader of the imagists, and Pound left. Afterward, Pound began referring to Imagism as "Amygism."

Lowell's more popular collections of poetry include *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914), *Men, Woman and Ghosts* (1916), *Can Grande's Castle* (1918), *Legends* (1921), *Fir-Flower Tablets* (1921), and *A Critical Fable* (1922). After Lowell's death from a stroke on May 12, 1925, Russell edited several of Lowell's unpublished poems and collected them under *What's O'clock*. The collection won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry that year.

### Ezra Pound (1885–1972)

Ezra Pound was born on October 30, 1885, in Hailey, Idaho, to Isabel (Weston) and Homer Loomis Pound, a mine inspector. After receiving a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, he left the United States and traveled throughout Europe.

After meeting with Hulme, considered the strongest philosophical influence on the imagist movement, Pound modernized his poetic style. One of Pound's first publications in London, *Personae* (1909) caused a critical sensation. His next publication, *Exultations*, published in the same year, marked what Glenn Hughes, writing in his *Imagism and the Imagists*, called the beginning of "the modern vogue of erudite poetry."

Although Pound is credited with creating, supporting, and educating the imagist poets, he moved quickly through this period and on to other modern forms of poetry. While forming the imagists, Pound wrote "In a Station of the Metro," a poem he considered to embrace the tenets of the movement. Pound's collection *Ripostes* (1912) represents the beginning of his involvement with imagist poetry. Pound created the first anthology of imagist poetry, *Des Imagistes* (1914).

Pound won the Dial Award for distinguished service to American letters (1922), the Bollingen Library of Congress Award (1949), and the Academy of American Poets fellowship (1963). He died in Venice, Italy on November 1, 1972.

### William Carlos Williams (1883–1963)

William Carlos Williams was born September 17, 1883, in Rutherford, New Jersey. Williams studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania where he met fellow poet and imagist, Ezra Pound. Encouraged and influenced by Pound, Williams published his poetry, essays, plays, novels, and translations while working as a pediatrician. Williams was associated with the Imagism movement in early anthologies by Pound and Lowell but later came to disagree with Pound's emphasis on the superiority of European over American culture. Williams worked to establish an American identity in poetry, spending time moving in artistic circles in nearby New York City and mentoring young poets. Williams chose to write about everyday subjects instead of following the allusion-heavy classical work of Eliot and Pound that was so popular in the early twentieth century. In the late 1940s, Williams suffered a heart attack and several strokes. Although his health was poor, he continued to write up until his death on March 3, 1963. Williams has since been recognized as one of the most influential American poets of the twentieth century.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Cathay

Although a prominent definer and great promoter of Imagism, Ezra Pound was not a great practitioner of poetry with an imagist bent. The closest he came to incorporating purely imagist tenets in his poetry is a collection titled *Cathay* (1915), which includes poems translated from the eighth-century Chinese poet Li Po (also

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- *Ezra Pound Reads* is an audio tape that contains Pound reading several of his "Cantos," as well as his poems "The Gypsy" and "The Exile's Letter." The tape is available from Harper Audio.

- There are several Web sites that contain biographical information, as well as some of the poems, of imagist poets. These include: http://www.americanpoems.com with poems by Doolittle; http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/pound/bio.htm with an explanation of some of Pound's works; http://www.poets.org with some of Pound's poems; http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/g_l/amylowell/life.htm with background information on Amy Lowell.

- William Carlos Williams reads his own work on the audiobook, *Voice of the Poet: William Carlos Williams* (2005), available on compact disc from Random House Audio Voices. Commentary by critic and poet J. D. McClatchy is included.

*Hilda Doolittle* (*AP Images*)

referred to as Rihaku). By working with these translations, Pound displays the interest and the influence that classical Japanese and Chinese poetry had for the imagist.

Critics agree that this collection is one of Pound's finest, at least of his earlier publications. The collection significantly marks not only Pound's connection to Imagism but also the beginning of the Western world's appreciation of Asian poetry. Not fully understanding the Chinese language, Pound worked with previously translated poems completed by Ernest Fenollosa. Being unfamiliar with the language gave Pound the freedom of arranging words and creating rhythms and sounds according to his own understanding and knowledge of poetry rather than being heavily influenced by the original poet's intent.

The wording of Pound's interpretations is clear and direct. Each line presents a spare image, and the emotions are expressed in understatement. These are hallmark descriptions of Imagism. Pound would go on to study Chinese more seriously after completing these poems. He later incorporated what he had learned about this ideographic language into some of his subsequent poems. Studying the Chinese characters, or ideograms—abstract pictures used to convey meaning rather than individual letters in an alphabet—inspired Pound to create new poetic forms.

### Goblins and Pagodas

John Gould Fletcher published his *Goblins and Pagodas* in 1916, after a visit to his childhood home in Little Rock, Arkansas, and then to Boston, where he had previously attended school. His *Goblins and Pagodas* collection is divided into two parts: "The Ghosts of an Old House," which presents several poems that reflect on the large home in which he lived in Arkansas, as well as on family members who influenced his development during those early years. The second part of his collection is called "The Symphonies," which, according to Hughes, "represents an ambitious attempt to arrange the

intellectual and emotional life of an artist in eleven separate movements, each movement being dominated by a color-harmony." In other words, Fletcher created poems that intertwined poetry, music, and art in an attempt to use the aesthetics of each form to express his understanding of his emotions.

The poems in the first section, reminiscences of Fletcher's youth, are, according to Hughes, "not a great performance," although Hughes does later recant this position by stating that taking the first section as a whole, rather than evaluating the poems individually, produces a more powerful "mosaic."

Many critics believe the second section of this collection shows most clearly the influence of the imagist style. Hughes describes this section of poems as reflecting "beauty and mastery of form, and several are consistently excellent." These poems are longer and more complicated than the ones in the first section, and Fletcher works with concepts for which there was little precedent. In these poems, he combines poetry, music, and art by giving colors different emotional values. Some of his attempts lean toward the conventional, such as using blue to express sadness, but other emotional values that he conveys are completely his own, as in his presenting the color orange as the color of war. Of the poems in this section, "Green Symphony" and "Blue Symphony" are the most often anthologized.

## Images of War

One of the strongest influences in Richard Aldington's life was his time spent in World War I. The experience made him bitter and cynical. His *Images of War* (1919) is a collection of poems that he wrote both during the war and afterward. He spent fifteen months on the front lines, and from that came what some critics refer to as some of the most beautiful war poems ever written. The beauty comes from the poems' intensity and Aldington's ability to make readers feel something akin to the poet's emotions.

The poems transport readers to the trenches and allow them the privilege of hearing Aldington's thoughts on life and death, love and pain, fear and loneliness. Ironically, the poems that Aldington wrote during the war are less cynical than the ones that he wrote several years later. The time between the end of the war and Aldington's writing the later poems allowed him to reflect more on the overall picture of war: the

reasons behind war and the consequences of such action. While in the trenches, Aldington thought of survival and wrote personal emotional accounts. After active duty, however, he suffered from having survived, and he brooded on why nations choose such destructive paths. In this time his poetry was bitter. This collection marks the end of Aldington's purest use of Imagism. From this point on, his writing took on other aspects and influences.

## Otherworld: Cadences

F. S. Flint published his last collection of poems, *Otherworld: Cadences,* in 1920. Most of the poems in this collection center on the effects of war, and thus he dedicates this volume to his fellow imagist poet Aldington, whose own writing was greatly influenced by his experience in World War I.

Not all of the poems in this collection were written with a specific reference to World War I. Some poems stress a more personal war, such as in the title piece, "Otherworld." In this poem, Flint reflects on the battle that he encounters on a daily basis, having to wake up to a world that demands that much of his attention be focused on material details. In contrast, he would much rather sit in his garden and meditate on the beauty of the world, the love of his family, and the goodness of his compatriots. Hughes writes of this poem: "The poem continues, and pictures the deadening routine of the day and the return of the worker at night to his home, weak and disheartened."

Hughes states that some of the poetry in this collection is "soft poetry. It is much softer than most poems written by the imagists. But it is absolutely human." Hughes concludes that even though Flint also writes poems with more edge, he is unlike his fellow imagist poets in that he "finds it impossible to conceal his tenderness."

Flint published two collections of poems with similar titles: each has the word *cadence* in it. An important element for Flint, he believed that cadence was one of the most important marks of imagist poetry. In the preface to *Otherworld: Cadence*, Flint proposes that unrhymed cadence truly marks the difference between traditional and modern poetry.

## *"The Red Wheelbarrow"*

Williams's most famous poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" is an excellent example of Imagism in the United States, as conceived by Williams in

response to the European, classically based imagistic work of Pound and Eliot. In his writing, Williams focuses on everyday objects and events. The central image in this poem is a red wheelbarrow wet after a rain. The wheelbarrow contrasts with white chickens nearby. The power of this poem is the clarity of the image drawn in bold strokes of words carefully chosen and arranged. He was inspired to write this poem after seeing this very scene in the yard of one of his patients. "The Red Wheelbarrow" was originally published in *Spring and All,* a 1923 volume of poetry and prose.

## Sea Garden

Hilda Doolittle's first collection of twenty-eight imagist poems, *Sea Garden* (1916), has been referred to by J. B. Harmer in his *Victory in Limbo: Imagism 1908–1917* as representative of one of two of "the chief memorial[s] of the Imagiste group." The poems in Doolittle's first collection are the most influenced by the imagist movement, and according to Harmer, after publication of this book, Doolittle "began to retreat" into more traditional poetic form. Thus, this collection marks both her entry into the movement and her exit.

Susan Stanford Friedman, writing in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Poets, 1880–1945*, compares many of the poems in this collection to Georgia O'Keeffe's flower paintings, stating that like O'Keeffe, "H. D.'s flowers indirectly suggest an intense eroticism, whose power comes precisely from its elusive, nonhuman expression." Friedman also states that it is through these poems that Doolittle expresses traits of her personality, such as her "pride in her difference, and her separation from the conventional."

This pride is best witnessed in the poem "Sheltered Garden," in which Doolittle writes about being tired of the pampered, neat garden and longing for a fruit tree upon which the fruit is allowed to remain until it naturally whithers and dies.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, writing in *H. D.: The Career of That Struggle*, mentions that in her poems about flowers, Doolittle rebels against convention by depicting the flowers in harsh environments, praising them for their wounds: "These flowers of the sea gardens are of a harsh surprising beauty, slashed, torn, dashed yet still triumphant and powerful." Such is the case with the poem "Sea Rose," in which Doolittle does not praise the flower for its delicacy but rather for its ability to stand against the winds. She repeats this theme in her poem "Sea Poppies," in which she describes the roots of the flower as being caught among the rocks and broken shells and praises the flower for its endurance.

## Sword Blades and Poppy Seed

Amy Lowell spent several years in London, meeting imagist poets and eventually taking over the promotion, education, and organization of this movement. When she returned to the United States in 1914, she published her own collection of imagist poetry, *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed.* The poems in this collection reflect many theories and philosophies that had been espoused by the imagists, as well as by the French symbolist poets who greatly influenced the Imagism movement. In the preface of this collection Lowell discusses her interpretation of free verse and what she refers to as polyphonic prose, two concepts that were used by some poets in the imagist movement.

Although Lowell was to become a popular poet, she was often criticized for her lack of originality. In her first collection, the influences of Pound, Doolittle, and Fletcher are apparent. Lowell was mostly known and praised for her business sense, especially in promoting the movement and finding ways to have the other poets published. However, her use polyphonic prose, one of the major aspects of this collection, impressed many of the other poets. Aldington, in fact, was so impressed with Lowell's ability to use this technique that he wrote an essay in which he recommended that all young poets study this collection of hers.

Polyphonic prose is a type of free verse that uses alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds), assonance (repetition of vowel sounds), as well as other poetic devices to create a poem that is appears like prose, but that reads or sounds like poetry. Although Lowell did not invent polyphonic prose, she is given credit for popularizing it, and it is in this collection that she best displays her ability to use this form.

## THEMES

### *War*

Several of the imagist poets used war as a theme of their poems and sometimes of their entire collections. One example is Aldington's *Images*

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- The controversy over what constitutes a poem remains unsolved. Research the topic of free verse (or *vers libre*) and write an essay on it. Consider including a historical perspective, the differences in various definitions and proposed applications of this style, as well as aspects of the controversy of the prose poem.

- Both Amy Lowell and Hilda Doolittle were involved in lesbian relationships. Study their poetry and compare how they handled this subject in their writing. You might also want to read some of their prose. For a more complex paper, you could include information on the social implications of lesbianism during the time of their relationships. You might also want to read some thoughts on the subject by Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf, two other writers around the same time period who also dealt with issues stemming from homosexuality.

- The Greek poet Sappho greatly influenced Hilda Doolittle's writing. Develop a biography of Sappho from the limited information available. Research her poetry and see if you can discover how Doolittle's writing was influenced by it; then compare two poems, one by each poet.

- Japanese haiku was a major influence on imagist poetry. Read some of the poetry of Matsuo Basho then try to write some of your own haiku. Include up to five of your haiku in a paper that explores Basho's life and works.

- F. S. Flint wrote war poetry. Study other poets and authors who described their war experiences. You may want to choose a writer for each major war, such as World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, or even a war from ancient times. Compare their experiences and their writings.

- Imagism marked the beginning of the modernist movement in literature and in other art forms. How did Modernism affect other arts such as painting, sculpture, architecture, and music? What were the drastic changes from the Romantic or Victorian age to Modernism? Or you might want to switch perspectives and show how Modernism and the postmodern world of art stand in contrast.

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*of War*, in which the poet draws upon his personal experiences in the trenches of World War I. This collection also includes poems that he wrote after the war, poems in which he uses a cynical tone to mark his disgust of societies that allow war to occur in the first place. The poem "The Lover," which first appeared in this volume, is a fitting example. It brings together an interesting mix of his fears and suggests the sexual desires that he experienced during the war.

Pound's *Cathay* also employs the theme of war. Although Pound wrote these poems from translations of Li Po, an eighth-century poet from China, the original poems focused on war, a timely concern of Pound's, as the effects of World War I were much in his thoughts.

Male poets were not the only ones affected by the war. Many of Doolittle's poems in her collection *Sea Garden* engage images of pain, suffering, and desolation. Some critics relate these images to the ravages of war felt by the entire population, including those who were left at home. Doolittle was married to Aldington at the time he served on the front lines and thus felt the full impact not only of her personal fears and sense of loss but also of Aldington's suffering. Many of the poems in Flint's *Otherworld: Cadences* also portray the devastation of World War I. In fact, he dedicated this work to his fellow poet Aldington because he was well aware of the effect that the war was having on his friend.

### Sense of Place

Flint, who lived all of his life in or near London, has many times been referred to as the poet of London. He grew up in the streets of this city and knew the sounds, smells, and colors so well that they permeated his poetry. His love of the city was not always an easy one, however, as espoused in some of his writings, such as his poem "Courage," in which he awakens every day and hopes for the strength to face the city one more time without whining. On a lighter note is his "To a Young Lady Who Moved Shyly among Men of Reputed Worth," written quickly at a dinner party in London. The original version of this poem did not meet the tenets of Imagism, so Flint rewrote it and titled it "London." In this version, it became one of Flint's most admired poems.

John Gould Fletcher returned to his childhood home in Little Rock, Arkansas, and there he wrote poems that would be collected in the book *Ghosts and Pagodas*. He eventually returned to Europe and then came back to the United States again. During his second return, he traveled across the Continent and looked at his homeland with fresh eyes. The result was his *Breakers and Granite* (1921), a sort of salutation to America. This collection demonstrates Fletcher's experiments with free verse and polyphonic prose, demonstrating the imagist influence on his work. The poems describe such diverse subjects as the Grand Canyon, the farmlands in New England, the small towns along the Mississippi River, elements of southern culture, and life on Indian reservations.

### Nature

Doolittle's *Sea Garden* is filled with images of nature: flowers, bushes, oceans, beaches, and more. Doolittle used nature in this collection to reflect on a variety of emotions, her sense of isolation, and suffering. Fletcher also employed nature in his poetry, beginning with his first collection *Irradiations*, in which he often refers to such natural elements as gardens, forests, and rain. Under the influence of Japanese haiku, which often portrays details in nature, Fletcher's poem "Blue Symphony" intertwines colors and images of trees in mists of blue to suggest seasonal changes.

Lowell also reflected on nature in her experiments with polyphonic prose, such as in her "Patterns," in which she envisions herself walking through a garden, as well as in "The Overgrown Pasture." In her poem "November," she describes many different types of bushes and trees as they are affected by the cold of approaching winter.

One of Flint's earliest poems, "The Swan," follows the imagist practice of conciseness and suggestiveness. The poem consists of several short lines, written in concrete terms that describe the movements of a swan through dark waters. The poem is filled with the colors found in nature, painting a precise image with words. The image of the swan gives way at the end to a symbol of the poet's sorrow.

### Greek Poets

Both Aldington and Doolittle were avid students of Greek literature and mythology. They both looked to the classical poets to find a model of excellence for their writing. Doolittle was perhaps most inspired by Greek poets, often alluding to Sappho in her works. Her poems that incorporate classical references are some of the most original.

Only one poem by Sappho survived to modern times in its complete state. The rest of Sappho's poetry exists only in fragments. It is upon these fragments that Doolittle built some of her most fascinating poetry. Doolittle has been credited, by Greek scholars such as Henry Rushton Fairclough (as quoted in Hughes's book), for becoming so completely "suffused with the Greek spirit that only the use of the vernacular will often remind the cultivated reader that he is not reading a Greek poet." Fairclough particularly refers to Doolittle's poem "Hymen" as exemplifying the influence of Greek poetry on her craft.

### Lesbianism

The subject of lesbianism occurs in many of Lowell's poems. She does not name it as such, but her poems depict the love she felt for women, in particular, one woman. In her poem "Decade," she celebrates the tenth anniversary of her relationship with her longtime companion, Ada Dwyer Russell. In her poems "A Lady" and "The Blue Scarf," she alludes to her love of an unnamed woman.

## STYLE

### Polyphonic Prose

Amy Lowell was the imagist poet most heavily influenced by the practice of polyphonic prose, a term coined by Fletcher (who also enjoyed using this technique), but a practice that Lowell learned from the French poet Paul Fort (1872–1960). Lowell understood this form to be similar to free verse but only freer. She called it the most elastic form of poetic expression, as it uses all the poetic "voices" such as meter, cadence, rhyme, alliteration, and assonance. Written in this form, a poem appears like prose on the page, but the sound of the poem reveals its poetic character.

Lowell described this technique in her essay "A Consideration of Modern Poetry," which she wrote for the *North American Review* (January 1917). She employed this technique for the first time in her collection *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914), about which Aldington wrote an article in the *Egoist* commending the collection and suggesting that all young poets should read Lowell's poems to learn the technique. Aldington writes (as quoted in Hughes's book), "I am not a bit ashamed to confess that I have myself imitated Miss Lowell in this, and produced a couple of works in the same style."

Although Lowell's poetry was often criticized for lack of depth, many critics praised her use of language, especially her proficiency in using polyphonic prose.

### Free Verse

Pound was responsible for creating six tenets designed to help poets understand what Imagism is and how it differed from other forms of poetry. Of these six, one was about free verse, which, according to the manifesto, would best express the individuality of the poet. The exact wording of this tenet is quoted in David Perkins's book, *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode*: "We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea." Free verse was one manner of escaping the need to rhyme. Pound thought that releasing poets from the need to rhyme would them to focus better on the image.

Pound was not original in this idea, as various forms of free verse had been used in classical Greek literature, in Old English literature (such as *Beowulf*), as well as in French, American, and German poetry. However, Pound and the other imagist poets took the meaning of free verse to new ground. They believed that rhythm expressed emotion, and the imagists understood, according to Perkins, that "for every emotional state there is the one particular rhythm that expresses it." Therefore, limiting rhythm to the fixed stanzas, meters, and other rhythmic standards of conventional poetry disallowed a full rendering of those emotions. In other words, the individuality of the poet's emotions would be thwarted by following traditional rules, and thus the overall effect of the poem would become inauthentic or insincere. Thus, the imagists were encouraged to let go of the old standards and open up their emotions to the flow of words that was allowed in free verse. Of the imagist poets, the Americans, more so than their British cohorts, readily took advantage of free verse. The traditional rules of poetry had been created in Europe and therefore had a European character. Through the use of free verse, the American imagists felt that they could compose more individualistic poetry that spoke in an American voice.

There was controversy around this form, as many critics had trouble distinguishing the differences between so-called free verse and actual prose. So the question arose: What makes a poem a poem? Poetry, most critics argued, required form. Aldington defined his use of free verse as poetry in this way: "The prose-poem is poetic content expressed in prose form" (quoted from Hughes). Whereas Fletcher took a more visual and more general approach in attempting to express his understanding of the difference between prose and poetry, believing that all well-written literature could be referred to as poetry, so that it did not matter if poems were written according to very traditional rules or in free verse. In Hughes's book, Fletcher is quoted as saying: "The difference between poetry and prose is … a difference between a general roundness and a general squareness of outline."

### Common and Precise Language

Another tenet in the imagist manifesto dealt with the specific use of language. Imagist poets were told to use the language of common speech, more like the language one would hear in conversation rather than the formal or decorative language often used in traditional poetry. Imagists were also told to be spare in their use of words, to

practice using only the words that were needed to describe an image. They should be concrete in their language, to stay away from abstraction.

## Image

Pound's definition of what an image was in terms of imagist poetry is rather vague. He stressed that the language should be precise and concentrated in expressing this image, but he never quite defined what the image of the imagist movement was. One of the tenets of the imagist manifesto was the freedom of the poet to choose any subject that he or she wanted. So image was not related to subject matter. However, it is stated that one of the main purposes of poetry is "To present an image" (quoted from Hughes). This image should not be an abstraction. If an abstraction, such as an emotion, is to be expressed, indeed, it should be told, through an image.

Aldington, as stated by Hughes, tried to be a little more specific in his definition of an image by stating that poets should try to create "clear, quick rendering[s] of particulars without commentary." William Carlos Williams, who wrote an occasional imagist poem, may have defined the image best. Ideas are best expressed through things, Williams believed, and there was no better way to express things that contained ideas than through images. The imagists' intent to focus on one image led them to embrace the poetry of Japan, especially haiku, which presents a single image in each poem.

## Japanese Haiku

Japanese haiku is an ancient form of poetry, originating about 1300 AD Haiku is a precise poetic form, consisting typically of seventeen syllables in three lines. Japanese, which is syllabic rather than based on individual letters of an alphabet, is better suited to this form than is English. Therefore, even though the imagist poets became enamored of this form, they technically never wrote an authentic haiku. However, haiku greatly influenced their work. Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) is one of Japan's best-known haiku poets. His most famous poem of this type is a good example:

> An old pond . . .
> A frog jumps in—
> The sound of water.

In comparison is Doolittle's "Oread" (also taken from Harmer's book), which demonstrates the imagist attempt to practice haiku by writing simply and focusing on one image:

> Whirl up, sea—
> whirl your pointed pines,
> splash your great pines
> on our rocks,
> hurl your green over us,
> cover us with your pools of fir.

# MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

## European versus American Imagism

Of the seven major imagist poets, five of them (Lowell, Doolittle, Pound, Williams, and Fletcher) were born in the United States. All but Williams, upon deciding to dedicate their lives to writing, and more specifically to poetry, traveled throughout Europe. There was a void, as far as poetry is concerned, in the United States at that time, and those who had a passion for creating poetry felt that they needed to go abroad to find out more about it. The American poetry that did exist in the early part of the twentieth century, according to Pound, was mediocre. As quoted in Perkins, Pound states: "Only the mediocrity of a given time can drive intelligent men of that time to 'break with tradition.'" Thus, the American poets, tired and frustrated by the conventional poets of the previous century, traveled to Europe and helped to open the gates of the modernist period, influencing it with their own credo of Imagism.

Interestingly, once these American poets became involved in creating the imagist movement, some of them (mostly Lowell and Fletcher) tended to veer in different directions from their British contemporaries in their attempts to give the language of their poetry a more American slant.

Williams stood apart from the other American imagists because he did not believe in the superiority of European styles. He immersed himself in the artistic community of New York City, befriending Dadaist artists Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray and modernist poets Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore, among others. He mentored young poets, emphasizing the importance of images from everyday life over allusions to classical literature.

## Objectivist Poetry

Objectivist poetry manifested in the 1930s, an outgrowth of Imagism and a subset of Modernism. William Carlos Williams inspired the objectivist

poets with the primacy he gave to images and his rejection of classical sources. They did not see themselves as a cohesive group, but the poets most associated with objectivist poetry include George Oppen, Basil Bunting, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, and Lorine Niedecker. The February 1931 issue of *Poetry* was a special edition that focused on objectivist poetry and was edited by Zukofsky. Its reception was mixed and, while objectivist poets continued to publish, the movement was mostly over by the end of the decade. In 1978, Oppen's wife Mary published a memoir, *Meaning a Life*, which includes a recollection of the objectivist movement.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Modernism

The transition from the Romanticism and Victorianism to Modernism was one of the major shifts in the history of poetry, and some critics credit the imagists with beginning this great change. Romantic poetry was marked by its idealism and embellished language, while the imagists proclaimed that they were realists who would write in the vernacular about concrete subjects. The romantics were behind the times, the imagists believed. The older poetic form appealed to audiences that were usually made up of the upper social classes. The modernists wanted to communicate with the masses.

"Imagism has been described as the grammar school of modern poetry," writes Perkins. The imagist poets were responsible for creating some of the basic instructions for Modernism, which included clear and precise language and suggestive and visual imagery. Craig Hamilton points out that Imagism is important because it is an immediate precursor to Modernism, if for no other reason. Modernists would also experiment with ways in which to relate poetry to the other arts.

Modernism implied that the population was tired of the past and wanted to see things as they really are in the present or to think about how they might be in the future. The past was gone, and the ancient casts should be broken and discarded. Modernists wanted to create something new. Experimentation and exploration were the new focus. There was a breaking away from patterned responses and predictable forms. One modernist theme was alienation: individuals had

difficulty placing themselves in the changing present context. Modernists also explored the inner self, life as experienced subjectively in large urban centers, and the effects of materialism and industrialization.

### World War I

World War I was a traumatic event for Europe and the United States. Previous wars had involved the upper social classes more so than the general population. World War I was also the first war to involve gas warfare and heavy artillery. The physically and emotionally wounded soldiers were brought home, many of them suffering from shell-shock, most of them filled with bitterness. They found themselves alienated from their previously optimistic views of the machine age. European and American authors writing during and after the war spoke about the horror of war and its attendant disillusions more than any generation had before them. Their styles became more introspective, less idealistic, and more cynical. In an attempt to heal their inner wounds, they tried to explain the effects that the war had upon them and to analyze and criticize the society that had sent them there.

### Women's Rights

In 1903, the women's suffrage movement in Britain took a turn toward the militant under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters. Tired of being silenced, they were determined to grab headlines with their acts of arson, destruction, and general mayhem in the streets. Many of the leaders of this group were often imprisoned, at which time they would then go on hunger strikes. After World War I, limited suffrage was granted to them. In 1928, eight years after their American sisters, British women were granted the right to vote.

With political awareness of their rights, women also gained the courage to speak out not only for public freedoms but also for independence in their personal lives. Everything from clothing to sexual relations was undergoing close examination as women began defining their lives in terms of what they needed and wanted rather than what the male-dominated society dictated for them. This can be seen in Lowell's mannerisms, in particular. She liked to wear men's clothes and often smoked cigars. Like Doolittle, she had a longterm lesbian relationship. Doolittle was also very free in determining her relationships with men. While married to Aldington, she had affairs with other men, one

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **Early Twentieth Century:** Women win the right to vote after a long period of political activism in both Britain and in the United States.

  **Middle Twentieth Century:** Gloria Steinman, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, and Betty Friedan join forces to establish the National Women's Political Caucus, encouraging women to use their political power to gain equal rights.

  **Today:** Although written in the 1920s and passed in Congress in the 1970s, the Equal Rights Amendment fails to be ratified by the states before the 1982 deadline.

- **Early Twentieth Century:** China and Japan open their cultural doors to the West, influencing Western literature with various forms of classical Asian poetry.

  **Middle Twentieth Century:** After the musical group the Beatles are influenced by the Eastern practice of meditation, Asian spiritual practices and belies such as Buddhism spread across the United States.

  **Late Twentieth Century:** The Japanese economy reaches its highest point as Japanese cars and electronic devices flood the U.S. markets.

- **Early Twentieth Century:** Over 57,000 American troops are killed in World War I.

  **Middle Twentieth Century:** Over 55,000 American troops are killed in World War II; over 33,000 troops are killed in Korea; over 58,000 are killed in Vietnam.

  **Today:** The United States wages war with Iraq, in which over 4,000 Americans die, and perhaps as many as 100,000 Iraqis are killed.

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of them resulting in her getting pregnant. Although both these women were courageous enough to demand their rights, Doolittle often suffered mentally from the emotional impact of her actions. She was well ahead of her time in terms of women's liberation and often sought the care 'of psychiatrists, including Sigmund Freud, to help her come to terms with her emotional needs and the social confines of the early era of women's rights.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

In the chapter "Critical Reaction," Hughes makes the statement that "few comments on the [imagist] movement have appeared in English periodicals. The effect is that of a conspiracy of silent scorn." Hughes wrote this in 1931, but his book remains one of the standard studies of the imagist movement, so his seventy-year-old opinion seems to be still relevant. Hughes claims

that the critics who did write about Imagism were usually either the imagist poets themselves or else their friends.

The only comments that were made were either brief sarcastic remarks or "mutual back-scratching," Hughes concludes. Of the sarcastic remarks, he mentions Harold Monro, who wrote an article in the *Egoist*, a largely imagist publication. Monro writes, "the imagists seem to have been struck partially blind at the first sight of their new world; and they are still blinking."

Ford Maddox Ford (using his German last name, Hueffer, for this article) is quoted by Hughes as commending Doolittle and Flint for their writing, praising them as the only two poets in the movement who wrote well enough to be called imagists. Ford then continues: "Mr. John Gould Fletcher, Mr. Aldington, and Miss Lowell are all too preoccupied with themselves and their emotions to be really called Imagists." Ford concludes by stating that the imagist movement

*John Gould Fletcher* (AP Images)

is the only thing that was happening in literature during that time.

Hughes then goes on to discuss the critical response that the imagists received in America. He begins with a statement from a reviewer writing for the *Chicago Tribune*. The writer concluded the review by stating that Imagism should be established as a constitutional amendment and that anyone who writes anything other than in the imagist mode should be imprisoned. Later, after the publication of *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), Conrad Aiken, an American poet himself and friend of Pound, wrote a poem for the imagists and had it published in the *Boston Transcript*. The poem was not at all flattering, and as presented in Hughes's book, Aiken ended each stanza with the question: "Where in a score [of] years will you be," making an allusion to the fact that he thought Imagism was but a mere fad.

Aiken later wrote an article for the *New Republic*, in which he praised Fletcher at the other imagist poets' expense, stating that only Fletcher was able to express enough emotion to move the reader. W. S. Braithwaite, in response to Aiken's attacks, also published an article in the *New Republic*. His opinion of the imagists was more generous, praising the poets for their

courage to break out of the old poetry molds. As quoted in Hughes's book, Braithwaite writes, "The final test of poetry is not that it stirs one . . . but that it haunts one."

In 1915, William Ellery Leonard, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, took upon himself the task of critiquing the imagists. His analysis was not very favorable. Hughes describes Leonard's remarks as "the most scholarly, sarcastic, and seriously-considered attempt at the annihilation of imagism yet recorded." Leonard disliked the imagists' allusions to Japanese poetry, although Hughes points out that at the time of the criticism none of the imagists had yet written any poetry that was influenced by haiku. Leonard also criticized their use of classical Greek and Latin poets, assuming (wrongly) that none of the poets had a real understanding of the classics. Hughes sums up his views about the Leonard attacks on the imagists by stating that Leonard was correct in pointing out some of the weak points of some of the poets but that to condemn the whole movement without mentioning any of their strengths was a "cheap trick."

Other critics did not like the egoism that the imagist poets appeared to flaunt. Some felt that the imagist poet made him- or herself more important than the poem. Hughes then writes that Lewis Worthington Smith, writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, believed that the imagists were only pretending to revolt from all literary forms but were, actually, "doing nothing of the kind: they are minor poets who cannot stand the strain of the sophisticated and complex world in which they find themselves." Smith concludes that Imagism is merely a "freakish and barren cult" and a sign that Romanticism will bounce back with a much "fuller and more vital poetry."

These were the early reviews. Later, Hughes writes, the critics were "more favorable, owing to the continuous propaganda of the imagists themselves and to the natural decline of prejudice toward something new."

## CRITICISM

### Joyce Hart

*Hart has degrees in English literature with a minor in Asian studies and focuses her writing on literary topics. In this essay, Hart considers the influence of the Japanese poetic form of haiku on imagist poetry.*

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
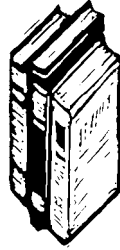
- *Imagist Poem*, edited by William Pratt and revised in 2001, is an expanded anthology of imagist poetry first published in the 1960s. This collection is a good place to start for getting to know and understand imagist poetry.

- A comprehensive collection of Japanese haiku from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century can be found in *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa* (1995), edited by Robert Hass. Basho, Buson, and Issa are the most proficient poets of haiku. This anthology contains three hundred of their poems.

- *The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s* (1993), by Christine Bolt, offers an extensive historical perspective of the women's rights movement seen through the more modern vision of feminism. This book offers a good understanding of the environment in which the men and women of Imagism were writing.

- Marjorie Perloff, a professor of comparative literature, has spent her professional career fighting for inclusion of a broader range of literary works in the list of books that are usually taught on college campuses. In her *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric*, she discusses poems by authors who have often been ignored. In this book, she includes Doolittle and Fletcher, as well as the more well-known poets associated with Imagism, such as Ezra Pound and D. H. Lawrence.

- *The Lost Voices of World War I: An International Anthology of Writers, Poets, and Playwrights* (1989), edited by Tim Cross, includes the poems of T. E. Hulme, the man most responsible for creating the philosophical foundation of Imagism. Hulme, who wrote very few poems in his lifetime, died in World War I, as did most of the authors included in this collection.

- *British Poets of the Great War* (1988), by Fred D. Crawford, contains a chapter on the imagists. Crawford offers a literary background for the movement and discusses the imagist poets and their poems.

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The Imagism movement, although short-lived and complicated by some basic contradictions and controversies, definitely left its mark on the literature of its time as well as on many works that would follow. Included in the contradictions was the dictate from the movement's founders to break the chains of tradition, while two of its most loyal poets wrote their imagist poems with allusions to classical Latin and Greek poetry. Another contradiction was the call for freedom in writing, and yet the leaders of the movement sat down and wrote an imagist manifesto, delineating rules for anyone who would write imagist poems. Added to the contradictions was the confusion that many readers (and critics) experienced as they tried to understand free verse, which to them read more like prose than poetry. And, finally, even though the basic tenet of this group of poets was that the *image* was the poem, no one was able to offer a definitive explanation of what the word *image* meant to them, despite the fact that, quite obviously, the most influential element of this movement was just that—the concept of the focused image. However, despite this latter problem, the imagists did discover a model upon which they could build their images, and that was the Japanese poetic form referred to as haiku.

It was in the form of the haiku, or, if not the exact form, at least in the general concept of it, that many of the tenets of the imagist manifesto were best expressed. The manifesto, in short,

expected imagist writers to use common speech, words from daily dialogue. The language should be precise and concrete. Rhythm should be free, and rhyming was not only unnecessary, it was practically discouraged. The poem should be concentrated and definite; and, most important, the poem should present an image. Matching this explanation of Imagism are the descriptions of the Japanese poem, which state that haiku should be true to reality and written as if it represented a first impression of subjects taken from daily life or as seen with fresh eyes. The language should be simple, and the focus should be on one image. In both the haiku and the imagist poem, two images are often juxtaposed and the meaning of the poem is understated.

Despite the fact that critics argue that the imagists never truly mastered the haiku form, the influence of the Japanese haiku is very evident in many of their poems. Pound, being the initial leader of the movement, tried his hand at the haiku with his often quoted poem "In a Station of the Metro," taken here from Harmer's book:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals, on a wet black bough.

Compare Pound's poem to one from Japan's more famous haiku masters, Yosa Buson (1715–1783), and the similarities are easy to see. Buson's poem is also taken from Harmer.

> Alone in a room
> Deserted—
> A peony.

In both poems, the wording is sparse. The language is simple. There are two very clear images woven together by a subtle reading, that is left to the reader to decipher. In Pound's poem, the image of the petals of a flower that have been momentarily pasted to the limb of a tree after a rainfall is something that almost all readers could relate to no matter where they lived, what culture they were brought up in, or what language they spoke. By using this image, Pound gives the reader a hint of his feelings, as the speaker stands, possibly leaning against some far wall, watching the crowd of temporary faces pass by him. Just as the petals of the flower are temporarily pasted against the wet limb, the people who are passing are only momentarily fixed in the speaker's mind. He juxtaposes the crowded station with a beautiful, understated scene from nature—a few wet petals.

Japanese art, whether a painting or a flower arrangement, is an expression as much of what is not there as of what is presented. A single flower placed with an interestingly formed stick allows space around its images, thus encouraging the imagination to fill in the emptiness. The beauty is in the simplicity. Pound senses this and even plays with it as he first takes his readers to a crowded and busy center of transportation in some unnamed city, then suddenly plants them in a quiet place where they can meditate on a single bough. Buson makes a similar surprising movement. He first implants the feelings of loneliness. The reader is made to believe that a person is sitting in a room by him- or herself, although the reader does not know for sure why. The next line adds the emotion. The loneliness gives way to the more incredible feeling of abandonment and neglect. Then Buson adds nature, and the image softens; it becomes pristine and beautiful in its aloneness. It is in the starkness of the single peony that an image of art is created. The lone flower in a vase is turned into a pure, focused image, because there is nothing else in the room to distract the eye.

One more example from the Japanese is the following, also taken from Harmer, and credited to Moritake:

> A fallen petal
> Flies back to its branch:
> Ah! A butterfly!

In comparison to this haiku is one written by Amy Lowell. Although Lowell's is not as humorous, she wrote a poem that contains a very similar rhythm. This poem is taken from Hughes's book:

> My thoughts
> Chink against my ribs
> And roll about like silver hailstones

In Moritake's poem, there is surprise in the last line, as there is in Lowell's. The surprise in Moritake's is more evident. The reader feels the jolt, just as the poet must have experienced it,

watching one image turn into quite another, from a dead, falling petal to a live and beautiful butterfly. Lowell's surprise is more subtle. The image of thoughts hitting, albeit lightly, against the speakers ribs is somewhat uncomfortable. The concept makes the speaker appear agitated and possibly hungry, if not for food, then for a solution of some kind. Then she adds the final line, having the thoughts roll now, a much more comforting feeling, and they are also turned into silver—smooth and shiny. Instead of being bothersome, they now appear somewhat precious.

There are many examples of the influence of haiku upon the imagists, as all of them tried their hand at the Japanese form, some of them more successfully than others. Even T. E. Hulme, who wrote very few poems and was not directly considered an imagist poet, even though it was his philosophy of poetry that began the movement, was able to create a type of haiku. In his poem "Autumn," taken from Hughes's book, Hulme writes a somewhat longer version, but the rhythm and the form are still there:

> A touch of cold in the Autumn night—
> I walked abroad,
> And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
> Like a red-faced farmer.

In this stanza of his poem, Hulme juxtaposes images of nature with the figure of a person. There is a similar surprise in Hulme's poem, as there is in Moritake's, in which the petal suddenly turns into a butterfly. With Hulme, the moon suddenly turns into the face of a farmer. The picture in the poem jumps from one image to the other, as Hulme superimposes the moon and the farmer in such a quick motion that the reader witnesses the blending of the two images into one.

One of the best examples of haiku poetry from Richard Aldington comes from his collection *Images of Desire*. It is quoted here from Hughes's book:

> Like a dark princess whose beauty
> Many have sung, you wear me,
> The one jewel that is warmed by your breast.

Here Aldington focuses on one image, that of a beautiful princess, bejeweled. What is interesting in this poem is that Aldington embeds the speaker in that "one jewel," creating a double image in one object. The attention remains on the princess and her beauty, while the speaker sneaks in and prevails over the throngs of men who clamor for her attention. This is a clever

poem, whose image changes the more it is thought about. The picture first appears as a solitary figure, then slowly grows more complex as more people crowd into the image, first the other admirers, then the jewel that takes on the personification of the speaker.

John Gould Fletcher wholly engaged Japanese art in many of its forms, and in the following two lines, taken again from Hughes, he captures a beautiful Japanese image in very few words:

> Uneven tinkling, the lazy rain
> Dripping from the eaves.

This short poem not only provides an image, it adds music. Raindrops splashing down on the roof, "tinkling" like the sounds of tiny bells or like a wind chime. Then he slows down the rhythm, as he describes the rain as lazy, and the reader can again see the sluggish drops leisurely slithering down from the eaves. This is imagist poetry imitating haiku at its best, with several of the senses drawn in, with such spare and simple words, to create one exquisite image.

Fletcher is successful again in one of his poems taken from his collection *Ghosts and Pagodas*. This one comes from the first section, "The Ghosts of an Old House," and as quoted from Hughes, it reads in part:

> The windows rattle as if someone were in
> them wishing to get out
> and ride upon the wind.

Knowing the context of this poem gives it more meaning. Fletcher has gone back to his family home, after having been away for a long time. His family is gone. All that remains for him are the memories of having once lived there. When the wind rattles the windows, he imagines the ghosts of his memories, trying to release themselves from his mind. Fletcher builds the image by bringing in various senses. Not only can the reader envision what this might look like, or feel like, but the sound of the wind and the rattling of the window are also very easy to imagine. The surprise element is also present. The normal impression might be that if there were ghosts inside the window, and they were trying to get out, that the ghosts would then come after the speaker of the poem. Instead, Fletcher has them wanting to ride the wind, to fly away from him, to return to nature. He has captured the essence of the haiku in his own way, imbuing the image with past emotions conjured

*Images such as these from World War I influenced Richard Aldington* (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection / Corbis)

in the present moment, all illustrated realistically and concretely.

Closing this essay is a poem from William Carlos Williams (1883–1963), who was not considered one of the major imagist poets, but he is often referred to as one of the major poets of that time who was affected by the Imagism movement. His poem "Red Wheelbarrow" is often used as a classic representation of both the perfect imagist poem as well as one that demonstrates the influence of the haiku. The image of the red wheelbarrow, on which, as the poem reads, "so much depends" visually, is so vivid that it could almost be framed and hung on the wall as a painting. The rhythm is slightly less Japanese, but the picture that is created is very much in line with haiku.

This poem is so visual that the reader feels as if standing in a museum, staring at an oil painting. The first line focuses on the brightest color, the red of the wheelbarrow. Added to this image is the simply stated observation that the wheelbarrow is "glazed with rain," a concise detail that further elaborates the scene with so few words that it seems understated. (Note the painting terminology in the word *glazed*, thus reinforcing

the impression of this poem as a painted image.) Finally, the lustrous, red wheelbarrow is situated near white chickens, which were at first unseen but now stand out, their whiteness exaggerated in contrast to the color red. What, if any, meaning Williams intended in this poem is practically unimportant. However, as a poem of meditation, which is one of the reasons that the Japanese haiku is written, this poem has excelled. When read for purely imagist terms, this poem is still a prizewinner. Who could read this poem and not take with them an extremely vivid, focused image impressed upon their minds?

The imagist manifesto wanted the poets to create images rather than to moralize or preach as many of their poetic Victorian predecessors had done. It also wanted poets to minimize their language. It is no wonder that they were attracted to and influenced by the Japanese haiku, which had been perfected many hundreds of years before them. The Imagism movement was short, and most of the poets who were involved in the movement quickly passed either into obscurity or moved on to create different forms of poetry. However, despite the brevity of their involvement, they left an indelible mark on poetry of the English language by introducing the form and facility of haiku to American and British audiences.

**Source:** Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on Imagism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## Craig A. Hamilton

*In this essay, Hamilton analyzes how language was used by Imagist poets to serve the ideals of imagism.*

### 1. ON IMAGISM

"What was Imagism?" is not an easy question to answer. For example, Ezra Pound called Stanley Coffman's 1951 book, *Imagism: A Chapter for the History of Modern Poetry,* "nuts" several times (Cole 248), and Pound would no doubt take issue with most histories of Imagism. Even so, this has not prevented critics from trying to understand Imagism. For John Fuller, although "Imagism seems absurdly provincial, its aims were at the centre of the whole modernist programme in poetry." Likewise, David Perkins calls Imagism "the grammar school of modern poetry," while Jacob Korg sees Imagism as a "corrective" to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetry. For his part, Joseph Frank

> *LESS IS MORE* WOULD BE ONE WAY TO SUM UP THE IMAGIST AESTHETIC EVEN THOUGH THE PRODUCTION OF *MORE* FROM *LESS* PUTS MORE EMPHASIS RATHER THAN LESS EMPHASIS UPON A POET'S FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE."

claims Imagism "opened the way for later developments by its clean break with sentimental Victorian verbiage." Because Imagism succeeds Symbolism yet precedes Surrealism, it is situated at the dawn of "classical" literary modernism (Zach 229), which is why teleological literary histories regard Imagism as "the beginning of modern literature in English" (Pratt 75). If such claims are true, then clearly Imagism mattered regardless of whatever else might be said about the movement.

Most of the poets involved with Imagism were based in London between 1912 and 1918. Three British poets (Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint, and D. H. Lawrence) and four American poets (Pound, H. D., Amy Lowell, and John Gould Fletcher) were more or less core group members (Jones 13). T. E. Hulme, a British writer who died in 1917 in World War I, was an influential figure for the Imagists before 1914. The word "Imagist" itself might have been used publicly for the first time in 1912, when Pound wrote "HD, Imagiste" at the bottom of "Hermes of the Ways" before sending H. D.'s poem to Harriet Monroe at *Poetry* in Chicago. In 1915 F. S. Flint claimed, however, that Hulme had actually used the term fast at his Poet's Club meetings before 1912 (de Chasca 75), so the origin of the term remains in dispute. What we do know for sure is that four Imagist anthologies were published between 1914 and 1918. Pound edited the March 1914 anthology, *Des Imagistes*, while Lowell edited the remaining three anthologies, all titled *Some Imagist Poets*, which appeared in April 1915, May 1916, and April 1917, respectively. Although the Imagists nearly became known as the "Quintessentials" in early 1915 when Lowell was negotiating with Ferris Greenslet, Houghton Mifflin's poetry editor, Greenslet rejected the name change due to his

sense that "'Imagism' had a certain mercantile value" (de Chasca 75). This may be why some see Imagism as little more than publicity stunt even if it was more than that.

To keep my terms clear for the purposes of this article, by "Imagist" I mean a poet whose poetry appeared in one of the four original Imagist anthologies. Between Pound's collection (which had eleven contributors) and Lowell's three collections (which each had the same six contributors), "we have a total of thirteen writers who may possibly be considered *bona fide* Imagists" (*Imagist* 24). There were 35 poems in the 1914 anthology, 37 poems in the 1915 anthology, 32 poems in the 1916 anthology, and 26 poems in the 1917 anthology. Thus, there were 130 Imagist poems written by thirteen "bona fide" Imagist poets. That excludes Imagist poems the Imagists published elsewhere as well as the thirty new poems published in the *Imagist Anthology* 1930. These tallies remind us that the number of Imagist poems and the number of Imagist poets are rather limited ones. Why, then, should such a small movement receive so much attention over the years?

One answer comes from literary history: Imagism, a "campaign for free verse" (Roberts, "Lawrence"), included some major twentieth-century writers. In his "Foreword" to the *Imagist Anthology 1930*, Glenn Hughes argued that many Imagists became well-known "world figures" after Imagism, which is one reason why Imagism has not been forgotten. Another reason literary history has not forgotten Imagist poetry is Imagist theory. Imagism, "a theory of poetics" according to Daniel Tiffany, was as much about poetic theory or poetic criticism as it was about writing poetry. That is to say, Imagism entailed writing both poems as well as critical explanations of those (and other) poems. Granted, in his *In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism,* John Gage raises many questions about the sincerity of Imagist rhetoric, especially with regard to the criticism and theoretical exposés written by the Imagists. However, it is hard to separate theory from practice in an attempt to understand what Imagism was. For this reason, it is helpful to be reminded of key components in Imagist theory.

The famous principles of Imagism, which were first set down in Flint's "interview" of Pound for *Poetry* in March 1913, were the following:

> (1) Direct treatment of "thing," whether subjective or objective.

> (2) To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.

> (3) As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.

*(qtd. in Jones)*

Korg, who recently paraphrased these three principles as (1) the use of concrete imagery, (2) "a rigorous economy of language," and (3) "the use of *vers libre*," reminds us that these principles were "subjects of thoughtful consideration" rather than strict "dogma" for Pound. Even so, Pound's three "thoughtful" principles would become six "essentials" a year later in the unsigned preface to the 1915 Imagist anthology:

> (1) To use the language of common speech, but always the *exact* word, not the nearly-exact, not the merely decorative word.

> (2) To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free-verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.

> (3) To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.

> (4) To present an image (hence the name: "Imagist"). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.

> (5) To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.

> (6) Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.

These principles or essentials may seem somewhat redundant at times. For instance, Keith Waldrop claims that in their writings about Imagism the Imagists really only cared about "the use of images and the use of free verse." However, because principle number 2 in March 1913 had become essential number 1 by April 1915, Waldrop is wrong to overlook the Imagist emphasis on verbal economy. Indeed,

the Imagists went out of their way in the preface to their 1916 anthology to clarify once again essential number 1: "The 'exact' word does not mean the word which exactly describes the object in itself, it means the 'exact' word which brings the effect of that object before the reader as it presented itself to the poet's mind at the time of writing the poem" (*Some 1916* vi). Moreover, because Pound in 1951 "still considered the principle paramount" to understanding Imagism (Cole 249), the verbal economy principle cannot be sidelined for the sake of convenience when telling the story of Imagism.

While the principles and essentials may seem like rules to follow for writing an Imagist poem, many Imagist poems in fact violate at least one principle or essential. That is why Korg reminds us that they are not dogma, and it is also why the unsigned preface to 1916 Imagist anthology informs us that the Imagists knew that "no theories nor rules [alone] make poetry." Thus, because many Imagist poems do not follow all the rules all the time, an Imagist poem cannot be defined simply as a poem that adheres strictly to every principle or essential. This is especially true when we see that essential number 1 conflates the *poetic* concern for verbal economy in principle number 2 with a *sociolinguistic* concern for using the "language of common speech" in poetic diction. Ironically, despite their apparent revolt against nineteenth-century English poetry, the Imagists' praise for the "language of common speech" harks back to Wordsworth's infamous preference (in the 1805 preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*) for "the very language of men." As Piers Gray has argued, swearing is the real language of men, but there is little of that in either Romanticism or Imagism. Of course, Pound would call European civilization "an old bitch gone in the teeth" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" in 1920, but that long poem was written after Imagism had run its course for Pound. Even so, the example shows us that vivid figurative language was highly valued by the Imagists.

## 2. ON COGNITIVE RHETORIC

The history of rhetoric reminds us that stylistics (broadly defined as the study of literary style) originated in rhetoric, and that figurative language (for the last few centuries at least) has become a focal point of that study. Given this state of affairs on the one hand, and the rhetorical nature of Imagism on the other, figurative language can be discussed in terms of cognitive rhetoric and Imagist style can be studied through examples of figurative language. And yet, a cognitive rhetorical study of literature is not a rhetorical study per se. In the past, rhetorical criticism often consisted of simply locating and identifying rhetorical figures (e.g., chiasmus) in a text, and resistance to rhetorical criticism may have been partly due to the belief that it only required naming figures in texts. Sitting with a text in one hand, and a handbook of rhetorical terms in the other meant such identification exercises could easily seem pointless. Why? Figure identification is not figure explanation. Moreover, the belief that figures are "in" texts is simply an illusion. According to Dan Sperber, "*la figure n'est pas dans le texte [ . . . ]. Elle est dans la représentation conceptuelle du texte,*" and this goes to the heart of cognitive rhetoric. To focus on *conceptual* representations is to move away from the linguistic realm of rhetoric and toward the conceptual realm of cognitive rhetoric. After all, "Meanings are [ . . . ] in people's minds, not in words on the page" (Lakoff and Turner 109), so figures "on the page" are but pathways to the mind as far as the cognitive rhetorician is concerned. While classical rhetoricians excelled at identifying figures and creating taxonomies for them, they sometimes confused figures of thought with figures of speech. For the cognitive rhetorician, figures of thought are conceptualizations that give rise to figures of speech, which are verbal manifestations of those mental conceptualizations.

Since the 1970s, the term "cognitive rhetoric" has been used differently in pragmatics (Sperber), literary theory (Turner, "Cognitive," *Reading*), and English composition studies (Flower, "Context," "Inquiry," "Writer-Based"). Although Sperber, Mark Turner, and Linda Flower each uses the term distinctly, given the fact that they work in different fields, Flower's emphasis on "constructing meaning" is no doubt something both Sperber and Turner would agree is key to any definition of "cognitive rhetoric." Generally, cognitive rhetoric can be thought of as the study of the production of discourse, the construction of meaning, and the interpretation of the potentially persuasive aspects of discourse. Specifically, cognitive rhetoric can be thought of as the interdisciplinary study of discourse. Semiotics, poetics, rhetorical theory, and cognitive sciences such as linguistics and psychology are locations where cognitive rhetorical research already occurs. That is why cognitive rhetoric is interdisciplinary—no single field has a

monopoly on its object of study. "Discourse" is a polysemous term, but I use it to mean the language of Imagism for the purposes of this article. Moreover, verbal "production," within a literary context, may refer to the object of study in genetic criticism. However, because this article does not treat genetic criticism, Imagism's figurative language is what I explore here.

To discuss Imagist poetry in terms of rhetoric may, I admit, seem strange. For the Imagists, "rhetoric was at odds with the practice of poetry" (Gage 5); and for Pound rhetoric meant "the art of dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience for the time being" (qtd. in Jones 21) or "discursive language [ . . . ] that only obstructs meaning" (Lewis 195). Given this view of rhetoric, Pound felt he was paying T. S. Eliot a compliment when saying "there is no rhetoric" in Eliot's poetry—even though Eliot knew "rhetoric" was a term often used imprecisely (Gage 32). And yet, the Imagists probably knew that rhetoric and poetics were reconcilable. As Jonathan Culler has stated, "Poetry is related to rhetoric: it is language that makes abundant use of figures of speech and language that aims to be powerfully persuasive." Poetry (even Imagist poetry) is in fact rhetorical, which is why classical rhetoricians categorized it as a form of epideictic rhetoric. Moreover, if critical writings (even those by the Imagists themselves) are also rhetorical, then it is fitting to study Imagism in terms of cognitive rhetoric.

### 3. METAPHORS AND IMAGISM

The presence of figurative language in Imagist poetry might seem perplexing because of the Imagist belief in verbal precision. After all, if one of the classic arguments against figurative language is that it seems imprecise or misleading, then praising so-called scientific or objective prose on the one hand (which the Imagists did) while using figures on the other (which they also did) would appear to be disingenuous. Pound often dismissed as "rhetoric" poetic diction that seemed too emotional or overwrought, but the Imagists did try to strike a balance between their use of figurative language in their own poems and their criticism of the figurative language of others. This balance was necessary because the Imagists probably sensed that figurative language was crucial to their short poems and therefore could not be purged outright from their works.

Although Imagists sometimes saw similes as "superfluous" (Pondrom 78) and metaphors as

"extravagances" (Hatlen 119), their poetry nevertheless is comprised of these figures. For cognitive linguists and psychologists (Gibbs; Lakoff and Johnson), this is just what would be expected, since metaphor is anything but "superfluous" to thought and language in general. If a metaphor "is a systematic conceptual mapping involving two domains" and not "just an expression from a source domain" (Lakoff and Turner 128), then an Imagist's explicit evocations of source domains are only one part of the equation. The target domains we implicitly construe via those source domains is the other part of the metaphor equation.

As Pound once stated, "The gulf between evocation and description [ . . . ] is the unbridgeable difference between genius and talent" (qtd. in Jones 31), and Imagism is a poetics of evocation rooted firmly in figurative language. If "conceptual projection from a source to a target is not arbitrary" (Turner, *Literary* 31), and if "the source domain is more concrete than the target domain in a wide range of conventional metaphors" (Shen 46), then we can see why the Imagists put great emphasis on depicting concrete objects in their poems. While Turner and Yeshayahu Shen highlight two tenets of cognitive metaphor theory, the Imagists seemed to have understood these tenets many decades ago. By merely priming source domains in the minds of their readers, Imagists could count on readers to complete the task and carry out the meaning-making procedures of mapping, inference, and interpretation.

With this in mind, let us consider Fletcher's poem, "Clouds Across the Canyon":

> Shadows of clouds
> March across the canyon,
> Shadows of blue hands passing
> Over a curtain of flame.
>
> Clutching, staggering, upstriking,
> Darting in blue-black fury,
> To where pinnacles, green and orange
> Await.
>
> The winds are battling and stirring to break
>   them:
> Thin lightnings spit and flicker,
> The peaks seem a dance of scarlet demons
> Flitting amid the shadows.
>
> Grey rain-curtains wave afar off,
> Wisp of vapour curl and vanish,
> The sun throws soft shades of golden light
> Over rose-buttressed palisades.
>
> Now the clouds
> Are a lazy procession;

Blue balloons bobbing solemnly
Over black-dappled walls,

Where rise sharp-fretted golden-roofed cathedrals
Exultantly, and split the sky with light.

Clouds, wind, lightning, mountaintops, rain, and sun are all personified in the poem's first four stanzas. Markers of personification, in terms of the EVENTS ARE ACTIONS conceptual metaphor (Lakoff and Turner 70–75), include action verbs such as "march," "clutching," and "battling," as well as "hands" that are "passing" before the sun. From a human source domain of volition and self-locomotion, we conceptually map the human capacity to carry out such actions onto the target domains here, which is to say the natural objects described in the poem. Mapping is how we metaphorically personify Fletcher's objects as we read, thereby bringing the metaphors to life in our imaginations. By the final stanza, an image metaphor appears when the "sharp-fretted" canyon peaks are called "golden-roofed cathedrals." To convey the idea that natural canyons are holy cathedrals, which is one of Fletcher's arguments, Fletcher uses figurative language to represent the scene. But how is the rhetoric of Fletcher's poem cognitive?

Consider the verbs used in the last two lines of the poem. Fictively attributing motion to immobile objects—canyon peaks that "rise" or cathedral spires that "split the sky"—is commonplace for the human conceptual system, and this is known as "fictive motion" in cognitive linguistics (Talmy). A famous example of fictive motion as a type of metaphor comes from Leonard Talmy: "The mountain range goes from Canada to Mexico." The mountains do not move anywhere literally, but the verb "goes" and the prepositions "from" and "to" all imply that they do when "the mountain range" is imagined as an agent moving from one location to another. With regard to Talmy's example, Jim Swan writes: "[T]he sentence is a model for the way cognition implements [in Talmy's words] 'veridically unequal discrepant representations of the same object,' without committing to one representation being objectively real and the other not" (Swan 462). To return to Fletcher's depiction of the stormy scene, the fictive motion apparent in the last lines is certainly metaphorical, and we can say this without entailing that this representation of the scene is false simply because it is not literal. Persuasiveness in poetry often depends on plausible uses of figurative language, and this is the case with Fletcher's

poem. If the scene proved to be hard to grasp rather than easy to understand, then the first place to look for problems would probably be Fletcher's choice of metaphor.

But Imagists like Fletcher seemed to have sensed that persuasion was very much an issue of comprehension. It would be hard for a poet to convince a reader that the poet's depiction of a scene was honest or credible if the figurative language the poet used in that depiction was incomprehensible and implausible. For a plausible use of metaphor, examples of it can be found in "Bus-Top," a poem from Fletcher's 1915 sequence, "London Excursion":

Black shapes bending,
Taxicabs crush in the crowd.

The tops are each a shining square
Shuttles that steadily press through woolly
    fabric

Dropping blossom,
Gas-standards over
Spray out jingling tumult
Of white-hot rays.

Monotonous domes of bowler-hats
Vibrate in the heat.

Silently, easily we sway through braying traffic,
Down the crowded street.
The tumult crouches over us,
Or suddenly drifts to one side.

The first two stanzas present London's taxis as "Shuttles" and traffic as "woolly fabric." In almost Cubist fashion, the taxis are verbally reduced to "Black shapes" and "shining square[s]." Gas lamps near the street are "Dropping blossom[s]" in the form of "white-hot rays" of light (perhaps "the heat" of stanza four). Then round shapes appear in the form of the "domes of bowler-hats" before the "tumult" of buildings and traffic and people either "crouches over" the persona and his fellow passengers, in a narrow street, "Or suddenly drifts to one side" whenever the bus turns a corner. In sum, this is one way to paraphrase the action in the poem.

However, such a paraphrase tells us little about the poem's figurative language and whether or not Fletcher's language seems plausible. In the poem, traffic metaphorically becomes "woolly fabric" that vehicles "press through" since shuttles weaving through a loom to create a fabric are the source domain of the metaphor here for vehicles driving in traffic. Exactly what kind of traffic Fletcher refers to here is clear in the final stanza. Although the bus moves "Silently, easily," the "crowded street" contains "braying traffic." As

the word "tumult" is used twice in the poem, the scene seems noisy even though it contrasts with the easy movement of the bus. While this makes Fletcher's choice of adverbs ("Silently, easily") questionable, my concern is with the metaphorical phrase, "braying traffic."

The *OED* will tell us that "bray" was used as a verb in the past to refer mainly to the sound made by a general range of animals. However, the *OED* also mentions the fact that by the twentieth century "bray" began to refer most commonly to the sound made specifically by the donkey, the mule, or the ass. In this sense, then, "braying traffic" is both "noisy" traffic and stubborn traffic. But where does the inference of stubbornness come from? According to the *OED*, "the mule is proverbially regarded as the epitome of obstinacy," so at some point in our cultural history the human personality trait known as stubbornness became attributed to mules. Associating obstinacy with mules reveals what Gilles Fauconnier and Turner call a "conceptual blend" in which a personality trait from the human domain has been projected onto the animal domain. The blend may have taken years to become entrenched culturally, but it arose when a human personality trait (i.e., obstinacy) became projected onto the mule as the animal's prototypical personality trait. This blend is evident in everyday similes ("stubborn as a mule") and novel poetic metaphors ("braying traffic"). Fletcher's choice of "braying" puts the culturally entrenched blend of obstinate mules into a new context: London's traffic. While the blend of obstinacy and mules is not novel, Fletcher's appropriation of it to depict London's traffic certainly seems so.

If "braying" demonstrates the Imagist preference for using "the *exact* word, not the nearly-exact" word because of the rich meanings evoked by *le mot juste*, it also puts into practice a theoretical idea espoused by Hulme. Great poetry, Hulme argued,

> always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you from gliding through an abstract process. It chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors, not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters. A poet says a ship "coursed the seas" to get a physical image, instead of the counter word "sailed."

What Hulme calls "the counter word" refers to the literal alternative of a figurative expression. Had Fletcher written "we sway through traffic making the noises of mules," or "we sway through traffic that is as stubborn as a mule," this would seem less effective than the more concise expression, "we sway through braying traffic." As Hulme would say, since the literal "counter words" do not "prevent us from gliding through" the poem, figurative language is needed to stop us in our tracks as we read the poem. This is precisely what figurative language can do for two simple reasons.

First, recent psycholinguistic data suggest that it takes longer to read sentences containing figurative language than it does to read their more literal equivalents. As psycholinguist Ira Noveck and his colleagues have found, "Universally longer reading times for sentences containing unanticipated metaphoric references is one piece of evidence revealing of [the cognitive] costs" of metaphor. If readers of Fletcher's poem do not anticipate the appearance of the word "braying," then it will take them several hundred milliseconds longer to read the sentence because of the added cognitive costs entailed by the metaphor. While a delay of several hundred milliseconds might not seem like being stopped in one's tracks, clearly contemporary cognitive science offers empirical evidence to support Hulme's original belief. Second, at 400 milliseconds post-onset in an experiment measuring brain activity via event related potentials (ERPs), a negative moving wave appears after exposure to and processing of items such as semantic anomalies or metaphors (Coulson 100–01). Known as an "N400 spike" (for negative moving wave at 400 milliseconds after stimulus presentation) in psycholinguistics, this empirically demonstrated phenomenon predicts that unexpected novelties such as figurative expressions will take subjects longer to process and thus comprehend. I assume "braying traffic" would produce just such an N400 effect although that is an empirical question. As Fletcher explained to Lowell in the summer of 1913, he wanted "to write about a modern city by recording its various moods," perhaps as "a series of pictures," which was why "he had been walking about London, staring intently at scenes and objects and setting down his reactions" in poems that would become part of his 1915 volume, *Irradiations* (de Chasca 41). "'Bus-Top" probably was a result of this method, and "braying traffic" puts into practice both Pound's insistence on selecting exact words and Hulme's preference for creative

metaphors that disrupt reading. In other words, concentration and creativity are aspects of many Imagist metaphors (for another discussion of Imagist metaphor, see Crisp).

### 4. SIMILES AND IMAGISM

Along with metaphor, Imagists also used similes, although they openly preferred metaphors. This is apparent when, in a review, Ford Madox Ford complained that Lawrence was "a fine poet" who nevertheless "employs similes" (qtd. in Jones 26). Ford and Lawrence were both Imagists, and Ford liked adhering to principles, such as "never state a negative" (qtd. in Kimbrough), but "never use a simile" was not an Imagist principle. Of course, the following claim is made in the 1916 anthology's preface: "Imagists deal but little with similes, although much of their work is metaphorical. The reason for this is that while acknowledging the figure to be an integral part of all poetry, they feel that the constant imposing of one figure upon another in the same poem blurs the central effect." This suggests that while figures may be used, they should only be used sparingly. It also relates to Pound's claim that the "'one image poem' [like his Metro haiku] is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another" (qtd. in Alfrey 33). Setting one idea "on top of another" is acceptable for an Imagist, but setting ten ideas upon one another is not. *Less is more* would be one way to sum up the Imagist aesthetic even though the production of *more* from *less* puts more emphasis rather than less emphasis upon a poet's figurative language.

Despite the expressed preference for metaphor over simile, Imagists frequently used similes. Although the Imagists openly praised Aristotle, ever since Aristotle claimed "[t]he simile is also a metaphor, the difference is but slight" in *Rhetoric* (1406b), the similarities and differences between similes and metaphors have been a source of endless commentary. Today, psycholinguists like Sam Glucksberg and Boaz Keysar maintain, rather categorically, that "[s]imiles can always be intensified by putting them in metaphor form, whereas the reverse does not hold." This would seem to account for the intuitive difference we sense between similes and metaphors, although intuition alone is inadequate empirical evidence for supporting such a robust claim. According to cognitive linguist Michael Israel and his colleagues, similes "reflect similarities between conventionally unrelated items or domains" whereas metaphors "create" similarities. Or, as the psycholinguist Albert Katz has recently stated, "A good metaphor emphasizes similarity relations and deemphasizes the dissimilarities," which is something a simile may also do.

The intuition that metaphors are more intense than similes may stem from the difference between reflection and creation, or between a target that is already similar to a source rather than a target constructed solely via an unfamiliar or dissimilar source. To consider the truth of the proposition that similes reflect similarities, rather than create them, let us consider "The Fisherman's Wife," a poem from Lowell's 1917 sequence, "Lacquer Prints":

> When I am alone,
> The wind in the pine trees
> Is like the shuffling of waves
> Upon the wooden sides of a boat.

Here the fisherman's wife tries to counter her feeling of loneliness by equating it with her husband's. She does this in two ways. First, wood metonymically links the "pine trees" and the "wooden sides of a boat," thus allowing persona and reader to make the two separate scenes cohere. Second, the wind that results in the sound heard in the trees is also "shuffling" the waves against the hull of the fisherman's boat. The two sounds can thus seem congruent because the simile reflects similarities between the sound the wind makes in the pine trees and the sound the waves make against the boat. Lowell's simile conceptually prompts us to recognize those similarities. Lowell's persona imagines that the loneliness she feels is also felt by her husband, despite the distance between them, through two natural items (wood and wind) that both the wife's scene and the husband's scene have in common. At the end of his long poem, "Horae Canonicae," Auden referred to a similar feeling with the refrain: "In solitude, for company." For the fisherman's wife, in "solitude" there is "company" when she imagines that she and her husband simultaneously share their solitude thanks to the wind and the wood that are present to each one at the same time.

"From China," the next poem in Lowell's "Lacquer Prints" sequence, also reveals a Far Eastern influence upon Imagism where the simile is concerned. In this case, the simile becomes the climax of the poem, with each line building up to the simile at the end of the poem:

I thought:—
The moon,
Shining upon the many steps of the palace
    before me,
Shines also upon the chequered rice-fields
Of my native land.
And my tears fell
Like white rice grains
At my feet.

What Pound called "super-position" might be evident with "steps of the palace" being visualized as "chequered rice-fields" by the persona. But that parallelism is neither a metaphor nor a simile overtly. The overt simile appears at the end, where "tears" are understood as "white rice grains." We have to wait until line six of the poem before the target is introduced overtly, and then the next two lines of the poem provide the source domain through which we understand the tears, how they fall, and (as Israel and his colleagues would maintain) how the tears in the target domain are a priori similar to the rice grains in the source domain. In contrast to Lowell, Aldington formally reverses the climax in poem 4 of "Images" by opening with the source domain of the simile and ending with the target domain:

As a young beech-tree on the edge of the
    forest
Stands still in the evening,
Then shudders through all its leaves in the light
    air
And seems to fear the stars—
So are you still and so tremble.

*(Jones 55)*

Here the persona's addressee, "you," is imagined in terms of a beech tree. The beech tree is the source of the simile, while the addressee is the target of the simile. Aldington, unlike Lowell, begins with the source rather than the target, thereby creating a different sort of climax. In Aldington's case, because he begins with the source ("As a") we expect a target to follow ("So are you").

The same *source-then-target* form of simile appears in "The Gold Fish," a poem in Allen Upward's sequence, "Scented Leaves from a Chinese Jar":

Like a breath from hoarded musk,
Like the golden fins that move
Where the tank's green shadows part—
Living flames out of the dusk—
Are the lightning throbs of love
In the passionate lover's heart.

Whereas Lowell used a *target-then-source* simile, Upward (like Aldington) uses a *source-then-target* simile. Upward's simile, if transposed into the *target-then-source* form, would read: "the lightning throbs" are "like [...]." What the *source-then-target* form used by Aldington and Upward creates is a sense of expectation whereby readers anticipate a target will follow and that a pattern is to be completed (see Rumelhart et al. on the cognitive process of pattern completion). But readers of Lowell's "From China" might not know a simile is coming at the end of the poem because of her choice to use a *target-then-source* form of simile in just the last three lines of the poem. Although both forms of simile are effective, the *source-then-target* form raises a reader's expectations in ways the *target-then-source* form does not. That the Imagists would use such similes is not surprising given the influence Far Eastern poetry had upon their own. In a Japanese *hokku* for example, "the tenor [target] can follow the vehicle [source]" (Lewis 202), which may explain why we see the similes we see in the poems by Aldington and Upward (ironically, the *source-then-target* form of simile is also found in Milton's epic similes in *Paradise Lost*).

If similes can either be of the *source-then-target* type, or the *target-then-source* type, then the implicit simile in Pound's famous haiku from September 1914, "In a Station of the Metro," seems to embody both types at once. The haiku, which ironically does not appear in any of the four anthologies, is widely recognized as one of the premier Imagist poems:

In a Station of the Metro
The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet black bough.

*(Jones 95)*

In *The Pound Era*, Hugh Kenner recognized the demands that Imagist poetry makes on readers, readers whose minds are provoked—by minimal cues like these—into forging rich associations between ideas. This recognition was based on his consideration of Pound's famous haiku:

The mind that found "petals on a wet, black bough" had been active (and for more than a year on that poem, off and on). The "plot" of the poem is that mind's activity, fetching some new thing into the field of consciousness. The action passing through any Imagist poem is a mind's invisible action discovering what will come next that may sustain the presentation—what image, what rhythm, what allusion, what word—to the end that the poem shall be "lord over fact," not

the transcript of one encounter but the Gestalt of many, from the Metro traveller's to that of Koré in the underworld.

*(Kenner 186)*

The mind of the Imagist poet and the mind of the reader of Imagist poetry engage in an "invisible action" of meaning-making for Kenner. The poems are visible, but their effects and how they are achieved are not. That is why it is necessary to examine the poem's figurative language even if identifying the poem's main rhetorical figure has proven to be surprisingly difficult.

While Christopher Butler calls this figure the prime example of the Imagist "metaphor without copula," Kenner argues the poem contains an implicit simile, which is "a simile with 'like' suppressed." Gage also finds an implicit simile here (with faces as the target) since the semicolon (later a colon) after the word "crowd" seemingly replaces the words "are like." As for the poem's function of "presenting a juxtaposition of images" (Lamarque and Olsen 414), Brian Caraher says the juxtaposition "puts human faces and natural flowers, underground platform and darkened tree limb, into coactive perceptual exchange." Caraher maintains that what makes Pound's figure unique is that it reverses the conventional trope of understanding a human element (target) in terms of a natural element (source) because he feels that the natural (petals) is understood in terms of the human (faces) here. But then Caraher contradicts his claim by saying (like Butler) that the figure is indeed a metaphor with "faces" as source and "petals" as target. Ethan Lewis seems likewise confused, since he argues that neither the faces nor the petals are metaphorically "construed 'in terms of' the other." Lewis says this in order to offer the poem up as an example of the so-called figure of super-position, in which neither term is strictly identifiable as source and target. Lewis's superposition position, although indebted to Pound, is (as I see it) an attempt to take up a third position somewhere between the implicit simile side of the debate (e.g., Kenner and Gage) and the metaphor side of the debate (e.g., Caraher and Butler). However, although it may seem that "no principle of decision for any of the questions raised is given by the poem itself" (Rodway 101–02), there are two good reasons to say Pound's implicit simile invites us to picture faces in terms of petals.

First, because "dynamic events, not single, isolated occurrences, are the basic unit of perception" (Gibbs and Colston 362), Pound's haiku reveals something vital about the mind. The "apparition" Pound depicts is a dynamic event, a fundamental "unit of perception." If similes "reflect similarities" (Israel et al.), then how does the implicit simile provoke a reflection of similarities between petals and faces? The cognitive-linguistic notion of image schema offers an answer. Image schemas are highly abstract, physiologically-based mental images used in cognitive functioning (Turner, *Reading* 57), and they may be thought of as "gestalt structures" (Johnson). Pound's implicit simile (faces are like petals) reveals is a LINK image schema: both faces and petals are *smaller* objects *linked* to objects (human bodies and tree boughs) that are *larger* in size, respectively. According to Mark Johnson, "The simple LINK schema makes possible our perception of *similarity*. Two or more objects are similar because they share some feature or features. Those shared features are their cognitive links in our understanding." While Johnson admits "we have a highly abstract notion of linkage" here, two features shared by faces and petals in Pound's implicit simile are (1.) their relatively small size in relation to the objects that (2.) they are *linked* to. Because these features of size and linkage are shared equally and in similar ways by both "faces" and "petals," this might explain the ease with which critics have been able to view either term as source and target.

Second, apart from the LINK schema, the size and position of the simile's terms can be examined from a cognitive perspective. Gage thus took a step in the right direction with his reference to the gestalt psychology of figure/ground relations in his discussion of this poem. The juxtaposition and relative size of the two different objects in the poem relate directly to a figure/ground relation. This can be seen in what the cognitive grammarian Ronald Langacker has called a "relational profile" between a figure and ground (conceptually) and between a trajector and landmark (linguistically). Just as faces are profiled *against* the bodies they are attached to in the poem, so too are petals profiled *against* the bough they are attached to. In this sense, faces are figures while bodies are grounds, and petals are figures while the bough is the ground. And yet, while petals are profiled against the ground of the bough, the faces are explicitly profiled against a "crowd" (i.e., a ground that is larger than any single human body to which a face would be attached). Indeed, there is a mismatch in profiles because of the different prepositions,

"in" and "on," that Pound uses here. The prepositions "in" and "on" semantically encode different profiles between figures and grounds at the conceptual level, and trajectors and landmarks at the linguistic level. For example, in ESL textbooks it is common to teach students the meaning of "in" and "on" with reference to pictures, say, of a ball "in" or "on" a cube. For Langacker, such visual, image-schematic information is encoded in the verbal prepositions themselves with their unique profiles. So while "faces" are profiled against the (back)ground of the "crowd" linguistically, in Pound's poem the faces are imagined as "in" a bounded space (the crowd on the subway platform) conceptually.

This is different from "petals" that are "on" the tree's "bough" since the petals are linguistically profiled against the (back)ground of the bough as opposed to the larger object (tree) to which the bough is presumably attached. In other words, in one line we have faces/bodies/crowd, while in the other we have petals/bough/tree. There are profiles between three levels in the two lines, but the profiles are mismatched. Pound and his readers profile the first-level term against the *third*-level term in the top line, while profiling the first-level term against the *second*-level term in the bottom line. Thus, there are four juxtapositions here rather than two: faces on bodies, petals on a bough, faces in a crowd, and faces *as* petals. We can find similarity between faces and petals due to the presence of a LINK schema although we can find a difference in the profiles marked by the prepositions in the poem. But similes reflect similarities, which is what Pound's figure also does, so Kenner and Gage seem right to feel that there is an implicit simile in the poem.

## 5. ANALOGIES AND IMAGISM

> Don't use such an expression as "dim land of *peace*." It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol. —Ezra Pound
>
> *(qtd. in Jones 131)*

Pound's preference for the concrete over the abstract helps account for the presence of many natural objects that appear in Imagist poems, but Pound's true reasons for dismissing examples like "dim land of peace" could be made explicit by analyzing such analogically compressed terms as "Noun Phrase-of-Noun Phrase" compounds (Turner, "Figure" 54). And yet, although Pound

dislikes "mixing" the abstract with the concrete, this is in fact how poetic symbols are conceptually created. "No particular objects are intrinsically [ . . . ] symbols. They are interpreted to be so," according to biological anthropologist Terrence Deacon, so "when we say something is a 'symbol,' we mean there is some social convention, tacit agreement, or explicit code which establishes the relationship that links one thing to another." The conceptual process that "establishes the relationship that links one thing to another" is an analogical process involving dissimilar elements. In general, an analogy, which "puts pressure on conventional category structures" (Turner, *Literary* 93), is "not constructed between very like concepts" (Turner, *Reading* 135). However, when analogies prompt us to combine two distinct elements, then poetic symbols can be the result.

In the case of Imagism, one of those elements is often a natural object, but that concrete object only obtains its symbolic significance when analogically associated with something abstract. To understand analogy as a process for creating Imagist symbols, let us consider two poems. The first is "The Swan" by F. S. Flint:

> Under the lily shadow
> and the gold
> and the blue and mauve
> that the whin and the lilac
> pour down on the water,
> the fishes quiver.
>
> Over the green cold leaves
> and the rippled silver
> and the tarnished copper
> of its neck and beak,
> toward the deep black water
> beneath the arches,
> the swan floats slowly.
>
> Into the dark of the arch the swan floats
> and into the black depth of my sorrow
> it bears a white rose of flame.

Flint, who probably knew more about the French Symbolism than any other Imagist in 1913, seems to have written a poem that is equally Imagist and Symbolist. If a "Symbolist poem was necessarily short, evocative, and mysterious" (McArthur, para. 1), then one might claim that Flint's poem is as much Symbolist as it is Imagist. The poem also demonstrates something Pound referred to once with respect to his metro haiku: "In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts

into a thing inward and subjective" (qtd. in Jones 33). The exterior-to-interior transformation Pound mentions is actually the completion of an analogical process. Here, the transformation occurs in the last stanza of Flint's poem when we recognize the swan as an analogue for the persona and what the swan does as an analogue for how the persona feels.

While sorrow is abstract, the swan is concrete. Just as the emotion—"the black depth of [...] sorrow"—is depicted spatially, the swan physically moves under "the dark of the arch." Just the "black depth" and "dark" "arch" are analogues, so too are the concrete "swan" and the abstract "sorrow." Therefore, we must mix the concrete with the abstract (*pace* Pound) to see the swan as a symbol for the persona's sorrow. Also, the "white rose," which is itself a symbol for purity (Ferber 175), exacerbates the persona's sorrow in the form of a painful "flame." These remarks are in fact recognitions resulting from analogical processes that yield poetic symbols. Clearly, Flint's literal depiction of what the swan does is a figurative description of an emotional state. Certain critics would no doubt define the swan as an objective correlative, but the agent responsible for that correlation is the subjective human mind that correlates the swan with sorrow. As for Flint's decision to depict a swan rather than some other animal or object, Deacon's idea of "social convention" in symbol interpretation is relevant here. Since "the association of swans with poets" is an old one in literary history, and since "swans are migratory, and are frequently seen alone," they seem apt symbols to poets for emotions like sorrow (Ferber 214–15). While Flint's depiction of the swan is original, the choice of swan is conventional. But that is not to say the conventional choice is the wrong choice. In fact, the conventional choice is the right choice lest the poet be reduced to using symbols that nobody else recognizes as such.

Another apt choice of symbol can be seen in the second poem under discussion here, "Brooding Grief" by D. H. Lawrence:

> A yellow leaf from the darkness
> Hops like a frog before me—
> —Why should I start and stand still?
> I was watching the woman that bore me
> Stretched in the brindled darkness
> Of the sick-room, rigid with will
> To die—

And the quick leaf tore me
Back to this rainy swill
Of leaves and lamps and traffic mingled
  before me.

Lawrence's choice of the leaf is symbolically apt. In classical poetry, "leaves, their mortality, and their susceptibility to wind made them perfect emblems for the dead" (Ferber 108), and much the same can be said here. Given Lawrence's argument that the world is "rainy swill" when your mother is ready to die on her deathbed, the presence of a leaf in this poem is fitting. According to Neil Roberts, "Pound's 'Go in fear of abstractions' is, of all the Imagist principles, the one that would most have appealed to Lawrence" ("D. H." 106), and this might also explain the presence of the leaf. While the persona's emotional grief is abstract, the poet's representation of the dead leaf blown by about the wind is concrete. The movement of the "yellow leaf" is first presented through a simile (the leaf "Hops like a frog"), and then "the quick leaf" becomes personified as an agent tearing the persona "Back to this rainy swill," itself a metaphor for the world. However, despite the frog simile and the personification metaphor, we might ask how the leaf (a natural object) becomes "the adequate symbol" for the persona's "Brooding Grief"?

To say the leaf is a symbol for grief is to make a simple statement about a conceptual process that is anything but simple. Simple explanations of complicated processes cannot be mistaken for the processes themselves. As F. R. Leavis once wrote, in reference to the "Water-Party" chapter in Lawrence's *Women in Love*, "to suggest that the rabbit and the cattle 'stand for' this and that would be to suggest much simpler ways of constructing and conveying significance and much simpler significances than we actually have." Disagreeing with Leavis today may seem like flogging a dead horse, but Leavis confuses our "ways of constructing and conveying significance" with *descriptions* of those "ways." The *production* of meaning and *descriptions* of the production of meaning are two different things. Just because a description seems simple, we cannot conclude that the process described is simple. The production of poetically significant symbols is an analogical process although naming that process and explaining how that process works are two different things. But in the poems by Flint and Lawrence the swan and the leaf are not irrelevant objects. They are not objects whose presence is simply

gratuitous. They are objects that we relate directly to the emotions suggested by the poems. We do so by recognizing that what the objects are, and what they do, are analogues for the personae and their feelings. After all, Pound aligned "evocation" with "genius" (Jones), and I stated earlier that Imagism was a poetics of evocation because the recognition of the symbolic significance of the natural objects in Imagist poems like these is something we do implicitly rather than something the poems do explicitly. That is the art of evocation and it is the art of Imagist poetry. Although it may seem difficult to imagine today, at the time Imagist poems seemed unusual—even "antipoetic" (Tiffany)—and terms like laconic, hard, clear, straight, objective, direct, and paratactic are just some of the words that have been used over the years to describe the Imagist style. As Hulme stated (circa 1913), "I prophesy that a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming," and that prediction was seemingly fulfilled by the arrival of Imagism and its presentations of "hard" objects of symbolic significance.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to reveal how concepts like fictive motion, image schemas, and analogical reference relate to the cognitive rhetoric of Imagism, especially figurative language in Imagism. Granted, discussing nine Imagist poems by seven Imagist poets means that some of the generalizations in this article may seem hasty. However, the cognition involved with metaphor, simile, and analogy is principled rather than arbitrary, and it operates just as effectively in literary contexts as it does in nonliterary contexts. That is why I think that some of the things I have said here are applicable not only to Imagist poetry in particular but to most poetry in general. That said, a cognitive rhetoric of Imagism will remain incomplete until the images of Imagism are analyzed. Of course, the image may be a difficult concept to come to terms with in Imagist theory. This is because, according to Tiffany, "Pound's attempts to define the Image violate the basic principles of Imagism (economy, precision, clarity). Not only is he unable to offer a literal definition of the Image, but the figurative analogies multiply with remarkable fecundity and obscurity." The infamously ill-defined "Doctrine of the Image" suggests at least as much. However, "in literary usage, imagery refers to images produced in the mind by language" (Preminger, ed.),

and the imagery produced by readers of Imagist poetry is something cognitive rhetoric could analyze in the future. But what would this demand?

It could require, for example, picking up where Elaine Scarry left off in her recent study of literary imagery. Scarry's book is not about Imagism, although many of her claims are supported by evidence from cognitive psychology. However, her ideas might be extended to Imagism while drawing on Zenon Pylyshyn's more recent imagery research and Allan Paivio's "dual storage system" theory of cognitive memory and its interaction with language. In Paivio's system, "an object elicits its verbal label (or image or other objects) and a word arouses implicit verbal associates or images of objects" (qtd. in MacCormac 140–41), so the power of words and objects to evoke each other has clear ramifications for literary study. After all, "the mind thinks with pictures as well as words" (Thagard 94), so literary imagery is worth studying in more detail. In sum, I am hopeful that cognitive rhetoric's roots in cognitive science will help it overcome the "disproven linguistics" and "dubious psychology" that Norman Holland maintains has plagued literary criticism for far too long (qtd. in Wright 530).

**Source:** Craig A. Hamilton, "Toward a Cognitive Rhetoric of Imagism," in *Style*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Winter 2004, pp. 468–90.

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# FURTHER READING

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> Hulme is credited with creating the initial philosophy behind the Imagism movement. His inspiration came from two sources, the symbolist poets in France and Bergson's metaphysics philosophy. This could be considered the book that started it all.

Carpenter, Humphrey, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound*, Houghton Mifflin, 1988.

> After meeting with T. E. Hulme, Pound formulated Hulme's ideas and organized the Imagism movement around them. Although Pound's poetry is not totally representative of the imagist tenets, his writing was influenced by the movement that he started. As one of the most noted American poets, the reading of his life story offers an interesting background for the study of American poetry.

De Chasca, Edmund S., *John Gould Fletcher and Imagism*, University of Missouri Press, 1978.

> De Chasca studies Fletcher's poetry and offers his interpretations and criticisms of this American imagist poet.

Doolittle, Hilda, *HERmione*, Norton, 1981.

> This is a semi-autobiographical novel about Doolittle's life during her twenties. At this time she was torn between old definitions of herself and her newfound world that included living in a foreign land, working with very powerful poets, and experimenting with sexuality. In this work, she discusses her relationship with Ezra Pound and her bisexuality and offers a vivid portrayal of her inner psychology.

Eliot, T. S., Aldous Huxley, and F. S. Flint, *Three Critical Essays on Modern English Poetry*, 1920, reprint, Folcroft Library Editions, 1974.

> The word *modern* in the title of this book cannot be taken at face value as it was originally written in 1920. When these three exceptional and well-respected writers refer to modern poetry, they mean the beginning of the modernist period, which means that imagist poetry is discussed. Eliot offers a brief criticism of poetry in general; Huxley discusses the subject matter of poetry; and Flint writes about the art of writing, especially as affected by the tenets of imagism.

Healey, E. Claire, and Keith Cushman, eds., *Letters of D. H. Lawrence and Amy Lowell, 1914–1925*, Black Sparrow Press, 1985.

> Lowell was the major spokesperson for the Imagism movement, and Lawrence, although not one of the major imagists, was affected by the imagist poets. Their correspondence offers the reader an inside look into their private discussions about American and British poetry at the turn of the century as well as their reflections on the movement.

Kirby-Smith, H. T., *Origins of Free Verse*, University of Michigan Press, 1996.

> One of the major controversies both in Britain and in the United States concerning the Imagism movement was the discussion of the use of free verse. This book offers an overview of the use of this form and tries to answer some of the questions that free verse has aroused: can free verse be categorized? or what is a prose poem?

Lehman, John, *America's Greatest Unknown Poet: Lorine Niedecker*, Zelda Wilde, 2003.

> This biography of Niedecker offers rare insight into the life of this late-comer to objectivist poetry. Lehman includes her poetry, photographs, and letters.

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> To better understand what Imagism was all about, it is helpful to comprehend the forces and influences that preceded this movement. Most of the imagist poets were heavily influenced by the French poets, and this book offers a historic perspective of some of the best of the nineteenth-century French poets and their Symbolism movement.

# LITERARY MOVEMENTS
## *for Students*

**Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Literary Movements**

### SECOND EDITION: VOLUME 2

# *Magic Realism*

Magic Realism is a literary movement associated with a style of writing or technique that incorporates magical or supernatural events into realistic narrative without questioning the improbability of these events. This fusion of fact and fantasy is meant to question the nature of reality as well as call attention to the act of creation. By making lived experience appear extraordinary, magical realist writers contribute to a re-envisioning of Latin-American culture as vibrant and complex. The movement originated in the fictional writing of Spanish American writers in the mid-twentieth century and is generally claimed to have begun in the 1940s with the publication of two important novels: *Men of Maize* by Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias and *The Kingdom of This World* by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. What is most striking about both of these novels is their ability to infuse their narratives with an atmosphere steeped in the indigenous folklore, cultural beliefs, geography, and history of a particular geographic and political landscape. However, at the same time that their settings are historically correct, the events that occur may appear improbable, even unimaginable. Characters change into animals, and slaves are aided by the dead; time reverses and moves backward, and other events occur simultaneously. Thus, magic realist works present the reader with a perception of the world where nothing is taken for granted and where anything can happen.

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1940
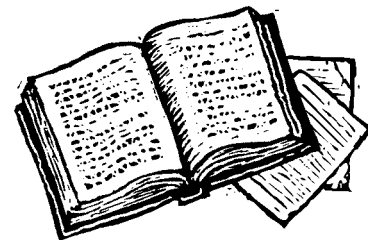
The fantastical qualities of this style of writing were heavily influenced by the surrealist movement in Europe of the 1920s and literary avant-gardism as well as by the exotic natural surroundings, native and exiled cultures, and tumultuous political histories of Latin America. Although other Latin America writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Carlos Fuentes, and Julio Cortazar used elements of magic and fantasy in their work, it was not until the publication of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in English in 1970 that the movement became an international phenomenon. Subsequently, women writers such as Isabel Allende from Chile and Laura Esquivel from Mexico have become part of this movement's later developments, contributing a focus on women's issues and perceptions of reality. Since its inception, Magic Realism has become a technique used widely in all parts of the world. Thus, writers such as Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, and Sherman Alexie have been added to the magic realist canon of writers because of their use of magical elements in real-life historical settings.

*Isabel Allende* (*Archive Photos / Getty Images*)

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Isabel Allende (1942– )

Isabel Angelica Allende was born on August 2, 1942, in Lima, Peru, the daughter of a Chilean diplomat, Tomas, and his wife, Francisca. They later moved to Chile, where Isabel attended a private school. Afterwards, she worked for a United Nations development organization before becoming a journalist in Santiago. Allende's most notable family member was her uncle, the Chilean president Salvador Allende, who was assassinated in 1973 as part of a military coup. This event heavily influenced Allende, who commented in an interview later that she divided her life before and after the day of her uncle's assassination. Her first novel, *La casa de los espíritus* (*The House of the Spirits*), published in 1982, won a number of international awards in Mexico, Germany, France, and Belgium. In the mid-1980s, Allende moved to the United States where she has taught creative writing at various universities. In 1985, an English translation of her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*, was published by Knopf. Since then, she has written a number of other well-known novels, including *De amor y de sombra* (*Of Love and Shadows*), translated in 1987, *Eva Luna*, translated in 1988, which won a number of national book awards, including the Before Columbus Foundation award, the Freedom to Write Pen Club Award in 1991, and the Brandeis University Major Book Collection Award in 1993. Allende's later books include *Ines of My Soul: A Novel* (2006) and *The Sum of Our Days: A Memoir* (2008). Allende became a U.S. citizen in 2003; as of 2008 she resided in California.

### Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899–1974)

Born in Guatemala City, Guatemala, on October 19, 1899, Asturias was the son of a Supreme Court magistrate, Ernesto, who later became an importer, and his wife, Maria Asturias. He became a lawyer in 1923 and left Guatemala for political reasons, residing in Paris and studying history of ancient Mesoamerican cultures at the Sorbonne in Paris from 1923 to 1928. In Paris, he associated with members of the surrealist movement, such as Andre Breton and Paul Valery. His exposure to Surrealism as well as his intellectual and political interests in Central American indigenous cultures would later influence his own writing. Returning to Guatemala in

1933, Asturias worked as a journalist, publishing books of poetry in small presses. In 1942, he was elected deputy to the Guatemalan congress and later became a diplomat under Jose Arevalo's presidency. In 1946, he published his first novel, *El señor presidente*, translated in English as *Mr. President*, which garnered praise from both South and North American critics. His next novel, *Los hombres de maize* (*Men of Maize*), published in Spanish in 1949, was not as highly praised but has come to be viewed as his masterpiece. In 1954, Asturias was exiled again due to the establishment of another repressive Guatemalan regime. He worked as a journalist in South America and later returned in 1966, becoming the French ambassador under Carlos Montenegro's moderate government. He was awarded the 1967 Nobel Prize for literature for his commitment to writing about the injustice and oppression of Guatemalan people, particularly working class and peasants. He died on June 9, 1974, in Madrid, Spain.

### Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986)

Born on August 24, 1899, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Jorge Luis Borges was the son of a lawyer and a translator. Of mixed European and Spanish-American heritage, he was educated in Switzerland, England, and Argentina. In 1919, the Borges family moved to Spain. However, young Borges moved back in 1921 and began to write poetry and essays for literary journals. He also cofounded a number of magazines before publishing his first book of poetry in 1923. His current reputation is based more on his short stories than his poetry, and it was the publication of *Historia universal de la infamia* (*A Universal History of Infamy*) in 1935 that heralded his career as a well-known writer of a hybrid genre that was part fiction, part essay. In 1941, his magic realist tales *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (*The Garden of Forking Paths*) were published, and it was followed a few years later by *Ficciones, 1935–1944* (*Fictions, 1935–1944*) and *El Aleph* (*The Aleph*). For many years, he worked as a municipal librarian in Buenos Aires, as well as a teacher. In 1955, he was appointed director of the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) where he served until 1970. By the late 1950s, he was completely blind but continued to publish in a variety of genres: poetry, essays, and stories. Borges died of liver cancer on June 14, 1986, in Geneva, Switzerland.

### Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940)

Mikhail Bulgakov was born in Kiev, Ukraine, on May 3, 1891. Although trained as a medical professional, Bulgakov gave up medicine to pursue writing in 1919. The next ten years were rocky for his career; by 1929, Bulgakov was unable to publish his novels, short stories, plays, translations, and essays because the government had censored his work. Out of desperation, he wrote a letter to Soviet dictator Josef Stalin in 1930, requesting permission to leave the country. From this correspondence, Bulgakov received work writing plays for theaters in Moscow but did not find success there either. His third wife, Yelena Shilovskaya, whom he married in 1931, inspired the central character of his most famous work, *The Master and Margarita*. Bulgakov died of nephrosclerosis on March 10, 1940. His work is noted for its satire, fantastic elements, and dark humor.

### Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980)

Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier y Valmont was born on December 26, 1904, in Havana, Cuba, to a Russian mother and a French father. He attended the Universidad de Havana until dropping out due to economic circumstances. For many years afterward, he worked as a journalist, editor, educator, musicologist, and author. Involved in revolutionary activities against the dictator Gerardo Machado y Morales, Carpentier was forced to leave Cuba after he had been imprisoned and subsequently blacklisted. He lived in France for many years, publishing his first novel in 1933, *Ecue-yamba-o!* which faded quickly into obscurity. In 1939, Carpentier returned to Cuba, where he began to write fiction again. This time, with the publication of novels such as *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of This World*) in 1949, *Los pasos perdido* (*The Lost Steps*), and *El Acoso* (*Manhunt in Noonday*), Carpentier became an established and world-renowned author. He continued to write short stories, novels, essays, and criticism until his death, from cancer, in Paris, France, on April 24, 1980, where he served as Cuba's cultural attaché.

### Laura Esquivel (1950–)

Born in Mexico on September 30, 1950, Laura Esquivel began her writing career as a screenwriter. Married to the Mexican director Alfonso Arau, Esquivel wrote a screenplay for a 1985 film, *Chido One*, which he directed. They continued to

collaborate on projects, culminating in Arau's directing of Esquivel's first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*. Published in Mexico in 1989 as *Como agua para chocolate*, the book became a bestseller and was soon translated into numerous languages, including an English translation in 1993. The film's release in the United States brought record-breaking attendance to a foreign film. Subsequently, Esquivel published *The Law of Love* (1996); *Swift as Desire* (2001), a book of autobiographical writings; *Between the Fires: Intimate Writings on Life, Love, Food & Flavor* (2000); and a novel, *Malinche* (2006). As of 2008 she lived in Mexico City.

### Carlos Fuentes (1928–)

Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes was born in Panama City, Panama, on November 11, 1928. The son of a Mexican diplomat, Fuentes was from an early age exposed to a number of South-American literary giants, such as the Brazilian poet Alfonso Reyes and the Chilean novelist Jose Donoso. He attended Henry D. Cooke, a public school in Washington, D.C., where he learned to speak English. He later went on to study in Geneva, Switzerland, and followed up by receiving a law degree from the National University of Mexico. Fuentes has written a number of influential and deeply provocative novels that interrogate the notion of Mexican identity. In 1958, he published his first novel, *La región más transparente (Where the Air Is Clear)*, translated in 1964 to international acclaim. With the publication of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (*The Death of Artemio Cruz*), translated in 1964; *Aura*, translated in 1968; *Terra Nostra*, translated in 1976; and *Gringo Viejo* (*The Old Gringo*), translated in 1985. Fuentes is seen as Mexico's premier author, winning a host of literary prizes in Spanish-speaking countries such as Venezuela, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Chile, as well as making the *New York Times* best-seller list for *The Old Gringo*. As of 2008, he lived in London, England.

### Gabriel García Márquez (1928–)

Born in Aracataca, Colombia, on March 6, 1928, Gabriel García Márquez is South America's most renowned author. Many of García Márquez's novels are set in a mythical town based on the town of Aracataca where he was raised by his maternal grandparents. For many years, García Márquez worked as a journalist, first in Colombia, then later in Paris, London, and Caracas, Venezuela, until pursuing his writing career full-time in the 1960s. In 1967, García Márquez published his most famous novel *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), translated in 1970. The publication put Latin-American fiction on the world's literary map, particularly those works related to the movement known as Magic Realism. Although primarily known as a fiction writer of novels such as *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*) and *El Amor en el tiempo de colera* (*Love in the Time of Cholera*) and short story collections *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (*No One Writes to the Colonel*), García Márquez continued to produce reportage for both Spanish- and English-speaking periodicals. In 1982, he won the Nobel Prize for literature. He has also won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction in 1988 for *Love in the Time of Cholera*. One of his later novels is *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, published in English in 2005. As of 2008, García Márquez lived in Mexico City.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Aura

*Aura*, a novella by Fuentes, was published in its original Spanish in 1962 and translated into English in 1965. Narrated by a young scholar who has been hired by an elderly woman to write the memoirs of her husband, a deceased general, the novella reveals how the past and present are often interlocked and how time is fluid, rather than progressive, all through the figure of Aura, who is a projected ghostlike image of the general's widow at her most beautiful. In this novella, Fuentes's use of the second person "you" is meant to pull the reader into the web-like reality in which the scholar is enmeshed. He cannot escape the past or extricate himself from others as his identity slowly transforms into that of the dead general. Because of its accessibility and brevity, *Aura* has been anthologized widely as a classic example of Magic Realism's ability to transform what people think of as reality into something mysterious and grounded in the supernatural.

### Fictions

Originally published in Spanish in 1944 as *Ficciones*, Borges's collection of short stories could more aptly be described as essays and parables rather than fiction. Embroidered with images of

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- On its release by Miramax in 1993, the Spanish-language film *Like Water for Chocolate*, based on the novel by Laura Esquivel, was an instant international success. Revised as a screenplay for film by Esquivel and directed by her husband, Mexican director Alfonso Arau, the film effectively translates the fantastical qualities of Magic Realism to cinema.

- A series of cassettes produced by National Public Radio in 1984, *Faces, Mirrors, Masks* provides a good introduction to twentieth-century Latin-American fiction writers. Authors represented include Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and Alejo Carpentier. Each tape provides an in-depth discussion of an individual author that includes interviews, music, and excerpts from stories and novels.

- *Gabriel García Márquez: Magic and Reality* is an hour-long biopic on the life and times of the Colombian author and Nobel Prize winner. The film (written, produced, and directed by Ana Christina Navarro) was distributed by Films for the Humanities and Sciences in 1995. It covers Márquez's life, the sources of his books, his development of Magical Realism, and a history of Colombia. Interviews with him, his friends, and critics are an integral part of the presentation.

- The Modern Word, an Internet resource for contemporary authors, has an informative Web site on Gabriel García Márquez at http://www.themodernword.com/gabo/index.html with many links to other related sites and sources.

- García Márquez's novella *Love in the Time of Cholera* was made into a major motion picture in 2007. Directed by Mike Newell, it stars Benjamin Bratt, Gina Bernard Forbes, and Giovanna Mezzogiorno and was nominated for a 2008 Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from New Line Home Video.

- Allende's debut novel *The House of the Spirits* was made into a film of the same name in 1993. It was directed by Bille August and has an all-star cast that includes Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, Antonio Banderas, Jeremy Irons, Vanessa Redgrave, and Winona Ryder. It won many international awards and is available on DVD from Artisan.

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mirrors, circular towers, mazes, gardens, swords, and ruins, these concise, broadly imaginative sketches are meant to be viewed as allegories of different states of consciousness. Rather than creating fully developed characters and traditional narratives, Borges creates characters who appear to have no relation to contemporary reality but who are, for different reasons, on a quest for some kind of knowledge. Unlike García Márquez, who views the specific historical and political reality of South America as having certain magical or "unreal" aspects to it, Borges uses different settings, historical characters, and fantastical plots as a way of exploring ideas about politics, philosophy, world events, art, and above all the limitless power of magic to envision a better world. *Fictions* offers readers a series of inventive worlds that are intellectually challenging but are not situated in current Latin-American politics and history. Both in its maze-like narratives that often pose questions that are never answered and in its excessive use of details, *Fictions* presents reality as a linguistic puzzle that needs to be obsessively figured out.

## The House of the Spirits

Allende's 1982 novel, *La casa de los espíritus*, published in English in 1985, immediately became an international bestseller among the literary crowd who had followed the older

*Alejo Carpentier* (© *Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission*)

"Boom" writers such as Marquez, Fuentes, and Borges. The narrative follows four generations of an upper-class family in Chile, revealing the political and social upheaval of that country as witnessed by various members of the family. The novel is a reconstruction of history that has been undertaken by Alba, who is a recent descendent of the family and its current social commentator. Its fierce political critique of the Pinochet dictatorship as well as its use of fantastical description and supernatural acts places it well within the parameters of magic realist fiction. As many critics have noted, in tone and content this novel is similar to García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, yet its focus on women as agitators and writers of history demands that it be viewed as a work that is not completely derivative of García Márquez's. Feminist critics have applauded the novel's ability to portray women not as passive victims of political and social injustice but as active resisters to political and sexual oppression through their desire to write about these experiences.

### The Kingdom of this World

The Cuban writer Carpentier, one of the earliest writers of Magic Realism, is best known for his novel, *El reino de este mundo*, published in 1949,

and later translated into English in 1957. This seminal work, set in both Cuba and Haiti, follows the story of Ti Noël, a slave who recounts the numerous insurrections by slaves who were aided by magic and the natural world against their oppressors from the mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. Its emphasis on Afro-Caribbean life, with its roots in African spiritualism, music, magical and healing practices, reveals the vitality of a culture that refused to be completely assimilated into Western cultural practices. Critics claim that this novel paved the way for a new generation of Spanish American writers who used the novel as a form of social protest that related particularly to the political, social, and physical conditions found in Latin America. The novel can be seen as a fictive extension of Carpentier's essay "The Marvelous Real," which argues that the rich cross-fertilizing of different cultures in South America engendered the literature that has come to be called Magic Realism.

### Love in the Time of Cholera

Originally published in 1985 as *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, this novel is another lavishly drawn epic written by García Márquez. However, unlike many of his previous novels and short stories that focus on the political and social upheavals in Latin America, *Love in the Time of Cholera* (translated into English in 1988) relates the intricacies of Florentino Ariza's love for Fermina Daza, a love that is requited after nearly sixty years. The novel is a tribute to the long-lasting abilities of love to succeed in a corrupt and unpredictably violent world. The bizarre and unlikely political and social events that become commonplace in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are secondary in this novel to a lyrical and deeply affecting portrait of the everyday lives of a group of people who are intimately connected to each other. Because this novel lacks some of the political intensity and narrative improbability that much of his previous work had, it has not received as much critical attention, yet for many *Love in the Time of Cholera* reveals the same intelligent and forceful wit at work that emphasizes the magic inherent in the everyday.

### The Master and Margarita

*The Master and Margarita* is a satirical, fantastical novel by Russian novelist and playwright Mikhail Bulgakov. It is his most famous work;

however, during his life he was best known for his plays. Bulgakov was frequently censored by his government so *The Master and Margarita* was only published in censored form in 1966, about 26 years after the author's death. An uncensored edition did not appear until 1973. Set in 1930s Moscow, the Master is a frustrated poet; Margarita is his mistress. Satan—known as Woland in the book—and assorted other devils are visiting Moscow. Woland seduces Margarita into his power, making her a witch with supernatural powers. At the end of the novel, she asks Woland to save her Master from poverty, and he whisks them away from Moscow while the city burns as Easter Sunday dawns. The novel, widely considered a classic of Russian literature, is a thinly veiled criticism of the corrupt and paranoid Soviet government. Bulgakov's use of Christian mythology is particularly poignant given the official position of the Soviet government regarding religion and the suppression of religious expression.

## Men of Maize

In 1949, Asturias published his novel *Hombres de Maize*, which was later translated into English as *Men of Maize*. Although the book may be viewed as too early to be part of the Magic Realism movement, the novel's focus on politics, the effects of colonialism, and the fantastical qualities of reality certainly shares characteristics with many later novels. Influenced by both European Surrealism and the indigenous myths of pre-Columbian Latin America, Asturias's novel reveals the plight of indigenous Guatemalans as their world becomes increasingly subjected to exploitation by the encroachment of whites. The novel's magical qualities invoke indigenous myths of the power of transformation through humans' ability to assume animal shapes. Critics have pointed out that its narrative nonlinearity, shifting points of view, and magical aspects were informed by the sacred Mayan book *The Popol-Vuh*.

## One Hundred Years of Solitude

A book that put the term Magic Realism into circulation, García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* was first published in 1967 and later translated into English as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1970. The book, amazing in its ability to cover the intricate lives of several generations of the Buendia family, sold more than thirty million copies worldwide and was translated into over thirty languages. Through his penetrating analysis of Colonel Aureliano Buendia and his subsequent descendents, García Márquez provides the reader with a micro-history of Latin America that pushes the limits of what readers think of as reality. His ability to mix historical and political events with fantastical and often outlandish events in the village of Macondo on the Colombian coast has earned this book the label of masterpiece. Although the novel explores serious questions about the nature of reality and the effects of colonialism, progress, and imperialism on so-called Third World countries, it is also comical and ironic in tone.

## THEMES

### *Exploration of Latin-American Identity*

A theme that runs through nearly every magic realist text is the urge to redefine Latin-American identity by forging a point of view specific to the events, history, and culture of that region. Therefore, its history of colonization, the importation of slaves and influx of immigrants, the political tumult after independence, and economic dependency on imperial powers such as the United States and England that positioned Latin America as inferior and backwards become subjects of investigation that are rewritten and retold from an alternative point of view. For example, Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* is told by a slave who is witness to numerous catastrophic and traumatic events occurring in Haiti during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Likewise, in *The House of the Spirits*, Allende attempts to forge a feminine identity within a social and historical framework that covers nearly a century of political conflict. For many writers, magic realist techniques were used as an attempt to break with many of their inherited representations by engaging with oral histories of indigenous people, as found in Asturias's *Men of Maize*.

### *Importance of Magic and Myth*

A defining aspect of magic realist texts is the powerful capabilities of myth and magic to create a version of reality that differentiates itself from what is normally perceived as "real life." This approach to narrative relies on legends and myths from oral pre-Columbian cultures, family histories (both García Márquez and Allende

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Compare Allende's *The House of the Spirits* to Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by researching the histories of Chile and Colombia respectively. How does the use of Magic Realism evoke the specific political and social realities of these countries? What do the histories of these countries reveal about the formation of Magic Realism as a literature of protest?

- Read Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in light of Carpentier's notion that magic realist texts are specifically related to Latin-American history and culture and that the term cannot address imaginative works outside this context. State whether you agree with his argument by making a case for or against *Beloved* as a magic realist text.

- Many magic realist writers incorporate indigenous people's legends, myths, and rituals into their fiction as a way to disrupt traditional notions of time and space. Read Asturias's *Men of Maize* in light of the Guatemalan oral text *The Popol-Vuh*. What structural and conceptual elements does he borrow from this traditional text to enhance the "ethnographic" elements of his novel?

- The natural world plays a large part in magic realist texts, often providing a richly textured backdrop to the social and political aspects of these works. Research the natural resources of one or two Latin-American countries. What minerals, plants, cash crops, natural formations, and ecosystems are most common in these countries? How have these natural resources become a source of conflict as well as of value to the various inhabitants and outsiders of these countries? Use examples from magic realist texts to help formulate your argument.

admitted the influence of their respective grandmothers' yarn-spinning on their writing), the narratives of early explorers and clergy to Latin America, and the spiritual magic of African slaves to the Caribbean region. Drawing from these various influences, magic realist writers redraw the parameters of what is possible by invoking legends and myths that have been passed from one generation to the next and that invoke a loss of some kind with the onset of the modern age. Sometimes it is the loss of traditional values, as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; other times it is the loss of the intimate relationship between humans and animals. These mythical influences form a collective voice that often acts as it does in *Men of Maize* and *The Kingdom of this World*, as a resistant force against oppression and exploitation.

## A Critique of Rationality and Progress

The use of magic and myth in magic realist fiction can be viewed as a critique of rationality and progress. Because many South American countries were economically exploited by countries in the industrialized West, first through slavery and exploration and then through economic imperialism, magic realist writers attempt to subvert the values that dominating cultures privilege in order to justify their exploitation of other cultures. Thus, logic, progression, and linearity are cast aside for a reliance on emotions, the senses, circularity, and ritual. For example, Asturias's *Men of Maize* consistently thwarts the notions of progress and rationality by presenting the perspectives of indigenous peoples as being outside of what most consider traditional concepts of time. Rather than present the reader with a linear narrative, Asturias divides his book into six chapters, each exploring an aspect of indigenous beliefs that counter Western conceptions of time, rationality, and progress. Similarly, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* begins with a sentence that disrupts the sense of time being a logical progression with a distinct past, present, and future: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." The fast-forwarding of time as well as the memory embedded in this future scene reveals time as occurring simultaneously. The notion of progress and its relation to technology is also critiqued in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, particularly in its relationship to economic imperialism. For example, the railroad that is finally established in Macondo is

viewed as both a sign of Macondo's assimilation into the modern world and a metaphor for its eventual exploitation by the North American Banana Company.

## *Questioning of Reality*

Many magic realist writers use language in innovative ways that raise doubts about the concept of reality as well as art's ability to imitate it. For many writers who work within the magic realist paradigm, reality is much more ambiguous and complicated than meets the eye. Rather than create a realistic fiction that attempts to mimic the events and outward appearance of the external world, magic realists use a variety of techniques that force the reader to question the nature of reality. For writers like García Márquez and Allende, reality constitutes both real and imagined acts. Thus, a levitating priest, appearances of the dead, and animals that have transcendent powers all take on matter-of-factness by those who observe these phenomena. For Borges, reality becomes an exploration of multiple universes and existences that tear away assumptions most people share about observed reality. Reality in *Fictions* is never taken for granted but in fact is often distorted so that what the reader thinks he or she knows is cast into doubt. This approach to understanding the nature of reality assumes that reality is not external and objective but is created subjectively in human thought. In this respect, reality and selfhood itself become fragile concepts. For many magic realist writers, existence is a concept that does not have a one-to-one correspondence with observed reality. By subverting the assumption of an observed reality through innovative forms and devices that address the fantastical, magic realist writers relay the message that language itself is unable to provide an accurate depiction of reality.

## STYLE

### *Genre*

An innovative technique of magic realist writers is to experiment with incorporating different kind of genres into the novel and short story form. Genres are different literary types that share certain characteristics. Thus, plays, short stories, novels, biographies, and poems can all be seen as having specific characteristics that set them apart from each other. In magic realist fiction, genres such as the epic, autobiography, historical documents, essay, and oral storytelling are used as a way of blurring the lines between fact and fiction. One of the earliest magic realist writers, Borges, is known for his use of the short story form that uses elements of the essay and autobiography to question the ability of language to represent observed reality. His stories also make use of the parable, a genre found most frequently in the Bible, in which brief narratives stress a philosophic statement about existence through the telling of a story. Other magic realists, such as Asturias, rely on older storytelling traditions from pre-Columbian times and thus incorporate tall tales, nonlinear narrative sequences, and repetitive phrases that are also onomatopoeic, which attempt to imitate sounds they denote. A genre used by Carpentier in *The Kingdom of this World* is the travel narrative, specifically those written during the centuries of exploration in the New World that described in detail the flora and fauna found in Latin America.

### *Hyperbole*

Hyperbole, or overstatement, is a figure of speech, or trope, that makes events or situations highly unlikely or improbable due to its gross exaggeration. Hyperbole is often used in the folk tale to make an event that may be commonplace appear larger than life. It is often used for dramatic affect, such as to invoke comedy or irony, yet it may also have serious meaning. Magic realist texts tend to use hyperbole for both comic and serious effect. In engaging the reader with bizarre and catastrophic historical events that have occurred in Latin America, magic realist authors use hyperbole to dramatize the emotional and traumatic effects these events had on the people affected. At other times, hyperbole may be used to make what is commonplace seem extraordinary and magical. This is a technique that García Márquez uses quite effectively to convey the mystery that ordinary objects, such as ice, for example, can have for those who have never been exposed to them: "When it was opened by the giant, the chest gave off a glacial exhalation. Inside there was only an enormous, transparent block with infinite internal needles in which the light of the sunset was broken up into colored stars." Thus, hyperbole has the effect of making the ordinary appear extraordinary through excessive and outlandish description.

### *Imagery*

Imagery is an essential device used in magic realist works since the attempt to create aspects of reality that are unfathomable relies on convincing images. Thus, the use of concrete language in detailing supernatural events and conjuring a sensual world that is both mysterious and based in material reality is key. Allende, García Márquez, and Carpentier use extensive description in their works, detailing the worlds they create with sensory images that communicate the mysteries of the natural world. In *The Kingdom of this World*, a description of the sea is like peering into a kaleidoscope: "It was garlanded with what seemed to be clusters of yellow grapes drifting eastward, needlefish like green glass, jellyfish that looked like blue bladders." The wonder and amazement at the varied diversity of life forms found in the New World is part of Carpentier's construction of "the marvelous real." Images of the natural world also pervade *Men of Maize*, in which, as the title indicates, maize is an essential life-force for the people who grow it. Thus, as the maize's sacred powers are destroyed by outsiders, the traditional ways of the Indians are eroded.

### *Point of View*

A main feature of magic realist writing is its attempt to incorporate numerous points of view into their narrative, many of which are drawn from popular or folk tales and are thus based more on popular understanding of events rather than originating from a specific character. Point of view traditionally investigates the formal dimensions of how a story is told and who is telling it. Magic realist texts often subvert these traditional notions of who is telling a story by presenting different versions of a particular event through a collective perspective, thus raising the question of which version is true. For example, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the disappearance of Remedios the Beauty is described as having two versions. The more descriptive one that is promoted by Remedios's family is that she ascended into heaven, holding her bed sheets tightly in her hand, whereas the more mundane story has Remedios running off with a suitor. However, because the village people of Macondo believe the family's story, it is that version that becomes privileged despite its improbability. Thus, point of view in this context suggests that reality is ascribed not by any sense of rationality but by what people are willing to believe.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

Given that writers such as Asturias and García Márquez began using magic realist narratives to critique the role of imperialism (especially U.S. imperialism), it should not be surprising that the style became well known and popular in other regions of the world where writers, readers, and thinkers found themselves in similar political and social predicaments. Thus, Magic Realism emerged in fictions in various parts of the postcolonial world such as South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East while also influencing many writers in the United States and England. In turn, it reemerged in Latin America with a particular focus on women's writing.

In the years between the end of World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the political predicament of imperialism and the social catastrophes of dictatorship and underdevelopment were very common throughout developing regions such as South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. For example, in Salman Rushdie's second and most celebrated novel, *Midnight's Children*, the Indian-born author creates a narrator who is born at the very moment that the British leave the subcontinent and when India and Pakistan are partitioned on midnight, August 14, 1947. This point of departure allows the narrative to relate a series of accounts of the climactic events in India's colonial and postcolonial history from the perspective of a very ordinary Indian family. The resulting effect suggests that free movement of South Asian history does not obey the narrow empirical rules of European historiography and that history is rewritten from the perspective of one born into the legacy left by the British colonial enterprise. In other well-known works such as V. S. Naipaul's *The Bend in the River* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, narratives are infused with narrative surprises and events that jar the reader's sense of reality. Translator Tara Chace introduced the English-speaking world to the Magic Realism and Postmodernism of *Amorfiaana* by Finnish novelist Marianna Jäntti. Jäntti's novel is about a collapsing apartment building in which she explores boundaries, physical bodies, and textual forms using Magic Realism.

Meanwhile, in Latin America female novelists revised the traditional genre with a feminist slant in Allende's *The House of the Spirits* and Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, two novels

that focused on the experiences of women and their roles within the family and state. Feminist Magic Realism was combined with a connection between Third World oppression and oppression of African Americans in the works of Toni Morrison and Ntozake Shange and also among Native-American and Latino writers such as Sherman Alexie, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Rudolfo Anaya. In her book *Show and Tell: Identity as Performance in U.S. Latina/o Fiction*, literary critic Karen Christian notes that magic realist approaches to Latino fiction are found in the 1971 novel *Bless Me, Ultima* by Anaya: "Anaya's novelistic portrayal of rural Chicana/o life and folklore, set in northern New Mexico, offered readers access to mythical, magical, and spiritual aspects of Chicana/o culture." However, Christian is quick to note that although influences of Magic Realism are found in contemporary U.S. Latino fiction, it does not necessarily mean that there is a Latino "mystical essence" that derives from Latinos connection to their ethnic roots. Instead, she claims that these magic realist tendencies are used to perform a certain kind of Latino identity that in fact may parody magic realist techniques rather than imitate them.

In another incarnation, the magic realist movement has begun to influence Western writers in what is seen as an ironic circling back to Surrealism in the work of Czech writer Milan Kundera in such works as *The Joke* and the Italian writer Italo Calvino in a Borges-like blurring of genres book called *Cosmicomics*.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a literary movement, Magic Realism was part of a larger cultural development in the mid-twentieth century among a group of Latin-American writers in the Caribbean, South America, and Mexico who contributed to the creation of an innovative approach to writing called "the new novel." Some generic aspects of the "new novel," as defined by Philip Swanson in his introduction to the anthology *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, are interior monologues, multiple viewpoints, fragmented or circular narrative structures, and an overall distorted sense of reality. Thus, to understand the social, political, and cultural climate that engendered magical realist fiction, one must first view it as being a

reaction to the narrative Realism that attempted to mimic reality. At the same time, "the new novel" arose as a response to the increasing understanding that Latin-American society was changing, particularly as it became increasingly urban and modernized by new technological innovations. Thus, many writers responded to these changing conditions by experimenting with new forms and genres that presented reality as ambiguous, complex, and disorganized rather than orderly and meaningful. This style of writing reached its height in the Boom period of Latin-American literature, a period from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, in which a number of extremely important works, most notably Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Cortazar's *Hopscotch*, became internationally recognized.

As one literary development among many occurring at the time, Magic Realism focused on the fantastical elements of everyday life as found in imagined communities situated primarily in Latin America. Its specific influences are found in the surrealist movement in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s of which Asturias, Borges, and Carpentier, three early magic realist writers, were exposed to while studying in Europe. In fact, the first magic realist movement was centered in Europe, especially Germany and France where the major exponents of Surrealism were Franz Roh and Andre Breton, respectively. During the 1920s, these critics and their cohorts declared the "marvelous" not only an aesthetic category but a whole way of life. These critics influenced and learned from artists like Max Ernst, whose painting *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale* brings together a random association of images to jar the viewer's conventional sense of what the contexts for the images should be. Ultimately, the work of Ernst, Joan Miro, Salvador Dali, and others, as well as the writings of Breton and other surrealist thinkers, sought to utterly confuse the distinctions between art, thought, ideas, and matter.

This interest in an ultimate union of all things was not shared by the first major proponents of Magic Realism in Latin America. This second movement, whose best known figures were Borges and Carpentier, both of whom lived as young men in Europe, borrowed from the surrealists' style and shared in their fascination with the fact that a banal everyday object could become magical simply by having extra attention called to it. But these writers practiced

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1950s–1960s:** Many Latin-American writers rely on aspects of indigenous cultures, especially their customs and beliefs that flourished before the Conquistadors arrived in America, as material for their writing.

  **Today:** Many indigenous cultures of Latin America are celebrated all over the southern hemisphere through the reenactment of traditional songs, dancing, and music by national and international groups and organizations.

- **1960s:** The Magic Realism writers mix elements of fantasy and fact, history and mythology as a way of capturing the social and cultural complexity of Latin America and exposing social injustices and political instability.

  **Today:** A new generation of Latin-American writers such as Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Montemayor rely on documentary realism to expose the contradictions and corruption that make up the contemporary urban realities found in Latin-American countries.

- **1960s:** Very few Spanish-American writers are translated or taught in English classes in high schools and college classrooms in English-speaking countries such as the United States and England.

  **Today:** Teaching literatures from India, Nigeria, Latin America, Egypt, and East Asia has become a staple of the English classroom as more and more novels by non-Western or non-English speaking writers are translated and become part of the literary canon.

- **1960s:** Many Latin-American countries are controlled by military dictatorships that often resort to violence, suppression of rights, and censorship to maintain their power.

  **Today:** Most Latin-American countries have moved toward democratic forms of government, although corruption and human rights violations continue to exist, especially in countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador where drug trafficking creates regional and national conflicts.

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their versions of Magic Realism almost exclusively in narrative fiction rather than visual arts, and each had his philosophical difference with the European movement. Borges, a staunch philosophical idealist, rejected the attempt to unify all categories. Instead, he wrote stories and essays that consistently embraced the notion of an orderly universal realm of thought that was confused by a flawed (and utterly separate) world of matter. Carpentier also rejected the surrealists' attempt to impose the magical on everything. But in his rejection of surrealist unity, he went in the opposite direction from Borges. In his 1949 essay, *On the Marvelous Real in America*, which was a prologue to his novel *The Kingdom of this World*, Carpentier argues that the very material history of the Americas is essentially magical (or "marvelous,"

in his own terminology). Specifically for Carpentier, this magical element comes from the rich religious mixture, heavily invested in magic, which manifests in Afro-Caribbean culture. This essay by Carpentier is considered a landmark because it is the first attempt to describe Magical Realism as uniquely Latin American. Thus, whereas Surrealism focused on dreams and the unconscious in creating new kinds of images and experimental writing styles through the juxtaposition of unrelated objects, both Asturias and Carpentier returned to their homelands in Latin America and infused their writing with mythic, historical, and geographical elements found in their local environments.

The historical and political currents that are often an indelible aspect of magic realist writing reflected a variety of social and political ills that

individual countries were undergoing or had undergone at some prior time. More specifically, Latin America's history of conquest, slavery, imperial domination, and subsequent attempts to self-govern become the backdrop as well as the primary "raw" materials for many magic realist writers. For example, Carpentier in *The Kingdom of This World* focuses on the slave uprisings in Haiti, which occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Other writers, like Fuentes in *Where the Air Is Clear*, probe the issue of national identity in contemporary urban societies such as Mexico City or Havana. In Allende's and García Márquez's work, historical events of the recent past tend to appear as pivotal scenes. For example, American multinational companies' entrance into Latin America economies in the late nineteenth century resulted in exploitation, alienation, and sometimes death of workers. The consequences of U.S. economic imperialism is referred to in the massacre scene at the banana plantation in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in which hundreds of demonstrating workers are killed and thrown into the sea. This scene is based on the 1928 banana strike by United Fruit Company workers in Colombia, many of whom were gunned down by the army. Similarly, both *The House of the Spirits* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reveal the rise of military dictatorships that created an endless succession of civil wars and political coups in countries like Colombia and Chile.

By contrast, a much-lauded event in Latin-American countries, where divisions between the rich and the poor were and still are extreme, was the socialist revolution in Cuba in 1960. The overthrow of a long-standing despot ushered in an optimistic era among socially minded Latin-American artists and intellectuals who were fueled by the socialists' hopes for an egalitarian, classless, and safe society. Thus, despite the many atrocities that many magic realist works depict, the movement's adherents have often been seen as delivering a hopeful message, revealing at its roots a joyful engagement with life that is bound together with the utopian vision that destruction and violence will be overcome.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

As a literary movement whose most well-known writers are from Latin America, Magic Realism played an important role in placing Latin-American fiction on the international literary



*Miguel Ángel Asturias* (AFP / Getty Images)

map in the 1960s, particularly in the United States. As Jean-Pierre Durix points out in his book *Mimesis, Genres, and Post-Colonial Discourse*, the term Magic Realism "came into common usage in the late 1960s, a time when intellectuals and literary critics were often involved in Third-Worldism, civil rights, and anti-imperialism." Propitiously, these same issues are often the underlying themes of many magical realist novels, and thus they were widely read and discussed as significant testimonies that "evoke the process of liberation of oppressed communities." However, it was not just these novelists' politics and commitment to social justice that made their works so well received. In their article, Doris Sommer and George Yúdice claim that Magic Realism's popularity could not be summed up as response to one particular aspect of the works but instead to an array of characteristics:

> Latin Americans dazzled the reader with crystalline lucidities (Borges), moving renderings of madness (Sábato, Cortázar), and violence (Vargas Llosa), larger than life portrayals of power and corruption (Fuentes, García Márquez), ebullient baroque recreations of tropical culture (Carpentier, Souza, Amado, Cabrera Infante, Sarduy).

However, for Latin-American critics, the concept of Magic Realism had been debated for quite some time. In his famous 1949 essay, "On the Marvelous Real in America," Carpentier discusses the importance of "lo real marvilloso" (the marvelous real) as an artistic movement that had sprung from the soil of Latin-American history, myth, and geography. The richness one finds in Latin America due to its unique history and fecund landscape acts as a catalyst for the imagination in Latin-American writers. However, other critics such as Angel Flores disagree. In his 1955 essay, *Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction*, Flores argues that (Latin) American Magical Realism is distinguished by a transformation of "the common and everyday into the awesome and the unreal." Flores locates magic realist's roots in the aesthetics of European art, particularly Surrealism. Interestingly enough, Flores does not even mention Carpentier's earlier essay on marvelous Realism, which later became influential. However, much later in 1967, Luis Leal put forward a thesis in his essay "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction" that resonated with Carpentier's. His claim that Magic Realism is not "the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances" coincides with Carpentier's material definition of Magic Realism as being a confrontation with a specific sociohistorical reality rather than an escape. Thus, a large part of the critical reception of magic realist fiction has been defining what exactly it is in terms of origins and philosophy.

For the most part, critics tend to divide into two camps: those who view Magic Realism as specifically tied to the formation of a Latin-American literature and others who view Magic Realism as less about geography, history, and culture and more about rendering a specific version of reality that can be adapted across cultures. For example, whereas Chilean literary critic Fernando Alegría, in "Latin America: Fantasy and Reality," reads magic realist works as a political critique in which "we come to realize [that their realism] is a truthful image of economic injustice and social mockery which passes off as authoritarian democracy in Latin America," for other critics, such as Zamora and Faris, authors of *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Magic Realism "is a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic." What is most impressive about Zamora and Faris's book is the liberty it takes in presenting Magic Realism as a device utilized by writers worldwide yet at the same time publishing key articles such as Carpentier's and Leal's that argue against this global approach.

Other critical approaches to Magic Realism that fall within the two poles mentioned can be seen as unorthodox. For example, the most radical view is taken by González Echevarría, who represents the skepticism that is part of post-structuralism. He states, "The relationship between the three moments when magical realism appears is not continuous enough for it to be considered a literary or even a critical concept with historical validity." Others such as José David Saldívar in *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* attempts to forge a pan-American approach to Magic Realism that includes the diaspora of slaves and Mexican immigrants in North America as being part of the collective voice that situates specific histories in a magic realist moment. Lastly, Durix's book *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse* probes Magic Realism as a specific genre that developed within a sociohistorical postcolonial moment in which writers and intellectuals in former colonized countries began to question the representations and realities handed to them by the colonizers. Thus, Durix is attempting to broaden the concept of Magic Realism by viewing it as an artistic manifestation of the psychological and ontological conditions posed by the European colonial era.

## CRITICISM

### Doreen Piano

*Piano is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Bowling Green University in Ohio. In this essay, Piano analyzes the literature of the Magic Realism movement as a new form of social protest to oppressive governments and imperial powers through the use of history and myth, supernatural events, and folkloric tropes as an antidote to narratives of progress and rationality.*

In the mid-twentieth century, a literary movement developed in Latin America that expressed a new form of writing that was deeply embedded in the cultural, physical, and political landscape of Latin America. This movement known as Magic Realism has been interpreted as both a literary device in terms of infusing

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
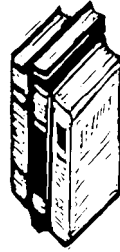
- *The History of Surrealism*, written by Maurice Nadeau and published in 1944 in French, is a classic text on this avant-garde movement. It provides an overall account of the movement and its evolution as well as internal debates about the meaning of artistic production. Leading surrealist proponents like Breton, Tzara, and Aragon are quoted extensively.

- Published in 1967, Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann's book *Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin American Writers* is one of the first books to present interviews with the leading writers of the Spanish-American Boom period. Interviews with Asturias, Borges, Cortazar, Fuentes, García Márquez and Vargas Llosa are included.

- *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, edited by Philip Swanson, provides a variety of essays on notable twentieth-century es as well as on avant-garde writers like Cortazar and Rulfo. This collection reveals a range of Latin-American literary styles and traditions that Latin American writers were working in during the Boom period.

- Based on an exhibition of Latin-American art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1993, the book *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Waldo Rasmussen, reveals a range of essays that focus on the previous century's visual trends found in different parts of Latin America. Particularly relevant may be the essays that focus on Surrealism and its connection to artistic movements in Latin America.

- Twenty five years ago, Paraguayan writer Eduardo Galeano wrote a highly engaging social and political analysis of Latin-American history entitled *Open Veins of Latin America* that is still a definitive poetic and historical work on the area's colonial and postcolonial past, particularly as it relates to United States foreign policy.

- A 1999 article by Jon Anderson in the *New Yorker Magazine* titled "The Power of Gabriel García Márquez" provides a current profile of this prolific author within the current political and social context of his homeland, Colombia.

- Naomi Lindstrom's book of literary criticism, *Twentieth-Century Spanish American Fiction* (1994), covers each period of Latin-American literature extensively from the beginning to the end of the century. She reveals important works in their historical context while providing in-depth discussions of adherents to specific movements such as Realism, Modernism, Magical Realism, Avant-Gardism, Boom and Post-Boom literature.

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realistic narrative with fantastical qualities and hyperbolic descriptions such as those found in the works of García Márquez, Allende, and Carpentier as well as an attitude that, as critic John Brushwood notes, is the reaffirmation of the novelist's right to invent reality, to make up his story rather than copy what he has observed. Thus, Magic Realism can be viewed as both a political and aesthetic movement in its attempt to forge new formalistic developments in literature at the same time that it addresses social and political issues.

One of the most daring innovators of magic realist fiction is Borges, author of *The Garden of Forking Paths* and *Fictions*, who not only questions the limits of what is known as reality but who questions the possibility of language to depict it accurately. His wide-ranging experimental forms of writing explore chance, coincidence, and fate as essential elements of a reality that

> EMPHASIZING THE FANTASTICAL QUALITIES OF REALITY ALLOWS FOR A BLURRING OF FACT AND FICTION WHERE THE QUEST FOR TRUTH IS DISCERNED AS BEING BEYOND THE MERE SURFACE OF THINGS."

needs to be figured out. Thus, his preoccupation with images such as labyrinths and mazes attest to his construction of a puzzling universe that has an order to it, but one that must be figured out. His numerous short fictions, however, are less concerned with the physical geographies and political landscape of Latin America than other magic realists' works are. In fact, although he is viewed as part of the magic realist movement, he is more concerned with different kinds of settings as a way to probe metaphysical questions about the nature of reality. Thus, although he shared many of the aesthetic aspects of Magic Realism such as innovative structure and uses of time, fragmented narratives, and shifting points of view, it is the later writers such as Asturias, Carpentier, Fuentes, and García Márquez who were more involved in invoking fantastical elements within a realist depiction of Latin America.

Therefore, although the fantastical elements of Magic Realism are its most notable feature, the importance of setting, particularly the social and political climate of Latin America, is not to be dismissed. In his introduction to *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, editor Philip Swanson argues that "Magical realism is based around the idea that Latin American reality is somehow unusual, fantastic, or marvelous because of its bizarre history and because of its varied ethnological make-up." The observation that Magic Realism was a literature that stemmed specifically from Latin America was first delineated in Carpentier's ground-breaking essay "The Marvelous Real in America," which ends on this note: "After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real?" Thus, the fantastical elements these writers use are intimately situated in the physical and historical realities in which their works take place. García Márquez makes this clear in *The Fragrance of Guava* when he states:

The history of the Caribbean is full of magic—a magic brought by black slaves from Africa but also by Swedish, Dutch and English pirates who thought nothing of setting up an Opera House in New Orleans or filling women's teeth with diamonds.

His comment intimates how the particular ambience of Latin America engendered acts of radical imagination that were not confined to the literary.

That Latin-American culture is a product of numerous cultural influences and powerful forces is revealed most powerfully in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a work that probes the very question of what is real and what is not. His use of traditional story-telling techniques and reliance on historical events points to an implicit conclusion that it is more a matter of point of view than the existence of facts that constitutes reality. For example, although the massacre of thousands of banana strikers in Macondo that takes place in the novel, based on a historic confrontation between the American multinational company United Fruit Company and the local workers, is witnessed by the sole survivor Jose Arcadio Segundo, his story is discredited, the event erased from history because of the power of the military to determine which version of history should be written.

That power has been dictated from the top down in Latin-American history, first through the conquistadors, then the colonizers, and more recently through the rise of military dictatorships, has inspired writers such as Carpentier, Asturias, Allende, and García Márquez to use literature as a method of telling a different version of history, one that critiques progress and rationality and that protests social injustices, especially as it is directed toward those most vulnerable—the working poor, peasants, indigenous peoples, and slaves. David Danow's observation that Magical Realism manages to present a view of life that exudes a sense of energy and vitality in a world that promises not only joy but a fair share of misery as well reveals the importance of understanding Magic Realism not as simply a way to make stories appear fantastical like traditional ghost stories emerged as a radical artistic response to the complex history that envelopes Latin America. In fact, another form of novelistic genre that magic realist writers engage in is called "the dictator novel," which may or may not invoke magical elements. García

Márquez's *The Autumn of the Dictator*, Asturias's *Mr. President*, and Carpentier's *Reasons of State* are all examples of another form of "protest" novel that has emerged in Latin-American literature.

Magic realist writers incorporate innovative narrative techniques to convey an alternative view of history by borrowing aspects of traditional storytelling devices as well as avant-garde experimental writing. James Higgins, in his essay "Gabriel Garcia Marquez," poses the theory that magic realists' use of hyperbole and/or linguistic exaggeration is linked to traditional forms of storytelling such as the "folk tale" and preliterate forms like the epic. Using the "tall tale" provides an alternative perspective of historical events from the point of view of "the people." In other words, "it permits a rural society to give expression to itself in terms of its own cultural experience." Creating a "people's history" has the effect of raising doubts about historical accounts that appear rational and sequentially ordered by providing a point of view that may disrupt the appearance of an orderly universe.

Although the narrative's point of view may shift from one character to another through omniscience, by focusing on local settings or specific histories, these writers project a version of history that is polyphonic, using a number of points of view to create multiple and sometimes conflicting histories. In Asturias's *Men of Maize*, the narrative structure of the novel is divided into six parts and an epilogue that creates a shifting point of view. The disruptive breaks in point of view prohibit traditional notions of cause and effect and reveal a concept of time that is recursive, revealing that the injustices occurring to indigenous peoples continue despite occasional moments of resistance. Thus, the history of conquest and colonization is one that continues to be present in the lives of indigenous people who are supposedly "free" of this history.

This presentation of time as nonlinear raises questions about the art of storytelling, particularly as it relates to the construction of a collective, and not individual, voice. García Márquez, Allende, and Asturias tend to view the stories told by families and communities as true rather than to weigh their truth-value against objective notions of reality. In many magic realist works, truth lies in a community's agreement of what constitutes reality rather than its ability to



*Murals in a Mayan Temple, Bonampak, Lacandon jungle in Chiapas* *(© Danita Delimont | Alamy)*

convey logical reasoning about certain events. Thus, extraordinary events in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* such as the levitation of Father Nicanor Reyna, the ascension of Remedios the Beauty into heaven, and the birth of a child with a pig's tail are as common as ice that is discovered and delighted over in Macondo. As Zamora and Faris note:

> Texts labeled magical realist draw upon cultural systems that are no less than those upon which traditional literary realism draws—often non-Western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, tradition over innovation.

Emphasizing the fantastical qualities of reality allows for a blurring of fact and fiction where the quest for truth is discerned as being beyond the mere surface of things.

What becomes most clear in reading the works of magic realists is that a reconfiguration of the relationship between artists and society has occurred. A more recent fictional work by

Allende, *The House of the Spirits*, illustrates this point succinctly by having one of the narrators of the novel, Alba, chronicle not just her family's history over four centuries, but the history of a nation that has not yet been told. In her book *Twentieth-Century Spanish American Fiction*, Naomi Lindstrom claims that "[t]he long-standing association between social criticism in litera-ture and realistic representation began to be questioned by writers who found stylized, mythical, and magical modes the best vehicle for their artistic statements about society." Thus, although magic realist writers were, like their narrative realism predecessors, social critics par-ticularly concerning freedom from oppression, their approach incorporated elements of tradi-tional forms of storytelling as well as new techni-cal innovations that engaged in questioning the assumptions of an observed reality and that embarked on a new form of social criticism.

**Source:** Doreen Piano, Critical Essay on Magic Realism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Tara Chace

*In this essay, Chace offers an analysis of Finnish author Mariaana Jäntti's novel* Amorfiaana *focusing on magical realism and postmodern techniques.*

Why am I telling you this story? ["*Miksi kerron tämän tarinan sinulle.*"] Thus begins Mariaana Jäntti's 1986 novel, *Amorfiaana*, in which she uses magical realism and narrative techniques to probe the ontologies of textual and physical bodies. Since the novel's publica-tion, Jäntti has been compared to Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Lewis Carroll, Walter Kilpi, Vir-ginia Woolf, and Hélène Cixous. As the list dem-onstrates, Jäntti's style impresses readers but proves hard to place. Philip Landon describes *Amorfiaana* as the most radically experimental work in the Finnish language (34). I will show how Jäntti's narrative transcends reality's boun-daries with magical realism and the borders of consciousness with its amorphous array of nar-rative styles in order to explore the constantly changing ontologies of subject formation.

*Amorfiaana*'s characters are united by their presence in one building and by the fact that the narrative rarely leaves the building. Jäntti organ-izes the text into chapters designated with locative headers like "cellar," "kitchen, hallway, and room," and "room." Readers voyeuristically

> JÄNTTI'S REFLECTIONS ARE VERSIONS OF SUBJECTS' SELVES THAT HAVE SPLIT OFF, SEPARATED FROM THE ORIGINAL SELF, AND HAVE THE POWER TO RETURN THE GAZE."

watch as a miscellaneous conglomeration of events including legal proceedings, seedy sexual encounters, illness, decay, meals, domestic squab-bles, and housework unfolds in the building. Jäntti taunts readers with sketchy details about the fatal tricycle accident that frames the rest of the book's events forcing readers to strain in an attempt to see what really happens. Jäntti draws readers in with hints of unspecified secrets, possi-ble incest, abortion, or child abuse but never resolves whether they are true or false or partially true. Her readers are left in a state of confusion wondering how the characters are related, who is telling the story, and what is actually happening.

To date, Jäntti's answer to the *nouveau roman* has inspired two full-length articles, which focus largely on the text's relationship to theory, particu-larly Freud, Lacan, Kristeva, and Cixons. Kris-tina Malmio interprets the novel's characters as representations of body parts, bodily functions, and psychological circumstances and the tricycle accident as a metaphor for female authorship. Anna Makkonen, on the other hand, devotes more attention to the novel's form by classifying it as poststructuralist, a cross between an artist's self-portrait and a female *Bildungsroman*. Mak-konen also analyzes recurrent themes including the Daedalus myth, gender rolls, and numerical and maternal images. In common with Malmio and Makkonen, my analysis of the text looks at its stylistic devices and treatment of physical bodies but takes a somewhat different turn. I focus on *Amorfiaana*'s narrative mode, particu-larly the incorporation of magical realism and postmodern techniques and its exploration of the nature of the posthuman body. Publicly, Jäntti has said little about the text insisting that it should speak for itself. She enjoys confused boundaries, permanently partial identities, and contradictory standpoints (Landon 36–7). Com-fortable with the idea of miscegenation—well

aware of the Jewish, Spanish, Swedish, German, and Finnish blood running through her veins—Jäntti requires her readers to embrace it as well (Landon 36). She calls *Amorfiaana* a context by explaining that being in *Amorfiaana* means testing boundaries (Landon 37).

That is precisely the approach I take here: I will demonstrate how Jäntti tests these various boundaries in *Amorfiaana*. She explores the boundaries of reality by using all five of the primary characteristics Faris suggests for magical realism (167). Jäntti tests ontological boundaries by foregrounding postmodernist literary devices. She tests narrative boundaries by creating a text that amorphously combines numerous narrative perspectives and modes of presenting figural consciousness with unannounced transitions from one to another. Finally, in all of these ways, she tests the boundaries of what it means to have a human body thereby probing the boundaries of the posthuman subject.

## MAGICAL REALISM

Wendy Faris spells out five primary characteristics of magical realism, and *Amorfiaana* fulfills all of them: an "irreducible" element of magic (168), detailed descriptions of a realistic world, contradictory understandings of events, the near merging of two worlds or realms, and a questioning of received ideas of time, space, and identity (167–74). Jäntti uses these magical elements to put forward the unpresentable, not for the reader to enjoy or take solace in, but to impart to the reader a stronger sense of the unpresentable (Lyotard 81).

Irreducible magic runs as a consistent theme throughout *Amorfiaana*. This magic occasionally involves a playful sense of surrealism: as Alfhild becomes aroused, for example, she feels her behind being stroked. Jäntti writes, "Takapuoli levitää itseään, ottaa henkeä" ["Her rear spreads itself, takes a breath."] Magical metaphors also create parallel scenes where events can be read either literally or metaphorically. In these cases, the surrealism derives from the overlay of literal and metaphorical to create a doubly coded scene. As Afhild's sex scene progresses, she

> kaataa kupillisen molemille, lämmittää kättään kupin poskella ja ottaa sitten lämpimin sormin kiinni pikkuherran luumumaisesta päästä. Se on gentlemanni. Kun Alfhild kysyy, onko se ikävöinyt häntä, se vastaa nyökkäämällä...

Sen nyytit voi ottaa käsiinsä. Niitä helliä. Naavaa nöyhtäillä... Venäläiset teekupit kilisevät.

> pours a cup (of tea) for both of them, warms her hand on the side of the cup, then takes hold of the little gentleman's plum-like head with her warm fingers. [It] is a gentleman. When Alfhild asks if [it] has missed her, [it] replies with a nod...You can take its bundles into your hands. Fondle them. Ruffle the mossy beard...The Russian teacups clink.

The Finnish distinguishes between the third person personal "hän" used to refer to the Black Man with whom Alfhild is having sex and the third person impersonal "se" referring to the gentleman. Richard Impola reflects the Finnish tendency to represent personals in the impersonal form by translating both "hän" and "se" as "he", whereas I have preserved the impersonal in my translation above for clarity. Despite the linguistic distinction, there are multiple scenes superimposed on each other here. In a larger context, Alfhild is losing her virginity with the Black Man on the dirty floor; squeezed between the radiator and the stove. She is also having tea with a gentleman. At the same time, the gentleman represents the Black Man's penis; his bundles, his testicles; and the mossy beard, his pubic hair. When the gentleman nods, it is both the gentleman tilting his head and his penis moving in Alfhild's hand. Jäntti's magical metaphors are so thorough and consistent that they become coexistent, palimpsestic story lines.

More in the spirit of Latin American magical realism, *Amorfiaana*'s magic is also mythical alluding in the following case to the Daedalus and Icarus theme:

> Pyörre levittää Alfhildin kiharoita. Madamen säästämät hiustupot nousevat yöpöydältä lentoon, rva Parkstein ja Kött, tottuneet linnustajat, hiustupujen perässä hätistävät niitä harittavin sormin itsekin näin lentoa oppien.

> A whirlwind spreads Alfhild's curls. The tufts of hair Madame has saved rise in flight from the night table, Mrs. Parkstein and Fleisch, experienced fowlers, pursue the hairfalls with spread fingers, thus learning to fly themselves.

Here Impola chose to translate the name "Kött"—the Swedish for "meat"—has the German "Fleisch" to preserve the allusion to meat in non-Swedish speaking readers' minds. The locks of hair stir realistically in the breeze, but the realism gradually blurs into magic as two of the characters take wing. The motif of flight as well as allusions to Daedalus and Icarus recur

throughout *Amorfiaana* and are an irreducible element of magic.

Jäntti also includes more epistemological examples of magic, moments that can almost be ascribed to an individual character's hallucinations (Faris 165). In the following example, instead of looking at her reflection in the mirror, the three dimensional Alfhild merges with her mirror image. Gazing into the mirror,

> Alfhild hiipii lasiin nähdäkseen tarkkaan ja kuullakseen tarkkaan.—Itse, siitenkin itse—tyttö puhuu peilissä ja—epäilen onko olemuksia . . . Kerro, onko olemuksia. Onko minulla olemus ja mikä se on?——Kaukana on kaiken olemus ja syvällä, syvällä; kuka voi sen löytää?—tulee vastaus peilin ääristä, jossa Alfhild tarkkasilmä havaitsee varatien viime hetkellä.
>
> (Alfhild slips into the exact seeing and exact hearing glass. "Oneself, after all oneself," the girl speaks in the mirror and, "is there a doubt in existence . . . Tell, is there. Do I have existence and what is it?" "All being is far away and deep, deep; who can find it?" the answer comes from the edges of the mirror, in which keen-eyed Alfhild notices the other way out at the last minute.)

Here Alfhild's physical body merges into her own reflection thus asking what constitutes existence. In the world of the text, Alfhild's journey into the mirror is magically real, not the result of a dream or vision. *Amorfiaana*'s magical elements consistently emphasize ontological concerns in the text.

Jäntti illustrates the second characteristic of magical realism with exhaustive details describing a realistic world. Full of smells, blood, prisoners, servants, physical punishment, broken glass, potatoes, grease, and urine, *Amorfiaana*'s world is not cleaned up for presentation. The reader desperately searches for a unifying point of view for the text and seeks identifiable characters and objects within the rundown landscape of the apartment building and the characters' lives. Jäntti's readers repeatedly pull back in horror and revulsion realizing that they are voyeuristically gazing at general decay, gritty reality, and a traffic accident. The Norwegian author Jan Kjærstad creates a remarkably similar scene in his 1993 novel *Forføreren*, where Jonas's childhood friend Nefertiti is killed by a truck while on her bicycle, but the similarity is even more pronounced in that he refers to the accident several times before telling readers what actually happened. In the same way, Jäntti taunts readers with allusions to the accident but never relieves their fears.

Jäntti exhibits the third characteristic of magical realism by presenting a plethora of contradictory understandings of events. Multiple readings of Alfhild populate the text. On the one hand, she is inside the apartment building when the tricycle accident occurs. On the other hand, she frequently seems to be the girl with the tricycle. The text refuses to answer the simple question, "are Alfhild and the tricycle girl one character or two?" but hovers instead on the border between the two possibilities. The text creates mutually exclusive story lines, alternate textual realities, and then allows for their simultaneous existence.

The story of the girl's accident is both a part of the novel, in that it happens, and not a part of the novel, in that it does not happen. In the quotation below, the accident seems to have been only a performance and the headlights are only circus spotlights. Just after the accident, we read, "Tyttö niiaa kun kullanvärisiä kolikoita heitetään hänen jalkoihinsa, niiaa, vilkaisee takanaan seisovaa rekkaa, jonka sirkuslyhtyjen valokeilassa hän, jääprinsessa, esiintyi. Vastaako näky todellisuutta?" [The girl curtsies when gold coins are thrown at her feet, curtsies, glances back at the standing truck, in the beam of light from its circus spotlights she, the ice princess, was performing. Does this correspond to reality?]. The accident becomes absurdly theatrical. The headlights become circus spotlights, and the audience throws coins at the performer's feet.

The fact of the girl being hit by the truck occurs in *Amorfiaana* as a real event, as a theatrical presentation, as a woodpecker's cry in the woods, does not occur, and may or may not have occurred. The tricycle story is one example of *Amorfiaana*'s self-conscious, postmodern experimentation with textual ontology. It is a contingent event, an exploration of boundaries, and an events *sous rature*.

Jäntti exhibits the fourth characteristic of magical realism by creating two realms that nearly merge and yet do not completely. Here characters who are nearly single, unified subjects split apart into two separate entities that are almost entirely separate, but not completely. This division takes place when Alfhild looks at herself in the mirror. Jäntti carries voyeurism to an extreme by creating dissonance within individual characters so that they become voyeurs of their own selves. Characters experience alienation from their own thoughts, feelings, bodies, their

own reflections in the mirror, and their own selves. Normal patterns of reflection and observation collapse. The whole, unified form of a single character breaks apart into multiple reflections.

Jan Kjærstad singles this multiplicity out as a distinctly postmodern trait using the prism as a metaphor for postmodernism's predilection for spreading open and looking at the many facets of the postmodern individual (*Mennesket* 268). Not only do Jäntti's characters undergo diffraction-like splittings, but they are also conscious of it. As Alfhild looks into the mirror, we read,

> Samanaikaisuuden ongelma on kahdenlainen: jonkin katsominen vaatii erillisyyttä siitä, itsen katsominen erillisyyttä itsestä, jakautumista . . . En siis katso itseäni peilistä, katson kuvaani siitä.
>
> (At the same time the problem is two-fold: watching something demands separation from it, being separated from oneself to see oneself, division . . . Therefore, I don't see myself in the mirror, I see my image there.)

The act of observation causes the viewing subject to break apart into component parts, to disintegrate.

Jäntti problematizes the relationship between "original" and reflection. The boundary between the two is not as fixed as would be expected in a realistic world; they can be split apart and separated from each other. As we will see here, they are not separate, distinct entities rather there is leakage between the two. Alfhild's eyes and their mirrored reflections trigger philosophical musings about the borders of her identity:

> Mutta nyt peilissä katsovat minun itseni silmät, eivät silmät vastaan silmät vaan yhdet silmät yksissä silmissä, eivät helman silmissä vaan minun minussa. Yhtäaikaispeilaus ruumismielestä lasiin ja takaisin vuotaa jatkuvasti. [ . . . ] Jos minulla nyt olisi tässä peili, todistaisin, että juuri vuoto kuvan ja alkukuvan välillä on niitä välittävä yhteys.
>
> (But now in the mirror the eyes are watching my self, not eyes facing eyes but single eyes facing single eyes, not the border in the eyes but mine in me. A simultaneous reflection of the body-mind leaks continuously into the glass and back. [ . . . ] If I had a mirror here now, I would demonstrate, that precisely the leakage between the picture and the original image is their mediating unity.)

The mirror is not reflecting merely her surface features, but rather, somehow, her inner self. Her reflection comes apart into separate elements; the reflection of her eyes is a reflection of distinct eyes, not a unified face. The reflected image and the person are not the same; both have the ability to watch the other. The idea of the unified individual is split. As Landon explains, "Unlike its distant modernist cousins (Woolf, Faulkner), *Amorfiaana* frustrates anyone who searches for a solid center within the rampant texture" (34). The character looking at her reflection is not a solid handrail in the whirlpool of this text; there is no single center of consciousness to focalize all the evidence (see McHale 9).

The body of the real person and the reflection are present, but they are not identical. They are related to and contingent on each other. Jäntti uses magical realism to draw attention to the near merging of the two worlds of the original and the reflection. Posthuman theorist Katherine Hayles describes the implication of reflexivity by saying that "once the observer is made a part of the picture, cracks in the frame radiate outward until the perspectives that controlled context are fractured as irretrievably as a safety-glass windshield hit by a large rock" (70). Jäntti's reflections are versions of subjects' selves that have split off, separated from the original self, and have the power to return the gaze.

Magical realism's fifth characteristic is questioning received ideas of time, identity, and space. Jäntti unsettles the reader's sense of diachronic progression by jumbling the reader's sense of time. Alfhild is mother to the little "incest-begotten" paperboy, but "hän ei ole vielä päästänyt ketään miestä kokonaan sisäänsä" ["she has not yet let any man completely inside her"]. Similarly, Jäntti confuses identities to the extent that even an attentive reader cannot keep straight who is hit by the truck, who is looking out the window, having sex with the Black Man, or slicing the potato.

Jäntti's magical realist treatment of spaces takes the form of imperceptible walls in the following selection,

> Muuri ei ollut ihmisaistein fyysisessä katsannossa havaittavissa, mutta olkaapa hyvät ja kuvitelkaa mielessänne elämää tuollaisten idioottivarmojen muurien sisällä. [ . . . ] Yksi pakotie elektronimuureistakin oli, ei ulos vaan sisään.
>
> (The wall couldn't be perceived or observed in a human sense, but please imagine in your mind such life inside the dead-certain walls. [ . . . ] And there was one escape route from the electron wall, not out but in.)

In the spatial world of *Amorfiaana*, people merge into walls or glass becoming part of an amorphous two-dimensional continuum.

Glass imagery often emphasizes and demarcates characters' unusual spatial situations in the text by separating inside from outside. Sometimes glass holds characters in; the narrator in the frame story says, "Voit nähdä naamani litistyneenä lasia vasten, katsahdat ylös, siihen ikkunaan ja luuletkin minua vain äkilliseksi heijastukseksi ikkunan pinnassa, valon oveluudeksi" ["You can see my face pressed against the glass, you look up at that window and mistake me for only a sudden reflection in the surface of the glass, a trick of light"]. At other times, characters wish for glass to hold them in. One character asks, "Uskotteko että lasimestari voisi puhaltaa jonkun halvan kuplan suojakseni. Minä nimittäin jäädyn" ["Do you think the glazier can blow me a cheap bubble to protect me? For I'm freezing"]. Sometimes they are trapped inside the glass. "In the pauses between words," we read, "ääni kiertää tässä talossa. [. . .] Haloo! Minä täällä, täällä, täällä, täällä, kerrrrrrrosssvankilasssa, lasinsisässähhh" [A voice circulates in this house . . . Hello! I am here, here, here, here, in this aparrrrrtment prrrrison, on the inside of the glasssssss]. When the glass finally breaks and the narrator is able to draw a deep breath, the air smells of exhaust.

### NARRATIVE

While most of the events in the novel occur within the walls of an apartment building, these indoor actions are occasionally interrupted by reference to something that happens outside the building. This frame story comprises the text's primary diegetic level; the events in the apartment building are one level removed or metadiegetic. The diegetic tricycle accident is differentiated from the rest of the text by both its italic typeface—a style not used elsewhere in the text—and its outspoken first-person authorial narration.

This first-person diegetic narrator gives the impression of a monologic presentation; it feels as though the narrator is directly addressing the reader in the opening, italicized statement. In the beginning, she asks in the present tense why she is telling this story and at the end of the book, in the past tense, why she told this story. This gives the impression that the tricycle accident and events in the apartment building are occurring simultaneously with both *Amorfiaana*'s narration and the reading of the novel. While the

tricycle accident would only take an instant, the other events within the apartment building require some time. This fact creates a split in which the tricycle accident occupies a chronological realm different from the metadiegetic events unfolding inside the apartment building. And yet, they all appear to occur synchronously.

The two narratives are not only not synchronized but are also largely not related thematically. Genette describes the function of this type metadiegesis as distractive (61–4). One of the best-known examples of a distractive narrative is Scheherazade's in *The Thousand and One Nights*. The metadiegetic stories she tells do not relate to her present (diegetic) situation. Instead, they serve a purpose: she narrates to delay her death and the longer she narrates, the longer she lives. I will demonstrate that Jäntti's first narrator is a subversion of Scheherazade.

While Scheherazade's narration delays her death, nothing can stop the tricycle accident in *Amorfiaanna*. The narrator tells the story so that it will happen and taunts the reader, saying "tiedät että se tapahtuu" ["you know it will happen"]. So, while Scheherazade narrates to maintain life, Jäntti's narrator does so to end it. Scheherazade's motivation is preserving her life, while *Amorfiaana*'s narrator's is to make herself known, to narrate herself and the story into existence. She explains, "Kukaan ei tunne minua, siksi minun on kerrottava, vasikoitava. Kaikki painostavat minua. Siksi minun on hajottava, kerrottava" ["No one knows me, so I have to narrate, to stooge. Everyone twists my arm. So I have to disintegrate to narrate"]. If Scheherazade stops narrating, her life will end. If Jäntti's narrator stops, no one will know her. And yet, as she continues, she is unable to prevent the tricycle accident and "disintegrates." Similarly, Scheherazade repeatedly interrupts her world of stories to introduce more stories, more fiction. *Amorfiaana*'s narrator interrupts *Amorfiaana*'s story line in order not to tell the story she promised to tell. While Scheherazade struggles to distract her captor from reality, *Amorfiaana*'s narrator struggles to break the spell of fiction and remind the readers of the story about death they are not hearing.

Jäntti plays self-consciously with the reader's desire to find out what happens to the girl on the tricycle. The diegetic narrative, the story of the girl on the tricycle, repeatedly breaks into the metadiegetic text, the world inside the apartment

building. Genette calls this *métalepse*, the deliberate transgression of the threshold between diegetic levels (58). For example, in the midst of other events, we read, "Kysyt ja vaadit, kärsimätön sinä, että missä on tyttö kolmipyörineen, että tyttö ja rekka esiin! 'TYT-tö ja REK-ka ja TYT-tö ja REK-ka'…Niin niin, aina siitä tytöstä" [You ask and demand, impatient you, where is the girl on the tricycle, bring out the girl and the truck! "G-irl and TRU-ck and G-irl and TRU-ck"…Yeah, yeah, always that business about the girl]. The first-person narrator's interruptions voice the readers' "impatient" curiosity about the accident and, at the same time, remind readers that they still do not know what happened to the girl. Instead of producing humorous or fantastic ends (Genette 58), Jäntti unsettles *Amorfiaana's* reader with metalepses, alluding to a tragedy, but refusing to tell the story.

This story that self-consciously remains untold is only one cause of *Amorfiaana's* narrative confusion. The pervasive reason that *Amorfiaana* is confusing and difficult to read is the instability of narrative focalization in the text. Borrowing Cohn's phrasing, *Amorfiaana's* narrating and figural minds vary dramatically in their degrees of transparency. I will show how Jäntti blends different narrative modes in the metadiegetic text, which is primarily narrated in the third person and varies between psycho-narration and narrated monologue. Psycho-narration, sometimes called "omniscient description," entails the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness and can be either consonant, where the narrator is effaced and fused with the character's consciousness, or dissonant, where the narrator is distanced from the character's consciousness (Cohn 14, 26).

At one extreme, there is no psycho-narration at all; the figural minds are not at all transparent, and the narrator is not privy to any of the characters thoughts or motivations (Genette 34). We read, for example, that "oikeastaan epäjärjestys johtuu Uri-koirasta (joka haukkaa milloin kenenkin jalkaa) ja niistä, joita sanotaan henkilöiksi" ["actually, the confusion is caused by the dog Uri (who chews indiscriminately at people's feet) and by the so-called characters."] Here, the narrator has no insight into the characters' minds but is merely reporting the situation. She even metafictively draws attention to her exteriority by using the qualifier "so-called" in her reference to the characters. At one end of the spectrum, Jäntti uses this narrative mode to

create distance, a sense of alienation. We read, "'Sydämesi pumppaa huonosti'—vastaa joku huoneessa ja joku toinen saa verukkeen harjoitella ivanaurunsa vivahteita" ["'Your heart pumps poorly,' someone in the room answers and someone else has an excuse to practice the nuances of his scornful laugh."] In this case, the narrator appears unable to identify who is doing what in the room. Not only are the characters' motivations and thoughts opaque to the narrator, she cannot even tell who is who.

At the other extreme, *Amorfiaana's* narrator is privy to characters' motivations and thoughts, what Cohn terms psycho-narration, which can be either consonant or dissonant (Cohn 14, 26). In consonant psycho-narration, the narrator fuses with the characters' consciousnesses, and we read their unspoken thoughts and feelings. Examples of this are when we read of Alfhild that "hänen tekee mieli rakastella" ["she feels like making love"] or when "Madamen mielestä keittiöstä vetää" ["In Madame's opinion, there is a draft from the kitchen."]

Consonant psycho-narration also occurs with regard to feelings that should be there but are missing and thereby create another level of distance or removal. When the woman pours oil into the flying pan saying, "Tämä on minun vereni" ["This is my blood,"] we then read, "Mutta ei tunne tuntoaan" ["But she does not feel her feeling."] In this case, the feeling is completely absent. In the next case, Alfhild has a fuzzy sense that she is missing something. Alfhild "näkee muistavansa jotakin. Hän näkee siristävänsä silmiään, tarkentaa" ["sees herself remembering something. She sees herself squinting, focuses."] The next is an example of the extreme to which Jäntti carries this lack of feeling, which creates an alarming degree of alienation. The Black Man "ei tunne itseään. Huutaa. Ei kuule itseään. Alasti polvin lumessa ei näe nahkaansa" ["does not know himself. He screams. He does not hear himself. Kneeling naked in the snow, he does not see his skin."]

Dissonant psycho-narration, on the other hand, involves a prominent narrator who even as she focuses on an individual psyche remains emphatically distanced from the figural consciousness she narrates (Cohn). For example, the Black Man "avaa suunsa huntaakseen (tai nälästä)" [opens his mouth to shout (or out of hunger).] The narrator seems to know why the man is opening his mouth but then admits

doubt, a degree of dissonance. In the following example, the narrator can see inside Alfhild's mind, but not Kött's: "Alfhild ei huomaa ivaa Köttin äänessä (onko siinä sitä?)" [Alfhild doesn't notice sarcasm in Kött's voice (is there any?)]. This excerpt is rife with dissonance between Alfhild, who does not notice sarcasm, Kött, who might or might not have inflected sarcasm, the narrator, who is self-consciously aware that Kött's mind is not transparent to her, and the reader, who has no way of answering the narrator's rhetorical question.

Jäntti carries narrative dissonance to its extreme. In the following example, the narrator, speaking from a consonant position within Alfhild's mind, reports the dissonance that Alfhild is experiencing from own consciousness: "Alfhild riemuitsee vaikka ei sitä vielä tiedä" ["Alfhild rejoices, although she does not know it yet."] At times, the characters' dissonance is so extreme that the wrong characters gain access to feelings. At one point, we read, "Mutta näyttää siltä että naistyttö itse on kadottanut näköaistinsa, että se on omituisesti imeytynyt muiden henkilöiden silmiin" ["But the woman-girl seems to have lost her sense of sight; it seems to have been sucked in some strange way into the eyes of the others."] Landon insightfully summarizes that the narrative is "punctuated with disquisitions on epistemological relativism that serve to accentuate the fluidity of the novel's word".

Jäntti uses a remarkably heterogeneous palette of narrative forms including clearly attributed first and third person narration, dialogue, and monologue. Her preferred mode, however, is to shift between forms without providing the reader sufficient information to be sure who is narrating. An example of unattributed dialogue is the confusing conversation between Alfhild and the paperboy, in which their dialogue shifts back and forth between the two speakers not specifying who is speaking. Full of references to the sea and burning newspapers, the conversation seems unreal. The child talks of pinching his mother's nipples, tells her she is burning, and calls her a whore.

In addition to dialogues, Jäntti also includes narrated monologue, mimicking Woolf, Kafka, and Joyce (Cohn 101–2). The text weaves into and out of Alfhild's mind without perceptible transitions and refers to Alfhild in the third person but also reports the thoughts she has as she looks around. As Alfhild is having sex with the Black Man, we read:

> Alfhidin silmissä vilahtaa puupino nurkassa. Mihin tarkoitukseen ovat pitkät uuniin ja hellaan sopimattomat halot? Kaikista esineistä hän tahtoisi kysyä, mitä ne ovat, mihin tarkoitukseen, miten ne toimivat voisiko hän saada jonkun niistä (sitä hän kysyisi vain kokeillakseen), mistä ne ovat peräisin, kuka on tuonut tuliaisena venäläiset teekupit, kuka on särkenyt kristallimaljan, miksi kankaalle maalatuissa kasvoissa on viiltoja, miksi semettiseinässä on päänkokoinen särmikäs kolo, miten tahrat ovat syntyneet kattoon, miksi käytetään kynttilöitä vaikka talossa on sähkö, mitä ovat seinällä ryömivät ruskeat eliöt, purevatko ne, saako jonkun kekeyttämän aterian syödä loppuun lautaselta, joka on pantu pöydän jalan juureen vai pitääkö odottaa ensin, varmistua ettei se ole muille. Alfhild on utelias.

> The woodpile in the corner flashed into Alfhild's view. What are the long logs that won't fit into the stove for? She would like to ask every object what it is, what it is for, how it works, could she get one (this she would ask only as a test), where it had come from, who had brought the Russian teacups as a homecoming present, who had broken the crystal goblet, why there are cuts on the face painted on the canvas, why there is a jagged head-sized crevice in the cement wall, how the ceiling has become stained, why candles are used although there is electricity in the house, what the creatures crawling on the wall are, whether they bite, whether one could eat the interrupted meal from the plate left near the table leg, or did one have to wait first to make sure it was not for others. Alfhild is curious.

The questions run together without question marks, move with Alfhild's gaze about the room, and are presented through the mask of her child-like consciousness (see Faris 177). Although it is similar to Molly's autonomous monologue in the Penelope chapter of *Ulysses* in its lack of standard punctuation and stream-of-consciousness style, there is a striking difference. While Molly spends much of her mental energy thinking about sex, Alfhild's autonomous monologue is full of thoughts about everything but sex. This fact is unexpected since she has a great many thoughts about sex in the rest of the novel, and she is actually having sex at the time of the citation. This disjunction is another example of dissonance in that Alfhild's thoughts are distanced from her body's physical experiences.

Jäntti uses narrative techniques to emphasize the characters' de-localized experience of

physical sensations and conscious thoughts. Jäntti's striking treatment of bodies and body parts also draws attention to the boundaries between characters and their environments. In the next section, I will show how Jäntti manipulates not only magical realism and narrative, but also the boundaries of physical bodies to explore subject formation.

## DISINTEGRATING BODIES

Jäntti "wrote *Amorfiaana* as uncompromisingly as possible, as [her] philosophy, which had to unfold precisely as it did, in bodily form" (Landon 37). She tests her theories of identity and subject formation on the "playing field" of the body. In the same way that the tricycle accident frames concerns of fictionality throughout the text, bodily boundaries and their transgressions problematize what it means to be an individual in a postmodern age. Hayles's theory of the posthuman will elucidate the implications of subject composition in *Amorfiaana*. A posthuman subject is "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (Hayles 3). *Amorfiaana* bears all the signs of a posthuman text: the destabilization of many kinds of boundaries, non-localized vocalization, dispersed subjectivity, and bodies of print punctuated with prostheses (Hayles 130). My discussion of *Amorfiaana*'s narrative has demonstrated how Jäntti actively destabilizes boundaries between narrative modes and figural consciousnesses to present non-localized vocalization. In this section, I will show how Jäntti disperses subjectivity and employs prosthetics to create simulacral characters.

Jäntti disperses subjectivity by drawing attention away from whole bodies and focusing on specific, often unappealingly depicted, parts. Her use of graphic bodily images along with her narrative style has garnered comparisons to Cixous and Joyce. This use of bodily elements for shock value also bears striking similarity to that of the Norwegian author Karin Moe in *Kjønnskrift,* for example, and American photographer Cindy Sherman. Sherman, in photographic medium, and Moe and Jäntti, in the textual, explore subjectivity by drawing so much attention to the parts that it becomes difficult to see the whole. *Amorfiaana* teems with dislocated body parts and imagery such as unnaturally large joints, sunken cheeks, crooked fingers, anatomical specimens, blood, urine, legs in

support hose, pockmarks, and sweat smells that drip from "hairy pits." Jäntti develops a sense of alienation by confronting the reader with abject images, defiling elements, and disturbing descriptions of bodies.

At times, the image of a contiguous body disintegrates into its composite parts. For example, as the incensed lawyer leans over the fire, we read,

> Kieli liikkuu suun sisällä jäykistyneenä pötkönä pitkin poskien ryhmyisiä limakalvoja ja rikkipurtuja huulen sisäreunoja. Ehkä hiilloksen kuumuus panee veren kiehumaan niin että sitä tihkuu hiukan huulillekin lukemattomista puhki nyrhätyistä suonista.

> His tongue, a stiff lump, moves in his mouth along the lumpy membranes of his cheeks and the cracked and bitten insides of his lips. Perhaps the heat of the coals has set his blood boiling so that a little of it seeps onto his lips from innumerable eroded veins.

In this scene, the details draw attention away from the lawyer as a person effectually rendering his body as a collection of bloody, fleshy lumps. Jäntti repeatedly violates figural bodies by drawing the reader's attention to lurid details and supplanting the idea of the figure as a complete entity. In this way she dissolves subjects into their component parts.

Jäntti also does just the opposite in composing subjects out of miscellaneous component parts. Most strikingly, this result occurs narratively through her reference to the communal transubstantiation. We read that someone in the kitchen "iskee puukon perunaan.—Tämä on minun ruumiini—,silpoo sen. Kaataa öljyä paistinpannuun, kiehauttaa yli suositusrajan—Tämä on minun vereni—" ["stabs the knife into the potato. 'This is my body.' She slices it up. She pours oil into the frying pan, boils it above the prescribed temperature. 'This is my blood.'"] Here, in an appropriation of the communion sacrament, the potato and oil become the body and blood of the cook. A sort of *heteroglossia* governs the communion allusion; it is simultaneously sacrilegious and reverential, sarcastic and factual. The act of slicing potatoes symbolizes women's work through the ages, and the woman's body as potato is a metaphor for the labor of her forebears, the communal contribution of cooking, the pleasure of food, and the yoke of servitude all in one.

In her treatment of subjects, Jäntti practices what Kjartan Fløgstad might call compost-modernism. She emphasizes the dissolution of the

subject by creating bodies that compost, disintegrate, and break down. Beyond just merging into other media or shattering into shards of glass or ceramic, one of the best examples of this bodily composting occurs when the first narrator says, "Kukaan ei tunne minua, siksi minun on kerrottava, vasikoitava. Kaikki painostavat minua. Siksi minun on hajottava, kerrottava" [No one knows me, so I have to narrate, to inform. Everyone is pressuring me. So I have to decompose, to narrate]. The process of coming apart here creates the text.

In another example, the truck hits the girl on the tricycle, she rises up in the headlights, and we read, "'salva me fons pietatis' hän hymyilee ollakseen kiltti. Tuliko latinalainen rukous hänestä vai altani keosta, äänilevystä, jota kärpänen soittaa ketaroillaan?" ["Salva me fons pietatis," she smiles to be good. Did the Latin prayer come from her or from beneath the mound that is me, from a CD that a bug plays on his limbs?]. Not merely coming apart to narrate, the narrator here speaks as a mound with the Finnish "keko," which might apply to a stack of hay. The presence of the bug makes the allusion to a compost pile or even a mound of garbage even more compelling.

In addition to certain characters' overall disintegration, many characters also experience minor infringements on their corporeal borders. The boundaries of the characters' selves are amorphous. Women's bodies merge with potatoes, walls, bits of text, wood, panes of glass, and mirrors. Their physical boundaries change, extend beyond and encompass their human forms as well as parts of other things around them. Posthumanists regard the body itself as the original prosthesis that humans learn to manipulate such that "extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born" (Hayles 3). Jäntti uses body-prosthesis amalgams to challenge the notion of the neatly bounded self. *Amorfiaana*'s bizarre, parodic, and often grotesque bodily formations explore the postmodern female body, not as an essentialized, concrete entity, but instead exposing the body's contingent boundaries, its partial connections to other things. For example, the boundaries of human characters in the novel can expand to include parts of things and inanimate objects around them.

I have already discussed the bodies that merge with glass and walls and mirrors. *Amorfiaana* also contains a three-legged chair that requires a human leg to keep it stable. Whoever sits in that chair becomes part chair and part human with his or her own human leg serving as the missing chair leg. Alfhild has the missing chair leg that she took from the woodpile. She paints human features on the chair leg to create a doll. So while human legs serve as simulated chair legs, the chair leg serves as a simulated human. The narrator also suspects that an "automatic" Madame may have replaced the human Madame. All of these examples demonstrate the confused boundaries between human and non-human in the text. In fact, Jäntti refers to the text itself in corporeal terms as a "book-body ... a secret, satisfying partner" (Landon 35). *Amorfiaana*'s non-essentialized bodies are defined by their relationships and communications with their various parts and with segments of the environment around them and their delineations continue to change throughout the text.

The issue of body as text and text as body is central to *Amorfiaana* and plays a major role in Malmio's article. One intriguing aspect Malmio does not discuss is that the original is often absent, and the bodies in the text are instead copies of a missing original or copies of copies. This mimics Baudrillard's paradigm shift from a modern representation system to a postmodern simulation system (635). Jäntti's simulacral bodies create a complex system of simulations.

One example is Jäntti's discussion of the Venus de Milo in *Amorfiaana*. The sculpture in the text is not the original Venus de Milo, but rather a replica; similarly, the original sculpture is an artist's representation of a woman's body. The sculpture in *Amorfiaana* is then a copy of an incomplete copy of a woman's body. Extending this motif, Jäntti writes, "Pöly nousee aina kahdeksanteen kerrokseen niin että Madamen ahkeraan puiva käsi puuteroituu suloisen tasaisesti ja pysähtyy äkkiä...Meloksen Venuksen kadonnut käsi" ["Dust rises all the way to the eighth story so that Madame's hand industriously fanning the air is powdered over with sweet evenness and stops suddenly...Venus de Milo's lost hand."] By layering levels of representation, Jäntti demonstrates that the posthuman body is more an informational pattern than a unified, material object (see Hayles 104).

Venus de Milo's body moves intertextually through *Amorfiaana* as a simulacral, as an informational entity. As Madadme's hand becomes Venus de Milo's, the fact that the original Venus

de Milo has long been without hands is immaterial. Madame's hand fits into the pattern of representation regardless of whether it is composed of flesh and blood, drywall dust, or marble. Jäntti shows that the boundaries of the subject are not so much penetrated, stretched, or dispersed as they are revealed to have been illusions all along (see Hayles 156). When the Venus de Milo reproduction falls and breaks into shards (139), it simulates the real female bodies that break into shards of glass throughout the text.

Jäntti repeatedly composes and decomposes women's bodies, and her narrators and characters are continually and "actively rewriting the texts of their bodies" just as cyborgs do (Haraway 177). The pattern of revision becomes more important than the flesh and blood form at any specific stage. This systematic devaluation of materiality and embodiment in favor of informational rather than material presence is one of the central elements of posthumanism (Hayles 48).

Jäntti makes her foregrounding of informational bodies over material bodies explicit and self-conscious. As I discussed above, she emphasizes the leakages between characters' physical bodies, their reflections, and the rest of their ontological makeup. She also self-consciously draws the reader's attention to the semiotic relationship between physical and textual bodies. Of the phrase written in blood on the basement wall, we read:

> Älä pese. Minä menen, kirjoitus jää. TÄMÄ ON MINUN RUUMIINI saa jäädä. Mutta jos TÄMÄ viittaa minun ruumiiseeni, kuinka kauas minun on mentävä, että viittaus lakkaa? Kun olen mennyt, tuleeko kirjoituksesta lentävä lause? [...] Mikä on lauseen ulko- ja mikä sisäpuolta? Viittaako lause sisäisesti itseensä? Onko se identiteetti eli onko TÄMÄ = MINUN RUUMIINI?

> (Don't wash. I am going, the writing stays. Let THIS IS MY BODY stay. But if THIS refers to my body, how far must I go until this reference ceases? When I have gone, does a flying sentence come out of the writing? [...] What is the sentence's out- and what is its in-side? Does the sentence inwardly refer to itself? Is it identity or is THIS = MY BODY?)

How far can the relationship between a textual reference and a physical entity be stretched before their unity is divided? The question is rhetorical and self-conscious. Jäntti leaves it for the reader to answer. The blood-words are a textual simulacrum of the body of the character who wrote them. They are written in the blood of a character whose only body is textual. Jäntti's exploration of the boundaries between physical and textual bodies appears here as *mise-en-abyme;* the author literally comes apart to narrate and uses her blood to write the text.

Jäntti does not stop there. In the following passage, she takes her metafictional play with "this is my body" to a new level. The blood sentence on the cellar wall becomes real: "Tässä ruumis kykkii, puistelee selkää irti seinästä johon verinäyte on sen liimannut, muistelee eli erittelee seinään yhtyvää ruumistaan joka on kaiken tapahtuneen muisti" [Here is where the body squats, shudders its back loose from the wall onto which the blood sample had been pasted, recollects or rather specifies from her body (merged into the wall) a reminder of everything that happened]. Here, a physical body emerges from the graffiti body. A character created the textual wall-body composed of blood and text, and in this citation it emerges from the wall "shuddering" itself loose as a new simulacrum of the fictional original that wrote it.

What we see in this *mise-en-abyme* occurs as a universal in all of Jäntti's characters. They all have the surface appearance of characters, names, job titles, and other identifying characteristics. They remain, however, depthless. Although the narrative dips frequently into their consciousnesses, readers never learn the most basic facts about them or about their relationships. Jäntti describes tableaux that might occur in an apartment building from the mundane act of frying potatoes, being bossy, or looking out a window to the peculiar legal trial and the female performance prisoner. She creates visual clichés of various roles and gives readers the illusion of recognition and reference. All the way through the text, readers have the feeling that they will be able to put the clues together and understand. In large part, this is a false sense of familiarity created by Jäntti's use of repeated phrases, elements, and scenes. Jäntti accomplishes in text what Sherman did in her *Untitled Film Stills*. Here Sherman photographed herself posing as an imaginary blonde actress. The photographs look like movie stills or publicity photos, and although most of the characters are invented, viewers sense right away that they recognize them (see Galassi). Jäntti's characters create the same false sense of recognition in the reader. At the end *Amorfiaana*, it is not any clearer who any given character or narrator is.

It is not clear whether the girl on the tricycle dies or not, whether she is Alfhild or not. Even the title of the book is unclear. *Amorfiaana* seems to be a Finnish woman's name made from the word "amorphous" or "amorfinen" in Finnish. And yet, at no point is it clear if there is a character named *Amorfiaana*. Having read the entire, confusing text, the reader will feel like there was, that perhaps the body of the text is *Amorfiaana* incarnate. The text creates a false sense of recognition for a posthuman, simulacral body named *Amorfiaana*.

Jäntti's amorphous narrative reflection of life, bodies, and boundaries in an apartment building collapses many times upon itself. She uses magical realism to create a realistic world but also to subvert it and transgress the laws of nature. She uses an amorphous array of narrative modes to de-localize the reader's sense of figural consciousness and repeatedly construct and tear down the reader's sense of narrative grounding. Finally she consistently undermines the importance of material embodiment by creating dynamic, posthuman characters that challenge the notion of the neatly bounded subject.

**Source:** Tara Chace, "Disintegrating Bodies: Postmodern Narrative in Mariaana Jäntti's *Amorfiaana*," in *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 76, No. 2, Summer, 2004, pp. 279–98.

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This critical edition of an early magic realist masterpiece includes a series of critical essays by well-known critics and writers of Latin-American literature that cover a variety of topics related to Asturias's work.

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This is a collection of short stories by African women from all parts of the continent. Divided by region, the book provides a comprehensive view of the variety and diversity of African women's approaches to imaginative writing. Many well-known and new writers are represented.

Graham-Yooll, Andrew, *After the Despots: Latin American Views and Interviews*, Bloomsbury, 1991.

Collected in this book are interviews, observations, and political analyses about Latin America by an Argentine journalist. Written in a style á la the *New Yorker*, Graham-Yooll has his finger on the pulse of the current literary and political currents of his time. A number of pieces focus on Latin America's leading writers: Allende, García Márquez, Borges, and Fuentes.

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# *Medieval Mystics*

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1250

Mysticism flourished in many parts of Europe, including Germany, Italy, the Low Countries, and England, from the middle of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fifteenth. The greatest figures in Germany were Meister Eckhart, a Dominican friar of formidable intellectual gifts, and his pupils, also Dominicans, Johannes Tauler and Henry Suso. In the Low Countries, John Ruusbroec developed a Trinitarian mysticism that owed much to Eckhart, despite his apparent disagreement with the earlier teacher. In Italy, the Franciscan scholar Bonaventure, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Catherine of Genoa upheld the mystical flame, and there was also a mystical outpouring in England, associated with the names Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Many of the continental mystics were members of the Friends of God, a movement that worked for the spiritual revival of people at a time when the worldliness of the Catholic Church, the ravages of the Black Death, and the cracks in the traditional social order created a desire in many to develop a deeper spirituality. Although some of the mystics were hermits, like Rolle, others combined their mysticism with practical concerns such as preaching, administrative duties, and caring for the poor and the sick.

The most enduring figures in medieval mysticism produced works of high spiritual and
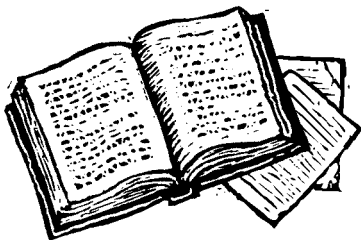
sometimes even literary quality. Although they were all loyal to the Church (including Eckhart, in spite of the fact that he was posthumously condemned for heresy), they expressed their mysticism in a wide variety of themes and tones. Eckhart's lofty statements from the standpoint of eternity are very different from Catherine of Genoa's intense dialogue between soul and body, for example. Similarly, the visions of Christ's passion granted to Julian of Norwich differ greatly from the down-to-earth advice given by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Taken as a whole, the writings of the medieval mystics provide a remarkable record of the vitality and variety of the spirituality of the period.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Bonaventure (1217–1274)

Bonaventure was born Giovanni di Fidanza in Bagnoregio, Italy, around the year 1217. He entered the Franciscan order and was later sent to Paris to complete his education. In Paris he became friends with Thomas Aquinas, one of the great philosophers in the Christian tradition. Bonaventure taught in Paris from 1248 to 1257, when he was elected minister general of the Franciscan Order. He held this position for sixteen years, during which time he wrote his major works, including *Life of Francis*, a biography of St. Francis of Assisi, and *The Soul's Journey into God*. Bonaventure was made a cardinal in 1273; he died the following year, on July 15, while attending the Second Council of Lyons. He was canonized in 1482 and declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Sixtus V in 1587.

### Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510)

Catherine of Genoa was born in 1447 to an aristocratic family. She had a melancholy temperament, which was made more pronounced by an unhappy marriage. A powerful spiritual experience in 1473 transformed her life, and after a period of penance and prayer she began to work among the city's sick and poor. In 1477, she founded the first hospital in Genoa and was its director from 1490 to 1496. It was during this period, in the summer of 1493, that an outbreak of the plague killed nearly four out of five of those who remained in the city. Catherine herself contracted the disease but recovered. Catherine attracted many followers, and between 1499 and



*Catherine of Siena receives crown of thorns from Christ* *(Hulton Archive / Getty Images)*

1507, she discussed her spiritual experiences with them, including the times in which she had experienced union with God. Catherine died on September 15, 1510, and was canonized by Pope Clement XII in 1733.

### Catherine of Siena (1347–1380)

Catherine of Siena was born in Siena on March 25, 1347, the twenty-fourth child in a lower-class family. Even as a child she exhibited a longing for God, and she refused to marry. When she was about sixteen, she joined the Mantellate, a Dominican body that worked with the poor and the sick. In spite of her lack of formal education, Catherine also became known as a teacher. During her lifetime she attracted a large following, and she also founded a convent. Catherine was active in politics, acting as ambassador between the Papacy and the city-state of Florence. Throughout her life she had unusual spiritual

experiences, including visions and ecstasies. In 1368, she experienced a "mystical marriage" to Christ, after which she felt totally given to Christ. She also received the stigmata (the marks of the wounds of Christ). All her life, Catherine practiced severe penance, and often she would eat very little. In 1380, she was unable to eat at all, which led to her death at the age of thirty-three on April 29 of that year, in Rome, Italy. In 1970, Pope Paul VI proclaimed her a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church.

### Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1327)

Meister Johann Eckhart, who is widely considered to be the greatest of all the German medieval mystics, was born in the village of Hochheim, near Gotha, Germany in 1260. His father was the steward of a knight's castle in the Thuringian forest. When Eckhart was about fifteen, he entered the Dominican monastery at Erfurt and remained there for at least nine years. He then studied in Cologne before becoming prior of Erfurt and vicar of Thuringia. In about 1300, he was sent to Paris to teach, where he presented the Dominican theological positions against their rivals, the Franciscans. In 1302, the prestigious Studium Generale in Paris conferred a Master's degree on him, and since then he has been known as Meister Eckhart. In 1303, he became Provincial of the Dominican order in Saxony, and four years later, Vicar of Bohemia. In 1313, Eckhart, now widely known and respected, lived in Strasbourg, where he preached and was prior of a convent. At some later time, not earlier than 1322, he was invited to take up a professorship at the Studium Generale in Cologne, an extremely high honor. But the Archbishop of Cologne harbored a dislike of all mysticism, and in 1327, he formally charged Eckhart with heresy. Eckhart denied the charges and made a vigorous defense. He is believed to have died the following year. In 1329, Pope John XXII condemned many aspects of Eckhart's teaching as heretical.

### Julian of Norwich (c. 1342–c. 1416)

There is little information about the life of Julian of Norwich, who was one of the most important figures in medieval English mysticism. She reveals something of herself in her *Revelations of Divine Love*. She reports that she was given her revelations in 1373, when she was thirty and a half, which would mean she was born in 1342. Since she is named as a beneficiary in a will dated 1416,

it appears that she was still living at that time as a recluse in Norwich, supported by the church of St. Julian and St. Edwards in Conisford. This church belonged to the Benedictine community. Julian's writings show her to be well read in many of the classic texts of Christian spirituality, and it is possible that she acquired her education by entering a religious order, although whether she was in fact a nun is not known.

### Margery Kempe (c. 1373–c. 1440)

Margery Kempe was born in King's Lynn, Norfolk, England, around 1373. Her father was a prominent civic authority—wool merchant, mayor, and member of Parliament at various times. She married John Kempe around 1393 and they had 14 children together. Immediately after the birth of her first child, Kempe became ill and had a vision of Jesus Christ. Inspired, Kempe recovered and tried to live a more reverent life but for years was tempted by many sins. Resolved to turn her life to God, she undertook a series of pilgrimages to holy sites around Europe and the Middle East. *The Book of Margery Kempe* details her travels and conversations with God over a forty-year period. During her lifetime, Kempe was charged and cleared several times for violating rules such as preaching in public, which was forbidden to women, and wearing white, which was forbidden to married women. Kempe is last heard of in the historical record in 1438 and died sometime after this date.

### Richard Rolle (c. 1300–1349)

Richard Rolle, who was born around 1300 in the Yorkshire region of England, has been called the father of English mysticism. Rolle was a prolific author in both English and Latin and was widely read and admired in his day. He was born at Thornton Dale, near Pickering, in Yorkshire. He studied at Oxford but appears to have abandoned his studies, since he did not receive a degree. Rolle then withdrew from the world and devoted himself to a contemplative life. He had a number of unusual psychic and spiritual experiences, feeling heat in his chest and hearing heavenly music. Some of his acquaintances thought him mad. He described these experiences in *Incendium Amoris* (c. 1340, trans. *The Fire of Love*). Rolle's works are characterized by a love of Christ and especially the power of the divine name Jesus. He emphasized love and a religion of the heart. Rolle died in 1349 at Hampole, near

Doncaster. Legend has it that he died after tending to victims of the Black Death.

## John Ruusbroec (1293–1381)

John Ruusbroec was born in 1293, in the village of Ruusbroec, near Brussels. He became a priest in 1317, when he was twenty-four. For the next twenty-six years he served as chaplain to the church of St. Gudule in Brussels. During this time he wrote treaties opposing the heretical teachings of a woman named Bloemardinne. In 1343, he retired to Groenendael in the forest a few miles from the city with two companions to lead a more solitary life. The small group acquired a few more members and became, with the blessings of the local bishop, an official religious community—canons regular of St. Augustine. Ruusbroec spent the remaining years of his life at Groenendael, where he wrote the most influential of his mystical works. He died December 2, 1381.

## Henry Suso (1295–1366)

Henry Suso, who with Eckhart and Tauler was one of the three great figures in German medieval mysticism, was born on March 21, 1295, to a noble family. When he was thirteen his parents sent him to the Dominican friary in the town of Constance. After being a member of the Dominican order for five years, he underwent a conversion experience that became the basis for his later life. In 1322 or 1323, he was sent to pursue advanced studies in the Dominican house at Cologne, an honor given to only a few. There he expanded his knowledge of theology and scripture, and his teacher for some of this period was probably Meister Eckhart. Suso remained in Cologne until 1326 or 1327, when he returned to the friary at Constance as a director of studies for the students in the order. Around 1330, Suso was summoned to Maastricht to defend himself against charges of heresy, and he was dismissed from his position at the friary. But he must have emerged unscathed from the accusations, since later he was appointed prior or superior of the house at Constance. He also preached in the countryside and supervised the spiritual studies of Dominican nuns. In about 1348, Suso was transferred to the Dominican house in Ulm, where he lived for the rest of his life. During this time, he edited his works for publication, collecting them under the title *Exemplar*. Suso died in Ulm on January 25, 1366.

## Johannes Tauler (c. 1300–1361)

Johannes Tauler was born around 1300 to a well-to-do family in Strasbourg. He began training in the Dominican Order in 1314, and became a preacher and director. In 1339, he moved to Basle because that city sided with Pope John XXII in his dispute with Louis of Bavaria, whereas Strasbourg was loyal to Louis. Tauler remained in Basle for four or five years, where his influence in the spiritual movement known as the Friends of God increased. Tauler was a disciple of Eckhart and a friend of Suso. Tauler became widely known in the vicinity for his preaching, and his teaching has survived in modern times in the form of sermons. He died in 1361, in the monastery of Saint Nicholas in Undis, during an outbreak of the plague.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The Book of Margery Kempe

*The Book of Margery Kempe* was composed in the fifteenth century by an English woman who went on a series of pilgrimages following a sickbed vision of Jesus Christ. Kempe traveled to holy sites in Jerusalem, Rome, Norway, and Santiago de Compostela, an autonomous community in northwest Spain. She also toured England to visit the religious dignitaries of her era, including Julian of Norwich and Henry Chichele, the Archbishop of Canterbury. She probably could not read; her book was composed by scribes to whom she dictated the text. *The Book of Margery Kempe* is controversial because Kempe was a middle-class married woman and not a member of a religious order like her revered contemporary female mystic, Julian of Norwich may have been. To this day, some do not consider Kempe's visions to be inspired by the Holy Spirit but, rather, the hallucinations of a mad woman. Her book was not discovered until 1934 and likely only survives because it was not available for destruction during England's Reformation in the early sixteenth century.

### The Cloud of Unknowing

*The Cloud of Unknowing* is an anonymous devotional book written in England, probably in the East Midlands, in the latter part of the fourteenth century. It is one of the classics of the English mystical tradition. The author appears to have been a male priest, but nothing more is
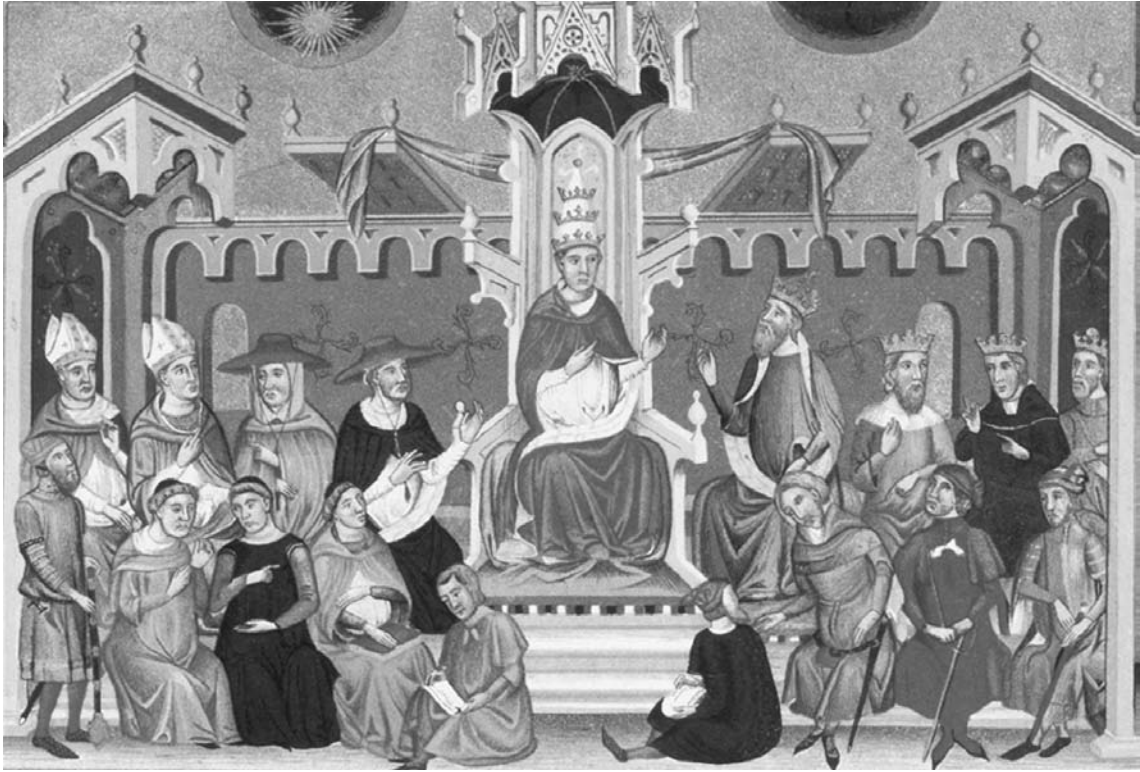
*Fourteenth-century manuscript illumination* (© Historical Picture Archive / Corbis)

known of him. In seventy-five short chapters, the author offers guidance to the spiritual seeker in his quest to know God. He points out that God is calling the disciple to a higher spiritual life. This is an act of grace on the part of God, and the seeker must respond with a desire for God. He must empty his mind of all thoughts and images in order to penetrate the "cloud of unknowing" that stands between him and God. Thoughts must be pushed away in a "cloud of forgetting." Then the love of God may pierce the cloud. Although the process may be difficult, the seeker eventually loses all awareness of himself, and his soul becomes united with God.

## The Exemplar

*The Exemplar* is the title given by Suso to the collection of his own works that he prepared for publication around the mid-fourteenth century. It includes an autobiography, *The Life of a Servant*, which for the modern reader is the most accessible of Suso's works. Suso describes the severe bodily penance he imposed on himself as well as the visions and mystical experiences that came to him on his spiritual journey. *The*

*Exemplar* contains three other works. *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was written to rekindle the love for God in those who wish for it, through the examples of Christ's sufferings and the sorrows of the Virgin. *Little Book of Truth* is about how to live a detached life and touches on many of the most important themes in German mysticism: spiritual freedom, the nature of true discernment, and of union with God. *Little Book of Letters* consists of letters of instruction for practical life and worship sent by Suso to women under his spiritual direction.

## The Fire of Love

*The Fire of Love* is a translation of a Latin work, *Incendium Amoris*, written by English mystic Richard Rolle in about 1340. Rolle's devotional text was inspired by the mystical experience he describes in the prologue and chapter fifteen. Sitting in a chapel one day, he felt his own heart burning with heat and heard heavenly music. The experience became the basis of Rolle's poetic exposition of a life lived in what he called the fire of everlasting love. He explains that divine illumination has three aspects: *fervor*

(heat), *dulce* (sweetness), and *canor* (song). The heat in the heart he associates with the burning of divine love. Sweetness refers to the peace and joy that results when the heart burns in love and the presence of the divine beloved is felt. By song, Rolle seems to mean the harmony experienced in the individual mind when all its powers are wedded to God; every thought becomes like a melodious song. These three modes of functioning (heat, sweetness, and song) represent the highest perfection of the Christian religion, although Rolle continually warns that they are not easily attained.

## Meister Eckhart's Sermons

Eckhart's sermons, especially those that he preached and wrote in Middle High German rather than in Latin, provide a representative view of his most important thoughts. Of the German sermons that survive, scholars consider about one hundred authentic, and about fifty more probably so. Eckhart's sermons focus on a few central themes, such as detachment or self-abandonment, the birth of Christ in the soul, the divine spark of the soul, the abyss of divine being, and the Godhead beyond even the Trinity. Eckhart's philosophy was based on mystical experience of the highest order, and his sermons and treatises were extremely controversial. In part this was because he had a gift for expressing himself in a striking way, using puns, word play, and paradox in the hope that his listeners would be startled into new understanding. In some respects also, the sermons express views that are on the margins of orthodoxy; Eckhart's teaching about the birth of Christ in the soul, for example, was condemned as being suspect of heresy.

## Revelations of Divine Love

*Revelations of Divine Love* was written in the latter part of the fourteenth century by Julian of Norwich and is the first book published in English and written by a woman. It is organized around sixteen revelations, or "showings," as Julian called them, which she received from God. All but the last came during one five-hour period from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. on May 8, 1373, when she was extremely ill and believed herself to be dying. The illness and the revelations came as an answer to an earlier threefold prayer, in which she had asked to more fully understand the passion of Christ, to suffer physically, and to be given three "wounds": contrition, compassion, and longing for God. The first twelve revelations are based on the crucifixion and suffering of Christ, which was a demonstration of God's love that redeemed mankind. The thirteenth revelation deals with the problem of sin, which will, Julian says, be turned into a blessing by Christ. The fourteenth revelation discusses the nature and purpose of prayer, and the fifteenth, the bliss of heaven. The final revelation (which was given to her that same night) acts as conclusion and confirmation of the others.

## The Soul's Journey into God

*The Soul's Journey into God* is a seven-chapter treatise by Bonaventure. The first six describe the steps toward the soul's union with God. In the first two steps, the soul looks outside of itself to God's creation and the world of the senses. In steps three and four, the mind turns within and contemplates God through the use of its faculties of memory, understanding, and will, and is purified through the traditional virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In the last two stages, the mind rises above itself to consider first the essential attributes of God, and then the Trinity through its name, the Good. The last chapter describes the final goal, a mystical ecstasy in which the soul is entirely absorbed by God. In this chapter, Bonaventure is deeply indebted to a treatise by the sixth-century mystic Dionysius the Areopagite, who described the ultimate reality as a divine darkness, beyond all names, that can only be known by stripping away all concepts and all forms.

## The Spiritual Dialogue

*The Spiritual Dialogue* was composed by friends of Catherine of Genoa to represent Catherine's teachings and her inner life. It had been written by about 1522, twelve years after Catherine's death. *The Spiritual Dialogue* is a spiritual autobiography cast in the form of a miracle play, in which different aspects of being conduct a dialogue as they go on their journey through earthly life. The main actors are Soul and Body. Body is joined by Self-Love and Human Frailty; Soul is supported by Spirit. The great enemy of the Soul is Self-Love, which is contrasted with the pure love that flows from God, which alone can lift the Soul from the murky waters of the material world in which it has become mired. When she has been granted a vision of the pure love of God, Catherine is sent more tests. She is sent to minister to the sick, where all traces of Self-Love and Human Frailty are burned out of her. The last part of the *Dialogue* drops the allegorical figures and describes Catherine's final illness and death.

## The Spiritual Espousals

*The Spiritual Espousals* is usually regarded as Ruusbroec's masterpiece, and it was widely known and read in his lifetime. Each of the three sections of *The Spiritual Espousals* (published c. 1335) is organized around the parable of the virgins in Matthew's gospel, in particular the passage, "See, the bridegroom is coming. Go out to meet him." The virgin is the individual soul, which must go out and meet the bridegroom (Christ), and Ruusbroec explains in each section the process by which this may take place. The first section, the active life, is intended for beginners; the second section describes the interior life, which is cultivated through virtue and the grace of God; the third section explains the nature of the "superessential" contemplative life, which few are able to obtain. This highest state of being, in which the individual is made one with God, cannot be gained by any learning or spiritual exercises but only by the abandonment of all forms and attributes of material life.

## Theologia Germanica

The *Theologia Germanica* is an anonymous devotional text written in southern Germany around 1350 by a man from Frankfurt. The author was a member of the Friends of God movement in which Suso and Tauler were prominent. Strongly influenced by Eckhart and Tauler, the *Theologia Germanica* focuses on the difference between self-will and God's will. Self-will is the prime obstacle to the spiritual life and must be overcome. Self-will belongs to the natural man, but the spiritual man possesses no will other than the will of God. Everything about the natural man must be transcended, including the activity of the senses, in order to know God. Like many mystics, the author of the *Theologia Germanica* emphasizes the eternal Christ within, rather than the historical Jesus. The *Theologia Germanica* was greatly admired by Martin Luther, who first discovered it and published it in 1516.

## THEMES

### *Awakening*

Many medieval mystics describe a dramatic personal experience in which they are first awakened to the full reality of the divine life. Once the experience has occurred, the mystic is never the

### TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- What relevance do the fourteenth-century mystics have in the early 2000s? Are they remote, inaccessible, and incomprehensible, or do they offer something of value? If the second, then what is of value and for whom? For everyone or just a select few? Does one have to be a Christian to appreciate them? Could one be a mystic without even believing in God? How would a modern psychologist explain the phenomenon of mystical experience?

- Research the poetry and prose of the seventeenth-century poet Thomas Traherne. Might Traherne be called a mystic? What elements in his poetry are mystical? What does he have in common with the medieval mystics that you have read and how does he differ from them? (You may apply the same questions to another poet or prose writer with whom you are familiar.)

- What were the underlying assumptions that the medieval mystics made about existence? What did they believe about human nature, sin, and God, for example? In other words, what was their world view—the set of beliefs and assumptions that shaped their response to life? How does their world view differ from the world view underlying a literary movement such as Romanticism, or Absurdism, or any other literary movement with which you are familiar?

same again. He or she has been allowed to experience, as a matter of direct cognition rather than intellectual speculation, the ultimate reality of life, its spiritual essence. After this experience, the mystic can never go back to the old way of understanding, and the mystic may also find that the direction and purpose of his or her life is dramatically altered.

Sometimes the experience of awakening comes spontaneously and unsought; at other times it represents a deepening of a religious life

already chosen. An example of the first category is Catherine of Genoa, who had no interest in the religious life until the age of twenty-six. At that time, as it is recorded in her biography, written by one of her followers:

> Her heart was pierced by so sudden and immense a love of God, accompanied by so deep a sight of her miseries and sins and of His Goodness, that she was near falling to the ground; and in a transport of pure and all-purifying love she was drawn away from the miseries of the world.

As a result of this experience and others that followed in the ensuing days, Catherine embarked on her life of contemplation and service.

By contrast, Henry Suso had already entered the Dominican Order when he had his dramatic awakening. The experience happened when, as he puts it, he was still a beginner. One early afternoon after the midday meal, he was alone in the chapel. He was feeling sad and oppressed by suffering, when suddenly "his soul was caught up," and he experienced something that he later, writing of himself in the third person, struggles to describe:

> It was without form or definite manner of being, yet it contained within itself the joyous, delightful wealth of all forms and manners. . . . He did nothing but stare into the bright effulgence, which made him forget himself and all else. Was it day or night? He did not know. It was a bursting forth of the delight of eternal life, present to his awareness, motionless calm.

The experience lasted for perhaps an hour. When Suso came to himself again, he felt as if he were coming back from a different world, and as he reflected on the experience it seemed as if he were floating in air. He knew intuitively that he could never forget what he had just known.

Descriptions of awakenings can be found also in Julian's *Revelations*, which is the record of one long experience of seeing into the divine essence and the divine plan. Rolle's *The Fire of Love* is another example, in which Rolle experienced, like Suso, a profound illumination while sitting one day in a chapel.

### Purification and Penance

Having had a taste of the divine essence, the medieval Christian mystics undertook spiritual exercises involving purification and penance. The purposes of these practices were to make the mystics worthy vessels for further revelation of the divine, and to enable them to be of greater service to God. Some of the penance was through prayer, study of scripture, or solitude, in which the mystic turned away from the things of the world. The mystic also cultivated the traditional virtues of the religious life such as humility, obedience, and poverty. Sometimes penance involved bodily deprivation or self-inflicted physical pain. Some mystics took this to extreme lengths. Catherine of Siena regularly flagellated herself with an iron chain and fasted to the point where she was unable to eat. (She died of starvation.) Suso described in his autobiography how he would wear an undergarment to which were fastened a hundred and fifty pointed nails. He would tighten the garment until the nails pressed into his flesh. He also fastened to his back a wooden cross into which he had hammered thirty nails, and he wore this cross for eight years to praise the crucified Christ. This was by no means the most severe punishment that Suso inflicted on himself, and eventually, so Suso believed, God told him to cease such practices.

The mystics' desire to endure bodily deprivation or practice self-torture was explained in two ways. First, it showed identification with the sufferings of Christ. Second, it rested on the dualism in Christian theology between body and soul, flesh and spirit. The body, as the site of sin and self-will, must be purged and made subservient to the higher faculties of soul.

However, not all mystics embraced this form of bodily penance, and even Suso later advised his students to take a more moderate course. Eckhart, in his "Talks of Instruction," wrote that "true penitence" required none of those things. The most effective penitence was simply a turning around of the will so that all the energies of the self were directed toward God.

### Visions

Many of the medieval mystics were subject to visions. The entire revelations of Julian of Norwich, for example, were based on a series of visions of divine love. Catherine of Genoa also experienced visions frequently, as recorded in the *Spiritual Dialogue*. She saw angels and laughed with them; she saw Christ crucified, with his body covered from head to foot with blood; she had visions of love, of joy, and of sin. Ill and dying, she had a vision of a ladder of flame (representing divine love) that drew her upwards, to her great joy. That vision lasted for four hours.

Suso also had visions through which he acquired a sense of what heaven, hell, and purgatory are like. He also claimed that the souls of deceased people appeared to him and told him about their situation in the afterlife. These included Suso's father and even Meister Eckhart.

Other mystics, such as Eckhart, Tauler, Ruusbroec, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, hardly mention visions. In fact, *The Cloud of Unknowing* is openly suspicious of them. The author states that the spiritual seeker will never have an unclouded vision of God in this life. He is also wary of the power of imagination to conjure images that have nothing to do with the divine, and he even pokes fun at the foolishness of some young disciples who gaze upward and form mental pictures of what heaven is like.

### The Dark Night of the Soul

After a period of living in awareness of the presence of God, it is common for medieval mystics to experience a time of spiritual aridity and personal adversity. It is as if they have been abandoned by God. The phrase "dark night of the soul" was coined by St. John of the Cross, a later mystic, but the same idea had been expressed many times before. Tauler, for example, refers to it as "spiritual poverty" and states that it is the second of three stages in the mystical life. And Suso tells a vivid story in chapter twenty-two in his autobiography of how he was overwhelmed with sickness and with attacks on his teachings by religious authorities. He complained bitterly to God about his situation.

Ruusbroec wrote of the dark night of the soul in Book Two, parts two and three of *The Spiritual Espousals*. In such a situation, the disciple feels abandoned, poor, wretched, and forsaken. He asks, Where has all the joy gone? He may lose friends, family, and earthly goods. Ruusbroec writes as if this feeling of abandonment is to be expected at some point. It is simply the path that spiritual progress follows. If the person has the right attitude, the dark night can be an opportunity for spiritual growth. All that is necessary is for the person to abandon himself to the will of God. This sentiment is echoed by Tauler: The state of "spiritual poverty" is the prelude to an even deeper and richer awakening.

### Contemplation

Contemplation is a broad term that encompasses the various stages of the process by which the mystic grows closer to union with God. Contemplation involves an ingathering of the mystic's faculties, so that the mind and the senses are turned away from the external world. In the process often called recollection or quiet, the mystic experiences a state of silence within; the surface activity of the mind is stilled. In order to achieve this, *The Cloud of Unknowing* advises the repetition of a simple, one-syllable word in prayer, such as Love, or God, which will lead the mind to quietness. In the state of quietness, the *Cloud* states, there is a paradox. The individual mind is "nothing" and "nowhere," and yet that empty state of consciousness is also "all" and "everywhere," because it partakes of the boundless divine nature.

Eckhart and his disciple Tauler spoke frequently of this "emptying" process, whereby the individual mind passes beyond itself to the "ground of the soul." Tauler, for example, said in Sermon 1, "If you go out of yourself, you may be certain that God will enter and fill you wholly: the greater the void, the greater the divine influx."

The goal of contemplation, attainable only through the grace of God, is the state of mystical union between the soul and God, sometimes called spiritual marriage, or deification. As Tauler puts it, "[God] raises [man] from a human to a divine mode of being, from sorrow into a divine peace, in which man becomes so divinized that everything which he is and does, God is and does in him."

## STYLE

### Paradox

The mystical experience is inherently paradoxical. A paradox is a statement that appears to be contradictory but which may also be true. Tauler, for example, writes of the Trinity as an "imageless image." Perhaps the most common paradox in mysticism describes the coexistence of rest and motion, or stillness and activity. The paradox describes the nature of the divine reality, which is at rest within itself but also actively contemplates itself and ceaselessly flows out from itself into the world. The person who is in union with the divine partakes of this paradoxical divine nature. Eckhart, Ruusbroec, and Tauler give the clearest descriptions of the paradox, even as they state that words cannot really capture it. As Ruusbroec puts it:

Every lover [of God] is one with God in rest and is like God in the works of love, for God in his sublime nature, of which we bear a likeness, subsists blissfully in eternal rest in accordance with the essential Unity of his being and also subsists actively in eternal activity in accordance with the Trinity. Each of these is the perfection of the other, for rest abides in the Unity and activity abides in the Trinity, and the two remain thus for all eternity.

Similarly, Tauler writes of the ground of the soul that God Himself inhabits:

For it is an unfathomable abyss, poised in itself, unplumbed, ebbing and flowing like the sea. As one is immersed in it, it seems still and void; yet in an instant it wells up as if it would engulf all things.

There are other paradoxes in mystical theology, many of them echoing the statement of Christ in the New Testament that "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39, Revised Standard Edition). The mystics interpreted this saying in terms of the need to transcend in contemplation all activity of the senses and of the individual mind. By "emptying" themselves in this way, they would allow the fullness of the divine to take possession of them. By making themselves poor (to the external world of the senses), they would become rich (in God); by renouncing everything, they would gain everything. As Eckhart puts it, again paradoxically, "those who are equal to nothing, they alone are equal to God." A similar paradox underlies the entire *Cloud of Unknowing*: since God is beyond thought, he cannot be grasped by the mind, therefore the way to "knowing" is by "unknowing."

Related to the device of paradox is the oxymoron, in which two contradictory terms are yoked together. Eckhart refers to the "splendent darkness" of the Godhead (splendent means shining). Bonaventure uses the same phrase; he and Eckhart are both quoting Dionysius the Areopagite, the sixth century writer of *The Mystical Theology* who exerted a powerful influence on medieval mysticism.

Oxymora are also used or implied in reference to the life of the person who has fully submitted to God's will. In such cases, joy and sorrow become of equal value because they are both expressions of God's will. It is this that enables Eckhart to say of the enlightened man, "all pain is a joy to him"; and Suso to declare

that his "severe sufferings . . . were like the sweet dew of springtime." It is only a short linguistic hop from these expressions to an oxymoronic "joyful pain" and "sweet sufferings."

### *Figurative Language*

It is commonplace in mystical writing that the experience of union with God is ineffable. Because it cannot be described in words, mystics frequently resort to figurative language, particularly simile and metaphor. Ruusbroec, for example, uses an elaborate simile that compares the coming of God into the life of the believer to the passage of the sun across the heavens from the period in late spring to early autumn, as it passes through the zodiacal signs of Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, and Libra. Ruusbroec also makes use of a number of extended similes intended for instructional purposes. The seeker, when Christ's light shines on him, should be like the bee that works for the good of its colony; at certain other times, he should follow the example of the ant.

Many of the similes and metaphors used by the mystics have their origins in the Bible—Christ as the shepherd or bridegroom, for example. Catherine of Siena, who in general is quite conventional in this regard, appears to have invented her own extended metaphor of Christ as a bridge. She writes in *The Dialogue* that this bridge stretches from heaven to earth and has three stairs, which correspond to three spiritual stages and to three parts of Christ's body. The first stair is the feet, which symbolize the qualities of the individual mind; the second, the heart, which is love; the third, the mouth, which symbolizes peace.

God as light and God as fire are also biblical images used frequently by the mystics, but their usage presents questions of interpretation. In some cases, the phrase "God is light" or similar is used in a figurative sense, but in other cases a literal light seems to be implied. The mystic describes what he sees and experiences. It is not always possible to tell the difference between these two usages, but when Eckhart writes of the "uncreated light" that exists in the ground of the soul, and Ruusbroec of the "incomprehensible light" that shines in the "simple being of [a person's] spirit," they are likely referring to a direct cognition and not speaking metaphorically.

The same problem occurs with the metaphor of God as a fire. When Rolle used the phrase the "fire of love," he intended a literal as well as a

metaphorical meaning. He insisted that he felt a real, physical warmth, or heat, around his heart, and this formed the basis for his entire metaphysics of fire or heat as one of the modes by which the divine can be experienced. Other English mystics were not so ready to accept this literal meaning of divine fire. For Walter Hilton, a fourteenth-century English mystic who wrote *The Scale of Perfection*, the phrase "God is fire" is a metaphor, meaning simply that God is "love and charity."

## Allegory

An allegory is a narrative that has two levels of meaning. One is literal, in which the characters act out their story; the other allegorical, in which the characters and actions symbolize something else—a set of concepts or ideas, for example. In general, the medieval mystics did not write much extended allegory, although they would frequently expound on the parables of Jesus. (A parable is a kind of short allegory.) However, Julian of Norwich does include in chapter fifty-one of her *Revelations of Divine Love* a long allegory about a lord and his servant. She supplies to the story her own double-level allegorical interpretation, in which the lord is God in his totality and also God the Father, and the servant is both Everyman and God's son.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

Christian mysticism is often divided into the two categories of *via negativa* (also known as apophatic theology) and *via affirmativa* (also known as kataphatic theology). The first emphasizes that God is not to be found in any image, name, or attribute, because these would be a limitation on him. On the one hand, the God of the *via negativa* is utterly beyond all concepts and all language, existing in an infinite darkness and eternal silence. In order to know him, the seeker must cast off everything that pertains to the individual self and lose himself in this infinity beyond being. The *via affirmativa*, on the other hand, affirms that words and images can convey something of the divine essence. God can be spoken of and known through contemplation of his attributes, such as goodness, love, wisdom, and power; through emulation of his son Christ; and through the revelations of scriptures.

Many mystics combine aspects of both approaches, and the categories should not be too rigidly applied. For example, in *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure describes the first six stages on the path in terms of the *via affirmativa*. Only in the last stage does he switch to the language of the *via negativa*.

Of the medieval mystics, Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, the *Theologia Germanica*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and Ruusbroec embrace to a greater or lesser degree the *via negativa*. But there are differences between them. The most towering figure in this respect is Eckhart. In almost all of his German sermons he repeats his central idea of the "simple ground," the "quiet desert" which is beyond form or image, beyond even the Trinity, and that there is an uncreated "spark of the soul" that belongs to this divine ground. Tauler echoes this with his concept of the "ground of the soul." The difference between Eckhart and his two pupils is that Tauler and Suso do not have Eckhart's intellectual power or his gift for exploring abstract subtleties, but they make up for that in their ability to translate Eckhartian concepts into practical spiritual advice.

The differences between Ruusbroec and Eckhart are more marked. Although Ruusbroec's mysticism contains all the Eckhartian (and Dionysian) elements of negation and stillness in the ineffable "essential bareness" of the divine being, he is often also referred to as a "Trinitarian" mystic. According to Louis Dupré, in the preface to *The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, Ruusbroec's God is always dynamic, never at rest: "Ruusbroec overcame the ultimate negation by refusing to posit a unity beyond the Trinity, as Eckhart had done." Moreover, some scholars claim that when Ruusbroec wrote treatises late in his life attacking the notion that the individual could in the fullest sense become God, he may have had Eckhart or one of Eckhart's disciples in mind. It seems likely that at the very least, Ruusbroec had concerns about this aspect of Eckhart's teachings, since during Ruusbroec's lifetime his disciple John van Leeuwen wrote a treatise that directly attacked Eckhart.

Of the other major mystics of the period, Julian of Norwich, Rolle, Catherine of Siena, and Catherine of Genoa belong more to the *via affirmativa*. Julian's entire *Revelations of Divine Love* consists of her meditations on her visions of Christ. The idea of her anonymous fellow English mystic (that God can be found only in a

cloud of unknowing) would have been alien to her way of thinking. Her work is full of images and metaphors designed to lead the reader to a fuller understanding of the love of God. Mystics of this type often tend to be Christ-centered and to emphasize in particular (as Julian does) the passion of Christ. This is not something to be found in the pages of Eckhart. Nor could one imagine a mystic of Eckhart's type receiving the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ, as did Catherine of Siena as a result of her intense meditations upon Christ's sufferings.

Rolle too is Christ-centered and places great value on the name of Jesus. His central concern is to reveal God as love. Although Rolle was himself a recluse, this type of Christ-centered mysticism often emphasizes the importance of the active life. It does not rest ultimately in quiet contemplation. Catherine of Siena's mysticism, for example, has been called "missionary"; as Ray Petry puts it, "For her the love of Christ and neighbor is inseparable from the love of God." The same might be said of Catherine of Genoa. Both these saints distinguished themselves for their active work in ministering to the poor and the sick.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### The Black Death

The fourteenth century in Europe was an extremely turbulent age for all levels of society. To begin with, there were more than the usual number of natural disasters. Famine, flood, and earthquakes caused misery and death for thousands, and the outbreak of the plague (Black Death) in 1348 was the most devastating public health crisis humanity has known. It began in Sicily in October 1347 and reached France in January 1348; it continued to ravage Paris until 1349. It reached England in August 1348, where it continued until early 1350. There were recurrences in 1360 and 1369. No one knows for certain what the death toll was, but it could have been one-fourth or even one-third of the entire population of Europe, which would have been about twenty million deaths. Paris lost half its population; London, one-third; Siena and Venice, two-thirds. (Catherine of Siena grew up during the period of the Black Death, and when there was another outbreak in 1374, she cared

for some of the victims, as did Tauler when the plague hit Strasbourg.)

The devastation caused by the Black Death was so severe that many people thought the end of the world was coming. It also had social and economic consequences, leading to inflation and a shortage of labor. The resulting social disruption produced peasant rebellions in France in 1358 and England in 1381, where peasants for a time captured London. These rebellions were suppressed with great brutality. In France, over thirty thousand died.

The Black Death also produced changes in the way people behaved. Many people considered the disease to be God's punishment for sin, and some took to practicing extreme forms of penance. One example of this was the Order of the Flagellants, who marched through towns beating themselves with whips. Other people sought a scapegoat and blamed the Jews for the Black Death, claiming that the Jews had poisoned the wells. There were many massacres in which hundreds of Jews were killed.

### The Church

The fourteenth century was a period of turmoil in the Catholic Church. Faced with political instability in Italy, the pope moved to Avignon, France, in 1309. This diminished the Church's authority, since Rome had been the traditional place where the pope reigned, and a pope in France was considered to be the tool of the French king.

During the Avignon period (which is known as the Babylonian captivity and lasted until 1377), the papacy also lost much respect because of its luxury and extravagance and the way it centralized the administration of the Church. High papal income taxes were imposed on the clergy, who passed them on to local parish priests and laity. There was also widespread corruption, with religious offices open to the highest bidder and preferments of all kinds available in exchange for money. Many clergy neglected their religious duties, being more concerned with wealth and property. Catherine of Siena, as well as another mystic, Birgitta (1303–1373), were two of many voices bemoaning the decadence of the Church. Catherine had direct audiences with the pope in Avignon, urging him to return to Rome and initiate church reform.

This period of the papacy also includes the Great Schism, which began in 1378 and lasted

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **Fourteenth Century:** The fourteenth century is an age of faith. Although there is dissatisfaction with the worldliness of the Church, few people in Christendom doubt the essential truths of the Christian religion. They believe that Christ offers salvation to all who believe, and that heaven, hell, or purgatory await the soul after death.

  **Today:** Although many thousands of evangelical Protestant Christians still believe in the literal truth of the Bible, and Catholics still accept the authority of the pope and of Catholic doctrine, the modern Western world is predominantly secular. Christianity is no longer the common language of Western civilization. People identify more with political ideas such as freedom, democracy, and equality of opportunity than with theological concepts. In the United States, because of the separation of church and state, religion is more a private than a public matter.

- **Fourteenth Century:** Before the development of the technology of printing, important manuscripts are copied and circulated by hand. For example, hundreds of copies are made of Rolle's *The Fire of Love*.

  **Today:** Anyone wishing to read Rolle's *The Fire of Love* simply has to access the Internet by computer. The electronic publication of texts revolutionizes the dissemination of knowledge as completely as the first printing press did.

- **Fourteenth Century:** The Black Death rages unchecked and kills perhaps twenty million people from Iceland to India. The disease is borne by rats and fleas, but this is not known at the time so no prevention is possible.

  **Today:** The plague of AIDS reaches public attention in the 1980s, and, although in the early 2000s diminishing in the United States and Europe, it is spreading rapidly in other parts of the world. In 2000, there are three million deaths worldwide from AIDS. Most of the deaths occur in developing countries, which cannot afford the expensive new drug treatments that are prolonging the lives of AIDS sufferers in the West. The total number of deaths from AIDS is estimated to be 21.8 million.

thirty years. During the schism there were two rival popes, one elected in Avignon (by the French cardinals) and the other in Rome. Each man claimed to be the leader of the Church.

## *Heresies*

With resentment growing against the Church, the time was ripe for heretical ideas to flourish. In late-fourteenth-century England, John Wyclif, an Oxford theologian and preacher, attacked the abuses of the Church and denied the authority of the pope. He claimed that priests were not necessary for salvation, denied the validity of the doctrine of transubstantiation, and encouraged the translation of the Bible into English. For Wyclif, following scripture was more important than accepting the received doctrines of the Church. Wyclif accumulated many followers in England, who were known as Lollards.

On the European continent, a movement known as the Spiritual Franciscans sprang up, who protested against the wealth that the Franciscan order had accumulated. They said that since Christ lived without possessions, that was the only true Christian life. In 1315, the Church denounced the Spiritual Franciscan movement as a pernicious heresy. In Marseille in 1318, some Spiritual Franciscans were tried by the Inquisition and burned at the stake.

One of the most persistent heresies was that of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, which began in the thirteenth century and spread across vast

areas of Europe. The most important surviving text of the movement is *A Mirror for Simple Souls*, written around the beginning of the fourteenth century by Marguerite Porete, who was burned as a heretic in 1310.

Adherents of the Free Spirit believed in a mystical doctrine far more extreme than that of orthodox mysticism. They claimed that they had been so transformed by their spiritual experiences that they had become permanently identical with God. Now made perfect, they were incapable of sin. This meant that in their view they were not bound by moral laws; they could simply do as they wished and take whatever they wanted (sexual liberties included) without being troubled by their consciences. Such beliefs involved a rejection of the need for the sacraments of the Church, and the Free Spirits saw no need to observe events in the Church calendar such as fast days and feasts, or to participate in confession or prayer.

The Brethren of the Free Spirit movement was condemned by the pope, and in the fourteenth century and beyond, the Church made extensive efforts to defeat the heresy. Some Free Spirits were burned at the stake. Many of the medieval mystics, including Ruusbroec, Tauler, and the author of the *Theologia Germanica* also tried to combat the movement. Ruusbroec in particular wrote treatises against it. He had firsthand knowledge of the Brethren of the Free Spirit because the movement flourished in the Low Countries during his lifetime, where in Brussels a woman named Bloemardinne had a large and devoted following.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The medieval Christian mystics have exerted a powerful influence on Christian spirituality, both Catholic and Protestant, that continues in the early 2000s. Perhaps the most interesting example is that of Eckhart. Seventeen propositions in Eckhart's teaching were condemned as heretical by Pope John XXII in 1329, but this did not destroy his influence. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, his writings continued to be copied and read in the Dominican and Carthusian Orders. He was known to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and his pupils Suso and Tauler continued to interpret his teachings in practical ways for the Christian life.

However, Eckhart's condemnation ensured that for several centuries his influence was far less than it might otherwise have been. In the early nineteenth century, interest in his writings was revived and scholarly German editions of his work were published. The twentieth century saw a remarkable flowering of interest in Eckhart. Part of this coincided with a growth of interest in Eastern mysticism, and Eckhart's philosophy has often been compared to Zen Buddhism. The influential Catholic monk Thomas Merton acknowledged his debt to Eckhart, as did psychologist Carl Jung. There is also a consensus amongst scholars today that Eckhart was unjustly convicted of heresy. It is believed that those who examined him were influenced by politics and also had a more shallow understanding of the roots of Christian spirituality than he did.

Eckhart's disciple Tauler has had a consistently favorable reputation. There appear to be only a couple of exceptions to this, when his works were banned in 1518 by the Jesuits and in 1590 by the Belgian Capuchins for advocating Quietism, the idea that the spiritual life consisted of passively resting in a state of mental quietness (a complete misreading of Tauler). But these attacks did not prevent Tauler from having a continuous influence during the Reformation, continuing into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The other fourteenth-century mystic who in the early 2000s occupies a place of honor only slightly less than Eckhart's is Ruusbroec. Like Eckhart's, Ruusbroec's writings concerning the union of the soul with God were daring, and he was aware that he might be in danger of being thought heretical. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, the last book of his, *The Spiritual Espousals*, was attacked by the theologian John Gerson, and this temporarily harmed Ruusbroec's reputation. But during the early years of the Reformation (beginning in the early sixteenth century) and Counter-Reformation (mid-sixteenth century), Latin translations of Ruusbroec's works were made, and these were intended to encourage people to remain in the Catholic fold. They had the effect of making Ruusbroec well known throughout the continent.

In modern times, Ruusbroec was championed by Evelyn Underhill in her authoritative book, *Mysticism* (1911). She regarded Ruusbroec as "one of the greatest mystics the world

*Procession of flagellants* (Imagno | Hulton Archive | Getty Images)

has yet known. In Ruysbroeck's [sic] works the metaphysical and personal aspects of mystical truth are fused and attain their highest expression."

William Ralph Inge, author of another influential study, *Christian Mysticism* (1899), grouped Ruusbroec with Suso, Tauler, and the *Theologia Germanica* as "the crowning achievement of Christian Mysticism before the Reformation."

In English mystical literature, *The Cloud of Unknowing* has always been held in high esteem. It was well known in medieval times since there were many manuscripts in circulation, and this was also true for Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* and many of the works of Rolle. *The Cloud of Unknowing* has held its reputation to the present day. Clifton Wolters, its most recent translator,

describes it as perhaps the greatest devotional classic of the English church: "No one who reads it can fail to catch something of its splendour and charm."

In medieval times, Julian of Norwich was not so well known as the other English mystics. Until the mid-seventeenth century, her *Revelations of Divine Love* had only limited circulation. Today her reputation is secure, and she has been called the most approachable of the medieval English mystics. Medieval historian Jean Leclercq, in the preface to the Colledge and Walsh edition, comments that "her writings are now considered to have universal and permanent value. As a woman, she represents the feminine teacher and feminine insight that are less rare in the Western Christian tradition than many of our contemporaries might think."

Petra Munro Hendry explores Julian of Norwich's rejection of gender duality in *Revelations of Divine Love*. Hendry stops short of the feminist argument, alleging that to do so oversimplifies Julian of Norwich's role within and reaction to the patriarchal religious institution of fourteenth-century England.

Julian has even had an influence on English literature. The lines, "All shall be well and / All manner of things shall be well," which bring T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* to an optimistic close, are taken from Julian's twenty-seventh chapter: "It is true that sin is the cause of all this pain, but all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well."

## CRITICISM

### *Bryan Aubrey*

*Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses different ways in which mystical experience has been defined and classified.*

When the modern reader approaches medieval mysticism for the first time, he or she may be more than a little bewildered by the language and patterns of thought of the period, and particularly by the mystical experiences themselves. These by definition are not everyday experiences and do not come under the category of things that can be explained solely by the rational intellect. Many questions arise: What is mystical experience? Is it an objective or a subjective phenomenon? How is it to be evaluated?

The problem is compounded by the fact that one cannot duplicate a mystical experience by reading someone else's account of it. At best one might receive a certain aesthetic pleasure from the act of reading and reflecting on the mystic's writings, but that is more like the pleasure that might accrue from reading, say, a novel or a poem; it is not the experience itself, which cannot be transmitted in this way.

And yet mystical experience, if what the mystics say about it is true, is surely a vitally important dimension of human knowledge. There is a well-known story about the great medieval scholastic theologian St. Thomas Aquinas. Toward the end of his life he was granted mystical experience, and he declared that all his learned tomes were but straw compared to what he had just been permitted to

## WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Thomas Merton (1915–1969) was one of the most influential religious writers of the twentieth century. His *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948) is his spiritual autobiography, describing his early doubts, his conversion to Catholicism, and his decision to become a Trappist monk.

- *The Tao of Physics* (1975), by Fritjof Capra, explores some of the striking parallels between modern theories of physics and the mystical traditions of the East.

- Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) was a shoemaker in Germany who had spontaneous experiences of divine illumination and became one of the greatest mystics in the Christian tradition. His *The Way to Christ*, originally written in 1622 and published by Paulist Press in 1978, presents the essence of his thought.

- *The Interior Castle* was written by Teresa of Avila in 1577 and published in the Classics of Western Spirituality series in 1988. The Spanish saint describes the mystical life in terms of seven interior mansions that make up the classic stages of purgation, illumination, and union on the mystical path.

- *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (1978), by Barbara Tuchman, is a best-selling history of the century in which almost all of the great medieval mystics lived. Tuchman sees those turbulent times as a mirror of the social and cultural upheavals of the twentieth century.

- *Thomas Traherne: Selected Poems and Prose* (1992) is a selection from one of the most mystical poets in English literature, who lived from 1637 to 1674. Traherne's poetry has been described as a nature mysticism that sees the glories of God in the external world.

experience directly. Similarly, a later mystic, the unlettered Protestant Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), said that he had learned more in his fifteen

minutes of mystical illumination in 1600 than he would have learned had he studied many years at a university.

Many writers have attempted to define and classify the different kinds of mystical experience. In a pioneering effort, philosopher William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, identified four characteristics of mystical experience. The first is ineffability: the experience cannot be expressed in words. One consequence of this is that it must be directly experienced, since it cannot be passed on to another person by use of language. The second characteristic is noetic quality, by which James means that it is a state of consciousness that communicates real knowledge of some kind—"insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect." In other words, it is not illusory. The third characteristic is transiency. The mystical experience cannot be sustained for more than a brief period, perhaps up to one hour or two at the most. The final characteristic is passivity, in which the mystic feels as if his own will is suspended, and he is held by a superior power.

A later philosopher, W. T. Stace, in *Mysticism and Philosophy*, sheds further light on James's first two characteristics. Stace classifies mystical experience into two types: introvertive and extrovertive mysticism. Introvertive mysticism corresponds to the end result of the *via negativa*; it is an experience of the oneness beyond all thought and activity of the individual mind. When the mind has turned inward, away from the senses, and transcended all the ephemeral manifestations of life, it arrives at the one eternal, unchanging, silent reality, without form or limit. This state of being is beyond language because language deals only with the differentiated world of subject and object. In the introvertive experience, consciousness remains, but it is not consciousness of anything—there is no

object of perception. It is, in a sense, the equivalent of the eye being able to see itself, an image that is used by Eckhart to convey his meaning (as translated by Blakney): "The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving."

Perhaps the best way to understand the introvertive mystical experience is by means of an analogy drawn from the modern world. Everyday perception is like seeing a succession of changing images projected on a blank screen, as with a movie. Normally, no one sees the blank screen on which all those images are projected. What the mystic does is free his mind of the images so that he experiences the blank screen, which is awareness itself, in all its simplicity—as it always is, was, and will be (although no such words of past and future can apply to it). Eckhart called this experience "isness," in the sense that it is beyond "myness." It is neither an objective nor a subjective experience; it is simply beyond such categories, and it is this that makes is so difficult for the rational mind to comprehend and for the mystic to describe. When the mystic does describe it, he is in effect capturing only his memory of it, since in the timeless moment in which it took place, "he" was not present, the individual self being wholly immersed in a state of undifferentiated unity, rest, and stillness.

If one had to identify a core mystical experience, common to all times and cultures, it would have to be, as Stace argues, the introvertive experience. The description of the experience of consciousness devoid of an object is consistently found in the spiritual writings of the East as well as the West. The *Mandukya Upanishad*, one of the oldest texts in the Hindu tradition, for example, says of reality:

> It is not outer awareness,
> It is not inner awareness,
> Nor is it a suspension of awareness.
> It is not knowing,
> It is not unknowing,
> Nor is it knowingness itself.
> It can neither be seen nor understood,
> It cannot be given boundaries.
> It is ineffable and beyond thought.
> It is indefinable.
> It is known only through becoming it.

It would be hard to find a clearer description of the *via negativa* than this, and there is nothing in this quotation that Eckhart would have

objected to. At this level of experience, differences between East and West tend to arise only when the mystic interprets his experience in the light of the doctrines of his own religious tradition. For the Hindu, the *Mundakya Upanishad* describes the essential Self that is identical by its very nature with Brahman, the universal consciousness.

The Christian mystic, on the other hand, is wary of how he describes this "unknowing" union of the soul with God. This is because in orthodox Christian doctrine, such "deification" is attained only through the grace of God, not by virtue of the intrinsic nature of the individual self, and the creature always retains its distinct identity even as it experiences its union with the divine. There is a certain tension between the theological position that mystics such as Eckhart and Ruusbroec felt the need to uphold and the introvertive experience itself, in which all distinctions of creature and creator, individual and universal, dissolve in the silent abyss of the divine ground.

Stace's second category, "extrovertive" mystical experience, occurs when the mystic perceives the underlying unity of all things in the multiplicity of the world of nature. This is often accompanied by a perception of glorification, in which everything is seen in the light of the divine. Evelyn Underhill, in her classic study *Mysticism*, described this as "the illuminated vision of the world." It is found in mystics such as Boehme and in mystically inclined poets such as Wordsworth, Blake, and Traherne. It is less common in the medieval mystics, who for the most part looked inward rather than outward.

But Eckhart, perhaps the most profound of all the medieval mystics, wrote numerous passages that allude in a subtle way to this extrovertive experience of seeing God in all things. Often his gnomic, paradoxical utterances must be unpacked before they yield his meaning. In his sermon on the passage in the Book of Acts, "Paul rose from the ground and with open eyes saw nothing" (as translated by Walshe), Eckhart gives a characteristic meaning to the word "nothing," as referring to God, for God is "no-thing," existing in the abyss beyond all "somethings." So in Eckhart's exegesis of the passage, when Paul got up he saw "nothing but God"; "in all things he saw nothing but God," and when he saw God, "he saw all things as nothing." Eckhart's play on words makes his meaning clear: when a person is filled with God, like the apostle Paul, everywhere he looks, even at the meanest thing in creation,

he sees God, for God is the no-thing that underlies and is present within all the multiplicity of created "things."

For a less intellectual, more practical (and devotional) example of the extrovertive experience, one might turn to St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), whose sense of union with all things was so refined that he preached to the birds, soothed captured turtledoves, and befriended pheasants, among other things. Underhill describes the reality that St. Francis lived not as an idea but as a direct experience: "every living creature was veritably and actually a 'theophany or appearance of God' . . . [he was] acutely conscious that he shared with these brothers and sisters of his the great and lovely life of the All." This kinship with all creatures, which is the practical fruit of mystical experience, is clear also in St. Francis's well-known "The Canticle of Brother Sun," in which he addresses the sun as "Sir Brother Sun" and the moon as "Sister Moon," as well as addressing "Brother Water" and "Brother Fire."

Given all these examples of introvertive and extrovertive mysticism, the question remains of the extent to which the mystical experience might be objectively evaluated. Does the mystic have genuine insight into the nature of reality? Does his experience add to our knowledge of human consciousness, or is it unverifiable in any meaningful sense? As William James pointed out, for the mystic, the experience by its very nature conveys a sense of truth. When the introvertive mystic sinks into a state of eternal peace and stillness, without boundaries of any kind, he finds it so immensely satisfying, so compelling, that he believes it to be self-evidently an experience of the ultimate truth, since it stands in such stark contrast to the transient, restless nature of everything that exists in the realm of time and space.

But in the scientific age in which we live, subjective claims of truth count for little. The introvertive mystical experience, in which consciousness remains awake but with no object of experience, falls outside the realm of what contemporary neuroscience, cognitive science, or rationalist philosophy can explain. This leaves the mystic in the position of a person trying to explain the taste of strawberries to someone who has never tasted one (and who also may doubt that such a thing as a strawberry really exists). No amount of description is going to help. The

*Woodcut print of* Danse Macabre *(© Historical Picture Archive / Corbis)*

mystic says: taste for yourself, and only then will you know.

**Source:** Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on the Medieval Mystics, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Petra Munro Hendry

*In this essay, Hendry argues that Julian of Norwich, in addition to claiming the body as a site of knowing, saw the body as a hub of limitless possibilities that transcended biological fact. Julian, Hendry claims, put forth that distinctions of male/ female or body/soul did not indicate the basis of who is a knower and how a person comes to know.*

Julian of Norwich (1342–1413) the medieval English mystic and anchoress was a profound and radical thinker. Her book the *Divine*

*Revelations of Love*, written in 1373, refuses any linear or quick reading. Meanings are not *in* her text, but in the experience of reading; of circling through the words, of never finding a final resting place and of being reminded that understanding requires patience. Her narrative strategies are only one of the many areas of Julian's work that I could address. Julian is well known for her theological innovations in relation to the concepts of sin, love, the trinity, and prayer. She is perhaps best known for her thorough theology of God as Mother. As a curriculum theorist however, my own interest in Julian regards her theories of how one comes to know, what is knowable and who can be a knower. It is the exclusion of women religious thinkers from the history of curriculum theory that is the impetus for this research.

> **JULIAN REVISES THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING ACTED ON BY ILLNESS, OF BEING A PRISONER TO A BODY THAT SUFFERS; PASSIVITY TURNS TO PASSION AS HER WOUNDED BODY IS CONFLATED WITH CHRIST'S."**

Julian wrote her life against and within St. Paul's dictate: "I suffer women not to teach." Despite this sanction, women religious were able to claim authority as knowers through having direct revelations from God, in other words, mystical experiences. For Julian, mysticism provided an avenue for authorizing herself as a knower through recuperating the body as a site of knowing. According to Leigh Gilmore (1994) "through their remapping of the body, mystics represented it as a network of possibilities and not simply as biological fact." How the body becomes a text for medieval mystics to authorize themselves as knowers is the focus of this research. Julian's negotiation of gender is a powerful reminder that who can be a knower and how we come to know is always inscribed in gender relations.

## LOCATING THE SUBJECT

Mysticism has a long tradition both within Christianity and other world religions. Modern philosophers' preoccupation with the psychological states of consciousness of mystics is, according to Grace Jantzen (1995), a serious distortion of what the mystics themselves desired or held important. Within western Christian tradition the mystic is seen as having direct access to God. Historically, especially within the medieval period being a mystic conferred considerable authority on an individual. What was defined as mystical experience and who was considered a mystic was then of considerable import since a person who claimed direct knowledge of God was in a position to challenge any form of authority which he or she saw as incompatible with the divine will.

The 12th to 15th century saw an unprecedented number of female mystics. Although mysticism was not a new phenomenon, and not unique to women, the concentration of female mystics within this time period is significant.

And yet, by the 15th century female mystics, previously revered for their wisdom were burned at the stake as heretics (One exception was Marguerite Porete, a French Beguine, who was burned as early as 1310 for insisting on teaching her ideas in public). What had been considered "natural" or normal female behavior, mystical visions, were considered in the 15th century the work of the devil. In the 20th century these same mystics (more likely defined as hysterics) were pathologized as suffering from psychological imbalances, primarily due to sexual repression.

However, within the historic context of the Middle Ages women mystics' claims to divine knowledge were taken very seriously. Their claims as knowers were legitimated not only because of their direct access to God, but because God in his divine wisdom spoke to them in profound ways. For example, it is perhaps inconceivable for us to imagine as conceivable the twelfth century mystic Hajwitch of Antwerp's vision of her bodily union with Christ as real. It is also difficult to imagine how she saw this union as a site for theorizing as she did in her "School of Love" poems in which she puts love before reason as the source of coming to know the divine. Contemporary, western perceptions of the universe as "controlled, atomistic and one-dimensional is in stark contrast to the chaotic, holistic and multi-dimensional reality" within which men and women of Julian's time lived (Flinders, 1993:84). As inheritors of the enlightenment project the Western cultural heritage is grounded in a Kantian notion of knowledge that maintains that "human knowledge can never extend to knowledge of things as they are in themselves, the best we can hope for is accurate knowledge of things as they appear to us. Knowledge of God, must therefore remain forever beyond human capability" (Jantzen 1995:7). On the other hand, mysticism, a tradition preceding Christianity, allowed for another mode of cognition. According to Lerner (1993),

> mysticism asserted that transcendent knowledge came not as a product of rational thought, but as a result of a way of life, of individual inspiration and sudden revelatory insight. Mystics saw human beings, the world and the universe in a state of relatedness, open to understanding by intuitive and immediate perception.

God was accessible through unconditional love and concentrated dedication manifested through sincere prayer and religious devotion, not reason. Central to mystical experience was

the profound, unexplainable ways in which God shared his knowledge through mind (reason), body (physical) and soul (spiritual). Thus, it was through mystical experience that women of the 12th to 15th century found the authority to speak, write, and teach. And, they were not merely content to claim their experience, they challenged deeply entrenched church doctrines that contested normative gender roles through actually reinscribing gender in more complex and destabilizing ways. Consequently, Julian's life story as a 14th century mystic provides a window into the ways in which women have struggled to authorize themselves as knowers. The shifting nature of who counts as a knower and how gender shapes this construction is one part of the tale Julian's story tells. To fully understand this story, I turn now to a historical contextualization of Julian's life.

## HANDMAIDENS OR HERETICS: RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

From a contemporary perspective, the choice to give one's life to the church is hardly considered a radical or liberatory act and even less a feminist act. However, in the early middle ages when a young woman of Christian parents would have been expected to marry and produce children, the decision to embrace perpetual virginity could have been an act of resistance to cultural norms for women. In choosing religious life, a woman would not be bound to obedience to a husband, and she would not be repeatedly pregnant and giving birth. In the early Middle Ages formal learning could be acquired only through tutors or in religious institutions. For a woman with intellectual interests convents provided access to books, literacy, leadership opportunities and a "room of her own." Grace Jantzen (1995) suggests "the extent to which such women were asserting their freedom in a Christian alternative to oppressive cultural patterns should not be underestimated."

And yet, this Christian alternative to marriage must always be seen as existing within a deeply patriarchal institution. The church circumscribed women's lives in different ways. Essentially women were considered inferior. They could not be ordained, therefore they could not hear confession, or grant absolution and they could not preach, teach, or administer the sacraments. The *Ancrene Riwle* (Salu, 1955), which laid out the rules to be followed by anchoresses is quite clear in its reminder that

St. Paul forbade women to preach: *I suffer not women to teach*. Women who felt themselves called to teach or write had to find a way to legitimate this forbidden act. It is within this context that mystical visions provided a source of authority for women. Consequently, despite severe restrictions some women religious were able to challenge the boundaries of gender norms and expectations.

In the seventh century more women entered monastic life than ever before primarily due to the conversion to Christianity of Anglo-Saxons and Franks. In Britain, Hilda of Whitby (-d.680) founded several convents, but is best known for becoming the abbess of Whitby, a double monastery (both men and women) famous for its learning. It hosted the Synod of Whitby in 664 which brought together the Celtic and Roman branches of the church of her time. All through the Middle ages, royal and noble women founded and endowed convents, in which the daughters of the nobility and some of the poor, received an education in religion, Latin, reading, writing, simple arithmetic and chants. Girls also received domestic training and instruction in needlework providing the skills required for nunneries to specialize in fine embroidery or in the transcription and illuminating of manuscripts. In the 10th and 11th centuries several famous canonical abbeys were founded in Saxony which developed a tradition of female scholarship, resulting in literary figures like Hrosvitha.

As the medieval period "progressed" changes occurred. The large double monastaries with powerful abbesses ceased to exist and the restrictions on women within the church increased. Julian was part of a growing resurgence of women choosing to take up a religious life in the late Middle Ages. Six categories of religious women existed in medieval East Anglia. They can be divided into two categories, those who lived in community and those who chose a solitary vocation. Women who chose to live communally had three choices: (a) to become a nun-living in a monastary; (b) a hospital sister-who took vows but tended to the sick and poor; or (c) a member of an informal religious community in which women took self-imposed vows (that is, they were not recognized by the church). These informal communities were unique to East Anglia. No other examples of this type of female religious community have been found in other parts of medieval England. Once again, it is

important to note that although sisters lived under the dominance of the institutional church, they enjoyed a certain independence. They managed their busy households and complicated finances, associated with a self-sustaining community, without male supervision and interference, as well as decided the nature of their activities with the local lay communities.

For women choosing a solitary vocation, like Julian, two primary options existed, that of an anchoress, derived from the Greek verb to retire, or a vowess. Vowesses were widowed women who vowed to lead a chaste life, usually in their own homes. An anchoress, like Julian, took vows, but was further removed from society by being walled in—literally buried alive—in small cells or anchorages attached to a church. The anchoress was regularly referred to as dead to the world, shut up as with Christ in his tomb. This tradition of leading a solitary life has its roots in the desert fathers of the fourth century, who withdrew from city life. Medieval society placed a high value on these solitary aesthetics for the severity of their lifestyles and for the prayers they sang for the benefit of all. The sacrifice of possessions and contact with human society was meant to focus their devotion to God. Although they were sought out as healers and counselors, once they were enclosed in their cell they never went into the outside world again. Anchorites lived lives of solitary contemplation undertaken for the good of the souls of one's fellow Christians. (See Rotha Mary Clay, 1914, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England,* London, UK: Methuen). After Julian there was a flowering of anchorites. More anchorites and hermits are known to have lived in Norwich than in any other English town. By 1546, as a result of the dissolution of the Catholic Church, all anchorages had disappeared.

What prompted Julian to become an anchoress is unclear. Why she chose a solitary life rather than a monastic life can only be a matter of speculation. The turbulent world around Julian might have contributed to her wanting an escape, or perhaps a place from which to make sense of the chaos engulfing her. In 1349, seven years after Julian's birth, the black death appeared in Norwich. In 1381, East Anglia was again disrupted by agrarian, peasant uprisings. Unrest with social conditions also extended to a vigorous attack on the church by the Lollards, led by John Wycliffe, an Oxford

scholar and preacher who condemned clerical and religious corruption and abuse. Believing that the church should expose people to religion, not exclude them from it, the Lollards translated the whole bible into English. Making the word of Christ more readily accessible to the common person was reflective of a growing critique that charged that the church has lost its true mission of spreading the word of God. The increasing persecution of the Lollards was based at least in part on the fact that they translated the bible in English and allowed women to participate in the ministry and to preach. The Bishop of Norwich, Henry Despenser, had authorized the burning at the stake for convicted Lollards.

From her cell, where she was writing her *Divine Revelations of Love*, Julian would most likely have heard the cries of those burned in Lollard's pit—a clear reminder of the consequences for women who overstepped the boundaries of gender norms. That she wrote at all is what is astounding. This was considered a heretical act. It perhaps also helps to explain why her manuscript was not in circulation during her lifetime and why the first published copy does not appear until 1670. It seems that Julian was quite aware of the risk of writing in English and thus kept the manuscript concealed. It is within this context that we can appreciate the truly radical nature of Julian's thinking. I turn now to Julian's experience, and specifically her experience of the body as a site for claiming women's experience as a site of knowing.

**JULIAN'S VISIONS**
In her youth Julian had prayed for three things:

(1) For an understanding of the passion of Christ.

(2) For a physical illness so severe that she herself and everyone around her would think that she was dying.

(3) For three wounds: true contrition, loving compassion and the longing of the will of God.

In her 31st year, Julian became violently ill. When her physical suffering ceased, a succession of sixteen visions began, the first fifteen lasting from early morning until mid afternoon, the last seen late that night. They varied in their matter and manner. She was vividly aware of the different levels of her visions. She writes: "All this blessed teaching of our Lord God was shewed in three ways: that is to say, by bodily sight, and

by words formed in my understanding, and by spiritual sight." Teachings are thus conveyed through bodily, intellectual and spiritual means.

Throughout her sixteen visions there is a fine counterpoint between Julian's suffering of illness and the suffering of Jesus on the cross. She is not an active participant in the visions, however, she carries on an animated conversation with Christ on the cross, asking him questions, probing for clarification and as Grace Jantzen describes it, "expects good answers from him" (Jantzen, 1995:167). Julian also understood that these answers were not for her sole gratification. The visions were not given to her, but for all her fellow Christians. This was made clear in the first vision:

> In all this I was greatly moved in love towards my fellow Christians, that they might all see and know the same as I saw, for I wished it to be a comfort to them, for this vision was shown for all men.

Julian's understanding is that her visions were for teaching others. Consequently, shortly after her unexpected recovery, at which point she became an anchoress, she wrote down her visions (first in a short text) and then in a second text what would become her book "Divine Revelations of Love." In the following sections I focus on her self-representations through and in the body as a site of knowing.

### INSCRIBING EMBODIMENT OR BEHAVING BODILY

According to Elizabeth Spearing (2002), medieval piety saw a variety of developments in the Middle Ages. As far as women were concerned one of these was that bodiliness provided access to the sacred. This emerged, in part, according to Spearing (2002) as a result of a "general shift in emphasis towards Christ Humanity, God inhabiting a suffering human body, culminating in the mutilation of that body in the Passion and Crucifixion." Christ's pain, and the blood and water that flowed from his wounds, were the means by which it was possible for human beings to be saved. Given that medieval thought associated masculinity with mind and spirit and femininity with body, women for all their inferiority and subordination, could be felt to have a special connection with Jesus in his Passion, and through their bodies they could hope to have special access to the sacredness associated with his body.

Julian's life-changing spiritual experience, her knowing, began as illness, that is, as a disturbance in the body. Julian asks for bodily knowledge of Christ's suffering through her own bodily experience. She writes

> In this illness I wanted to undergo all those spiritual and physical sufferings I should have were I really dying, and to know, moreover, the terror and assaults of the demons-everything, except death itself.

*(Wolters, 1966: 63)*

Julian becomes ill and it is during this time that she receives her sixteen revelations, visions. She recalls:

> When I was half way through my thirty-first year God sent me an illness which prostrated me for three days and nights. On the fourth night I received the last rites of Holy Church as it was thought that I could not survive till day. After this I lingered two more days and nights, and on the third night I was quite convinced that I was passing away-as indeed were those about me.

*(Wolters, 1966: 64)*

Julian was administered her last rites by the parish priest and a cross was set before her eyes. She writes:

> My sight began to fail, and the room became dark about me, as if it were night, except for the image of the cross which somehow was lighted up; but now was beyond my comprehension . . . then the rest of my body began to die, and I could hardly feel a thing. Suddenly all my pain was taken away, and I was as fit and well as I had ever been.

She continued:

> Then it came suddenly to mind that I should ask for the second wound of our Lord's gracious gift, that I might in my own body fully experience and understand his blessed passion. I wanted his pain to be my pain: a true compassion producing longing for God.

When women hunger for Christ and long for union with him they desire a body capable of representing the experiences of women. Women's mystical self-representation insists upon the simultaneous presence of Christ's body in the mystic's and the mystic's body in Christ's. Julian's "knowings" evolved from the body in pain, through the body on the cross, to the ecstatic and risen body. According to Leigh Gilmore (1994), the body of Christ offers something other than the absence of "male or female." In its anatomical maleness and its semiotic femaleness (feeds us with body and blood), the desire of and for both the female and the male effectively undercuts the phallic mode of desiring (Gilmore,

140). Like Christ, her body is capable of miraculous transformation. It is a body that can resist the logic of gender and map a contradictory discourse of gender hierarchy into religious discourse

Her bodily changes, that she "could hardly feel a thing" are the result of her meditations on and vision of Christ as he undergoes the profound changes he underwent in the Passion and Resurrection (rebirth). It is at this point that she receives her first vision: Christ's (female) bodily experiences on the cross. There are graphic and poignant descriptions of his bodily sufferings.

> Because of the pull of the nails and the weight of that blessed body it was a long time suffering. For I could see that the great, hard, hurtful nails in those dear and tender hands and feet caused the wounds to gape wide and the body to sag forward under its own weight, and because of the time that it hung there. His head was scarred and torn, and the crown was sticking to it, congealed with blood; his dear hair and his withered flesh was entangled with the thorns, and they with it.

> *(Wolters, 1966: 89)*

According to Grace Jantzen (1995) no male medieval writer, not even Francis of Assisi, ever focused so lovingly or in anything like such detail on the physical body of Jesus on the cross. Julian revises the experience of being acted on by illness, of being a prisoner to a body that suffers; passivity turns to passion as her wounded body is conflated with Christ's. This union becomes the center of her autobiographical reflections in which she represents herself as an active agent in relation to the Divine.

Clearly, Julian claimed the body as a site of knowing. However, this signification operates in complex ways. On one level her narrative fits neatly within the orthodox religious discourses of identity and faith (Gilmore, 1994). According to Caroline Bynum (1991) behavior in which bodiliness provided access to the sacred seems to have increased dramatically in frequency in the twelfth century and to have been more characteristic of women than men. For medieval mystics the body is a recurrent theme. Late medieval piety emphasized the body as the locus of the sacred. Both male and female saints regularly engaged in what we would call torture-jumping into ovens or icy ponds, driving nails or knives into their flesh, whipping or hanging themselves as a means to pantomime the crucifixion. The discipline of the body is seen as synonymous with and essential to the discipline of the mind and full devotion to Christ. Taming the body is necessary to resist temptations of all kinds. Both men and women manipulated their bodies through flagellation and other forms of self-inflicted suffering as well as illness. To attribute this behavior solely to hatred of the body (or a form of self-regulation) is to neglect that the mystics emphasized the body as a theater of tremendous potential for self-representation. If we reduce their desire to control the body to masochism or self-regulation (both psychoanalytic and Foucaultian readings) we misread as passivity their passionate activity.

Because preachers, confessors, and spiritual directors assumed the person to be a psychosomatic unity, they not only read unusual bodily events as expressions of soul, but also expected the body itself to offer a means of access to the divine. On one level, this was concurrent with medieval theological thinking. During this time the Platonic and Augustine notion that the person is a soul, making use of the body was being modified. The concept of a person as both body *and* soul undergrided most scholastic discussions, thus persons were seen as their bodies (Relics, pieces of dead people were seen as the loci of the sacred). Because they associated the female with the fleshly, they expected somatic expressions to characterize women's spirituality. However, despite these bodily expectations, woman was inferior to man and women clearly internalized the negative value placed on them by the culture in which they lived. Moreover, for all its expressiveness, the body was inferior to the soul. The locus of fertility and mystical encounter, it was also the locus of temptation and decomposition (Bynum, 1992: 236). Whereas soul (male) was immortal, body rose only after decay and as a result of Christ's grace.

Simultaneously, the clergy encouraged somatic female behavior since it brought them under supervision of spiritual directors and was a way for men to learn the will of God (Bynum, 1992: 195). Thus, although bodily experiences legitimated women as knowers of divine will, the nature of what counted as legitimate bodily experience was defined by male clerics. It is within this politics of control that women mystics rewriting of the body as irreducibly plural in its capacity to signify different levels of experience occurs. The spiritualities of male and women religious were different and this difference had to do with the body. For Julian this difference

had to do with "her resistance to the representation and interpretation of female gendered bodies and identities as unfailingly secondary" (Gilmore: 134). Cheryl Glenn (1997) maintains that Julian "unsexes the maleness of God, of Jesus, of Christianity, with a feminine and masculine Christology through which women and men could be liberated and redeemed-as women and men." This knowledge and Julian's theology is the result of her embodied knowing.

Thus, for Julian, her bodily illness which results in her revelations and union with Christ, become a site of transformation in which gender is reconceived. The body, that which signifies female, was not just a site within which revelations occurred. It was not a container or holder of experience, for this would ultimately render the body as passive. Instead, for women mystics knowledge was generated from within the body. These psychosomatic manipulations included: stigmata, mystical lactations and pregnancies, catatonic trances, ecstatic nosebleeds, miraculous anorexia, eating and drinking pus, visions of bleeding hosts and *illness* or recurrent pain. It is within this context that the extraordinary bodily qualities of women's piety between 1200 and 1500 must be understood. As Caroline Bynum (1992) suggests: "The body, and in particular the female body, seems to have begun to *behave* in new ways at a particular moment in the European past. I turn to Julian's symbolic association of women with blood (menstruation/childbirth) as a specific embodied site in which she recuperates female experience/disrupts it and thus creates her own unique understanding of knowing.

**BLOOD**

Julian's first revelation is the crowning of Christ:

> At once I saw the red blood trickling down from under the garland, hot, fresh and plentiful . . .

In the medieval conception blood was the basic body fluid and female blood was the fundamental support of human life. Medical theory held that the shedding of blood purged or cleansed those who shed it. Bleeding was held to be necessary, so much so that physiologists sometimes spoke of males as "menstruating" (hemorrhoidal bleeding) and recommended bleeding with leeches if they did not do so. Thus, Christ's bleeding on the cross was associated with female bleeding and feeding. This similarity was however, according to Leigh Gilmore

(1994) not interpreted by women as "lack but as a symbol of their power."

For women mystics the blood and wounding of Christ and the menstrual blood and blood of childbirth associated with women's sexuality linked his blood and their blood and signified their union. This longing for union (longing is a ongoing theme throughout Julian's narrative) is not reducible to the desire of the phallus, but "persists as desire for the whole body of Christ and especially for a body capable of representing the experiences of women" (Gilmore, 1994: 141).

This is significant for although the shedding of blood was seen as necessary, blood itself was seen to be impure, unclean, hence the association with pollution. Julian's revelation of the bleeding alternatively signals cleansing and healing:

> . . . though God through his compassionate love has made an abundant supply of water on earth for our use and comfort, he wishes us to use quite simply his blessed blood to wash ourselves clean of sin. For there is no comparable fluid that he would so like to give us. Of all it is at once the most copious and most costly (because it is divine), and, because of his great love, it is the most suitable and gladdening we could want."

> *(Wolters, 1966: 82)*

Julian's fourth revelation is "God prefers that we should be washed from our sin in his own blood rather than in water; his blood is most precious." His blood is Julian's blood and thus women's bodily experiences are reinscribed as precious. As a consequence both male and female experience is validated, the female body is reinscribed, or is it?

On one level this reading is comforting, and as a woman soothes the wounds of a culture that has a love/hate relationship with women's bodies. It is a seductive reading. Elevating the body over the soul as the primary site of knowing is a powerful epistemological standpoint within a culture that as Petroff (1994) describes needs to control and purify the female body—a "grotesque" as opposed to a "classical" body, to borrow Bakhtin's terminology. And yet, I am unsettled by this textualized "good" body since it infers that women's experiences can indeed be consolidated through the *female* body. Thus, it potentially functions to make the female body "natural" and persists in maintaining gender identity as either male or female as inevitable.

And yet, there is nothing "naturally" oppressive or libratory about the discourse of the body. What appeared to me initially as a subversion of gender, Julian's recuperation of the female body, functions on another level to keep binary concepts of gender intact which then reproduces the body as natural as opposed to a social construction. Judith Butler (1990) maintains that positing a strong or autonomous female subject leaves in tact gender bipolarities and institutional structures that support given gender positions. More importantly, it retains notions of power as a source of liberation. Thus, I am back to a heroines reading of history which reinforces duality and essentializes gender.

Another possible reading resists my desire for closure, for a tidy rereading of the female body. A second reading of Julian's use of the body is done within the context of Julian's experience in which knowledge of Christ was shown to her in three ways. At the end of the first revelation in which she is in union with Christ's bodily pain during the crucifixion she states: "All this was shown me in three ways, in actual vision (physical), in imaginative understanding (mind) and in spiritual sight (soul)." (Wolters, 1966: 76). Bodily experience is also spiritual and imaginative experience. The body does not become a mere conduit for experience, but bodily experience *is* spiritual experience and imaginative experience. Julian writes;

> For just as the body is clothed in its garments, and the flesh in its skin, and the bones in their flesh, and the heart in its body, so too are we, soul *and* body, clothed from head to foot in the goodness of god.
>
> *(Wolters, 1966: 70)*

Thus in reading gender, the body is textualized not as either male or female, but as *both* male and female. In this way, "mystical self-representation resists the duality and finality of gender" (Gilmore, 1994: 133). Julian is not privileging the body but on some level suggesting an integrated theory of body, soul and mind as an epistemological framework. To say that God— that which she has signified as female—is three entities in one is to insist that no single conceptualization can encompass the divine (Flinders, 1993: 95).

What was ultimately shown Julian through these mediums was that souls and bodies are clothed in the goodness, the love of God. Grace Jantzen (1995) maintains that "Julian's teaching concerning spiritual progress has everything to do with receiving and trusting the faithful love of God and nothing to do with standard themes of distrust of the body and especially sexuality." Julian reconceives the female body from the site of evil and temptation to one is which she has absolute conviction that the body is a site of goodness and the love of God. The body embodies goodness and thus control and repression of the female body (the normative Christian reading) are absent in Julian's text.

For women mystics, bodily experiences, like the union with Christ, in Julian's case through their mutual bleeding, is such a profound and sensual experience that it goes beyond the senses and words for describing them. I quote Julian, "…his suffering and self-abnegation so far surpasses anything we might experience that we shall never wholly understand it" (Wolters, 1966: 105). This is in contrast to male mystics (Eckhart or Walter Hilton) who write of being at a core or ground or inner point of understanding (Bynum, 1992: 192). Julian claims her bodily experience as a site of knowing and simultaneously suggests that we can never know. Her resistance to fixed, meaning claims, that *knowing* cannot be put into words functions to destabilize and keep in flux any unitary reading of gender and thus how we come to know. Julian exchanges normative secular practices of femininity for a lifelong attention to an eroticized body discourse that moves beyond gender. This positioning allows her to reread herself as a subject.

Julian's revelations are thus a profound reminder of the body as a contested terrain for knowing and the continuity of women's experience of the body as a site of regulation. When we are taught to hate our bodies, that they are never good enough so that we have to pluck them, tweeze them, shave them, suck them in, tighten them up, liposuction them, face lift them, silicone them, and starve them, Julian's message of self-love can not be treated as mere sentimentalizing. In this way Julian's narrative pushes us to continually ask "What makes it possible for us to think of the body as natural" who defines the limits and possibilities of our knowing and how is the body implicated in this inscription. Julian not only claims the female body as one site for knowing, but in becoming one with that body we can *embody* love.

**CONCLUSION**

Julian's spiritual experiences began as illnesses, that is as disturbances in the body. She

produced a discourse evolving from the body in pain, through the body on the cross, to the ecstatic and risen body. Her body was enfolded by and enfolded the body of Christ. The body of Christ as the ground of mystical experience provided the occasion for what can be called a counterdiscourse of gender. That is, in the mystics self-representation of the relationship between Christ's body and her own, there is both male and female. Julian's text insists upon the interchangeability of male and female, gendered body tropes within a single, reconceived body. In this way, mystical self-representation of the body resists the duality and finality of gender. The mystics texts narrativize gender less as an inevitable identity than as a focus for self-representational agency. It is not that gender disappears in mystical self-representation focused on the body, but its ideological construction as "limitation" and "flaw" is escaped.

For Julian the bodily experiences of illness and consequent revelations authorize a new logic of gender that disrupts the unitary subject. Julian unsexes God/Jesus, thereby revising the logic of gender and mapping a contradictory discourse of gender. Not only does she claim the body (symbolic of women) as a site of knowing, she reconceives the body as an infinite network of possibilities not as biological fact. The dualism of male/female and soul/body no longer constitute the basis of who is a knower and how we come to know. In fact, Julian's theology does not position the body as *the* site of knowing. Knowledge is not conceptualized as reducible or something that can be contained, but as infinite and beyond our comprehension.

I do not want to construct Julian as a feminist heroine. To construct such a monolithic, unitary figure would be to disregard the powerful patriarchal discourses of identity within which women and men struggle to authorize themselves as knowers and construct a subject position. Julian's story provides a unique picture into one 14th century woman's ongoing negotiation of gender. Of a woman compelled to push at the male-defined ecclesiastical boundaries while simultaneously being subservient to them. It is a reminder of the ongoing struggle we each confront as we claim and name the meanings of our experiences within structures that impose meanings on us that are not of our own making.

**Source:** Petra Munro Hendry, "Disrupting the Subject: Julian of Norwich and Embodied Knowing," in *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Spring 2005, pp. 95–108.

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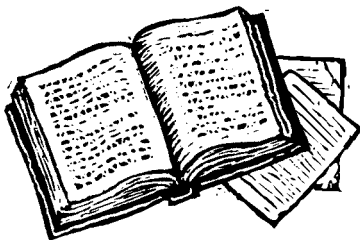
# Modernism

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1900

"On or about December 1910 human nature changed." The great modernist writer Virginia Woolf wrote this in her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" in 1924. "All human relations shifted," Woolf continued, "and when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature." This intentionally provocative statement was hyperbolic in its pinpointing of a date, but almost anyone who looks at the evolution of Western culture must note a distinct change in thought, behavior, and cultural production beginning sometime in the late nineteenth century and coming to fruition sometime around the Second World War. This change, whether in art, technology, philosophy or human behavior, is generally called Modernism.

Modernism like Romanticism, designates the broad literary and cultural movement that spanned all of the arts and even spilled into politics and philosophy. Like Romanticism, Modernism was highly varied in its manifestations between the arts and even within each art. The dates when Modernism flourished are in dispute, but few scholars identify its genesis as being before 1860 and World War II is generally considered to mark an end of the movement's height. Modernist art initially began in Europe's capitals, primarily London, Milan, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and especially Paris; it spread to the cities of the United States and South America after World War I; by the 1940s, Modernism had thoroughly taken over the American and

European academy, where it was challenged by nascent Postmodernism in the 1960s.

Modernism's roots are in the rapidly changing technology of the late nineteenth century and in the theories of such late nineteenth-century thinkers as Freud, Marx, Darwin, and Nietzsche. Modernism influenced painting first (Impressionism and Cubism are forms of Modernism), but in the decade before World War I such writers as Ezra Pound, Filippo Marinetti, James Joyce, and Guillaume Apollinaire translated the advances of the visual arts into literature. Such characteristically modernist techniques as stream-of-consciousness narration and allusiveness, by the late 1930s, spilled into popular writing and became standard.

The movement's concerns were with the accelerating pace of society toward destruction and meaninglessness. In the late 1800s many of society's certainties were undermined. Marx demonstrated that social class was created, not inherent; Freud reduced human individuality to an instinctive sex drive; Darwin provided fossil evidence that the Earth was much older than the estimate based on scripture; and Nietzsche argued that even the most deeply held ethical principles were simply constructions. Modernist writers attempted to come to terms with where humanity stood after its cornerstones had been pulverized. The modernists sifted through the shards of the past looking for what was valuable and what could inspire construction of a new society.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### T. S. Eliot (1888–1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 26, 1888. He attended Harvard, the Sorbonne, and Oxford, studying philosophy and writing a dissertation on the logician F. H. Bradley. While in college, Eliot began writing poetry, but in 1908 he discovered French symbolist poetry and his whole attitude toward literature changed. Ezra Pound read some of Eliot's poetry in the 1910s and immediately decided that Eliot would be a member of his own literary circle. Pound advocated for Eliot with Harriet Monroe of *Poetry* magazine and got Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" published in that journal in 1915. Eliot had settled in London at the same time and married the emotionally unstable Vivian Haigh-Wood. Eliot struggled to make a



*Virginia Woolf* (© Hulton-Deutsch Collection / Corbis)

living, working as a teacher and later at Lloyd's Bank until 1925.

In 1922 Eliot broke through with his brilliant and successful poem "The Waste Land," although the manuscript of the poem demonstrates that Ezra Pound played a large role in the editing of the poem. "The Waste Land" brought Eliot fame and a place at the center of the burgeoning modernist movement. For the rest of the 1920s and 1930s, Eliot used his fame and his position as editor of a prominent literary journal (*The Criterion*) and as managing editor of the publishing house Faber & Faber to argue for a new standard of evaluating literature. In critical essays and his own poetry, he denigrated the romantics and neoclassicists and celebrated Dante and the Elizabethan "metaphysical" poets. He argued for the central role of "Tradition" in literature and downplayed the cult of individual genius created by the romantics.

For the remainder of his life, Eliot occupied the role of literary elder statesman. He continued to produce poems such as the *Four Quartets* but was never prolific. He became the model of the conservative, royalist, High Church English gentleman. He died January 4, 1965, the very embodiment of the literary establishment.

### *William Faulkner (1897–1962)*

William Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, on September 25, 1897, to a family with deep Mississippi and Confederate roots. He grew up in Oxford, Mississippi, and briefly attended the University of Mississippi before leaving the state to seek his fortune as a writer. Settling briefly in New Orleans, Faulkner came under the tutelage of Sherwood Anderson and published his first book, *The Marble Faun*, a collection of short stories, in 1924. In 1929 he published the novel *Sartoris*, his first work set in the fictional Mississippi county of Yoknapatawpha. Others followed, including his masterpieces *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Faulkner received a great deal of critical attention for his works, but he never obtained the kind of financial success that he sought. Attempting to remedy this, he wrote two sensationalistic books (*Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*) and briefly moved to Los Angeles to work as a screenwriter in Hollywood. Faulkner died on July 6, 1962, in Byhalia, Mississippi.

### *James Joyce (1882–1941)*

James Joyce is the most important writer of the modernist movement. He produced relatively few works, but these books included poetry, drama, short stories, and the novel that the Modern Library publishing imprint named the most important novel of the twentieth century. His life, too, became the embodiment of many of Modernism's most central themes: exile, the presence of the past in one's life, familiarity with a broad range of cultures and historical periods, and self-destruction.

Joyce was born in Dublin, Ireland, on February 2, 1882, to a lower middle-class Catholic family. His father died when Joyce was young. Joyce attended Catholic schools in Ireland and matriculated at University College, Dublin. During his youth and college years he struggled with the rigid structures of Catholic school and Irish nationalism. In 1902 Joyce left Dublin for Paris, but was called back to Ireland when his mother fell ill. He left Dublin again in 1904, bringing with him his companion Nora Barnacle, an uneducated but vivacious young woman (who became his longtime companion and then married him in 1931). For many years Joyce struggled to make a living and to provide for his growing family. Settling first in Trieste

and then in Zurich, he taught literature and enjoyed an occasional monetary grant.

During this time Joyce wrote and published stories, poems, and a novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. *Dubliners*, his collection of stories, was published in 1914 and immediately obtained the notice of the Anglo-American avant-garde and the disapproval of the Irish literary establishment. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) was just that, a stream-of-consciousness narrative of Joyce's own life (barely fictionalized as protagonist Stephen Dedalus) up to the point that he left Ireland. In 1922 Joyce published his masterpiece and the single greatest work of Modernism, *Ulysses*. This retelling of the Odysseus myth through the persona of a Jewish advertising salesman in Dublin is a triumph on every level. The book was immediately banned in England and the United States for blasphemy and obscenity; it was not until 1934 that it became legal in the United States.

After *Ulysses*, Joyce began work on another long novel, which was simply called *Work in Progress* during its composition. Joyce, by now the leading modernist writer, was living in Paris and had the worshipful admiration of the Lost Generation Americans as well as the more established writers of the city. Celebrations of *Work in Progress* appeared even before any of the work appeared in print. When it finally was published as *Finnegans Wake* in 1939, it shocked readers with its incessant wordplay. It is a very difficult novel, barely recognizable as English in many places, but its intricate structure and brilliant use of all of the English language's possibilities ensure that readers will attempt to decipher it for decades to come. After finishing *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce and Nora moved back to Zurich to avoid being caught in the Nazi occupation of Paris. Joyce died in Zurich on January 13, 1941, following surgery for a perforated ulcer.

### *Ezra Pound (1885–1972)*

In many ways, Ezra Pound was the father of literary Modernism. If nothing else, he almost single-handedly brought the techniques of Modernism to U.S. poets, while at the same time bringing the talents of American modernist poets to the notice of the avant-garde establishment. Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, on October 30, 1885, but soon after his birth his family moved to the suburbs of Philadelphia. He grew up in that area and attended the

University of Pennsylvania (where he met William Carlos Williams and another important American modernist poet, Hilda Doolittle) and Hamilton College. After a short stint teaching at a small college in Indiana, Pound grew tired of what he saw to be American small-mindedness and moved to Venice, Italy.

In Venice, Pound resolved to become a poet. He published a book there, but soon relocated to London. In the decade he spent in London, Pound, through the strength of his own will, created movements and forced himself into the center of those movements. Probably the most important of those movements was Imagism, a school of poetry that explicitly rejected Victorian models of verse by simply presenting images without authorial commentary. In 1920 Pound left London for Paris, where he spent a few years before becoming frustrated by the dominance of Gertrude Stein in the avant-garde scene there. In 1925 he moved to Rapallo, Italy, where he developed a strong affinity for Mussolini and Italian fascism. At this time he also began working in earnest on *The Cantos*, the epic poem that would become his life's work. In composing *The Cantos*, Pound also undertook translations, including Anglo-Saxon works such as "The Seafarer." As examined by Lee Garver, Pound's translations have not received much critical attention, but they did influence his politics and his writing.

Pound stayed in Italy for more than twenty years. During World War II he spoke on Italian state radio broadcasts aimed at U.S. soldiers; in 1943 he was indicted for treason as a result of these activities and, in 1945, returned to the United States to face trial. Found mentally unfit to defend himself, Pound was incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Washington, D.C. for thirteen years. Because of the intercession of such luminaries as T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, and Ernest Hemingway, in 1958 Pound was released from his incarceration and allowed to return to Italy. Settling in Venice, he published a few more books but by the mid-1960s he fell into a silence. He died in Venice, Italy, on November 1, 1972.

### Gertrude Stein (1874–1946)

Gertrude Stein was born February 3, 1874, in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. She studied philosophy and psychology at Radcliffe College and then medicine at Johns Hopkins University but left to live in Paris in 1903 before earning her

M.D. Stein lived with her beloved brother Leo in Paris and together they began a famous collection of modern art that included paintings by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Cézanne. Many of the painters whose work they collected became part of the Stein salon, a social gathering for artists and intellectuals. Stein met Alice B. Toklas in 1907; in 1910, Toklas moved in with Leo and Stein and became Stein's lifelong partner. Leo and Stein had an irreconcilable split in 1913, whereupon they divided their collection and he moved to Italy.

Stein's first published novel is *Three Lives* (1909), but she found international fame in 1933 with the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (which is actually her own autobiography). She is credited with coining the term "Lost Generation" to describe the American expatriate writers and artists who began gathering at her house after World War I. Stein died on July 27, 1946, from cancer, having survived two world wars and the Holocaust despite being Jewish, homosexual, and living in Europe for most of her adult life.

### Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)

Wallace Stevens was born October 2, 1879, in Reading, Pennsylvania. He lived a dual life as an insurance lawyer working out of New York City and Hartford, Connecticut, and as a modernist poet. Stevens married Elsie Kachel in 1909, and they had a daughter, Holly, in 1924. His first book of poetry *Harmonium* was published in 1923. Stevens received the National Book Award in 1951 for his poetry book, *The Auroras of Autumn*. In 1955, Stevens received the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. While ill from terminal cancer, Steven converted to Catholicism; he died several months later on August 2, 1955. Although he was a successful poet during his life, his intellectual poetry became even more well known after his death, influencing poets such as Donald Justice and John Ashbery.

### Virginia Woolf (1882–1941)

Born January 25, 1882, in London, England, Woolf met many eminent Victorians during her childhood. In 1904 she moved to the Bloomsbury district of London, a neighborhood that gave its name to Woolf's literary and intellectual circle. She married the journalist Leonard Woolf, and in 1917 she and her husband

founded the Hogarth Press, an important literary and cultural publishing firm that published the first English-language editions of Freud's work and T. S. Eliot's early collection *Poems* (1919).

Beginning in the late 1910s, Woolf began to write. She quickly internalized the discoveries of Freud and the literary advances of the modernists and produced a number of novels striking in their sophistication: *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Her novels brought the stream-of-consciousness style a new depth and possibility. In addition to her activity in the literary world, she brought her feminist orientation and bisexual lifestyle to the forefront of her writing. In such works as *Three Guineas* (1938), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and *Orlando* (1928) she expressed opinions revolutionary for her time. However, her own life was not entirely happy. During the 1930s she grew increasingly fearful that she was suffering from a mental illness and would become a burden on her husband and friends. Spurred on by this fear and by her dread of World War II, she committed suicide by drowning on March 28, 1941, in Lewes, East Sussex, England.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Call It Sleep

Perhaps the most notable example of Joycean prose in American literature is this novel, written in 1934 by Henry Roth, the son of Jewish immigrants to New York. The novel tells the story of David Schearl, an immigrant boy in New York. Using the stream-of-consciousness technique perfected by Joyce in his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the novel articulates the interior voice of this boy as he grows up poor, watches his parents fight, and struggles with persecution from neighborhood bullies. The novel gained critical acclaim upon publication but was quickly forgotten until its paperback republication in 1964. By this time Roth had given up writing and moved to New Mexico. In the early 1990s, near the end of his long life, Roth returned to writing, producing four sequels to his masterwork.

### The Cantos

If *Ulysses* is the most successful and greatest work of the modernist movement, Ezra Pound's

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS
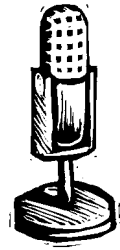
- Historically, most modernist works have not translated well into film or television adaptations. Of the modernist writers, it is Hemingway whose work has been most often filmed. Hollywood produced two versions of *A Farewell to Arms*, one in 1932 (starring Gary Cooper and Helen Hayes, directed by Frank Borzage) and the other in 1957.

- Other modernist writers have seen their novels turned into films. A few attempts have been made to produce Joyce's work, for instance. In 1967 the director Joseph Strick filmed a version of *Ulysses* that depicted a bare-bones version of the story. However, since most of the book takes place on a linguistic and allegorical level, most viewers have found the film unsatisfying.

- The 2003 film *Two Soldiers* is based on a short story by William Faulkner about two brothers in Mississippi during the bombing of Pearl Harbor. It was directed by Aaron Schneider and stars Jonathan Furr and Ben Allison as the brothers and Ron Pearlman as an Army recruiter. *Two Soldiers* won an Academy Award for Best Short Film. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from Westlake Entertainment.

- *Hubby/Wifey* is a comedic romance about a lesbian couple who pay homage to Stein and Toklas for the path they forged for modern artists and gay couples. It was written and directed by Todd Hughes, using letters written by Stein, and produced by Killerpix Global Media.

- Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, was made into a 1998 film of the same name. Directed by Marleen Gorris, it stars Vanessa Redgrave and as of 2008 was available on DVD from First Look Pictures.

long poem *The Cantos* is perhaps its most characteristic. Its composition and contents mirror the ideas of the modernists. It is composed of
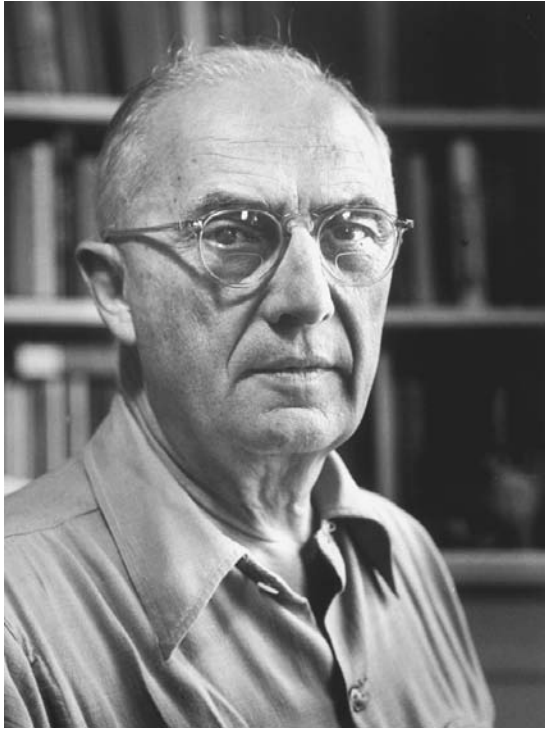
*William Carlos Williams* *( Alfred Eisenstaedt | Time & Life Pictures | Getty Images)*

fragments, of different voices from different times and places. It attempts to diagnose the ills of the modern world, comes up with an ultimately failed solution, and imagines a better world that existed once and could exist in fragmentary form again.

Pound began writing his "poem including history," as he called it, in 1917, when he published early versions of three of the cantos in a literary magazine. He began working in earnest on the poem in the 1920s after he moved to Italy, and continued working on it, eventually publishing eight installments, until the late 1960s. The poem is an epic, attempting to tell "the tale of the tribe" (civilized humanity) from ancient to modern times.

Structured to mirror and include characters from two of history's great epics (Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*), the poem was originally planned to include 120 cantos, or shorter chapters. There is no plot per se, but the poem broadly moves from hell (literally but also in the sense of an utterly fallen civilization)

to purgatory, where historical figures such as Confucius, Sigismondo Malatesta, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Mussolini are introduced. Pound wanted to highlight moments in history when a just and aesthetically appreciative society existed or could have existed. The poem veered sharply back to Pound's own life during the 1940s, when Pound found himself working for the Fascists and ultimately was incarcerated in a mental hospital in the United States. As Pound neared the end of his life and of the poem, he discovered and recorded glimpses of paradise on earth.

Public opinion of the work varies dramatically. Many readers can make no sense of the poem; others find that it contains some of the most remarkable passages in English-language poetry. Critics have been similarly divided. Although the poem is solidly in the canon of American literature and is considered one of the central works of modernist literature, many scholars and academics dismiss it as a failed, obscure, and ultimately fascist poem.

## A Farewell to Arms

Ernest Hemingway published *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929. He was already famous for his portrait of dissolute youth in Paris, *The Sun Also Rises*, but this novel was a great step forward in terms of sophistication and importance. It tells of Hemingway's own experiences as an ambulance driver during the last days of World War I; his wounding and convalescence and affair with a nurse. More important, though, was Hemingway's revolutionary technique. His prose was terse and journalistic, stripped of adjectives and any construction that might call attention to itself. Such narration achieved a numbness that reflected the mental brutalization the war visited upon the hero—and the author. Hemingway eschews abstract concepts such as glory, duty, and honor because, like his hero's, his own experience during the war showed him that these were weapons used by people in power to manipulate ordinary people.

After the popular and critical success of this novel, Hemingway became an international celebrity with literary credibility. He continued to write for much of the rest of his life and produced at least two great novels (*For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*) before committing suicide in 1961.

## Harmonium

The popularity of the work of poet and insurance lawyer Wallace Stevens has continued to grow even as the work of other modernists has fallen in favor. Stevens's first book of poetry was *Harmonium*, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1923. While modernist poetry written by Pound and Eliot was allusive, drenched in the fragments of previous cultures and other languages, and overwhelmed by an almost angry melancholy, Stevens's work was light and lyrical. In *Harmonium*, Stevens exhibited a verbal dandyism, delighting in the sounds of words and in Elizabethan definitions. He was a direct descendant of Keats and Marvell, whereas other modernists saw Browning, Shakespeare, and Dante as their ancestors.

But Stevens cannot be dismissed as a writer of light verse. His poems exhibit the characteristic modernist fear of nihilism while entertaining the fear that the entire world is simply a projection of his mind. In "The Snow Man," for instance, Stevens listens to "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is," and in "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" the narrator questions whether "I was the world in which I walked." In his later books Stevens produced longer, philosophical poems that questioned art's place in human cognition, and by the 1970s and 1980s, Stevens, not Eliot or Pound, was cited as an influence by hundreds of practicing American poets.

## The Sound and the Fury

William Faulkner, a Mississippian, began his career as a writer heavily influenced by the regionalist Sherwood Anderson, with whom he worked in New Orleans (in the 1920s, the home of American Bohemianism). But Faulkner quickly outdid his teacher. He created an entire fictional world in which almost all of his fiction was set: Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. In this world the past always impinges upon the present, and Faulkner's fiction is full of narrative devices intended to outflank language's need to be based in time. His 1929 *The Sound and the Fury* contains Faulkner's most successful experiments with time.

The novel is the story of the fall of the Compson family that culminates in the suicide of son Quentin. Told by a series of narrators, the stories in the book provide different perspectives on the same events and the reader must compare all of the different versions in order to understand what "really" happened. Most difficult is the narration of Benjy, a retarded boy who has no conception of time. In his narration there is no differentiation between what happened years ago, what happened yesterday, and what is happening now. Faulkner's experiments did not gain him a large audience in the United States (in search of income, he moved to Hollywood in a failed attempt to be a screenwriter) but his influence was vast among Latin American writers, especially such magical realists as Gabriel García Márquez.

## Tender Buttons

Gertrude Stein's second book was a collection of poetry, *Tender Buttons*, published in 1914. Her poems are avant-garde word clusters wherein Stein seeks to rename objects whose original names have lost their meaning. She relied on prosody, or rhythm and intonation, to discover these new names. The book is divided in three sections, Objects, Food, and Rooms and does not conform to conventional poetics but instead reads like lyrical prose in short paragraphs. Its literary significance is hidden in the book's subtle references to homosexuality and its expression of Stein's cubist influences.

## To the Lighthouse

Virginia Woolf perfected the stream-of-consciousness or interior monologue style in her novels of the 1920s. Her 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse* depicts the Ramsay family, who is spending the summer in a vacation house on the Isle of Skye. Assorted guests, including the painter Lily Briscoe (a character many readers feel is a stand-in for Woolf herself), also come and go. The novel moves from a focus solely on the personal level of the family to a wider focus; the impending world war appears as a dark cloud on the horizon. The novel then shifts time to ten years later as the family deals with the death of one of its members.

Woolf's novel delicately and insightfully pulls apart memory, family relationships, and the effects of death. In a movement such as Modernism, generally so focused on the big picture often to the exclusion of the personal, *To the Lighthouse* stands out as an example of how modernist technique can be applied to the examination of emotion.

## Ulysses

James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, first published in 1922, is the single greatest work of modernist

literature and is considered by many to be the finest novel ever written. Joyce spent ten years writing this book, a meticulously detailed day in the life of three Dubliners. The main characters are Leopold Bloom, a Jewish advertising salesman; Molly Bloom, Leopold's wife, a singer who is planning to cheat on her husband; and Stephen Dedalus, a dissipated young intellectual. The story parallels Homer's *Odyssey* but translates that epic journey of ten years to eighteen hours and one city.

Upon its publication—and even before, when fragments were published in magazines—the book was immediately hailed as a work of genius. Joyce's boundless erudition, his command of languages and literature and history, his love and intimate knowledge of one small place at one specific time, are all on display in this book. More than just an intellectual enterprise and a small gem of engineering, though, *Ulysses* is a genuinely moving story of conjugal and parental love. Because of its frank treatment of sex and its, at times, insulting portraits of religion and Irish nationalism, the book was banned in Ireland and the United States. It took twelve years for the book to be allowed in the United States; until then, travelers to Paris would have to hide the book in their luggage from customs inspectors (who were warned to look for its characteristic blue-green binding).

### "The Waste Land"

T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," published in 1922, is the single most important modernist poem. Essentially plotless, the poem instead attempts to capture historical development to the present day by use of allusion. Characters such as Tiresias, the Smyrna merchant, and an East London housewife, wander through the poem. London, the "Unreal City" in the fog, becomes the synecdoche for the fallen world as a whole. The poem moves from Elizabethan times to the ancient world to the present and ends, finally, with a small failing voice speaking Sanskrit.

Interestingly, in its original version the poem was six times as long and titled "He Do The Police in Different Voices." When he was still a struggling poet, T. S. Eliot showed the poem to Ezra Pound, asking for his advice. Pound performed what he called a "Caesarean operation" on Eliot's manuscript, telling him to cut the links between the vignettes so that the poem appeared as a series of fragments. Eliot never called attention to Pound's central role in creating "The Waste Land" and it was not until the 1960s, when the original manuscript was found, that Pound's true role became publicly known.

Most critics have seen the poem as expressing a fundamental despair at the sense that, with the loss of all certainties, the world was nothing but "fragments" that are "shored against [our] ruin." It continues to vex students with its complexity, but even the most basic reading evokes a sense of desperation and loss.

## THEMES

### Technology

In very real terms, the entire world and the way that humans understood that world changed between 1860 (when the modernist period is generally understood to have begun) and 1940. In 1860 the idea of traveling at a mile a minute was but a dream, as was the notion of flight for human beings. The photograph was new; moving pictures, much less moving pictures that talked, were only fantasies. Electrical signals being sent through wires was a possible dream, but the idea that voices could be transmitted was fantastic. The idea that voices could be transmitted without wires, through the air, was utterly preposterous.

In 1940 the world was a different place. Machines allowed people to see moving, talking pictures; to travel at more than one hundred miles an hour; to fly through the air; to transmit both voices and images without wires; to talk, in real time, with someone at the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Humans relied on machines to a much greater extent than they ever had. It is hard today to conceive of a world without powered machines, but in 1860 many people in the United States lived their entire lives without ever encountering a powered machine. By the 1940s machines had made it possible to communicate or travel—or destroy—with much greater speed and efficiency than anyone had ever dreamed in 1860.

The modernist writers, almost as a rule, feared the new technology and left it out of their writing. Joyce set his masterpiece *Ulysses* in 1904, before motorcars had become widespread. Eliot and Pound move easily between historical periods but rarely mention the technological advances that had permeated all aspects of urban life by

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Modernism evolved as an artistic reaction to dramatic changes in politics, culture, society, and technology. Research some of the technologies that were developed in the late 1800s and early 1900s that might have literally changed the world. Some of the inventions you might want to investigate might be the technologies that captured and recorded reality (photography, sound recording, film), the technologies of communication, the technologies of transportation, and the technologies of weaponry.

- The two world wars of the twentieth century had an enormous effect on the modernist movement. Many critics feel that the movement hit its height just after World War I and was effectively killed by World War II. Research the wars' effects on writers of the modernist movement. What did they do during the war years? How did the war change their lives? You might want to look at lesser-known writers such as Rupert Brooke or Wilfred Owen who actually served in the conflict.

- Most of the important modernist writers were born between 1880 and 1900, and most

of them died in the 1960s. The world changed dramatically in the intervening period. In 1890 what were the world's great powers? Who were its important leaders? What were the important issues in international relations? What products did people use? How did people travel from place to place? Compare the answers to these questions to what the world looked like in 1965.

- In addition to being a reaction to changes in technology and politics, Modernism was a reaction to important developments in Western thought. Dozens of philosophers and scholars of the late nineteenth century rejected the accepted explanations about the world and proposed their own. Of these, the thinkers who had the greatest effect on Modernism were the economist Karl Marx, the naturalist Charles Darwin, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and the psychiatrist Sigmund Freud. Research any one of these thinkers. What were their most important insights? What previous explanations did their writings reject? How do their ideas affect the world today?

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1920. Rather, they look back to the classical or medieval or Renaissance periods, fearing that dependence upon machines will cloud their minds, make them less able to understand what is truly important about being human. The only modernist writer who really engaged with technology, in fact, is the Italian futurist writer Filippo Marinetti. Marinetti was a Milanese who came to London to perform spoken-word pieces that celebrated machines. The glory of airplanes, cars, factories, and machine guns was always the subject of Marinetti's verse. Blinded by his fascination with the clean efficiency of machines, Marinetti ended up advocating the violence of World War I and, in the mid-1920s, became an apologist for Mussolini.

## Freud

Modernist novelists had no more important influence than the Viennese psychiatrist Sigmund Freud. Although he did not actually invent the discipline, Freud is considered the father of psychoanalysis. His writings propose a three-part model of the psyche consisting of the id (or the primitive drives), the ego (the sense of the self), and the superego (or the moral lessons and codes of behavior people internalize). Freud believed that human behavior and neuroses have causes of which people are unaware, causes that stem from childhood experiences or from the thwarting of certain basic urges. Psychoanalysis was predicated on the idea that an analyst could

pick out certain ideas and reactions in a patient that would indicate the real problem.

Such writers as Woolf and Joyce took this idea and turned it into the basis for fiction. They were reacting against realist writers, who sought to simply record the unadorned facts of the world around. Doing so was impossible, the modernists believed; the psyche of the narrator will always be affected by unknown forces and thus is never able to capture reality without any kind of bias or alteration. Rather, people should attempt simply to record thoughts, for by this the reader can understand things about the narrator that the narrator him- or herself does not. Joyce's first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, records the thoughts of Stephen Dedalus from the time he is a "nicens little boy" to the time he is a college student. In her short story "The Mark on the Wall," Virginia Woolf captures a moment in time as a woman looks at a mark on the wall. The narration follows her mind as she extrapolates all of the possibilities of what the mark could be and follows all of the subconscious connections her mind makes with seemingly unrelated topics. Modernist writers felt that the "interior monologue" or the stream-of-consciousness technique gave readers access to the character's subconscious.

### The "Unreal City"

In "The Waste Land" Eliot describes London as an "Unreal City," a city through which shades of the dead troop over the bridges. Modernism was the first literary movement to take urban life as a given, as a form of experience that was categorically different from any other kind of life. The French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire was fascinated by the "flaneur," the man who strolls the city aimlessly as a way of life. The anonymity of the city, its darkness, its mechanization, its vast power, all inspired the modernists; it attracted and repelled them in equal measure. Modernist writers (most of them, interestingly enough, from suburbs or small cities) gravitated to London and Paris, St. Petersburg and New York, where they found each other, formed movements, drank and fought together, and broke apart.

London was the first home of Anglo-American Modernism, but the city's essentially commercial character eventually sent most of the writers elsewhere. By the 1920s, Paris was the home of one of the greatest concentration of artists in history. In the 1930s, with war looming in Europe, the artistic energy moved west to New York. But no matter what city, the city was almost always the subject of modernist literature. Although he could not stay there and moved between Paris, Trieste, and Zurich during his "exile," everything James Joyce ever wrote was about the vibrant urban life of Dublin. The poet Hart Crane composed his epic poem "The Bridge" about the Brooklyn Bridge, the monument of engineering and architectural beauty that made New York City the center of American urban life. Eliot's melancholy poems point out the loneliness and lack of meaning city-dwellers often feel. The city, where technology and masses of people and anonymity come together, became the master trope of Modernism itself.

### Alienation

Alienation is defined as the sense of being alien, or of not belonging, to one's own milieu. It can also mean separation from something. If the city is the master trope (or image) of Modernism, alienation is its master theme. Almost all modernist writing deals with alienation in some form.

The primary kind of alienation that Modernism depicts is the alienation of one sensitive person from the world. The stream-of-consciousness technique of narration is particularly well suited for this because readers can see the inner feelings of a person and witness his or her essential self along with the actions of the world outside. Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's protagonist and stand-in, is alienated from his family, his friends, his religion, and his country because of devotion to art and his certainty that nobody can understand and accept him. Woolf's heroines are doubly alienated from the world because of their status as women; because of their sex, they are not allowed to participate in the world of politics, education, or economics. Eliot's narrators (most notably Prufrock in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock") are confronted by a world that is just broken shards of a discarded whole; everyone else seems to walk through the world calmly but they cannot. And for Ezra Pound, it is the world itself that has been alienated, by the forces of greed, from what should truly be historical heritage.

### The Presence of the Past

Surrounded by the debris of all of the smashed certainties of the past, modernist writers looked at the contemporary world as a directionless

place, without center or certainty. These past certainties, although oppressive and constructed on specious values, were at least some kind of foundation for the world. The modernist age set out to break apart these certainties; World War I then finished the job and horrified the world by demonstrating what humanity was capable of. Writers in the modernist age often felt that they were at the end of history. Because of this, modernist poems and novels often incorporate and mix together huge swaths of history. Allusion— brief references to people, places, things, or even languages and literatures—was the characteristic modernist technique for including history. Partly because of their profound uneasiness in the modern world, modernist writers alluded constantly to the past.

This is not to say that the modernists were uncritical admirers of the past. In his poem "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," Ezra Pound wrote that World War I's vast slaughter was ultimately for the purpose of defending "an old [b——] gone in the teeth . . . a botched civilization . . . two gross of broken statues . . . [and] a few thousand battered books." Joyce's Stephen Dedalus says that "history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" and the Irishmen who live in past glories are portrayed as buffoons and fools. But both of these writers' works are filled with allusions to the past. And almost all of the important modernist writers, as well, incorporate in their work the belief that the past exists in the present.

Pound, for instance, called his *The Cantos* "a poem including history" and the list of allusions in that poem has over ten thousand entries.

## STYLE

### Narration

Modernism sought to accurately portray the world not as it is but as humans actually experience it. Modernist literature, then, relied especially on advances in narrative technique, for narration (a voice speaking) is an essential way to convey the perceived or experienced world. Interestingly, the narrative techniques in modernist poetry and modernist fiction illustrate the same ideas about experience, but they do so in very different ways.

Modernist fiction tends to rely on the stream-of-consciousness or "interior monologue"

techniques. This kind of narration purports to record the thoughts as they pass through a narrator's head. The unpredictable connections that people make between ideas demonstrate something about them, as do the things they try to avoid thinking about. In *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom attempts not to dwell on his knowledge that his wife will cheat on him as he wanders the city, so thoughts of his wife, of Blazes Boylan (her lover), or of sex make him veer quickly in another mental direction. Also, a number of small ideas and images recur throughout the book: an advertisement for Plumtree's Potted Meat, for instance, and the Greek word *metempsychosis*. These ideas crop up without any apparent pattern and get stuck in Bloom's head, just as a song or a phrase might resonate through people's minds for hours and then just disappear. This narrative technique attempts to record how scattered and jumbled the experience of the world really is, and at the same time how deeper patterns in thoughts can be discerned by those (such as readers) with some distance from them. That humans are alienated from true knowledge of themselves is the implicit contention of the stream-of-consciousness form of narration.

Modernist poets such as Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot, by contrast, did not delve deeply into the individual consciousness. Rather, they attempted to model the fragmented nature of minds and civilization in their narratives. Eliot's "The Waste Land" has dozens of speakers that succeed each other without warning: The poem opens with the voice of the dead speaking from underground, then shifts quickly to the unattributed voice of Countess Marie Larisch of Bavaria, then shifts just as quickly to a stentorian, priestly voice. The effect is a cacophony of voices, a mass of talking devoid of connection.

In Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* or William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, this array of voices is taken to its logical conclusion. The poet speaks in many different voices, but historical figures speak, artworks speak, ordinary people speak. In both of these long poems, the poets transcribed letters (Pound used letters of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, while Williams used the letters of his friends and admirers) and included them in the poem. The poet, in this case, is less a writer than a compiler of voices; it is the arrangement of pieces, not the content of each individual piece that is important. The effect is to "decenter" the reader. Readers are no longer sure where the poet

(with his or her implicit authority over the text) exists in the poem.

### Allusion

An allusion is a brief reference to a person, place, thing, idea or language that is not actually present. Because of modernist theories about the omnipresence of the past, allusions are difficult to avoid in modernist literature. Joyce, Eliot, and Pound—the three authors generally acknowledged as the leaders of the modernist movement in English—included allusion as perhaps the central formal device in their writing. The past is everywhere in the writing of these three, and indeed this is the case with most of the other modernist writers.

But it is in Joyce, Eliot, and Pound that the allusion is particularly important. Indeed, it is essentially impossible to understand their work without tracking down their more important allusions, and scholars have compiled long volumes explaining each reference in *Ulysses* and *The Cantos*. Some of their allusions are quite clear: for instance, in "Canto IV," Pound includes the lines "Palace in smoky light, / Troy but a heap of smouldering boundary stones." Most readers would be able to identify those lines as a reference to Homer's *Iliad*, which tells the story of the end of the Trojan War. But not all of Pound's allusions are so clear: "Canto VIII" begins "These fragments you have shelved (shored)"; the allusion is to Eliot's famous line "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" at the end of "The Waste Land." Eliot's line is well-known, but only those who have studied poetry would know it. And many of Pound's allusions, indeed most of them, are frankly inaccessible. Pound spends a number of cantos alluding to Sigismondo Malatesta, an obscure Italian warrior-prince from the Renaissance. Only because Pound made him famous does anyone recognize his name.

Joyce structured *Ulysses* to work on numerous levels. All of the mundane events in Bloom's day correspond to episodes in Homer's epic *Odyssey*, for instance, but the book also works as a retelling of Irish history, of the growth and development of the human fetus, and of the history of the Catholic Church. Eliot's "The Waste Land" can be read simply as a collection of allusions or fragments as he calls them in the last section: appearing in the poem are the Greek seer Tiresias, a pair of working-class women in East London, a number of Hindu deities, Dante, and an American ragtime singer. These references are not explained; they just appear and the reader must make what sense of it he or she can. In the critical reevaluation of Modernism that took place during the 1990s, one of the central questions was whether one must understand all of the allusions in order genuinely to appreciate the work.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Fin de siècle

*Fin de siècle* is a French term meaning "end of the century." The term is used to denote the interval between 1880 and 1914, a transition period when writers and other artists abandoned old conventions and looked for new techniques and objectives. Many despaired that western culture was morally degrading, but others anticipated the new century with great hope for what was to come. *Fin de siècle* has strong associations with French Symbolism but was also an immediate precursor to Modernism in Europe and the Americas. Writers commonly associated with the *fin de siècle* mindset are Stéphane Mellarmé, Oscar Wilde, and George Bernard Shaw.

### Imagism

Imagism is the best-known of the dozens of small movements in modernist poetry in the years leading up to World War I. Ezra Pound formulated the "rules" of Imagism, which were essentially a rejection of Victorian poetry. Imagist poets were encouraged to "simply present" an image; the poet "does not comment." Excessive adjectives and the voice of the poet were anathema. Finally, Pound urged imagists to use the rhythm of the metronome.

From his base in London, Pound published the anthology *Des Imagistes* in 1914. Other poets in the movement included H. D., William Carlos Williams, Richard Aldington, and Amy Lowell; H. D.'s poem "Oread" embodies the imagist project. Pound soon moved on from Imagism but Lowell, from Boston, continued to publish imagist anthologies for years after the movement had become irrelevant.

### Vorticism

After Imagism, Pound moved on to Vorticism. Works of this movement (which consisted

primarily of Pound, the writer T. E. Hulme, and the painter/novelist Wyndham Lewis) were published in their magazine *Blast: A Review of the Great English Vortex*). It took the basic tenets of imagism, combined them with the painting style of Cubism, and injected an aggressive anger. At this time Pound had discovered the Chinese written character and had decided that its unique combination of sound, text, and image created a luminous "vortex" of energy. The movement fell apart as World War I began, for its anger and violence seemed very small and ineffective when compared to the realities of trench warfare.

### Bloomsbury Group

The Bloomsbury Group was a gathering of English writers, artists, and intellectuals who held informal artistic and philosophical discussions in Bloomsbury, a district of London, from around 1907 to the early 1930s. The Bloomsbury Group held no uniform philosophical beliefs but did commonly express an aversion to moral prudery, a desire for greater social tolerance, and pacifism in the face of two world wars. At various times the circle included Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, and John Maynard Keynes.

### The Objectivists

The objectivists were a group of modernist poets who formed relatively late during the modernist period. In a way, they can be considered the descendants of the imagists, but their poems tend to be even starker and flatter. The objectivists drew their inspiration from William Carlos Williams but most of the members of the movement were of the younger (born after 1900) generation. George Oppen, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, and a few others are the best-known poets of the objectivist movement.

### The Lost Generation

The "Lost Generation" was a name given by Gertrude Stein to the group of young Americans who migrated to Paris in the 1920s. Ernest Hemingway is the most famous of these Americans (in fact, it was to him that Stein said, "you are all a lost generation"), but there were dozens. Many of these Americans were artists and writers, but just as many were not and were attracted to Paris because of the strong dollar and the bohemian lifestyle. Hemingway's first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, is the enduring portrait of this group as they wander from Paris to Spain and back, looking for thrills and occasionally working.

The Lost Generation's members constantly crossed paths with the European artists who were already living there. Pablo Picasso, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Stein, Constantin Brancusi, and many others had made Paris their home and had made it into one of the great centers of artistic activity. When the "Lost Generation" arrived, many of the established artists befriended these Americans, took advantage of them, or even worked with them. By the end of the 1920s, though, most of these Americans had returned home.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### World War I

Modernism took place over many decades, and almost no facet of life in the West was not profoundly transformed by the changes that took place between 1860 and 1939. But if Modernism revolved around one historical event, it was the unthinkable catastrophe that became known later as World War I. In the years leading up to World War I, the modernist writers thought of themselves as rebels, ruthlessly breaking apart all of the societal certainties of the Victorian age. The American modernists sneered at American middle-class acquisitiveness, while the British modernists chafed at the smug, self-assured conservatism of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Modernist writers broke convention by writing frankly about sex, by insulting religion, and by arguing passionately that the poor were not poor simply because of moral depravity. By breaking these societal taboos, modernist writers found themselves cast in the role of rebels, pariahs, even dangerous men and women. And such writers as Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis began to believe their own hype about being dangerous to society.

The coming of World War I fulfilled the modernist predictions of a coming fragmentation and destruction beyond anything they could have imagined. The war itself came upon an unsuspecting Europe almost in a way that the modernists might have envisioned, for it was society's faith in its own structures that ended up destroying it. Specifically, the complicated network of alliances dividing Europe into two moderately hostile camps (one consisting largely

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **1890s:** The United States' economy expands rapidly as the nation exploits its natural resources. Large corporations in the transportation, steel, oil, meat-packing, and financial industries establish monopolies; as a result, Congress passes the Sherman Anti-Trust Act intended to break up such monopolies.

  **Today:** Dozens of states and the federal government go to trial with the Microsoft Corporation. Charged with being a monopoly, the company defends itself on the grounds that standardization is better for consumers than variety.

- **1914:** World War I breaks out when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is assassinated in Sarajevo. The system of interlocking alliances among Europe's great powers compels these nations to go to war on each other's behalf. The war drags on until 1918; millions are killed.

  **Today:** After a terrorist attack destroys the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., President George W. Bush calls for a war against terrorism and initially against Osama bin Laden. In the first stage of the war, American and British submarines and airplanes bombard Afghanistan, where bin Laden is said to reside. Later, The United States invades Iraq and over a hundred thousand die.

- **1915:** During the first years of World War I, the United States refuses to join the fighting. In 1915, though, the passenger ship *Lusitania* is sunk by the German navy, killing thousands of Americans. This incident plays an important part in swaying American public opinion toward joining the war.

  **Today:** After terrorists pilot jetliners into American targets, killing thousands of people, President George W. Bush calls for a "war on terrorism" and begins bombing targets in Afghanistan. American troops fight alongside the local militias to defeat Afghanistan's Taliban government.

- **1927:** Al Jolson stars in *The Jazz Singer*, the first "talkie" motion picture. The conjunction of recorded sound and recorded image, revolutionary in its time, follows the instantaneous broadcast of sound by radio, which achieved its first transatlantic broadcast in 1901. It is followed by the instantaneous broadcast of sound and images by television in 1939.

  **Today:** The advent of computers in the 1960s has by now changed the nature of recorded sound and images. Pre-computer technologies such as film, magnetic tape, vinyl records, and radio broadcasts present information in analog (other than binary bits) form. Modern technologies such as compact disks, digital cameras, computer hard drives, and even cable television feeds present information in digital (binary bits) form, in which electrical "on" and "off" signals correspond to binary digits.

- **1927:** Charles Lindbergh is the first aviator to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. In his plane *Spirit of St. Louis*, Lindbergh travels from New York to Paris without stopping and becomes an international celebrity.

  **Today:** Commercial air travel is the norm in the West and transatlantic flights are common.

- **1929:** After the decade of what is now known as the Roaring Twenties, a period in which the American economy expands rapidly and the United States begins to develop the consumer culture, the stock market crashes on October 29, 1929. The crash is caused by many factors, including dramatic economic troubles in Europe and Asia and the tendency, among American consumers, to buy items on credit and then default on payment. The crash leads to the terrible Great Depression of the 1930s.

  **Today:** After many years of unprecedented economic expansion (largely driven by the high-technology sector of the economy), the economy slows down dramatically. Many stock options become worthless. Hundreds of Internet companies go out of business, but the slow-down also affects "brick and mortar" industries such as automobiles, construction, and travel.

of democracies such as Great Britain and France, the other consisting of monarchies or dictatorships such as Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but even these categories had exceptions—Czarist Russia fought on the democracies' side) became not a means of stability but the mechanism of Europe's destruction.

The war began when the Serbian rebel Gavrilo Princip assassinated the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. Austro-Hungary sought reprisals against Serbia, the Russians came to the Serbian defense, the Germans came to the assistance of the Austro-Hungarians, and Eastern Europe was at war. At the same time, the Germans took this opportunity to try out a plan they had been developing for years. The German strategic command had worked out a way to march across Belgium and northeastern France and take Paris in six weeks, and in 1914 they attempted to do just this. The plan bogged down and soon the English came to the assistance of the French and Belgians. Pushing the Germans back from the very suburbs of Paris, the Allied forces managed to save the French nation but the armies soon found themselves waging trench warfare in the forests and fens of northern France, Alsace, and Belgium. Millions died in futile attempts to move the line forward a few yards. Among these were a number of modernist artists and writers, including the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Ezra Pound's friend.

The tone of excitement about violence that characterized earlier modernist writing disappeared after the war, for the writers who exalted in the promise of destruction were utterly numbed by the effects of real destruction. Although the soldier-writers like Rupert Brooke and Siegfried Sassoon have left readers with vivid, horrifying pictures of combat, perhaps the enduring modernist imagery of the war is contained in two poems: Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley." Pound's poem addresses the war directly, saying that "There died a myriad, / And of the best, among them, / For an old [b——] gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization." Eliot's poem is more evocative of the psychological effects of the war, for it is a collection of fragments, of pieces of culture and society broken apart and without meaning. The poem is perhaps the best verbal portrait ever created of civilized man confronting the possibility that everything has been destroyed.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Modernism did not exist until it was almost dead. That is, until the 1930s or later the term "Modernism" simply did not mean what it means today: a group of writers, an arsenal of literary devices, a number of characteristic themes. Interestingly, in the 1910s and 1920s—the height of Modernism as it is understood today—the word "Modernism" referred to a particular strain of thought in the Catholic Church. At that time, the modernist writers did not see themselves as a unified movement. Instead, the writers now called modernists were members of dozens of different smaller movements: the Lost Generation, the Dadaists, the Imagists, the Vorticists, the Objectivists, the Surrealists, and many others. What is identified as the characteristic themes or concerns of the modernist period (a general pessimism about the state of the world, a rejection of society's certainties, a sense that only the rebel artist is telling the truth about the world) were simply "in the air" of the times; everyone was thinking and writing about the same ideas, so it did not seem necessary to name their commonalities.

Literary critics of the early twentieth century were generally hostile to the writers now called modernists. The Victorian ethos held that literature's purpose was to identify "sweetness and light" and "the best that has been thought and said" (in the words of Matthew Arnold, one of Victorian England's most important critics) in order to make better citizens. Literature and art, for the Victorians, were meant to be "edifying"—educational. Literature was read to learn how one should behave. By that same token, literature that did not put forth edifying models was simply bad literature. This attitude is shown especially well in the hostile response to Gustave Flaubert's 1857 *Madame Bovary*, a novel that depicted, without comment or condemnation, the adulterous behavior of a middle-class woman. The Arnoldian attitude toward literature persisted well into the twentieth century, and in the United States was personified by the writers and editors of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, especially Henry Seidel Canby.

For these critics, modernist literature was both incomprehensible and dangerous. Its stylistic experiments made it difficult to digest easily—readers had to work to make it through *Ulysses* or *The Sound and the Fury*, not to mention *The Cantos* or "The Waste Land"—and its

*T. S. Eliot's corrected proof for his poem "The Waste Land"* (Public Domain)

pessimistic, negative attitude toward society could hardly be expected to make better citizens. In fact, modernist literature celebrated those people, artists especially, who rebelled against society. Where the late Victorian critics and their intellectual descendants wanted edifying, socially-uplifting literature, modernist literature sought to create independent, critical, alienated subjects.

As a result, Modernism had to create its own critics and to a remarkable extent it succeeded. At first, modernist writers simply started their own magazines and reviewed each other's work. Ezra Pound, through the journals *Poetry* and *The Egoist*, was especially productive in this. Later, T. S. Eliot became Modernism's leading critic. In his journal *The Criterion* and, later, from his post as managing editor of the publishing house Faber & Faber, Eliot advanced his own vision of good literature. He denigrated the neoclassicists and the romantics and praised the Elizabethans; he argued for a literature steeped in the "Tradition"; he valued tension, ambiguity, and allusion. Not coincidentally, his own poetry seemed to be the height of "Good Literature" as he defined it.

After Eliot defined a modernist aesthetic, other critics began to agree with him. Difficulty, resistance, ambiguity, irony, and the sense of an ending to something were all qualities praised by critics ranging from the political right wing (the New Critics) to the far left (the New York Intellectuals). By the 1930s and 1940s the modernist aesthetic was taking over Anglo-American literary criticism. The old guard of critics defending the edifices of Western civilization seemed less and less relevant after a war, a depression, and another war. The pessimistic modernist view of the world began to seem correct. By the 1950s, Modernism and its aesthetic standards were almost unquestioned in American criticism and education. Susan Jones argues that Modernism found popular acceptance through serialization, which also affected narrative technique.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Modernism remained dominant in American literature. Literary histories were rewritten to reflect Modernism's new importance; earlier, forgotten writers such as Herman Melville were rediscovered as important ancestors. And the modernist aesthetic of alienation, separation from the world, and profound pessimism became almost synonymous with literature.

This all changed in the 1970s and 1980s. Because of the political upheavals of the 1960s, relevance again became an important virtue of literature. Readers wanted literature to be politically engaged, to tell the stories of the struggles of oppressed groups (women, African Americans, Chicanos, gays and lesbians), and most importantly to take a political stand on issues. The modernist aesthetic denigrated works that sought to be politically relevant; this dated the works and made them less timeless and universal. But again, as in the 1940s and 1950s, a new generation of critics and teachers reevaluated Modernism and found it to be lacking in many virtues. It did not help that many modernist writers held political and social beliefs that ranged from extremely conservative to outright Fascist.

Through the 1990s and into the 2000s, a new generation of scholars sought to again reevaluate Modernism. These scholars no longer looked at Modernism according to Eliot's own opinions of what is important in literature. In a sense, these new scholars read Modernism against its own grain, trying to find buried content in the literature. And while Eliot's reactionary beliefs and Pound's anti-Semitism still exist, even the

most left-wing critics often find something to admire in their works, something that often Pound or Eliot explicitly urged readers to ignore. Perhaps the most notable example of this "against-the-grain" reading of Modernism is the reconsideration of "The Waste Land" after Pound's central role in the poem's composition was discovered. Eliot's cult of the solitary, alienated artist standing apart from all of his peers and creating suddenly seemed questionable after readers discovered that Eliot's greatest poem was, in fact, the product of a collaboration that he tried to hide for decades.

## CRITICISM

### Greg Barnhisel

*Barnhisel directs the Writing Center at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. In this essay, Barnhisel describes the process by which Modernism became the dominant literary movement of the twentieth century.*

In its heyday (the 1910s and 1920s), Modernism did not exist. That is to say, the word "Modernism" did not have the meaning that it has today. Modernism referred to technology, to an openness to the new commercially-driven society that was coming about, and to changes in Catholic theology. The literary themes and concerns and stylistic innovations that today are called modernist belonged, in their time, to dozens of different writers who lived in different places, spoke different languages, were members of different groups, and very often were hostile toward each other and their work. It was only in the 1950s and 1960s, years after the movement ended, that the term Modernism came to designate a group of writers preoccupied with alienation and the destruction of old certainties. It can be instructive to look at the ways that large trends in literature and culture are examined, classified, and codified into a movement by readers and critics. Modernism was produced long after the movement's height by critics; Modernism was not produced by the modernist artists themselves.

In a very real sense there is no one Modernism; there are many modernisms. Some critics have identified Modernism as far back as the French writer Gustave Flaubert, who wrote in the 1850s, and many critics see a number of works of the 1970s (Thomas Pynchon's novel

## WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
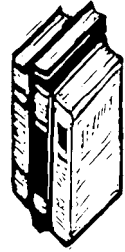
- There was almost no facet of life that was not fundamentally transformed by the technological advances of the modernist period. Stephen Kern's 1983 book *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (1983) is an excellent meditation on how technology changed human life and perception.

- A movement that was not similar to Modernism in its formal features but provided many modernist writers with a model of artistic rebellion was the so-called "Decadent" movement of the 1890s. The best-known Decadent writers were the Anglo-Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde and the French novelist J. K. Huysmans, but dozens of other writers were loosely affiliated with this group. Reading Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) gives a good idea of the nature of Decadent literature.

- World War I was the central historical event affecting Modernism. Paul Fussell's study *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) provides a detailed and often moving discussion of this war and its effects on contemporaries.

- Out of the armistice that settled World War I grew the seeds that would eventually mature into World War II. The "belligerents," or the losing powers, were forced to pay vast sums to the victors and give up large amounts of territory. Even in Italy, a poor country that was dragged into World War I, the effects of the war led directly to the ascension of Benito Mussolini to power. Dennis Mack-Smith's 1983 biography *Mussolini* gives a detailed portrait of post–World War I Italy.

*Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance) as late examples of Modernism. The themes now understood as characteristically modernist existed in many works of the nineteenth century. By the early 1900s, an explosion of artistic subgroups whose members crossed between music, painting,

MODERNISM, WITH ITS FRAGMENTED VISIONS OF THE WORLD AND ITS INSISTENCE THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN OBJECTIVE PERSPECTIVE, WAS A BLOW AGAINST THE SMUG CAPITALIST STRUCTURE OF ADVERTISING AND CONSUMPTION."

sculpture, dance, photography, and literature rapidly coalesced and just as quickly disappeared. Almost all of these groups—the Surrealists, the Imagists, the Cubists, the Vorticists, the Dadaists, the Futurists, and many others—are considered components of Modernism.

It was only near the end of the movement that critics came to a consensus about what constituted Modernism in literature, and these critics set the rules for who should be considered a central member of the movement and who would remain only a minor figure. Perhaps more important in the long run, these critics codified a way of reading and criteria for evaluation of literature, both of which, not coincidentally, were particularly friendly to Modernism.

These critical developments of the 1950s were a direct reaction against the climate of earlier decades. In the 1930s and 1940s, art and politics were linked together very closely. Artists were expected to weigh in on the political issues of the day, and especially in the 1930s they allied themselves with left-wing causes. Dozens of artists and writers joined the Communist Party, feeling that only a worker-centered movement could save America from the Depression and from vast concentrations of wealth. Other, albeit fewer, writers and artists allied themselves with the other side: of these, the most notorious were the English painter and novelist Wyndham Lewis, the Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun (who praised Hitler), and the American poet Ezra Pound, who admired Mussolini and held anti-Semitic beliefs. T. S. Eliot, although he never supported fascism, had extremely conservative political views as well.

Writers have never become famous only by their own efforts. It takes dozens of people to bring a work from the mind of the writer to the hands of the reader. And in an age such as the mid-twentieth century, when thousands of works of literature were published every year, the role of the critic became especially important in establishing whether a writer was important and why. In the 1930s, when the modernist writers had already produced a solid body of work to be explained and evaluated, two groups of critics with drastically different backgrounds and political inclinations set their sights upon Modernism. Together, these groups defined the sprawling movement, telling readers what it meant and, most importantly, arguing that Modernism should be read without concern to any political beliefs expressed in the works or held by the writers. Their consensus about Modernism eventually made the movement the great movement of twentieth-century literature.

The first of these two groups came together in the American South in the 1920s. This "Fugitive" or "Agrarian" group included writers Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate (most of whom were poets or novelists as well as critics) who were inspired by the antebellum South and its Elizabethan English heritage. They yearned for a preindustrial world where cultured aristocrats cultivated the land and wrote subtle, accomplished verse. In the 1920s they read the influential critical writings of T. S. Eliot, which meshed well with their own ideas about literature and led them to appreciate Eliot's (and by extension other modernists') works.

Eventually, these writers obtained academic posts and developed a method of literary analysis called "New Criticism." The New Criticism valued such formal devices as tension, ambiguity, wordplay, and irony. It had absolutely no interest in questions of what a work can tell about history or about an author's life or what political meaning a work holds. People who read works for what they had to say about society were Philistines to the New Critics; the goal of reading literature was to refine one's sensations and to make ever-finer distinctions about the excellence of language. In such works as Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn* and Ransom's *The New Criticism*, these critics provided a model for reading literature apolitically.

This apolitical attitude was anathema to the New Critics' counterparts, the New York Intellectuals. The New York Intellectuals were urban, immigrants or the children of immigrants, largely

Jewish, and adamantly left-wing (many of them were briefly Communist Party members). They came together writing for *Partisan Review*, the leading intellectual journal of postwar America. And for these critics—Philip Rahv, Delmore Schwartz, Diana Trilling, Irving Howe, and many others—Modernism's value was that it undermined the simplistic happy-ending narratives produced by capitalism and "mass culture." Modernism, with its fragmented visions of the world and its insistence that there is no such thing as an objective perspective, was a blow against the smug capitalist structure of advertising and consumption. Modernism accomplished this not by means of the content of the writing, but by means of the form. The complicated combination of allusions, the decentralizing interior monologue, and the often jarring sense of time take away all certainties and call attention to the ways that minds create the world.

During most of the 1930s, these two groups had little to do with each other. The New Critics, from their posts at universities and colleges, taught students how to read and appreciate literature. The New York Intellectuals wrote for journals and lived as public intellectuals; few of them had any affiliation with schools and most of them mistrusted universities. But both argued to different audiences that the type of writing now called "modernist" was the highest form of literature in the contemporary world.

In 1949, though, these two groups were forced to directly confront Americans' refusal to ignore literature's political meanings. The great American Modernist poet Ezra Pound had lived in Italy for over two decades, during which time he had expressed his admiration for Mussolini as well as for a growing anti-Semitism. During World War II, Pound broadcast radio programs on Fascist state radio and, as a result, was indicted for treason in 1943. In 1945 Pound was arrested and brought back to Washington to face trial. Broken and unstable, he was found mentally unfit to stand trial. He was sentenced to an indefinite period in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the criminally insane.

But Pound was not finished. During his term in the army's detention center in Pisa, Italy, Pound composed a series of cantos (individual installments of his epic poem *The Cantos*). Published in 1948 as *The Pisan Cantos*, the book was Pound's most personal work in decades and perhaps his greatest single book of poems. It won the first Bollingen Prize, an award given by the Library of Congress, in 1949. Immediately, a storm of controversy arose. The American press and large numbers of American citizens were angered and insulted that a man who had supported an enemy power only a few years before, and who could have been executed for treason, was now being honored by the United States government.

The Bollingen Prize committee included members associated with the New Critics and the New York Intellectuals as well as the poets W. H. Auden, Conrad Aiken, and T. S. Eliot. Called upon to defend their decision, the committee members did so in very different ways. The Jewish poet Karl Shapiro frankly stated that he voted against Pound because he could not abide anti-Semites. Allen Tate argued that poetry must be judged without reference to the personal life of the poet. The committee as a whole released a statement to the press arguing that their decision was grounded on "that objective perception of value on which civilized society must rest."

Where the New Critics would have been expected to defend the prize, many assumed that the left-wing, anti-Fascist, Jewish New York Intellectuals would oppose any award being granted to Pound. *Partisan Review* convened a symposium in its pages to discuss the award, and although a range of points of view were expressed, the editors of the notably leftist journal (Philip Rahv and William Barrett) came out in support of the award. They feared what they termed the "Stalinoid" tendency of governments and societies to judge art only by the criteria of whether it advances that society's interests. To the New York Intellectuals, art must spur challenge of society's assumptions, not uphold them; art must demand thinking and questioning. By no means did the New York Intellectuals endorse Pound's ideas; on the contrary, many of them made a point to condemn him even when defending his award.

If World War I was the vortex out of which Modernism was truly born, the Bollingen Prize controversy became the event that transformed Modernism from an avant-garde movement into the literary establishment. During the 1950s, literary critics of the left and the right agreed about literature, at least in broad strokes. And while they each admired different things about Modernism (the New Critics liked its formal

*A scene from the film* The Dead*, based on the story by James Joyce* *(The Kobal Collection | The Picture Desk, Inc.)*

intricacy, while the New York Intellectuals endorsed its demands on the reader), their consensus about the movement defined it and ushered it into the center of the American literary canon, where it has remained ever since.

**Source:** Greg Barnhisel, Critical Essay on Modernism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Susan Jones

*In this essay, Jones argues that modernist author Joseph Conrad in revising his originally serialized novel,* Chance*, critiqued methods of popular publishing.*

Many early twentieth-century authors now associated with protomodernist or modernist experimentation appeared initially in weekly or monthly journals before proceeding to book form, partly as a matter of economic necessity, partly to ensure a broad dissemination of their work. Experimental writers relied on journal publication in the British Isles and the United States to make a living, while their innovations in narrative method often failed to fit the contexts of their initial appearance. Thus, three of Joyce's *Dubliners* stories, "The Sisters," "Eveline," and "After the Race" were first published

in 1904 in a popular Dublin agricultural journal, *The Irish Homestead*, a journal Joyce later referred to in *Ulysses* as "the pigs' paper."

Moreover, a distinctive eclecticism characterised many journals in the period, where writers such as Thomas Hardy or Joseph Conrad appeared in *Harper's* (then a far more broadly-based journal than the current publication) or *The Pictorial Review* alongside the romances of Baroness Orzcy, Marjorie Bowen or Marie Corelli. Instalments of fiction were often framed by features on beauty and fashion, advertisements for household goods, articles on topical issues, and photographs of distinguished personalities. In the July issue of *The London Magazine* for 1912 an advertisement directs its female readers to "Obliterate Fatness and Restore Beauty," while the October number offers a fictional romance by Arnold Bennett, whose content questions the very conventions of representation that implicitly shape female identity in this context.

Recent critical debates have revealed the complexity of the relationship between modernism and popular forms. Tim Armstrong, for example, asks whether modernism might not be understood as "a phenomenon of the market" (2005, 48). He cites competing accounts

**WAS CONRAD MERELY TRYING TO CHURN OUT A POPULAR ROMANCE AND FAILED?"**

presented by Lawrence Rainey (1998) and Mark Morrisson (2001), who both establish, in different ways, modernism's response to market forces and the emergence of popular journal publication. Both critics try to avoid the polarisation implied by Andrea Huyssens's notion of "the great divide," in which modernist authors' relationship to mass culture is seen as "an anxiety of contamination" (1986, vii). Even so, Rainey's account of the development of Little Magazines sometimes reflects the enduring Greenbergian distinction between "lowbrow" and "highbrow." As Armstrong observes, Rainey argues for modernism's élitist tendency "to create a new niche market for an 'advanced literature' structured by scarcity rather than abundance" (2005, 48).

It is true that with the development of the Little Magazines and literary journals, experimental fiction moved out of the broad-ranging popular contexts like *Pall Mall*, *London Magazine*, and *Metropolitan Magazine* and found a more exclusive niche. Pound and Eliot's *The Egoist*, which ran 1914–1919 as a mouthpiece for Imagism, serialised *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; John Middleton Murry's *The Adelphi* published Dorothy Richardson in London, Margaret Anderson's Chicago *The Little Review* published work by Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, Ford Madox Ford and chapters of *Ulysses*. However, Rainey's account of modernism's emergence through systems of patronage rather than through direct commercial relations changes the emphasis from a polarisation of "high" and "low" to a more nuanced identification of authors' individual relations with figures associated with the mass market, such as the newspaper magnate, Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe) or C. Arthur Pearson in England, Randolph Hearst or S.S. McClure in the United States.

On the other hand, Morrisson suggests a more fluid interaction between modernism and the popular market, outlining the ways in which modernism exploits techniques of advertising and popular publishing, "even where it seems

to create a 'counter-public' sphere" (Armstrong 2005, 48–49). Morrisson argues for the adaptation of mass publication techniques by contemporary political groups such as suffragists, socialists, and anarchists and the argument for a strong relationship between experimental work and the popular press can be illustrated by the fact that the popular context for "high-brow" fiction does not disappear in the twentieth century. After all, Sylvia Plath published short stories such as "Sunday at the Mintons" in *Mademoiselle* in August 1952, and "Initiation" in January 1953 in *Seventeen*.

Studies such as those of Rainey or Morrisson give rise to general theories of modernism's relationship to the marketplace, yet they have not always explored fully the close textual problems arising from this context, in particular the implications of a transformation from serial to book text of much modernist writing. Critics such as Alfred Habegger (1989) or R.B. Kerschner (1996) have led the way by exploring the periodical publication of the works of protomodernist and high modernist figures ranging from Henry James to James Joyce. Likewise, Linda Hughes and Michael Lund have observed an important relationship between the serial context and the protomodernist novel, noting that "serialization was the dominant form for the first appearance of major works by Stevenson, Hardy, Wells, Kipling, James, Conrad, and others" (Hughes and Lund 1991, 230).

Yet for those writers who sought a wide readership as well as integrity for the novel as art form, a tension often arose in the period between aesthetic aims and marketing incentives, where the themes and content of fiction did not always meet the generic expectations of a mass audience. The censored serial text of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, for example, appeared in *Harper's* in 1895 under the editor's somewhat misleading title of *Hearts Insurgent*. As Hughes and Lund observe, this title suggests the "romantic fulfilment, ascension through the social ranks and expansion of real influence" that conformed more readily to serial readers' expectations than to the harsh scepticism of Hardy's book text (1991, 232). Moreover, Hardy's manuscript was bowdlerized in the serial, the editor having cut such events as the pig-killing or Arabella's seduction of Jude.

In fact, the serial text of late nineteenth-early twentieth-century protomodernist fiction

has often been dismissed out of hand by contemporary critics and editors. It sometimes occupies a similar place to that of the "The Bad Quarto" of *Hamlet*—where the text has in the past been almost too easily dismissed as inferior, unreliable copy without reference to its more elusive potential. The serial version of novels of this period, cranked out to deadline, unchecked at proof stage, brutally censored and edited, nevertheless retains, in its context, an "improvisational" quality, not least in its often disjunctive combination of text and illustration. Of course it could be argued that the apparently naïve mismatch between fictional texts and the surrounding visual material used for illustrations of fiction, advertisements and feature articles incorporates the discourses of freedom and individual worth. But you could polemicize this phenomenon in a different way. Images for advertisements and illustrations for fiction usually conform to a limited taxonomy, promoting received conventions of genre and of gender identity according to standards of contemporary taste or fashion and often eliding generic ambiguities in the texts themselves. Instead they emphasise the conservative tendencies that shaped the desires of readers of popular romance.

In this respect, textual studies have provided useful models for rethinking critical assumptions associated with modernist writers. Theorists of the history of the book, ranging from Pierre Macherey and Pierre Bourdieu to Jerome McGann have increasingly encouraged us to engage with the context in which the text is produced (see Macherey 1966, Bourdieu 1993, McGann 1983). D. F. McKenzie's theory of the "Sociology of the Text" has similarly led to a radical revision of critical attitudes in the examination of all pre-publication and published states of the text, identifying a more fluid, open and inclusive framework (McKenzie 1986).

The serial text of modernist fiction may be unreliable in bibliographical terms, but I want to question whether the transformation from serial to book version can tell us something about the construction or development of modernist narratives. In this essay I shall consider some of the issues raised by the condition of popular serialisation in this period, using the example of Joseph Conrad's *Chance* (1913) to illustrate the complexity of the problem. Rather than focussing on the familiar image of Conrad as writer of sea-stories and masculine tales, in this essay I shall reflect on

his modernist strategies in relation to popular contexts and especially those that courted a female readership of romance fiction. Drawing on his experience of the periodical market, where many of his novels and short stories were first published, Conrad produced a striking response to popular genres in *Chance*. With this novel he broke with his usual masculinist themes, offering instead a number of intertextual allusions to the treatment of feminist politics in contemporary fictional forms such as the romance, sensation fiction, or the New Woman novel. But while Conrad was, throughout his career, an astute reader of popular forms, the extant manuscripts suggest that it was during the revisions of *Chance* that he first began to consolidate a response to the popular *as* a critique of the contemporary serial. I would argue that in his response to serialization, Conrad interrogates to some extent the modern journal's dependence on its readers' recognition and repetition of visual images, in a context that gave equal emphasis to the printed word and the printed image. A study of the revisions of the text of *Chance* from serial to book reveals Conrad's striking engagement, in his final version of the novel, in a critique of the methods of popular publishing.

**I**

It is important to remember that *Chance* was not Conrad's first encounter with a popular market. The author's enduring relationship with *Blackwood's Magazine* (which published "Youth," *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*) meant that the works up to 1900 with which he is now most popularly associated first appeared in a sober context whose tone often verged on the masculinist and jingoistic. But Conrad moved to a different phase in his career as he sought a wider readership. The *Blackwood's* years had failed to produce economic success for Conrad, and, attempting to reach a more lucrative market for his work, the author engaged with a broader, more popular and visually appealing form of journal publishing, initially starting in Britain, and then in the United States. In a deliberate move away from the conservative presentation of his contributions to *Blackwood's*, he began to court the popular journals, with their strongly visual component, as far back as 1901 with "Amy Foster" in *Illustrated London News* (1901). "Typhoon" (1902) and "Gaspar Ruiz" (1906) both appeared initially in *Pall Mall Magazine*, "The Secret Sharer" in *Harper's* (1910), "A

Smile of Fortune" in *The London Magazine* in 1911, and "Freya of the Seven Isles" appeared in that magazine in June 1912.

The big breakthrough for Conrad came in 1909 with a contract from Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* to publish a serial novel in the women's pages of the Sunday Magazine of the paper. In fact, Conrad's customary practice of deferral and delay in completing projects meant that *Chance* did not appear until three years later. It has now become a critical commonplace to refer to the success of the book version of *Chance* (1913) as a turning point in Conrad's career as a writer. The novel secured his reputation in the United States, and brought him economic success for the first time in his life. But the serialisation of the novel had initiated this success. Appearing in the *Herald* from January–June 1912, it was preceded by a lively marketing campaign which declared the sea-novelist's promise to write especially for women. Instalments of the serial text were sandwiched between advertisements for hair care, dress design, and domestic appliances, articles on the Suffragist movement, and Marriage Schools for young ladies. The serial accommodated its context in many ways—it was a narrative about a woman, full of contemporary references to feminism. Set mainly in the English countryside and in London, *Chance* confirmed Conrad's attempt to shift his public image from that of, exclusively, "writer of the sea," and the marketing drive paid off. The book versions were a roaring success, first published by Methuen in London in 1913, and then by Doubleday in the United States in 1914, where it was again aggressively marketed by Alfred Knopf (Karl 1979, 746–47). In May 1914 one Chicago bookseller had orders for 1,200 copies of the novel, having never before taken more than 200 orders for a Conrad title. (Karl and Davies 1996, 382n2).

Modern critics have been baffled by the phenomenon. They frequently mourn the fact that Conrad never found popularity in his lifetime with the protomodernist *Heart of Darkness* or *Lord Jim*, but achieved it with what they consider to be an inferior women's romance. In 1996, Cedric Watts asked,

> Why should *Chance*, of all his novels, have been so successful? *Chance* is certainly not one of Conrad's best works; among the texts in which Marlow features as narrator, it is remarkably disappointing: it lacks the radical verve of the earlier works. But neither is it obviously popular in its nature. The narrative is fluid, serpentine, diffuse and prolix, employing complicated relays of reporters of events.
>
> *(Watts 1996, 84)*

Watts's argument raises several critical dilemmas. He believes that Conrad set out to write a popular romance. But since the text seems to him to be far from populist in character, he wonders why it was a success. Later in the essay he concludes that it was successful only by virtue of its American-style marketing for women readers. But does the puzzle associated with this text amount solely to a matter of modern marketing? Was Conrad merely trying to churn out a popular romance and failed? And should this novel be so easily dismissed as "inferior" Conrad? (Moser 1957).

Conrad's engagement with a burgeoning serial-market in his late novels might seem to favor the argument that Conrad had "capitulated" to popular trends, where the contextual material of serialised fiction assumed readers' conservative expectations. The themes of his later novels, such as *The Arrow of Gold* (1919), *The Rover* (1923), and *Suspense* (published posthumously 1925) seem to suggest the emergence of an emphatically romantic, revisionist Conrad, nostalgic for the quest of the hero in the context of the historical novel so popular with the journals in which they were initially serialised, *Lloyd's Magazine* (1918–20), *The Pictorial Review* (1923), or *Hutchinson's Magazine* (1925). *The Rescue* (1920), in its finished form (Conrad first began it as a short story "The Rescuer" in 1896) but then serialised in 1919 in *Land and Water*, fits into the "popular" category, both in its subtitle, "A Romance of the Shallows" and in its continuity with the Malay fiction of the early years, which had often been (mis)represented by H. G. Wells and others, as predominantly "exotic romance." Yet to categorise these novels of the very early and the very late phase so reductively is in part to deny the late works their continuity with areas of Conradian scepticism developed during the years of his "major" work and to ignore his engagement with the periodical press throughout his career. A close examination of manuscript, serial, and the fundamental typescript revisions for the book-version of *Chance* shows the extent to which Conrad increasingly shaped the work to achieve a delicate balance in positioning the book successfully between a saleable romance and a critique of the romance form itself, a move that suggests the complex interdependence of popular forms and the rise of literary modernism.

The transition from manuscript to serial version of *Chance,* with its major shift in composition from short sea tale to full-length romance novel, illustrates the nature of Conrad's experiments in the late work. (Jones 1999, 134–60) Conrad had first thought of the idea for *Chance* in 1898. At that time he had conceived of it, not as a novel, but as a sea-tale (entitled "Dynamite"), to be part of a projected collection for *Blackwood's.* It was never completed, but the idea was revived when Conrad obtained the contract for the *New York Herald* Sunday Magazine. He made changes to the projected novel at this point, moving away from a tale exclusively about the sea and accommodating within the story its contemporary feminist context and female readership. Nevertheless, the serial version of *Chance* still relates to some degree to that earlier version. Each instalment was squeezed out to deadline in the manner of a Dickens novel, without giving Conrad time to reflect much on his editing process. During the frenzied composition of *Chance* for the *New York Herald* deadlines, Conrad had been cynical about its worth, a point that has often led critics to believe that he did not care about it and had merely capitulated to modern marketing by writing a serial for women. He had, at the serial stage, altered the focus of the story, dividing the location between sea and land; he included a larger, central role for the female protagonist, and added many "popular" or contemporary elements. In fact the bare essentials of the plot read like a popular melodrama, complete with isolated heroine, wicked governess, financial frauds, attempted suicide, a failed poisoning, unrequited love, and a prospective marriage to finish. The inclusion of topical characters, such as the financier De Barral, and an ardent feminist, Mrs Zoë Fyne, integrates a rites of passage narrative, and a potentially conventional romance of a young girl and a sailor with a contemporary tragi-comedy whose sharp political register explores the relationship between gender and genre.

In spite of these changes in plot, character, and theme, much of the serial version still conforms, in its register and tone to our assumptions about the masculinist Conrad. The serial version is framed by the dialogue between an unnamed first-person writer and a dramatised narrator who is a retired sea-captain and oral story-teller, Charlie Marlow (he had already appeared in "Youth," *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*). As the tale unfolds in the serial version, these men ponder the nature and meaning of textuality,

and the discussions of the male narrators threaten to hinder the advance of the plot. The text is prolix and meandering with few obvious divisions (it has no chapter titles, for example). But with the revisions for the book version, a new focus emerges. Marlow's interlocuter loses his role as writer, shifting the focus of the narrative away from Marlow's discussions with him about textuality, and allowing the shadowy presence of the female figure to emerge into sharper relief. In this version the elusive female protagonist herself represents the "gap" associated with a modernist text, resisting as she does Marlow's imposition upon her of a romance narrative in which he awards himself a paternalistic and chivalrous role. For the book, Conrad divided the text into chapters and two parts, entitled "Damsel" and "Knight," achieving a more deliberate ironisation of the romance form. He cut large sections of the early manuscript that related to an earlier conception of the novel as a sea story, augmenting the character of the female protagonist, and highlighting a political discussion about feminism.

Conrad himself suggested a rift in continuity of subject matter from the original sea-tale to the topical romance. In a letter of June 1, 1913 to his agent J.B. Pinker he wrote that *Chance* "was written in 1907 and the rest of the novel in 1911–12. And it did not belong to that novel— but to some other novel which will never be written now." However, Conrad's most radical changes to *Chance* occurred at an even later stage, during the revisions from serial to book in 1913, completed rapidly and intensively that year between May 11 and June 18 (Karl and Davies 1996, 221–35).

## II

We can trace the history of Conrad's rewriting of *Chance* in manuscript. Besides the holograph manuscript (MS *Chance*), held in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, there are three extant typescripts of *Chance* (TS1, TS2, and TS3), held in special collections at Colgate University, University of Texas at Austin and Yale University, which document this process of revision in 1913, recording the cuts and refinements Conrad made to the serial version. But it soon becomes clear that the really essential structural revisions from serial to book occurred in TS2, the Texas typescript with holograph revisions, now residing at the Harry Ransome Humanities Library, Austin.

The plot of the final version still retains, in its barest details, its debt to popular melodrama. Flora de Barral, the motherless daughter of a parvenu financier who has been jailed for fraud, is abandoned to her own resources. Flora is "rescued" by a concerned couple, Mr and Mrs Fyne, the latter being an active feminist. Nevertheless, Flora suffers psychological despair, and she first attempts suicide, then marries a sea-captain who happens to be Mrs Fyne's brother. Flora's jealous father, released from prison, tries to poison the captain on board ship. But when discovered by a young seaman, Powell, de Barral kills himself. After a brief period of happiness for Flora, her husband drowns at sea. Some years later, Powell reappears in her life, and the novel concludes with a prospective marriage. In spite of its melodramatic themes, Conrad constructs in the book version of the text a complex narrative framework that lends itself more closely to modernist writing. The story is constantly punctuated by elusive gaps and hiatuses, and the representation of the female protagonist evades its narrators' assumptions about her identity.

But something else is going on. The serial includes an oppressively didactic element in which Marlow laboriously explains to the women readers of the *Herald* the value of life at sea compared to the moral failures of a life on land. In the book version Conrad's new narrative strategy itself offers a critique of the serialised version, in which the author felt obliged to offer the women readers a patronizing explanation of all things pertaining to the sea. Conrad cut large tracts of Marlow's moralizing framework, leaving the women readers to think for themselves. But Conrad also removed aspects of Flora's characterisation where, in the serial she appears to conform far more closely to the conventional presentation of the heroine of serial romance. In the Texas typescript (TS2), for example, Conrad made several cuts to Marlow's imagining of the meeting between Flora and Captain Anthony (from Chapter 6 in the book) and his decision to ask her to marry him. The book version retains a passage from TS2, concerning Marlow's view of Anthony: "I imagine to myself Captain Anthony as simple and romantic . . . " (Conrad 1949, 193).

But in TS2 Conrad cuts from the serial a long passage about how Marlow imagined *Flora* might have felt, and how Anthony *might* have responded:

This girl of which he knew nothing would interpret him like a personal matter. It was possible he had never seen grief—not a girl's grief. His concern would be naïve and genuine and probably helpless—in masculine fashion. And probably the girl . . . would be touched . . .

Did poor Flora ever in this new experience find the opportunity to smile while resting her eyes on him; and did he then feel her glance penetrate his heart like a beam of bright sunshine that seems to descend deep, to the very bottom of clear water?

*(TS2)*

The tone here conforms very much to the overwritten passages of serial romance to be found elsewhere in the *Herald* Sunday Magazine pages. In the serial version of *Chance* Marlow implies the *possibility* of a conventional romance situation, insinuating that both parties are "innocent" or inexperienced in dealing with love—but that Flora might have subconsciously wished to reciprocate Anthony's half-suppressed, but protective attentions. The passage might have appropriately described a moment in another fictional item, published in an earlier issue of the magazine (June 18, 1911), "The Adventure Hunter: The Affair of the Assistant Cashier," by Hamilton Lang. Here the illustration for the story shows a woman in distress leaning over a railing, while an honourable gentleman looks on with outstretched arm to comfort her. The caption runs: "He attracted her attention and she raised a face so turned by despair that all its traces of beauty seemed to have gone from it."

But although a similar semantic and iconographic register is used to illustrate Anthony's protective intentions towards Flora in the serial version of *Chance* (one illustration shows Flora leaning on a gate between fields, while Anthony looms over her)—in the book version, where Conrad has cut Marlow's narratorial intervention, the reader gets no guidance on how to interpret the situation—leaving Flora's responses to Anthony as something of a mystery. She behaves unconventionally—by this point in the narrative we have no explicit knowledge of her feelings for him, and thus Conrad presents bewilderment, confusion, and misunderstanding between them. He leaves the onus of interpretation to the reader to fathom Flora's psychological pain, first in relation to Anthony's attentions, and then (paradoxically, it seems) in the Captain's later refusal to consummate the marriage. Such cuts from the

serial text show to some extent Conrad's sense of freedom from, and critique of the serial's demands for conventional explication and fulfilment of readers' generic assumptions. By leaving out Marlow's influential interpretation of Flora's situation, Conrad resists a reductive image of Flora as innocent young girl embarking on a first love, wishing for male protection, and instead, a more complex, unfathomable portrait emerges of a psychologically damaged woman, who, through experiences of abandonment and betrayal feels both unlovable and incapable of expressing love. Moreover, it is a portrait that resists Marlow's romanticising.

But not all the revisions to the serial came in the form of cuts. If we look closely at one of the few *additions* Conrad made at this stage in the novel's evolution we find some striking shifts in the focus of the final story. Here he frames Marlow's comments in the context of a more sceptical discussion of the Woman Question. But he also achieves this tighter ironisation of romance by bringing into play his responses to a new form of serial fiction in which he now aimed to present his work.

The following section comes from an earlier moment than the above section, from what eventually constitutes Chapter Two. The dramatised narrator, Marlow, tells his interlocutor about his visits to the country home of a middle-class couple, Mr and Mrs Fyne, whom he has befriended while taking a vacation in the home counties of London. It is through this couple that he meets the abandoned heroine, Flora de Barral. On the surface, the Fynes's is a highly conventional marriage, but Mrs Fyne is a feminist, writing a tract on women's education. This episode sets the scene of Marlow's visits to the Fynes. In the first state of the text, which appears in the manuscript and corresponds to the serial text, we hear nothing about Mrs Fyne's political or possible sexual persuasions at this point:

> The atmosphere of that holiday cottage was— if I may put it so—brightly dull. Healthy faces, fair complexions, clear eyes—and never a smile, not even amongst the kids. After tea we would sit down to chess and then Fyne's passive gravity became faintly animated by an attenuated gleam of something inward which might have been a smile.
>
> *(MS Chance)*

In an interim text (TS1) Conrad refines Mr Fyne's character only slightly. But in the revised TS2 text, Conrad adds an important paragraph, placing Mrs Fyne in the feminist context much earlier than in previous states of the text. Marlow's expression of wry anxiety about the girl friends (note the "kids" have disappeared) is fundamental at this point to his re-shaping of the narrative framework:

TS2 (Texas; holograph corrections to the TS1 text appear here in italics):

> The atmosphere of that holiday cottage was— if I may put it so—brightly dull.
>
> Healthy faces, fair complexions, clear eyes— and never a frank smile in the whole lot, unless perhaps from the girl friend.
>
> *The girl-friend problem exercised me greatly. Were they got these pretty creatures from I can't imagine. I had at first the wild suspicion that they were obtained to amuse Fyne. But I soon discovered that he could hardly tell one from the other, though obviously their presence met with his solemn approval. In fact they came for Mrs Fyne. They treated her with admiring deference. They answered to some need of hers. They sat at her feet—They were like disciples. It was very curious. Of Fyne they took but scanty notice. As to myself I was made to feel that I did not exist.*
>
> After tea we would sit down to chess and then Fyne's everlasting gravity became faintly tinged by an attenuated gleam of something inward which resembled sly satisfaction.

This passage shows how Conrad emended his narrative strategy in two specific areas, both of which extend the role of feminist critique in the novel. The first applies to narratorial positioning. His additions contribute to the greater sense in the final version of Marlow's possessiveness over the story. In his somewhat dry and teasing tone there is nevertheless a hint of his increasing paranoia (developed elsewhere in TS2), an anxiety about being marginalised from his own story— "As to myself I was made to feel that I did not exist." Conrad also confirms this move elsewhere in TS2 by cutting Fyne's role. In this version Fyne has almost no response to "the girl-friends," whereas in earlier versions Marlow hints at Fyne's erotic attraction to the main "girl-friend" Flora. TS2 leaves Marlow's textual and sexual appropriation of Flora unchallenged (he expresses an erotic attraction to her victimisation). Thus Flora's later rejection of his chivalrous attitude to her and his misunderstanding of her actions is more acutely refined.

Second, Conrad draws on his familiarity with the social and political context of the narrative, particularly through allusion to a variety of popular contemporary texts. Marlow introduces a far more pointed sexual and political subtext to Mrs Fyne's association with the girl-friends. The shift from kids to girl-friends emphasises Mrs Fyne's role as proselytising feminist and introduces the possibility of a lesbian subtext that Marlow articulates with a certain coyness. The narrator who elsewhere insists on his iron control of the narrative here initiates a tone of equivocation and unreliability—again a point that is developed throughout TS2. Conrad is of course gesturing to those popular or sensational, as well as controversial fictional contexts like the New Woman novel, initially exemplified by Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) but which endured into the twentieth century. Certainly something of the characteristics of Hardy's Sue Bridehead appears here in the combined presentations of Mrs Fyne and Flora. Jane Eldridge Miller has observed that

> In his 1912 postscript to the preface of *Jude the Obscure*, [Hardy]... agrees with a German critic that Sue Bridehead is "the woman of the feminist movement—the slight, pale, "bachelor" girl—the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet; who does not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession."

> *(Miller 1994, 34)*

In the emended TS2 Conrad fleshed out Mrs Fyne's role as an ardent feminist, interested in the careers of her "girl-friends," advocating female autonomy and writing books on women's education, although she apparently sustains a highly conventional marriage herself. Conrad's method seemed also to include a fitting acknowledgement, on his part, of the difficulty someone like Hardy had found in writing seriously about the contemporary position of women for a popular readership. On the other hand, Conrad exploited the new market for fiction about women's issues (where Laurence Bliss or John Galsworthy had found some success). First, these texts capitalised on the topicality of the Woman Question. But Conrad avoids to some extent the problems encountered by Hardy in his presentation of the New Woman by refusing a direct confrontation with the issue. He distances himself as author from the narrative frame in his novel and couches his presentation of Mrs Fyne

in Marlow's ironic tone, while providing an interlocuter who will later question the validity of Marlow's position.

But this passage from TS2 not only gestures to the political context. Consider the line—*But I soon saw that he could hardly tell one from the other*. Here we need to return to the issue of serialisation. Marlow hints at the homogeneity of all those ubiquitous images of women to be found in contemporary serial publications. The moment initiates an overall shaping of the critique of female representation throughout the book, where the text constantly refers us to the limited nature of existing representations of women (including Marlow's).

Conrad had published "A Smile of Fortune" in *The London Magazine* in 1911, and "Freya of the Seven Isles" appeared in the same journal in June 1912. He possessed copies of the issues, which he had already offered to send to Henri Davray to show that he "had arrived" in terms of popular publication (Karl and Davies 1996, 61). It is of interest here to consider that before Conrad commenced the revisions of *Chance* he had been discussing with Davray the publication of his earlier stories in a magazine context. We might speculate to what extent Conrad was aware of the illustrations for these journals, but in the text of "Smile" he certainly teases the reader with a wry perspective on visual conventions associated with the representation of women. While the illustration accompanying the story presents a sensuous, but otherwise traditional portrait of the heroine, in the text Alice Jacobus appears entrapped in her father's house, "snarling and superb," "the everlastingly irritated captive of the garden." If we then compare, for example, the illustration for "Smile," which followed directly an advertisement for Beecham's Pills sporting a very similar image, with an earlier illustration for the front cover of the American *Ladies Home Journal* in 1903, we find a curious iconographic homogeneity. The practice of syndication is partly responsible (whereby one image might be sold to any number of periodicals to illustrate any number of different features). The construction of visual stereotypes in these illustrations make the interaction between Conrad's text and the context in which it is published peculiarly disjunctive. In each of the above examples, the representation of the woman converges in the depiction of hairstyle, facial characteristics and bone structure, expression, and so

on. The limitation of popular representations of women seems to provide evidence for Conrad's sense of the limitations experienced by the female protagonist of his story. Alice Jacobus expresses, with unladylike defiance, a feeling of frustration in her role as dependent woman, confined to the spaces of a bizarre *hortus conclusus*, where she is destined to conform to conventional assumptions about her appearance and behavior.

In similar fashion, whether consciously or not, Conrad's serial text of *Chance* also allows for some ironic readings in context. But I would suggest that it is *after* the serialisation of *Chance,* as Conrad turned to the book version, that he refined and sharpened his response to a disjunction between visual and textual representations occurring in the context of popular romance, and that, on reflection, he tightened his critique by offering a comment on the initial context in which so many of these romances appeared. Marlow is himself quick to point out that Mrs Fyne corresponds to the popular visual image of the New Woman. In this chapter he describes her dress, in white shirt, jacket, tie, and culottes—matching, in fact, an illustration for a *New York Herald* Magazine feature of 1912 on the "Joys of Women Walking."

I will now turn to TS3, the typescript held in the Beinecke Collection at Yale University. This text is almost certainly the final typescript before the type-setting and proof stage, where we find Conrad's ultimate polishing of the text, with its new focus for Mrs Fyne's character.

> The atmosphere of that holiday cottage was—if I may put it so—brightly dull. Healthy faces, fair complexions, clear eyes, and never a frank smile in the whole lot, unless perhaps from the girl friend.
>
> The girl-friend problem exercised me greatly.
>
> *How and* where they got these pretty creatures *to come and stay with them* I can't imagine. I had at first the wild suspicion that they were obtained to amuse Fyne. But I soon discovered that he could hardly tell one from the other, though obviously their presence met with his solemn approval. These *girls in fact* came for Mrs Fyne. They treated her with admiring deference. *She* answered to some need of *theirs.* They sat at her feet. They were like disciples. It was very curious. Of Fyne they took but scanty notice. As to myself I was made to feel that I did not exist.
>
> After tea we would sit down to chess and then Fyne's everlasting gravity became faintly tinged by an attenuated gleam of something inward which resembled sly satisfaction.
>
> *(TS3 Yale)*

In TS3 Conrad clinches Mrs Fyne's role—he gives her greater powers of authority over the girls. There is a reversal of roles: *she* answered to some need of *theirs.* Mrs Fyne replaces, in Marlow's view, the authoritative role of the husband or indeed himself. This addition to the text is helpful in Conrad's deeper parody of Mrs Fyne's political position later in the text. When Flora later elopes with Mrs Fyne's brother, Mrs Fyne proves to be the most conventional of sexual moralists complaining that Flora is an "adventuress." Conrad here provides a commentary that supports the words of Grant Allen's heroine in *The Woman Who Did* (1895), who observes that "the education at Girton [College, Cambridge] made only a pretence at freedom. At heart, our girls were as enslaved to the conventions as any girls elsewhere. The whole object of the training was to see just how far you could manage to push a woman's education without the faintest danger of her emancipation."

Conrad's presentation of Mrs Fyne's "biblical" authority with the disciples at her feet reverses the patriarchal role. As she takes leadership of what looks like a Victorian reading group, she is given the role of a Mrs Pankhurst rather than a Carlylean figure. But more importantly, Marlow's authority as narrator is also undermined. Marlow's unnamed interlocuter challenges his more outrageous pronouncements about the nature of women: "Do you really believe what you have said?" Marlow's presentation of feminism in the novel is shown up to be unreliable and driven principally by anxiety for his own role as convenor of the narrative.

So, as Conrad revised his critique of romance, allowing for a wry perspective on the conventional marriage plot, he brought to bear on the text references to forms of fiction associated with a female readership, the romance, the New Woman novel, contemporary political references. But he also produced an astute reading of the representation of women in popular journals with their highly visual component. He shows up the limitations upon women of this homogenising effect of syndication, of a dissemination of repetitious images to a wider public than ever before. Even the critique of patriarchy itself is open to the media's conventionalising effects. The representation of the feminist solidifies into yet another popular convention.

With the publication of *Chance,* Conrad moved into a new phase of his career, but I

would argue that he nevertheless sustained in his later novels the critique of serial publication established during *Chance*'s revision from serial to book. Conrad's final texts all appear in contexts that promote conservative generic expectations and readership. Illustrations of the serial instalments offer misleading and highly sentimentalised representations of what in the text amounts to far more problematic, disjunctive moments of narration. For example, illustrations of Doña Rita (*The Arrow of Gold*) in *Lloyd's Magazine* are indistinguishable from the face of the girl widely used to advertise De Reszke cigarettes in periodicals of the period, belying that character's self-interrogations in the text. Instalments of *The Rover* appeared in 1923 in the monthly *Pictorial Review* (see Mott 1957, 362) where Conrad's written text seems to conform initially to the illustrations of a conventional romance figure. He describes the heroine, Arlette, entering the novel thus: "A young woman with a fichu round her neck and a striped white and red skirt, with black hair and a red mouth, appeared in an inner doorway." The image is reminiscent of Flora de Barral in *Chance* (who also possesses black hair and a red mouth). Yet Arlette also defeats expectations of female passivity associated with the idealised visual framing of her entrance. Later in the text we learn of her first-hand experiences of "The Terror" during the French Revolution, and she takes an active lead in the romance plot with Réal). Conrad uses Arlette, like Flora in the final version of *Chance*, to resist the syndicated repetitions of popular images of the romance heroine. The critique is never explicit, but we detect Conrad's implicit reference to the effects of representational homogeneity that we have seen emerge in his rewriting of *Chance*.

Following the brutal cutting of the serial version of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and that book's subsequent failure with contemporary audiences, the author famously stopped writing novels. We might speculate on what Hardy might have produced had he, like Conrad, had the opportunity to exploit the potential for a sceptical response to the processes and methodologies of popular marketing. While *Chance* still suffers from enduring critical assumptions about its "inferior" status as romance, I believe that the textual history of the novel makes it look less like a capitulation to market forces than an initiation of an astute and highly modernist response to them.

**Source:** Susan Jones, "Modernism and the Marketplace: The Case of Conrad's *Chance*," in *College Literature*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Summer 2007, pp. 101–19.

### Lee Garver

*In this essay, Garret argues that from Ezra Pound's translations of medieval texts one can discern not only early ideals of modernist poetry, but also Pound's political leanings.*

Ezra Pound's pre-World War I medieval translations are the ugly ducklings of contemporary Pound scholarship. At a time when Pound's work is undergoing unprecedented socio-cultural scrutiny, these works find themselves snubbed. To the extent they are even discussed by critics, the poems are assigned strictly aesthetic importance, and the bulk of scholarship on them is more than twenty years old. This is particularly true of Pound's most celebrated pre-war translation—"The Seafarer." Although it has long been regarded as one of Pound's major "personae," a poem that gives expression to themes of manly virtue and heroic individual endeavor which were dear to the young American expatriate, analyses of the work have always focused on issues of language. Arguing that "The Seafarer" consistently sacrifices sense to sound, critics have concentrated on Pound's efforts to bring the harsh, alliterative resources of Anglo-Saxon prosody into modern English poetry. They have emphasized how the poem helped "break the pentameter" and thereby provided the "first heave," as Pound would later reflect in Canto 81, in the modernist poetic revolution. In contrast to Pound's translations for *Cathay* (1915) and *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919), which have been rightly perceived as major statements about World War I and British imperialism respectively, "The Seafarer" has been considered apolitical. Other than identifying a "fiercely anti-bourgeois" undercurrent (Alexander, *Poetic Achievement* 76), critics have never tied it to contemporary political events or controversies, and the assumption that its subject matter exists apart from ideology continues to shape views of the work.

This, in my opinion, represents a significant oversight. When viewed together with medievalist commentary and political reflections published by Pound between 1911 and 1914, "The Seafarer" reveals itself to be not only deeply political but surprisingly socialist in its sympathies. Modernist scholars have always recognized that Pound's interest in medieval poetry was rooted in an appreciation of craft traditions hostile to

> **WHEN PROPERLY CONTEXTUALIZED, POUND'S MEDIEVALIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO *THE NEW AGE* OPEN A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON HIS POLITICS, REVEALING THAT HIS YOUTHFUL POLITICAL VIEWS WERE CONSIDERABLY MORE PROGRESSIVE, LEFT-LEANING, AND ANGLO-MEDIEVAL IN INSPIRATION THAN HAS BEEN REALIZED."**

capitalism, but they have not otherwise identified a progressive ideological dimension to his concern with the medieval past. Indeed, they have tended to assume that this interest was principally conservative and aestheticist in nature and have argued that his pre-war politics were shaped almost solely by his engagement with the radical individualist and at times reactionary polemics of Dora Marsden and Wyndham Lewis. While I do not wish to dismiss the importance of Marsden and Lewis to Pound's political outlook or to suggest that Pound was not at times a reactionary, I do want to argue that there were other significant influences on Pound's views. When one examines his pre-war medieval and political writings in the context of Anglo-Saxon and nationalist discourses of the period, the great labor strikes of 1911–12, and above all progressive political discussion found in A.R. Orage's *The New Age* (1907–22)—the magazine which first published "The Seafarer" in 1911—one discovers that early twentieth-century Anglo-medieval radicals and socialists had an equal impact on his politics.

*The New Age* was the most important socialist magazine in Edwardian and Georgian England, an eclectic mix of politics, literature, and art that gave voice to a variety of anti-capitalist viewpoints, many of which were scathingly critical of the Liberal and Labor parties in Parliament. The magazine was also an enthusiastic supporter of rank-and-file labor unrest and a major exponent of Anglo-medieval radicalism, most notably a hybrid, anti-statist variant of socialism known as guild socialism. By publishing "The Seafarer" in this venue, where English historical pride and radical progressive politics

commingled, Pound did far more than simply contribute to a recovery of interest in Anglo-Saxon prosody or establish, as some critics might have us believe, an alliance with conservative critics of capitalism; he affirmed his solidarity with striking English laborers, particularly what was understood to be their patriotic efforts to recover ancient Saxon liberties. In addition, by discussing in subsequent contributions to the magazine how the medieval past could provide a precedent for reforming contemporary poetics and politics, Pound gave literary and cultural support to the efforts of *New Age* editor A.R. Orage and others to apply the example of medieval guilds to a modern industrial economy. Although Pound would never self-identify as a guild socialist, he was intrigued by the guild labor model, especially insofar as it offered a means by which contemporary English workers might balance the claims of personal liberty with social responsibility, and he drew upon it in ways that highlight heretofore unrecognized medievalist socialist affinities in his work.

The most obvious affinity between Pound and *New Age* Anglo-medieval radicals, one already noted by a number of scholars, was a shared emphasis on the importance of medieval craft traditions to the reform of art and industry in Great Britain. Unlike their continental counterparts, most British socialists placed relatively little importance on the thought of Karl Marx. This was especially true of *The New Age*, where nineteenth-century and distinctly English medievalist critics of capitalism William Morris, John Ruskin, and Thomas Carlyle, the latter two considered "socialists malgré eux without knowing it" (Shaw-Sparrow 55), exercised far greater influence. As a consequence, the magazine regarded medievalist social criticism as fundamental to its mission and gave prominent space to its aesthetic-minded spokesmen, including architect A.J. Penty, author of *The Restoration of the Gild System* (1906) and a fierce critic of modern machine production, and art critic Huntly Carter, who was in contrast what Michael Saler has recently identified as a "medieval modernist," someone who sought to integrate modern industry and medieval values and use English medievalist discourses to defend modernist and avant-garde innovations in the arts (Saler 1–3). Pound's first contribution to *The New Age*, a twelve-part series of medieval poetic translations and scholarly reflections titled "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," of which

"The Seafarer" was the first installment, would have had appeal to both men and their allies in the magazine. Throughout the series, which appeared between November 1911 and February 1912, Pound sought not only to reawaken interest in the achievements of such medieval poets as Arnaut Daniel and Guido Cavalcanti, whose writings remained in his view touchstones of artistic accomplishment, but also to indicate ways their work might be, to those of a more modernist outlook, "of service to the living art" ("I Gather the Limbs of Osiris").

For most Pound critics, these affinities with Anglo-medieval radicals comprise the entirety of Pound's pre-war engagement with the politics of *The New Age*. They find it unimaginable that he could have found inspiration in any kind of progressive labor doctrine and characterize Pound's early tenure with the magazine as one of awkward accommodation. However, these scholars underestimate the extent to which Pound shared the larger aims and goals of this publication, something that becomes quite obvious when "The Seafarer" is examined in its original historical context. Nothing did more to establish Pound's medievalist credentials in *The New Age* than this poem, and it would remain an important point of reference for the magazine for years to come. Although *New Age* editor Orage did not always see eye-to-eye with Pound on matters of aesthetics and often criticized him for allying himself with literary movements of "foreign extraction . . . none of them native" ("Readers and Writers" 333), he was always unstinting in his praise of "The Seafarer." In August 1915, a time of tension between the two men, Orage described the translation as "without doubt one of the finest literary works of art produced in England in the last ten years" ("Readers and Writers" 332), and it cannot be overestimated to what extent the poem laid the foundation for Pound's long and fruitful friendship with his editor, a friendship that would persist until Orage's death in 1934. As will be seen, more so than any other work of literature published in the magazine before 1914, "The Seafarer" gave patriotic voice to the beliefs and values of Anglo-medieval socialists in *The New Age*.

The poem's progressive radicalism begins with its Anglo-Saxon subject matter. In radical and socialist circles of the time, Anglo-Saxons were closely associated with the working classes. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, a number of key political radicals in England, most

notably Obadiah Hulme, began to revive the longstanding myth of the "Norman Yoke" in a new and aggressively populist manner. Unlike the political establishment of that era, which looked to the Glorious Revolution and Magna Carta—both aristocratic and parliamentary settlements—in defining English notions of liberty, Hulme and other radicals turned back to what historian Gerald Newman has described as "the nebulous and ill-documented golden age of the Saxon common man, the age before the coming of the Normans and the establishment of the feudal system" (184). By invoking this mythological history, these radicals hoped to "delegitimate contemporary government and stimulate people to 'repossess' their stolen rights" (190). Such ideas were later embraced by William Cobbett, the Chartists, and other defenders of worker rights in the nineteenth century, leading to the development of a tradition in labor circles that Anglo-Saxons were the once glorious upholders of all their lost liberties.

Equally important to Pound's original readers would have been the translation's seafaring theme. As an island nation, England had long relied on its navy to protect its shores and its merchant sailors to foster prosperity, and its national identity was deeply rooted in images of sea adventure, perhaps never more so than during the Edwardian era. This was a period when maritime defense and commerce enjoyed newly acquired status and national economic importance. Despite the military exploits of Lord Nelson during the Napoleonic Wars and the growth of overseas trade during the long peace that followed, the nineteenth century had witnessed a relative decline in the prestige of England's navy and shipbuilding yards. Poorly trained officers and mutinous crews, frequently recruited through the brutal methods of the press-gang, appalled reformers, and in the 1850s and 1860s, French and American technological innovations in shipbuilding left the much larger English navy and merchant fleets looking decidedly out-of-date (Thomson 97–8; Pugh 84–5). However, by the time Germany began to challenge English naval supremacy in the opening decade of the twentieth century, the English navy had reasserted itself, becoming a source of national pride and the primary bulwark against a much-feared German invasion. The first battleship to use turbine propulsion, the English *Dreadnought*, immediately rendered every foreign battleship obsolete, and the public rallied

behind an expensive naval shipbuilding program (Pugh 156). Merchant shipbuilding and marine engineering were similarly important to the nation's self-image. At a time when the country's iron, steel, coal, and textile industries were losing ground to foreign competition, England was a world leader in these nautical spheres. Besides being an innovator in engine design, the nation broke new ground in the development of refrigerator ships and oil tankers, and its shipyards produced approximately three-fifths of all sea-going vessels on the globe (Arthur J. Taylor 110–17). For the intensely patriotic readers of *The New Age*, no less than for other Englishmen, Pound's subject matter would have had undeniable appeal, especially insofar as it celebrated the labors of working-class Britons who made these industrial successes possible.

But all this is mere backdrop to the seaman's strike of June and July 1911, the key reason why a poem about an Anglo-Saxon sailor would have struck a responsive chord among Anglo-medieval radicals of the time. When historians discuss the great labor upheavals that shook Britain in the years just before World War I, they typically speak about the dockworker and railway men strikes of 1911 and the coal strikes of 1912, which involved spectacularly large numbers of men. However, when Pound first published "The Seafarer" in November 1911, readers of *The New Age* would have regarded the smaller seamen's strike as equally monumental. Not only did the seamen's strike take place first, acting as a match to a powder keg of labor discontent, but it was also widely perceived to be the opening salvo in a struggle to discredit Liberal paternalism and Labor Party parliamentarism. In his first comments about the strike, Orage declared, "If the proper alternative to State doles administered by a costly bureaucracy is to raise wages, the Seaman's Union have this week appeared in the role of successful statesmen" ("Notes of the Week" June 29, 1911, 193). In later remarks, after protests became more violent, Orage became even more stridently supportive of the seamen. Celebrating their "repudiation of the moderating counsels of their timid leaders, in whom the virus of Parliamentary decorum still lingers," he asserted, "We are happy to record the fact that while Parliament has been fiddling the sea-ports have been burning" ("Notes of the Week" July 6, 1911, 218). He firmly believed that the seaman's strike represented a prophetic moment in labor history.

Parliamentarism having hopelessly failed to raise wages or ameliorate conditions, workmen everywhere will be driven to resume their war on shareholders by the barbarous weapons of the strike, with its accompaniments of "peaceful" intimidation and police charges. By good or evil fortune, the first battle of the new campaign has been opened by the toughest and most desperate regiment of wage-slaves in existence. Should it result, as it has every appearance of resulting, in a victory for the men, their example will be followed by all the big unions in the Kingdom. We are at the end of the Liberal policy of opportunism and the Labour Party's policy of importunity. War has resumed.

*("Notes of the Week" July 6, 1911, 218)*

Giving even greater significance to these remarks was the fact that, with the partial exception of the dockworker strike, none of the labor outbursts that immediately followed were nearly as successful. Of the more sizeable railway men's revolt, Orage could only lament that "the most promising strike ever recorded in English history should be treacherously nipped in the bud by the men's own officials" ("Notes of the Week" September 7, 1911, 433). As a consequence of these disappointments, the seamen would long hold pride of place in *The New Age*'s labor pantheon, only ceding this honor during the massive coal strike of 1912.

Pound would certainly have been aware of the incendiary nature of his subject, and he took several steps to ensure that his translation would be understood to be in part a commentary about the recent seaman's strike. Most obviously, he made the poem's heroic protagonist identifiably working class in character and circumstance. This is evident from the very beginning of the poem.

> May I for my own self song's truth reckon,
> Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days
> Hardship endured oft.
> Bitter breast-cares have I abided,
> Known on my keel many a care's hold,
> And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent
> Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship's head
> While she tossed close to cliffs. Coldly afflicted,
> My feet were by frost benumbed.
> Chill its chains are; chafing sighs
> Hew my heart round and hunger begot
> Mere-weary mood . . .

*("I Gather the Limbs of Osiris")*

Like the striking seamen, described by Orage as "the toughest and most desperate regiment of wage-slaves in existence," the poem's

weary speaker leads a life of grinding and perilous labor, stoically enduring hunger and cold while piloting a small ship at night amidst pounding storms. Other translators of the poem note the bitter cold and hardship, but in keeping with the original they make no mention of physical weariness or hunger, instead emphasizing the speaker's emotional sorrow and deprivation. Even the poem's rough-hewn rhythms and language, typically understood to be of purely formal significance, contribute to the impression that the speaker is a hardened laborer, not someone of more refined background and tastes. Phrases such as "bitter breast-cares" and "close to cliffs," with their insistent repetition of heavily accented "b" and "k" sounds, together with the poem's densely impacted syntax, give a rough eloquence to his speech that would have been understood to correspond with the toughness and dignity of contemporary workmen.

Pound further expressed tacit sympathy for the striking seamen by invoking class antagonisms not present in the original Anglo Saxon. In the original poem, the seafarer speaks of how the joys and kindnesses of "the Lord" inspire him more than his dead life on the sea. In Pound's version, he instead comments, "My lord deems to me this dead life", a dramatic alteration of the poem's meaning which transforms God into a mere mortal and assigns responsibility for the seafarer's hardships to this now culpable and heartless authority. Even more cutting are the speaker's attacks on the rich. A quarter of the way into the translation, he establishes a sharp contrast between the "needy" and "wealthy." "Not any protector," he asserts:

> May make merry man faring needy.
> This he little believes, who aye in winsome life
> Abides amid burghers some heavy business,
> Wealthy and wine-flushed, how I weary oft
> Must bide above brine.

Translators both before and after Pound invariably render what he translates as "needy" as either "cheerless" or "despairing"; they never suggest that the speaker is referring to anything other than emotional deprivation. Similarly, translators never refer to the "wealthy" or individuals engaged in "heavy business." Instead, they merely speak about proud and wine-flushed city dwellers. These strategic deviations from the poem's original meaning, together with such uniquely Poundian interpolations as "arrogance of all earthen riches" later in the translation, give

a startlingly contemporary significance to "The Seafarer." No longer is the speaker merely contrasting his difficult labors with those of soft-living city folk. Instead he is making a bitterly pointed comment about economic and class inequalities in contemporary England. The speaker risks his life on the ocean while wealthy businessmen are blithely unaware of his toils. In addition, he notably has little faith that any "protector" could make a needy laborer such as himself "merry," a reflection of the fact that at the beginning of the twentieth century the working classes no longer trusted the landed aristocracy or even Liberal reformists to safeguard their welfare.

This disdain for protectors is especially important because it helps further explain the appeal of this poem to Anglo-medieval radicals and socialists. It is often assumed that socialism has always been synonymous with state control of industry and social welfare. This, however, was not the case in *The New Age*, where, as has been seen, Parliament was frequently viewed with scorn. Unlike the Fabian Society, which looked to the House of Commons to redress economic and social ills, most socialists in the magazine viewed the state with suspicion and regarded social welfare reform with horror. Orage was typical in this respect. Although he wanted the state to rein in the worst abuses of monopoly capitalism, he did not wish to entrust government with vast new powers. In his view, most reformers tended to treat workmen as mere abstractions, not fully autonomous individuals. "The houses, the conveniences, the amenities, the traveling facilities, the conditions of labour, the religion, the morality, the very streets and roads provided by our professed philanthropists," he complained, "are intended for that abstraction, the people, but they are one and all abhorrent to the individual" ("Unedited Opinions. Contempt for Man" 203). Even worse, these Liberal reformers did not listen to or trust workmen to look after their own interests. Lamenting the gulf between the "mechanical" proceedings of Parliament and the "personal" wishes of laborers ("Notes of the Week" July 27, 1911, 289), Orage excoriated almost every major reform proposal of his age, none more so than a Liberal Party-sponsored National Insurance Bill which proposed that state revenues and compulsory contributions from employers and employees be used to create a nationally distributed insurance fund to protect workers against sickness and certain forms of unemployment. Orage believed that this bill

would only be the first step in the imposition of "barrack and uniform conditions for everybody" ("Unedited Opinions. Contempt for Man" 203). In his opinion, by encouraging workers to forsake the sometimes "onerous responsibilities that membership of a trade union involves" ("Notes of the Week" May 18, 1911, 50) for a less demanding state-administered insurance system financed by compulsory deductions from wages, the proposed legislation was the "pioneer of slavery." "There is no doubt whatever," he asserted, "that if the working classes are willing to allow officials to spend 4d. a week for them they will expected before long to submit to a much greater tutelage" ("Notes of the Week" August 17, 1911, 362).

When read in light of such comments, the spirited independence and self-reliance of Pound's seafarer, who claims to sing about his seagoing hardships solely for his "own self," can be understood to speak for a view of labor in the magazine that stood opposed to all forms of state paternalism. Particularly important in this respect are those parts of the poem that draw out the moody, impetuous nature of the speaker. As Pound's translation makes powerfully evident, the speaker is not merely a type or representative of a sea laborer; he is an individual with a rich emotional and spiritual life in its own right. The following passage is characteristic.

> So that but now my heart burst from my
>    breastlock,
> My mood 'mid the mere-flood,
> Over the whale's acre, would wander wide.

These lines portray someone whose heart is so bursting with emotion it can be contained by only vast stretches of ocean, thereby giving support to Orage's view that laborers should under no circumstances be treated as bloodless, cardboard abstractions. Even more significant is the speaker's headstrong, defiant character. As Pound is at pains to emphasize throughout the translation, his protagonist is an individual whose native Saxon love of liberty is too strong to be restrained by anyone, least of all any authority figure. "Not though he be given his good," declares the speaker, he "shall have his sorrow for sea-fare / Whatever his lord will." In the original poem, the seafarer speaks fearfully in these lines about what "the Lord" or "Almighty God" will ordain for him during his travels. In Pound's rendition, this pious and humble statement becomes instead a brazen assertion of independence. Even if his lord gave him proper recompense for his service, the speaker claims he would do exactly as he pleases. Such

declarations would have had a twofold political significance for Pound's original readers. By celebrating the uncompromising self-sufficiency of an Anglo-Saxon sailor, a figure associated with labor freedom in *The New Age*, Pound denied that social welfare legislation would, as Orage feared, succeed in "'break[ing] the proud spirit of the poor'" ("Notes of the Week" May 18, 1911, 50). He also allied himself with pronouncements in *The New Age* that there was "a new spirit" permeating "industrial workers," a "sternness of attitude and mind . . . that should warn the governing and employing classes [against] merely juggling with wages and hours" (Norman 389).

Giving, however, perhaps the greatest excitement to original readers of "The Seafarer" would have been the poem's radical patriotism. Despite being the very embodiment of the mythical, freedom-loving Anglo-Saxon common man, Pound's seafarer yearns for belonging. In addition to grieving the disappearance of benevolent statesmen who might have looked after his welfare ("There come now no kings nor Caesars / Nor gold giving lords like those gone"), he expresses sorrow early in the poem that he is a "wretched outcast / Deprived of [his] kinsmen." This lament for lost community and personal ties, sadly compounded by the failures of a corrupt feudal system that has betrayed its original ideals, reaches a peak towards the end of the translation, when the speaker asserts the need for man to

> Frame on the fair earth 'gainst foes his malice,
> Daring ado, . . .
> So that all men shall honour him after
> And his laud beyond them remain mid the
>    English,
> Aye, for ever, a lasting life's-blast,
> Delight mid the doughty.

It has long been known that Pound purposely eliminated half of a line in this passage making reference to "devils" and deliberately mistranslated a word meaning "angels" as "English." However, the effect of these changes is not simply, as is commonly assumed, to make a Christian poem heroically secular. When read in light of earlier emendations and labor and nationalist discourses of the period, it becomes clear that the proposed "malice" and "daring ado" is militant and nationalistic in character. Like medieval English poet William Langland, who *The New Age* championed over Chaucer because he depicted both "the bare and barren existence of the hard-worked and ill-fed poor" and "the cruelty, rapacity, and vices of the rich"

(Gilbert 85), Pound's Anglo-Saxon seafarer directs his malice towards the wealthy, suggesting that the "foes" he speaks about in the above passage are not foreigners, about whom the translation makes no mention, but rather the lords and businessmen he criticizes earlier in the poem. What is more, Pound's deliberately anachronistic reference to how Saxon deeds of glory will "remain mid the English" is not just a pointed assertion that the English nation rests on a Saxon as opposed to Norman foundation. It is also a reminder of the recent seaman's strike, which was widely understood in *The New Age* to be a patriotic attempt by laborers in England's most successful branch of industry to recover ancient Saxon liberties. Like the seamen, who brought new honor to the nation through their daring actions, Pound's seafarer seeks lasting glory and meaning in his life through bold national sacrifice.

"The Seafarer" undoubtedly offers the most striking evidence of Pound's pre-war interest in Anglo-medieval radicalism, but it is by no means the only, or even the most pointed, proof of such concern. Subsequent contributions to *The New Age* provide rich confirmation of Pound's unorthodox socialist sympathies. Fourteen months later, in January 1913, Pound expressed unambiguous support for the great miner's strike of 1912. In a piece that was otherwise highly critical of England, comparing London to the "Rome of the decadence" and singling out for scorn the nation's "idle rich" and "idle poor," Pound spoke glowingly of the worker unrest that was unsettling the country.

> If anything were calculated to give me faith in the future of England and a belief in her present strength, it was your coal strike—which your papers misrepresented. This thing will be written in his history when the future produces a Burckhardt. A million men going out of their work and keeping perfect order . . . This thing is stupendous.
>
> *("Through Alien Eyes")*

In Pound's view, the discipline and self-possession of the miners, slanderously misrepresented by the English press, was salutary, and unless the nation created "a government based on, and representative of, the real strength of the nation—*i.e.*, the producers, the million men who struck and the rest of their sort and caliber," England would be unable to face the challenges of the new century ("Through Alien Eyes"). In

making a case for such a sweeping reorganization of government, he pointed with disdain to Parliament, which had flattered itself, in the aftermath of the strike, that labor had been "broken for the next thirty years." In his opinion, the well-to-do men in the House of Commons, whether Liberal or Conservative, were—in contrast to the miners—grossly ignorant of what it took to run the nation. Comparing their speeches to the empty "lucubrations of [a] debating club," he claimed that the only talk in the chamber that had the least bit of merit was based on first-hand knowledge of industrial production, labor, and design. Of his own observations of parliamentary debate, he commented, "I [have only] heard two things that sounded like sense—one from a man who knew something about the inside of a coal mine, and, later, another argument from a man who knew something about marine engines." In short, Pound believed, as he inimitably phrased it in his article, that "the real division of the House," indeed of the nation, was "somewhere about the gangway, rather than a matter of left and right," that only when authority was vested directly in miners, seamen, and other laborers, as opposed to chattering ideologues and politicians, would the nation be in capable hands ("Through Alien Eyes").

Aside from their obvious pro-labor slant, one of the most crucial things to note about these comments is the stress they place on "order." The strain of modernism that Pound has most persuasively been linked to in the pre-war years is, following Michael Levenson's lead, characterized not only as individualist but also "anti-traditional" and "defian[t] of social involvement" (47,151). Levenson argues that it was not until the advent of World War I that Pound and other early modernists expressed any misgivings about radical libertarianism or the liberating prospects of "general social disarray" (140). Certainly it is easy to mistake Pound's enthusiastic support of labor strikes and open disdain for parliamentary democracy as evidence of an anarchistic desire to rend the social fabric of England. One only has to look at Wyndham Lewis's *BLAST* or some of Pound's more intemperate contributions to Dora Marsden's *The Egoist* to see that he sometimes relished the possibility of a violent overthrow of authority in Great Britain. But I would argue that such writings, however accurately they may have reflected Pound's mood at the time they

were written, give an incomplete picture of his pre-war politics. When one devotes equal attention to his medievalist writings, which remained a major focus of his energies during the period, a more balanced ideological portrait emerges. Pound's many contributions to *The New Age* reveal that, for all his individualist iconoclasm and anti-establishment zeal—traits frequently shared, it should be noted, by Anglo-medieval radicals—he was, if not a medievalist socialist per se, a traditionalist and communitarian, someone deeply concerned with social order, civic responsibility, and institution building.

Like most contributors to *The New Age*, Pound believed that tradition and historical precedent could give much needed direction and restraint to the often dangerous process of political reform. During the magazine's first years of publication, George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells had been widely admired by socialist intellectuals in *The New Age* for their attempts to imagine what individuals might become if they could evolve morally and intellectually beyond their current state. Like Nietzsche before them, they placed hope for social renewal in the overthrow of supposedly antiquated notions of good and evil and the development of a new race of supermen who would cast a cold eye on long-standing social arrangements. Pound was part of a widespread reaction in the magazine against such views. Discussing his reasons for translating "The Seafarer" and other medieval poems, Pound claimed that such masterpieces, far from having lost their relevance, provided "the permanent basis of psychology and metaphysics" ("I Gather"). Later, in a series of articles titled "Patria Mia" published in Fall 1912, he was even more explicit about why the medieval past was an indispensable resource for socialist reformers. "One wants to find out what sort of things endure, and what sort of things are transient; what sort of things recur, what propagandas profit a man or his race; to learn upon what are the forces, constructive and dispersive, of social order, move." As these comments demonstrate, Pound believed socialists and other radicals always had to be cognizant of what propagandas had succeeded and failed in earlier ages if they wanted their own propagandas to be "constructive" rather than "dispersive" of social order. In addition, they reveal that he shared with Orage the view that man was "a fixed species" and that all "talk and aspiration after supermanhood

proceed[ed] from the original error of misconceiving man's nature and refusing to admit its limitations" ("Unedited Opinions. The Government of the Mind" 299).

Like Orage and other Anglo-medieval radicals, Pound also placed great importance on community and civic responsibility. Orage was a fierce proponent of free speech and individual liberty, giving space in his magazine to a wide variety of different political viewpoints, but he was no doctrinaire libertarian. In his view, liberty as an abstract ideal meant only "free play for the most stupid" ("Unedited Opinions. Down with the Tricolour" 489). Although he sometimes took gleeful pleasure in the era's disruptive labor strikes, he remained in calmer moments fearful that they might lead not to the elimination of "private property, rent and interest," but rather to "civil anarchy" or new forms of tyranny ("Notes of the Week" August 24, 1911, 386). Orage especially worried that syndicalism, the French-derived term used to describe worker efforts to seize control of the economy through a general strike, would end in "the fortification of industry against citizenship" ("Notes of the Week" June 27, 1912, 195). There was even a small but influential school of thought in his magazine, inspired by such conservative thinkers as Edmund Burke and Benjamin Disraeli, which regarded political individualism as the great enemy of civic good. Its most important spokesman, J.M. Kennedy, *The New Age*'s foreign affairs columnist and a professed Tory democrat, was an arch defender of "hierarchy," and he argued that "individualistic principles [had] invariably been supported by political parties which made a point of looking after industrial interests" (341). Pound shared many of these same concerns about the excesses of individualism. Although he argued in "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris" that "truth [was] the individual," that it was every artist's business to give expression to his own inimitable perception of the world, he also claimed that it was only through "technique," which rested on an understanding of "tradition, of centuries of . . . agreement, of association," that poets could accurately express themselves. He even equated technique with "protection of the public," regarding it as "the sign manual by which [the public] distinguishe[d] between the serious artist and the disagreeable young person expressing its haedinous egotism."

In later commentary, Pound also expressed an interest in what he described as "the equitable social order" ("The Approach to Paris"), praising medieval and early Renaissance Europe's dream of restoring the Roman "imperium." Although he admitted that the dream "came to no sort of civic reality," he argued that it nevertheless had its value. "It set a model for emulation, a model of orderly procedure, and it was used as a spur through every awakening from the eighth century to the sixteenth" ("Patria Mia"). In sum, Pound identified his own revolutionary efforts, rooted in the retrieval of medieval poetic techniques, with medieval Europe's comparable efforts to construct a new, more just society through "orderly" recovery of the lost civic, cultural, and political glories of the classical past.

Pound's belief that the gangway or workplace, not the political chamber, was the true basis of authority in England also requires additional comment. It is among the earliest indications that Pound shared *The New Age*'s interest in reviving the guild labor model. Beginning in 1911, *The New Age* gave renewed attention to A.J. Penty's ideas about returning England to a guild-based economy. However, it did so in light of the period's great labor upheavals and with a determined intention to resist Penty's personal antipathy for modern industry and machine production. The impulse behind this re-examination of Penty's thought, which would lead Orage and others in his magazine to theorize the basis of guild socialism during the next several years, was rooted in the assumption, best stated by Orage himself, that the "right to an equal share in the responsibility of management" was the "only concession" capitalists could offer workers that would solve the problem of labor unrest ("Notes of the Week" January 18, 1912, 267). Besides giving the men the recognition they craved, such a concession, Orage believed, would foster greater responsibility among laborers and build naturally on native English traditions of labor organization. "The unions," he declared,

> thus admitted and recognised in the conduct of their industries, become—what they are not now—responsible bodies, approximating in spirit to the ancient gilds. It should never be forgotten that the gild system was a genuine Saxon invention, as native to our genius as our language. The true line of development of our trade unions is, therefore, most certainly in the direction of the restoration of the essential features of the gild system—the responsibility for

skilled work, the discipline of its members, the disposition of its collective forces, and the joint control with their clients (employers in this instance) of the whole range of the industry.

*("Notes of the Week" January 18, 1912, 267)*

While laborers currently lacked any incentive to maintain social peace or corporate loyalty, the concept of joint partnership, Orage argued, would give them a powerful reason to desist from striking and to assume accountability for the skilled work and proper governance of their respective industries. More importantly, transforming unions into responsible, self-governing bodies exercising authority over discipline and working conditions would accord with England's free Saxon heritage. Guilds were "a genuine Saxon invention," native to the genius of the English people, and would better suit England's proud laborers than a system that placed primary responsibility and control over industry in the hands of either corrupt capitalists or feckless national legislators.

Although Pound did not share Orage's optimism on the subject nor look to England's Saxon past for sanction, he did believe the guild model represented a possible solution to the labor troubles of the day and that medieval history provided some hope that workers might acquire not simply joint partnership but actual ownership and control of particular industries. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in a section of "Patria Mia" published in October 1912.

> [A]ny body of a few thousand of men who really wish independence, liberty with responsibility, can achieve it under any system—under any feudalism . . . What worked once on the plane of arms will work very well on the plane of money. We see about us plenty of the old feudal equations transposed in similar fashion . . . I don't say that the burghers of free cities found life easier than did vassals. I don't say that if men owned the factories and employed their commercial agents they would get much better wages—and certainly they would not get them at the start. I don't say that the transfer of property would be easy. But I do say that it is a possible solution. And I have discussed it with at least one very intelligent and successful owner of factories; and, according to him, the only difficulty would lie in the men's unwillingness to take the risk.

As this passage makes evident, Pound clearly believed that the example of the medieval past, especially the rise of free cities made up of former feudal vassals, confirmed that modern

English workers could own and run factories themselves. As long as they were willing to shoulder the expanded duties of ownership and assume the uncertain financial risks and rewards of management, they might establish, like their feudal forbears, the grounds for a bold new social order, one that combined, as Pound so aptly phrased it, "liberty with responsibility."

This last phrase is of paramount importance. Despite speaking at times as if he were a syndicalist, Pound was no more prepared than Orage to tolerate the fortification of industry against citizenship, and critics who attempt to tie Pound to this revolutionary labor doctrine take him far too much at his own word. The model of labor organization he embraced was much closer to that of his editor than French syndicalist theoretician and exponent of violence Georges Sorel. This becomes evident in an article Pound wrote praising long-time *New Age* contributor Allen Upward in April 1914. Composed at a time when Pound's energies were turned far more to *The Egoist* and *BLAST* than to *The New Age*, this piece demonstrates that, though Pound never had much interest in the details of guild socialist doctrine, he nevertheless maintained a strong allegiance to the guild ideal throughout the pre-war period. Towards the end of his article, Pound offered a series of conclusions that could be drawn from an analysis of Upward's work.

> 1. That a nation is civilised in so far as it recognises the special faculties of the individual, and makes use thereof. You do not weigh coals with the assayer's balance.
> 1a. Corollary. Syndicalism. A social order is well balanced when the community recognises the special aptitudes of groups of men and applies them.
> 2. That Mr. Upward's propaganda is for a syndicat of intelligence; of thinkers and authors and artists.
> 2a. That such a guild is perfectly in accord with Syndicalist doctrines. That it would take its place with the guilds of more highly skilled craftsmen.
>
> *("Allen Upward Serious")*

Although Pound speaks here rather naively as if he were an advocate of syndicalism, the claims he makes on behalf of this labor doctrine are starkly out of key with those of its advocates. Whereas Sorel and other syndicalist proponents of the general strike promoted recklessness and violence as ends in themselves and sought to exacerbate tensions between social classes, Pound, like Orage and other guild socialists, sought a social

order that would be "civilised" and "well balanced." In addition, while most syndicalists anticipated the rise of autonomous syndicats or unions beholden to no central authority, Pound, in keeping with *The New Age*'s efforts at the time to promote state-mediated partnerships between guilds and their citizen clients, speaks of the need for nation and community to "recognize" and "make use" of the distinctive talents of different social groups.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of Pound's enthusiasm for the guild model is his call for the creation of a syndicat of "thinkers, authors, and artists" that would "take its place with the guilds of more highly skilled craftsmen." No longer simply voicing his opinion about what would be best for the working classes, Pound here shows a remarkable willingness to subsume his own ambitions under a modern guild system inspired by their example. The appeal for him would have been twofold. First, this was a system that promised to respect and honor "the special faculties of the individual." Unlike capitalism and parliamentary democracy, which gave authority to men who often had little knowledge or understanding of vital national trades, a guild system promised to empower England's producers, including its artists and intellectuals. One of the recurring complaints of Orage and other contributors to *The New Age* was that publishers and other capitalist middlemen, such as merchants, bankers, and accountants, wielded too much control over the arts. "What a large percentage of dunces these businesses contain," exclaimed Orage.

> A trade union that had no more skilled men in its ranks than are contained, let us say, in the ranks of publishers would find itself unemployed in a week. And serve it right, too. Society has the duty imposed on it of seeing that men are put to jobs for which their gifts fit them. But these professional rings are in league to defeat society's good intentions.
>
> *("Unedited Opinions. On the Incompetence of Professionals" 390)*

In promoting the creation of an artist's syndicat or guild, Pound was placing his hopes in a system that he believed would take proper advantage of his unique gifts and talents. Second, Pound would have been attracted to the guild ideal because of guilds' traditional commitment to upholding the highest standards of craft and production. In an ongoing series of anonymously

penned articles titled "Towards National Guilds," this point was repeatedly emphasized by *The New Age*.

> That guilds of workmen entrusted with the responsibility of national industry and receiving the public consideration (which is status) dependent upon it, would be satisfied with the current standards is against sense and against history. The history of the old Guilds proves that the restrictions on shoddy production were as severe as they were strictly kept.

*(National Guildsmen 151)*

By seeking to affiliate himself with other artists and skilled craftsmen in a larger guild-based system, Pound was not only trying to give institutional backing to his belief that technique and craft served to protect the public interest; he was also attempting to support a system that would expose as criminal what he described elsewhere in his article as "the type of writer produced by present conditions, who keeps in the public eye by a continuous output of inferior work" ("Allen Upward Serious").

When properly contextualized, Pound's medievalist contributions to *The New Age* open a new perspective on his politics, revealing that his youthful political views were considerably more progressive, left-leaning, and Anglo-medieval in inspiration than has been realized. Not only do they disclose that his sometimes fierce individualism was tempered by an interest in working-class labor organization and matters of community and social order, but we recognize that aspects of his politics which might reasonably be regarded as anti-democratic were, in fact, compatible with a liberatory socialist program, one that combined "liberty with responsibility." Although Pound certainly disdained state socialism and parliamentary democracy, prized individual liberty, and looked to the past for a better model of government, he frequently did so in the service of a modern labor politics that sought to return the country to its producers. Pound's headstrong, defiant seafarer was at once a representation of the mythical Anglo-Saxon common man, whose liberties radical socialists hoped to recover, and a timely celebration of the striking seamen, who had given warning to the ruling classes that workmen would no longer be pandered to or trifled with. Pound's support of the striking miners and interest in adopting a guild model of government were similarly progressive, providing evidence of a desire to give greater power and responsibility to England's many underpaid and underappreciated laborers.

All this in turn has important implications for how we regard Pound's later poetry and politics. We can now see that the sometimes contradictory impulses that govern *The Cantos*—in particular their efforts to balance the defiant, individualist energies of a Sigismundo Malatesta with the traditional, community-minded imperatives of a Kung, to reconcile linguistic discontinuity and order—have their roots in Pound's pre-war engagement with Anglo-medievalist radicals in *The New Age*. We can also better comprehend how Pound's early progressive views might eventually lead to a fascistic embrace of dictatorial rule. Given the precariousness of a politics rooted in heroic endeavor, impatient with Liberal democratic legislation, and intended both to empower the individual and enforce social responsibility, it would take only a slight shift in priorities for Pound to embrace a charismatic leader promising to act as a mediator and policeman for a nation's many warring elements. Finally, Pound's writings for *The New Age* powerfully remind us that Pound was once an ardent Anglophile and likely remained one in key respects for his entire life. When Pound described England as an "old bitch, gone in the teeth" in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* in 1919 and departed the country the following year, he did not betray the England celebrated in "The Seafarer," in which text he claimed to discover the "English national chemical" ("Patria Mia"). Instead he turned his back on a nation that he believed had betrayed its free Saxon heritage and the promise of the great labor strikes of 1911–12. "The Seafarer" in all its Englishness would remain a touchstone for Pound for years to come, and its line, "Lordly men, are to earth o'ergiven," would serve as a touching epitaph in the *Pisan Cantos* for Pound's many lost comrades from that era, not least A.R. Orage, editor of *The New Age* and the man who introduced the young poet to a tradition of Anglo-medieval radicalism which would cast a long shadow on his poetry and thought.

**Source:** Lee Garver, "Seafarer Socialism: Pound, *The New Age*, and Anglo-Medieval Radicalism," in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Summer 2006, pp. 1–21.

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> The artistic scene in New York in the 1920s was a "mongrelized" blend of black and white, urban and rural, male and female, according to Ann Douglas, who suggests that there is a need to understand the important contribution that marginalized groups made to American Modernism. In her book, she portrays the rise of New York City to cultural preeminence and balances the stories of traditional modernist heroes such as Ernest Hemingway with discussions of Harlem Renaissance figures such as Langston Hughes.

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> Controversial and idiosyncratic, Hugh Kenner is the most famous critic who deals with Modernism. In this book, he argues that Ezra Pound, not T. S. Eliot or James Joyce, is the central figure of Modernism and that all of Modernism's themes and formal devices can be found in Pound's writings.

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# Naturalism

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1860

Naturalism applies scientific ideas and principles, such as instinct and Darwin's theory of evolution, to fiction. Authors in this movement wrote stories in which the characters behave in accordance with the impulses and drives of animals in nature. The tone is generally objective and distant, like that of a botanist or biologist taking notes or preparing a treatise. Naturalist writers believe that truth is found in natural law, and because nature operates according to consistent principles, patterns, and laws, truth is consistent.

Because the focus of Naturalism is human nature, stories in this movement are character-driven rather than plot-driven. Although Naturalism was inspired by the work of the French writer Émile Zola, it reached the peak of its accomplishment in the United States. In France, Naturalism was most popular in the late 1870s and early 1880s, but it emerged in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and remained in vogue up to World War I.

The fundamental naturalist doctrine is presented in Zola's 1880 essay "Le roman experimental" (meaning "the experimental—or experiential—novel"). In it, Zola claims that the naturalist writers subject believable characters and events to experimental conditions. In other words, these writers take the known (such as a character) and introduce it into the unknown (such as an unfamiliar place). Another major principle of
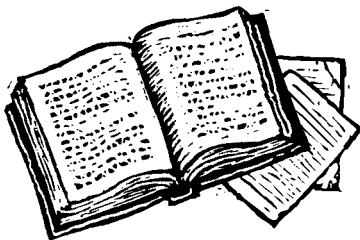
Naturalism that Zola explains in this essay is the idea of determinism, which is the theory that a person's fate is determined solely by factors and forces beyond an individual's personal control, such as heredity and environment.

While the French initiated and developed Naturalism, Americans are credited with bringing it to its fullest expression. American Naturalist writers include the novelists Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Hamlin Garland, and Jack London; the short story writer O. Henry (William Sydney Porter); and the poets Edwin Arlington Robinson and Edgar Lee Masters. Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* is considered the pinnacle of naturalist achievement. Other representative works are Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, London's *The Call of the Wild*, Norris's *McTeague*, and Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*.



*Jack London* (*The Library of Congress*)

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Stephen Crane (1871–1900)

Best remembered for his Civil War narrative, *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane was born on November 1, 1871, six years after the war ended. He was born in Newark, New Jersey, and later launched his career in New York as a journalist for the *New York Herald, New York Tribune*, and *New York Journal*. His first story, the novella, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, was self-published when he was twenty-two years old. In 1895 *The Red Badge of Courage* was published, making Crane internationally famous and enabling him to focus on writing fiction for the rest of his short life. Crane died of tuberculosis on June 5, 1900, in Badenweiler, Germany. His body is buried in Hillside, New Jersey.

Crane's major contribution to American literature is his examination of the nature of courage in the novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, the story of Henry Fleming, a young man who enlists to fight in the Civil War. Through his experiences, Fleming ultimately discovers that he possesses courage but that war is less glamorous and far more brutal than he imagined it would be. With this narrative, Crane takes the characteristics of Naturalism and applies them to a critical period in American history. The result is a work that was immediately embraced by Americans at the time of publication and

continued to be admired and taught into the twenty-first century.

### Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945)

Born in Terre Haute, Indiana, on August 27, 1871, Theodore Dreiser enjoyed a successful career as a journalist and novelist. Dreiser left Indiana as a young man and found work in Chicago as a journalist. When his first novel, *Sister Carrie*, was a failure, he was plagued by self-doubt. But this initial disappointment proved to be unfounded, as he rose to prominence in literary circles, was a finalist for the Nobel Prize for literature in 1930, and received an Award of Merit from the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1945. Dreiser died of a heart attack in Los Angeles, California, on December 28, 1945.

In *An American Tragedy* and *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser depicts the dark side of the myth of the American dream, a recurring theme in his work. Both novels feature tragic characters who are the victims of their own desires. In any discussion of Naturalism, *An American Tragedy* is generally held up as the best example. But *Sister Carrie* also illustrates the movement.

### *Jack London (1876–1916)*

Jack London was born on January 12, 1876, in San Francisco, California, and raised by his mother alone after they were deserted by his father. London educated himself by studying at public libraries. As a young man, he worked as a sailor, punctuated by periods of homelessness and joblessness. In 1896, he briefly attended the University of California but was unable to finish because of a lack of money. In 1897, he took part in the Klondike gold rush in northern Canada, an experience that fueled his writing although malnourishment affected his health. He returned to Oakland, California, the following year and began to seriously pursue a career in writing. Advances in printing technology made magazines cheaper to produce and resulted in a boom market for short fiction. Within two years, London was earning a more than respectable income as a writer. His second novel, *The Call of the Wild,* was published and widely advertised by Macmillan in 1903, propelling London to literary fame. London was dogged by claims of plagiarism, stemming from his use of newspaper articles as inspiration and resource for his stories. He died November 22, 1916, at his home in Glen Ellen, California, from complications stemming from kidney failure. Some believe he may have overdosed—on purpose or by accident—on the morphine he was taking to manage his pain.

### *Frank Norris (1870–1902)*

Benjamin Franklin Norris Jr. was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 5, 1870. He was an artistic and well-educated man, having studied painting in 1887 at the Atelier Julien in Paris and attended the University of California at Berkeley (1890–94) and Harvard University (1894–95). Like many naturalist writers, he worked in journalism as a foreign correspondent. Norris wrote from South Africa for the *San Francisco Chronicle* from 1895 to 1896, and from Cuba for S. S. McClure Syndicate of New York City as a war correspondent in 1898. He died of appendicitis in San Francisco, California, on October 25, 1902.

Norris is one of the major writers who developed American Naturalism. Critics regard his work as closest to the pure Naturalism described by Zola. His most notable works are *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, *The Octopus: A Story of California*, and *The Pit: A Story of Chicago*. Although *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* was written early in Norris's career, many scholars consider it his masterpiece. *The Octopus: A Story of California* and *The Pit: A Story of Chicago* are two volumes of an unfinished trilogy. In addition to novels, Norris wrote numerous short stories that appeared in publications for a wide range of audiences.

### *Edith Wharton (1862–1937)*

Edith Wharton was born January 24, 1862, in New York City to a wealthy family. In addition to writing fiction, she was an acclaimed designer. She designed her famous home, The Mount, in Lenox, Massachusetts, which as of the early 2000s has served as a public museum devoted to Wharton's talent and life. Unhappy in her marriage, in 1913, Wharton divorced her husband of twenty-eight years after he was committed to a hospital following a mental break. She left The Mount and settled permanently in France. During World War I, she became involved in charitable works in France, aiding the displaced, the unemployed, and the ill. In 1921, Wharton became the first woman to receive a Pulitzer Prize, which was awarded for her novel *The Age of Innocence* (1920). Wharton was a prolific author of over seventy books, including novels, poetry, and memoir. She died on August 11, 1937, in France.

### *Émile Zola (1840–1902)*

Émile Zola was born in Paris, France, on April 2, 1840. During his career Zola wrote novels, short stories, plays, translations, and criticism. He was awarded the position of Officer of Legion d'Honneur in 1888–89. This position was revoked, however, because of Zola's disputes with the French government. Always a controversial figure, Zola had a wide audience among his contemporaries and remains a major figure in French literature in the twenty-first century. He died of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning on September 29, 1902, in Paris. Although he was buried in Paris, his ashes were later moved to the Pantheon in Rome, Italy, home to the tombs of many of the greatest thinkers in the world.

Considered the most prominent theorist of Naturalism, Zola wrote the essay "Le roman experimental" (meaning "the experimental—or experiential—novel") in 1880. In it, Zola explains that the role of the naturalist novelist is to subject believable characters to experimental conditions in order to find truth (meaning natural law). The author, in a sense, becomes

an experimental scientist. Zola also claims that character is conditioned, determined by heredity and environment. Although Zola is credited as the father of Naturalism, his views are often considered to represent the extremes of the style.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The Age of Innocence

Wharton's novel, *The Age of Innocence* was published in 1920 and won the 1921 Pulitzer Prize. The novel opens in New York City during the 1870s among the social elite. Concerned with changing social values and behaviors, *The Age of Innocence* tells the story of Newland Archer, a young man from a wealthy family who is engage to May Welland, his equal in breeding. Despite himself, Newland falls in love with May's scandalous cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, who is visiting from Europe to escape an unhappy marriage. Newland and May marry when it seems impossible that he and Ellen can be together. Years later, he changes his mind and determines to leave May for Ellen when the latter is preparing to return to Europe. At the last second, May tells Newland that she is pregnant and Newland chooses to honor his marital commitment over Ellen. Twenty-five years later, the now widowed Newland and his son are in Paris; they go to visit Ellen. Newland sends his son ahead of him then decides he does not want to ruin his memory of the love of his life and he leaves without seeing Ellen. Andrea J. Sand deciphers the language of flowers used by the Victorian characters of this novel: Newland's flower, often worn in his lapel, is the gardenia, which stands for secret love.

### An American Tragedy

Published in 1925 and concerned with social and economic inequities, *An American Tragedy* is loosely based on a true story and is considered the best example of American Naturalism. It is the story of Clyde Griffiths, whose desire to realize the American dream in his life almost leads him to commit murder. In just one of the novel's examples of irony, Clyde is found guilty of committing murder, even though his intended victim died accidentally.

*An American Tragedy* illustrates how Dreiser's work demythologizes the American dream. Dreiser felt that, for the disenfranchised, believing in the American dream leads to heartbreak, disappointment, and cynicism. *An American Tragedy* typifies Naturalism because it concerns an ordinary middle-class man whose sexual impulses and desire to enter a more moneyed class converge to cause him to make extreme choices. Having always dreamed of a better life and having always been told he could create that life, Clyde arrives on the brink of entering the upper echelons of society when a wealthy woman becomes romantically interested in him. The problem is that he already has committed to marry a poor woman who has had his child. This situation is devastating for Clyde because he sees his long-awaited opportunity to fulfill his dreams slipping away. The lure of the American dream proves too strong, and he plans to kill his betrothed.

Upon publication, *An American Tragedy* received popular and critical acclaim. Some critics suggested that the novel's popular success was due to the post-World War I public's desire to read about individual social accountability. After all, Clyde is found guilty of a crime he intended to commit but did not actually carry out. Critically, the novel is declared a masterpiece and is deemed Dreiser's best work. Although some reviewers claim that the book is inelegantly written, contains bad grammar, and is overly melodramatic, many readers enthusiastically recommend it.

### The Call of the Wild

Although it started as a short story, London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) soon became a sensationally popular novel. The money London made by selling the rights to the novel enabled him to purchase a boat on which he could disappear and write without distraction. Read all over the world and taught in schools, *The Call of the Wild* is considered a classic of American fiction.

*The Call of the Wild* is about a dog named Buck who is taken from his home in California and put on a dog team in the Yukon. In order to survive in his new environment, he must assert himself among the other dogs. He is eventually adopted by a loving man named John Thornton, whose patience and kindness teach Buck to trust and love. This novel is unique among naturalist novels because its main character is an animal, but this is also why it is a good example of Naturalism. The laws of nature are laid bare in

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS
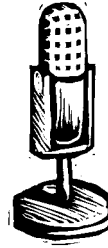
- *The Call of the Wild* was adapted to audio by Naxos Audio Books (abridged) in 1995, read by Garrick Hagon, and by Dercum (unabridged) in 1997, read by Samuel Griffin.

- *The Call of the Wild* was adapted to film in 1908 by Biograph Company; in 1923 by Hal Roach Studios; in 1935 by 20th Century Pictures, starring Clark Gable; and in 1972 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, starring Charlton Heston.

- *The Call of the Wild* was also adapted for television movies in 1976 by Charles Fries Productions; in 1993 by RHI Entertainment, starring Rick Schroder; and in 1997 by Kingsborough Greenlight Pictures. It was adapted as a television series in 2000 by Cinevu Films and Call of the Wild Productions.

- *Sister Carrie* was adapted to audio by Books on Tape in 1997, read by Rebecca Burns, and in 2000 by Blackstone Audio Books, read by C. M. Herbert.

- *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* was adapted to audio by Audio Book Contractors in 1994.

- *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* was adapted to film in 1915 by William A. Brady Picture Plays and was adapted as a television opera by Robert Altman in 1992 in a production by the Lyric Opera of Chicago aired on Public Broadcasting Station.

- *The Red Badge of Courage* was adapted to audio in 1993 by Bookcassette Sales, read by Roger Dressler.

- *The Red Badge of Courage* was adapted to film in 1951 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, directed by John Huston and starring Audie Murphy.

- *The Red Badge of Courage* was also adapted as a television movie in 1974 by 20th Century Fox Television.

- *An American Tragedy* was adapted to film in 1931 in a production by Paramount. It was redone as a film in 1951, titled *A Place in the Sun,* starring Montgomery Clift, Elizabeth Taylor, and Shelley Winters. This production won six Academy Awards.

- Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* was made into a major motion picture in 1993. The film was directed by the Martin Scorsese and stars Daniel Day-Lewis, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Winona Ryder. It won numerous awards, including an Oscar for Best Costume Design. *The Age of Innocence* is available on DVD from Sony Pictures.

the story of Buck. His interaction with the pack, nature, and people reveals the laws of nature.

## McTeague: A Story of San Francisco

In *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899), Norris disputes the image of the self-reliant American in charge of his or her own fate. Norris takes a typically naturalist approach and portrays people as the products of their environments, genetic traits, and chance occurrences. Norris took almost a decade to complete this novel, and it is his most prominent work. In *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, the title character is an unlicensed dentist of below average morality and intelligence. He is an ideal naturalistic character because he is guided by his impulses rather than by careful deliberation or acts of will. In the end, he loses his practice and beats his wife to death when she refuses to tell him where she has hidden money she inherited. Both characters are portrayed as victims. While she is the victim of violence, he is the victim of his own bestial nature.

Readers and critics found the book to be unnecessarily violent and pessimistic. While other naturalist books included violence (most

Henry's experiences lead him from uncertainty to confidence in his own character. In the true spirit of Naturalism, Crane portrays Henry's fate as a set of outcomes based on his inborn traits (his drive to be a part of the adventure) and his new environment (the pressures of engaging in battle). Crane uses many typical naturalist techniques such as symbolism, third-person point-of-view, and concrete detail.

## Sister Carrie

Dreiser's first novel, *Sister Carrie*, was published in 1900. After publication, controversy surrounding the novel focused on the main character's lack of morals and the fact that the outcome suggests that she is rewarded for her sinful ways. Still, many readers and critics find it to be a moving and honest portrayal of a young woman who leaves her rural home to make a life for herself in the city. After briefly working in a Chicago factory, Carrie moves in with a well-to-do salesman and becomes his mistress. Soon, however, she catches the eye of a wealthier older man who leaves his wife and career in order to run away with Carrie. They end up in New York, where they part ways and Carrie successfully pursues a stage career.

As a naturalist writer, Dreiser reveals the harshness of life and the ways in which individuals can seize opportunities to alleviate much of that harshness. While some of Dreiser's contemporaries found the depiction of Carrie's sexual life inappropriate, others found it refreshingly realistic. This novel is also important because it shows Dreiser's early tendencies toward the naturalist style. For example, he takes Carrie out of her comfortable environment (the Midwest) and places her in the unfamiliar big city of Chicago to see how her desires and needs affect her decision-making. The setting, in essence, becomes a set of conditions which cause changes in the character. Other aspects of the novel, such as Dreiser's attention to detail and his portrayal of the struggling lower class, are consistent with the naturalist style.



*Émile Zola* (*AP Images*)

notably *The Red Badge of Courage*), they were not as explicit. This novel is important, however, as a key work of the naturalist movement and as the masterpiece of one of its dominant figures.

## The Red Badge of Courage

The Civil War narrative, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) made Crane internationally famous. The style and the stirring, emotional voice of a young soldier captivated critics and readers alike. Veterans of the Civil War praised the book's realistic account of the soldier's experience. Although numerous books containing Civil War narratives were published since the 1860s, *The Red Badge of Courage* stood out for Crane's contemporaries. The book is a classic of Naturalism and proof of its author's imagination; born in 1871 (six years after the war's end), Crane never served in the war; everything he knew of it was from secondary sources.

The story is about Henry Fleming who is full of youthful adventure and longing to be part of the war. He enlists, only to face doubts about his own courage and romantic attitudes. Crane uses the war as the fictional laboratory into which he places his young protagonist. The war defines an extreme set of environmental variables, and

## THEMES

### Scientific Principles

Naturalist writers apply scientific principles to the fictive world they create. Like scientists conducting experiments, they introduce characters to certain circumstances and then dramatize the

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Consider the main identifying characteristics of Naturalism, and choose three films that you believe reflect naturalistic ideas. Write a review of each film, explaining the characteristics of Naturalism that you see in it.

- After Naturalism came Modernism, a period that produced fiction, drama, and poetry expressing the experiences and attitudes of wartime and postwar writers. Research this period and its major contributors and create a presentation in which you demonstrate how Modernism grew out of, or in reaction to, Naturalism. Be sure to consider historical influences.

- The photography of Edward Curtis is often associated with the naturalist movement. His subject matter was primarily the dwindling Native-American population and culture. Examine some of his photographs and decide if you would classify him with the naturalists or with the romantic Western writers. (You will need to learn a little about the characteristics of romantic Western writing.) Explain your position in a well-organized essay that makes references to specific photographs.

- Read a naturalist work of your choice, paying particular attention to the author's use of symbolism. Write an essay discussing examples of symbolism in the work and how the symbols used relate to Naturalism.

interaction that generates events. Thus, characters' inherited traits and environmental influences determine plot outcome. In some cases, an unexpected opportunity is also introduced to give the character a chance to take it or to ignore it. Given extreme circumstances, desires, and needs, characters make decisions they would not otherwise make. The naturalist writer believes that the characters' true natures emerge in these situations.

Another scientific idea used in naturalist writing is conditioned behavior. Characters learn how to behave when they are exposed repeatedly to the same environmental influences. A character such as Henry in *The Red Badge of Courage* quickly learns how to behave in order to survive in the extreme circumstances of war. Buck in *The Call of the Wild* is first conditioned to hate people but later learns to trust the right man.

Darwinian theories are sometimes evident in naturalist writing. In *Sister Carrie*, for example, Carrie is inherently stronger than Hurstwood; as a result of his weakness, he abandons all of his comforts and ultimately commits suicide, while self-reliant Carrie enjoys a successful stage career. Society is unforgiving and harsh toward the weak but offers rewards to its strongest members, which suggests that civilized society is as much a forum for competition among its members as nature is for animals.

## Ordinary People in Extraordinary Circumstances

Novels of the naturalist movement feature common, everyday people. There are no members of royalty, titans of the business world, or great minds. Instead, naturalist authors choose protagonists like McTeague, a would-be dentist; Carrie, a rural Midwestern girl; and Buck, a mixed-breed dog. These characters lead simple lives, uncluttered by the good fortune and distractions of glamour, wealth, or adventure. They are left only with their limited resources and their innate natures. In rare cases such as Carrie's, a character attains a successful life but finds it ultimately unsatisfying. These characters learn that there are more similarities than differences between the common and the uncommon.

Naturalist authors place these ordinary characters in extraordinary situations. Carrie finds herself first in the big city of Chicago and eventually in New York City, enjoying a glamorous career as an actress. In contrast, her lover, Hurstwood, descends from a lavish lifestyle to living on the street. In the end, his dramatic decision to take his own life is underscored by the cheap motel where he does it.

Henry in *The Red Badge of Courage* is an ordinary young man who makes a decision to seek the extraordinary by enlisting to fight in the Civil War. He discovers that it is he who is extraordinary in his courage and that war consists of common ugliness.

By placing ordinary people in extreme situations, naturalist writers show their readers that they, too, could find themselves in extraordinary situations. They also show that while some people become extraordinary due to their circumstances, others are destined to remain common.

## STYLE

### Symbolism

Naturalist authors use symbolism to subtly convey a wealth of meaning in a few words or images. In *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, Norris uses McTeague's tooth-shaped sign as a symbol of how the character would like to perceive himself and be perceived by others. Although he has no license to practice dentistry, he wants the respectability such a profession would bring him. The tooth is gold, which symbolizes McTeague's drive to acquire wealth. In *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser introduces the rocking chair as a symbol during key moments in Carrie's life. Her rocking in it symbolizes her solitude in the world. As she rocks, she thinks about the state of her life, and the chair moves but never goes anywhere. Still another example of naturalist symbolism is the mountain in *The Red Badge of Courage*. It is ominous and immovable and represents the power and permanence of nature.

### Details

Naturalists are similar to realists in their attention to detail. Naturalist works contain detailed passages describing settings, backgrounds, appearances, and emotions, all of which helps the reader get a specific perception of the characters' lives. Details also give the work a realistic feeling, a sense of being inevitable and true. The objective is to depict a subject wholly and factually. Dreiser uses details to give the reader insight into his characters in *Sister Carrie*. By describing Carrie's clothing and furnishings in detail, he suggests to the reader how important appearance is to Carrie and to her first lover, Drouet.

A common naturalist pattern is to present a great deal of information at the beginning of the novel and then let the events unfold. *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* adheres to this pattern. Norris provides a great deal of information at the beginning, and the events of the story evolve logically from this information. There are no plot twists, shocking turns of events, or unexpected characters. Further, the information given at the beginning is reliable, so the reader is a fully informed observer from the start.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### France

Naturalism began in France in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until the early 1880s. The principal figure of French Naturalism is Zola, whose 1880 essay "Le roman experimental" was instrumental in the spread of Naturalism to the United States. Zola describes human existence as being determined by environment and genetics, and he adheres to the belief that people behave basically as animals in nature do.

Edmond and Jules de Goncourt were brothers who also wrote in the naturalist style in France during Zola's time. The Goncourt brothers adhered to certain tenets of Romanticism, such as the elite status of the artist, as they explored the realistic tone of Naturalism. Their application of scientific ideas in fiction was a major contribution to the naturalist movement.

### England

The term naturalist is not generally used to describe English literature during the American naturalist period. The Edwardian period (1901–14), however, shares certain characteristics of Naturalism, indicating that attitudes and reading habits were similar among Americans and the British in the years leading up to World War I. Edwardian writers were cynical and questioned authority, religion, art, and social institutions. This is akin to the naturalist method of observing and testing human behavior in an inquisitive manner rather than accepting traditional beliefs uncritically. Both Naturalism and the Edwardian period were dominated by fiction writers rather than by dramatists or poets.

### Drama

Naturalism in drama was a minor movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century. Playwrights of this style paid special attention to detail in costume, set design, and acting in order to remove as much artificiality as possible. They sought to break down barriers between the audience and the stage, and they were especially opposed to the melodrama that was so popular

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **Early 1900s:** In 1907, Paris is the site of the first Cubist painting exhibition in the world. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque spearhead the movement. An artistic manifestation of the age's rationalism, cubism is embraced by some and staunchly rejected by others. It will be years before it is recognized as a legitimate artistic movement and its influence fully appreciated.

  **Today:** Modern art includes a wide variety of media and styles. Although art lovers are more accepting of innovations and radical new approaches, many artists continue to struggle with widely preconceived notions of what constitutes art. This tension between the artist and society keeps alive the fundamental question: "What is art?"

- **Early 1900s:** In 1903 Henry Ford founds the Ford Motor Company and creates an efficient assembly line ten years later. This revolutionizes both transportation and manufacturing, making it possible for many more people to own cars.

  **Today:** Owning a car is quite common, and prices range from the affordable to the very pricey. Car buyers are no longer limited to the basic black first offered by Ford or even to American-made vehicles; automobiles are imported from all over the world. Innovations in design often dictate innovations on the factory floor.

- **Early 1900s:** Max Planck and Albert Einstein make major contributions to physics, publishing theories that radically change the way scientists look at the universe.

  **Today:** In 2006, Americans win the Nobel Prize in Science: Roger D. Kornberg of Stanford University School of Medicine wins in chemistry, and John C. Mather of NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and George F. Smoot of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory share the prize in physics. In 2007, Al Gore for his work on global climate change shares the Nobel Prize in Science with the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

with audiences at the time. Some naturalist playwrights embraced social causes of the day, preferring to inform and alarm audiences rather than to provide them with mindless entertainment. As a result of removing artifice from the theater, they hoped that the audience would have a sense that they were watching and learning from real people. Playwrights associated with this style include Henri Becque (French), Eugene Brieux (French), Gerhart Hauptmann (German-Polish), and Maxim Gorky (Russian).

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### *Realistic Period in American Literature*
Realism preceded Naturalism in American literature, and the two are closely related. Both aim for realistic portrayals of everyday life, and both incorporate a great deal of detail. Realism arose after the Civil War, a traumatic period in national disillusionment in which approximately 600,000 Americans died. After the Civil war, Americans soberly set about trying to recreate their lives. A new kind of American fiction emerged in the wake of widespread disillusionment.

Public education developed, creating a broader readership, and new laws helped protect copyrights. These developments meant that more writers could enjoy viable careers. Authors of fiction found ready audiences for their unsentimental works. Within Realism, minor movements such as pragmatism emerged. Writers of this period who became prominent include Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James. In poetry, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and

Sidney Lanier were writing. In drama, little change was evident. The melodrama and fanfare that typified drama prior to Realism continued to find audiences.

## *Technology and Science*

The early 1900s was a period marked by advances in technology and science, creating a social environment in which the intellect was considered superior to emotions and to traditional, blindly accepted beliefs. In 1900 Max Planck opened up a new world of physics when he discovered the quantum nature of energy. Five years later, Albert Einstein developed the special theory of relativity, and in 1915 he developed the general theory. Together, these advances in physics revolutionized scientific thought. This new way of thinking shaped not only the sciences but also the arts, economics, and politics. By the turn of the century, the United States was well on its way to being an industrialized nation. After the Civil War, the spirit of industrialism that had been born in the North took on new fervor. It was time to repair the nation and its economy. Progress was made in the fields of communication, transportation, and manufacturing. In transportation, Henry Ford founded Ford Motor Company in 1903 (the same year that Orville and Wilbur Wright successfully flew the first motorized plane) and opened the first automotive assembly line in 1913. General Motors Corporation was founded in 1908.

In the intellectual world, new thinkers revolutionized the ways in which people understood their world. Charles Darwin challenged the traditional religious concept of the origin of human beings; Karl Marx challenged traditional views on economics and social class; and Auguste Comte initiated the philosophy of positivism (which claims that the purpose of knowledge is merely to describe, not to explain, the world) and the field of sociology (which focuses on observing, quantifying, and predicting social phenomena).

Advances in science and technology led to widespread acceptance of rationalism and scientific inquiry. Among the arts, this attitude was especially noticeable in literature. Moving away from the realms of feelings and relationships, writers approached their craft as a medium for understanding the human psyche. Writers were inspired less by the desire to provide readers with escape and more by a desire to depict the world as it is.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Although naturalist novels such as *The Red Badge of Courage* and *The Call of the Wild* are now considered classics, critics are often torn on the merits of the movement as a whole. The movement was initially met with suspicion because it was regarded as irrelevant to the American culture and its values. Perhaps because of its French roots, Naturalism was perceived as having little to offer an American readership. The lack of a strong morality presented in many naturalist novels further alienated critics and readers who looked to literature to enlighten and inspire. In his book *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Donald Pizer provides a retrospective comment: "We are coming to realize that a generation of American critics has approached American literary Naturalism with beliefs about man and art which have frequently distorted rather than cast light upon the object before them." Conservative reviewers denounced the works of Dreiser, for example, for his unfavorable depiction of the modern American man and woman. Still others, like Joseph Warren Beach in his book *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique*, praise Dreiser for his negative depictions. Beach commends Dreiser's "fearlessness, his honesty, his determination to have done with conventional posturings and evasions." Shawn St. Jean, in examination of *Sister Carrie*, finds Dreiser's novel to be an empowering tale of fortune derived from both luck and hard work.

In the 1940s and 1950s, critics were quick to distance themselves from naturalist writers because some of them (such as Dreiser) were associated with the Communist Party. During that time, there was intense distrust of anyone with communist leanings. Today, critics legitimize the movement on its own terms, crediting it as a significant and coherent movement that resulted in great literary works.

Many critics have difficulty discussing Naturalism without reference to its predecessor, Realism. The two movements share characteristics (such as attention to detail, common people as subjects, and portrayals of harsh circumstances), but many scholars see Naturalism's reliance on the principle of determinism as its distinguishing feature. This refers to the belief among naturalist writers that people's

*1951 film version of the* Red Badge of Courage, *written by Stephen Crane and set during the Civil War* *(Hulton Archive / Getty Images)*

fates are determined by their environments and/ or their genetics. Pizer declares:

> The common belief is that the naturalists were like the realists in their fidelity to the details of contemporary life but that they depicted everyday life with a greater sense of the role of such causal forces as heredity and environment in determining behavior and belief.

Critics find Naturalism to be the more pessimistic of the two movements. Pizer comments that another important difference is the way human nature is perceived. He explains:

> A naturalistic novel is thus an extension of Realism only in the sense that both modes often deal with the local and contemporary. The naturalist, however, discovers in this material the extraordinary and excessive in human nature.

Critics like Pizer find Naturalism to be empowering because it reveals the humanity, experiences, and emotional states of common and lowly characters.

## CRITICISM

### Jennifer Bussey
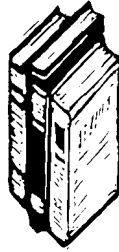
*Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, Bussey asserts that Theodore Dreiser's* Sister Carrie *is important because it makes Naturalism accessible and relevant to American women.*

A survey of Naturalism reveals that women are underrepresented in this movement, both as authors and as protagonists. Of the major authors—Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Jack London, Frank Norris—none are women. Previous movements, most notably Romanticism, included women as contributors and as heroines, yet Naturalism is almost exclusively masculine. This is not to imply that the omission of women was intentional but rather that something about the movement itself spoke to men more meaningfully than to women. Some of the best-known naturalist works represent experiences that, at the time, were exclusive to men. Crane's moving Civil War story, *The Red Badge of Courage*, is set during the war and relates a soldier's experiences. London's *The Call of the Wild* is about a dog in the Yukon, where living conditions are harsh and the culture revolves around heavy drinking, gambling, and dog fights. Where in all of this is there a place for women? The answer, ironically, comes from one of the male authors, Theodore Dreiser, in his novel *Sister Carrie*.

*Sister Carrie* is unique among the prominent naturalist works because it is about a woman and it speaks to the difficult decisions many women were forced to make in turn-of-the century urban America. The story concerns Caroline Meeber, known as Carrie or Sister Carrie by her friends and family. She leaves her rural home to live with her sister in Chicago, where she hopes to find work and establish her independence. This change of scenery embodies the Naturalist technique of transplanting a character to create a fictional laboratory in which the reader can observe the character's behaviors and reactions.

After working briefly in a factory she becomes a salesman's mistress, sharing an apartment with him and enjoying a nicer lifestyle than she had with her sister. While this choice is not the most moral one, it enables her to get what she wants (a better way of life) by providing what

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) is the startling story of a pretty girl whose life of violence and poverty leads her to prostitution and suicide. Although less well-known than *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Maggie* is considered an excellent example of the naturalist novel.

- *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theater* (2000), by Christopher Innes, introduces students to the influences of Naturalism on modern theater. He visits Naturalism's roots and analyzes six plays by three playwrights, including full chapters on each play's historical and theatrical context.

- Mary Lawlor's *Recalling the Wild: Naturalism and the Closing of the American West* (2000) summarizes early American attitudes about the West and the literature that came out of those perceptions. Lawlor then shows how Naturalism stripped the West of its romantic overtones and forever changed the way it was understood.

- Edited by Donald Pizer, *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism* (1995) explores Realism and Naturalism in American literature. Pizer addresses the conflict over terminology before providing an overview of critical approaches to these two movements. He also offers in-depth analysis of various texts with reference to their importance to the movements and their historical influences.

someone else wants (the company of a pretty girl). Given Carrie's standing as a woman in turn-of-the-century Chicago, she reacts to her new environment within her limited choices. When a wealthier man shows interest in her, she readily transfers her loyalties to him. He eventually disappoints her, however, and having moved to New York with him, she finds that she has more options. She makes a career for herself

> DESPITE THE COMMON THREADS THAT UNITE CARRIE WITH THE MALE PROTAGONISTS OF NATURALISM, SHE IS UNIQUE BECAUSE OF THE REALITIES OF BEING A WOMAN. SHE FACES A DIFFERENT ARRAY OF CHOICES THAN THE MALE CHARACTERS FACE."

in the theater, and no longer needing the security of a man, she leaves him. In the end, Carrie has all the things she thought she wanted, but she remains vaguely unsatisfied with the trappings of her new, independent life.

Carrie is an important character in American literature because she begins as typical of many women of her time: average and faced with few opportunities. Because she is ordinary, she was accessible to women readers at the time and is accessible to women today. She is also a believable character. Dreiser gives her a share of virtue and principle but does not hide her weaknesses and flaws. She is ambitious, unwilling to be involved with a married man, and ultimately self-sufficient, but she is also materialistic, selfish, and jaded. She is, in many ways, a typical naturalistic character, and in this way she has much in common with her male counterparts in other prominent naturalist novels.

In *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser introduces Clyde Griffiths, whose lack of emotional attachments (even in his romantic life), desire to be a social climber, and opportunism are also manifest in the character of Carrie. Both characters make morally questionable decisions, and while Carrie's decision-making does not have criminal intent as Griffiths's does, she is ultimately rewarded for it rather than punished.

In Frank Norris's *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, the title character loves money, acts impulsively and selfishly, and sustains false appearances to try to recreate himself. He is also quick to sacrifice actual respectability for the appearance of respectability. All of these characteristics are seen in Carrie as well. She longs for a better life, which she defines as a life of material wealth and societal approval. She, however, realizes what McTeague does not: that a

*A scene from* A Place in the Sun, *based on* An American Tragedy, *written by Theodore Dreiser* (The Kobal Collection | The Picture Desk, Inc.)

better life is only attained when a person's inner world is content and fulfilled. Carrie and Henry Fleming from Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* share qualities, too. Both are innocents introduced into environments that are totally foreign to them, and they both have romantic ideals at the onset. The harshness of their new environments soon becomes evident, however, and these characters surprise themselves by how they react to, and function in, their new realities. Both are, in their own ways, heroic in the end.

Carrie even has something in common with the canine protagonist, Buck, in Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*. Both experience a dramatic change of environment and are highly distrustful as a result. Unfortunately for Carrie, she does not encounter someone whom she can learn to trust, as Buck does when he is adopted by John Thornton.

Despite the common threads that unite Carrie with the male protagonists of Naturalism, she is unique because of the realities of being a woman. She faces a different array of choices than the male characters face. She cannot learn basic dentistry and practice as an unlicensed dentist like Norris's title character in *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, and she cannot decide between staying home to seek work or becoming a soldier like Henry Fleming in Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. Her choices are to become a rural housewife or to move to the city and work in a factory or find a wealthy man.

What is heroic about Carrie is that she accepts her limited choices and through them creates a new set of choices for herself. Her relationships with Drouet and Hurstwood ultimately lead her to becoming a successful stage actress in New York, which enables her to provide for herself in a career she genuinely enjoys. She is inspiring as a woman because of whom she becomes and the circumstances she seeks out, not because she displays nobility in the narrow confines of her given circumstances.

In contrast to Carrie is Crane's title character in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. Maggie comes from a poor and violent background, but rather than find her way out of it, she becomes a victim of it. Maggie becomes a prostitute and commits suicide in the end. She does not seek self-sufficiency but rather survival. Granted, Maggie's situation is more dire than

Carrie's is, but Maggie's character is one who would not seek out or, possibly, even recognize an opportunity for something better. In the eyes of readers at the turn of the century, both characters trade on their feminine wiles to get what they need from men, and although Carrie remains more socially respectable than Maggie does, the premise is the same. Both characters were seen as leading immoral lives for material gain. This may be true, but judgments aside, Carrie finds a way to provide for herself so she no longer has to trade on her virtue to have what she needs. Maggie, on the other hand, loses her battle with hopelessness and ends her life.

Without Carrie, the only major female protagonist in Naturalism might have been Maggie. How unfortunate if the portrayal of women and their experiences in turn-of-the-century America had been limited to Maggie. Although Carrie's story has its share of sorrow, it is hopeful and as optimistic as such a story can realistically be. In the end, she still feels empty; the objects and luxuries she longed to have do not fill her heart or nurture her spirit. She has come to understand this, however, which means there is the possibility that she will seek out what she truly needs as fervently as she sought out what she thought she needed. These feelings of loneliness and confusion are common, and women can certainly relate to them now just as they could then. Carrie is a new kind of heroine in American literature. She is flawed, fallen, and lost, but knows herself better at the end of the story. In this light, she is as important a character to the naturalist movement as the men who dominate it.

**Source:** Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on Naturalism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Shawn St. Jean

*In the following essay, St. Jean discusses Dreiser's unpremeditated composition of* Sister Carrie *and its organic philosophies of free will and chance.*

As we approach the twentieth-century novel, scholars will take stock of where the study of major literary figures has gone and where it has yet to go. What opportunities have been missed? For example, according to literary myth, Theodore Dreiser began his first novel, *Sister Carrie* (1900), at his friend Arthur Henry's insistence by spontaneously setting down the title and proceeding without a plan. The story's source is Dreiser himself, as he recalled the book's genesis in a letter to H. L. Mencken (qtd. in Swanberg, 82). Even

> AND WHILE *SISTER CARRIE* IS NOT PATTERNED IN A SUSTAINED WAY AFTER ANY SPECIFIC MYTHS OR CLASSICAL WORKS, DREISER RELIES HEAVILY ON TROPES LEARNED FROM THE CLASSICAL LITERARY TRADITION AND CARRIED ON BY WRITERS OF ALL SUBSEQUENT AGES."

when controverted by documentary evidence, myths like this one have an inexplicable staying power. Speculating as to why leads to unique insights about the novel's construction.

Years later Dreiser would become famous for the painstaking research and preparation that went into novels like *The Financier* (1912) and *An American Tragedy* (1925). These later works have unmistakably crafted plot structures and specific thematic concerns. But *Sister Carrie*, though by no means an aesthetically inferior work, and, indeed, the one for which the author is today best known, appears to meander through intellectual issues much as its protagonist wanders the streets of Chicago seeking employment. Although filled with intrusive disquisitions by the narrator on all manner of topics, the work poses more questions than answers, and its predominant question is the archetypal one: What forces influence (or control) the lives of human beings? It is perhaps best to believe that Dreiser did not steer his book toward predetermined conclusions, that he struggled along with his protagonists with the meta-question. For one thing, such a view allows us to circumvent a major critical mire: whether the overt philosophy peppered throughout Dreiser's novel forms a consistent or even coherent system of thought and provides a reliable index to its themes. *Sister Carrier* more closely follows Emerson's model of organicism, in which thoughts grow naturally from events and are spoken in hard words today though they may be contradicted by everything one says tomorrow.

In pursuing his profound life-questions by this method, one natural enough for the intellectual yet inexperienced novelist, Dreiser drew on a self-acquired background in the classics, a

tradition in which the finest minds of the past pursued the same object as he. And while *Sister Carrie* is not patterned in a sustained way after any specific myths or classical works, Dreiser relies heavily on tropes learned from the classical literary tradition and carried on by writers of all subsequent ages. The view of human life that emerges from the novel "stems directly . . . from the Greeks" (Mencken, 21), according to terms described by midcentury classicist William Greene:

> The problem of fate, good, and evil, then, is not one that admits of any final intellectual solution; it remains partly, to be sure, within the realm of human activity and human suffering, but it lies partly on the knees of the inscrutable gods. That is what Homer and Greek tragedy have said, once and for all. Man is free, but within limits: therefore life demands of him the patient endurance of evil, the hand of compassion for fellow sufferers, and the smile of irony at fortune's ways. Above all, it demands the performance of God's will, which works through us, and which is the source, if not of worldly success (for chance has a part in that), at least of human good and human happiness.

*(Greene, 396)*

Although the novel deals scarcely at all with "God's will" in a religious form, it has an updated equivalent in the determinism to which Dreiser often (but not wholly) subjects his characters. What the Greeks sometimes called the *Moirea* (fates), anthropomorphized goddesses under which even Zeus was subject, and other times called *moira* (the will of the gods) is really analogous, from the perspective of mortals without access to divine intentions, to the forces like heredity and social environment identified by the nineteenth century. In all cultures in all times people have recognized external forces that limit their freedom—thus even nonworshiping peoples have their "gods."

Beyond those forces, human beings are often profoundly affected by change (*tyche*), which lies halfway between fate and human will. *Tyche* can refer to events completely beyond any form of divine or human control, or to a realm of man's self-determination, as when Tiresias warns Creon that his decision about Antigone's punishment will determine his own future (Green, 146). Thus human will holds the third part in this cosmic scheme, allowed to operate when the other forces do not and often at crucial moments. Herman

Melville poetically described the interaction of these forces; Ishmael's fanciful depiction of the swordmat he and Queequeg weave in *Moby-Dick* anticipates the fabric of Dreiserian "naturalism":

> aye, chance, free will, and necessity—no wise incompatible—all interweavingly working together. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course—its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions modified by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events. (215)

Dreiser's novels have been the occasions for protracted debates over literary naturalism because of their highly variable reliance on determinism. What twentieth-century critics, who have been less and less rigorously trained in the classics than their nineteenth-century counterparts, have failed to recognize is that close comparative study of authors and their classical influences yields invaluable insight into otherwise baffling problems. Through our eyes a writer like Dreiser appears woefully inconsistent in his philosophy. Adding to the confusion in the case of *Sister Carrie*, three major characters are (partially) determined by three kinds of external force: Carrie Meeber by poverty, Charles Drouet by desire, and George Hurstwood by social convention. Examining in detail the dynamics of each life here represented demonstrates Dreiser's use of archetypes to expose varied attempts to live successfully and happily.

From the moment Carrie arrives in Chicago from her parents' home in Columbia City she is set to the task of obtaining money. At her sister's home she must earn her keep: "Anything was good enough so long as it paid, say, five dollars a week to begin with. A shop girl was the destiny prefigured for the newcomer." Later, after losing her job because of sickness and reencountering Drouet (both chance events), the drummer insists on giving her two ten-dollar bills upon which Dreiser immediately begins the next chapter:

> The true meaning of money yet remains to be popularly explained and comprehended. When each individual realizes for himself that this thing primarily stands for and should only be accepted as a moral due—that it should be paid

out as honestly stored energy and not as a usurped privilege—many of our social, religious and political troubles will have permanently passed. As for Carrie, her understanding of the moral significance of money was the popular understanding, nothing more. "Money: something everybody else has and I must get," would have expressed her understanding of it thoroughly.

Both the narrator's socialistic linking of unequal distribution of money to societal ills and the parody of the "popular," the one circular and the other mindless, pursuit of it reveals Carrie's energies as woefully misdirected. Since she has neither the leisure nor the intellectual proclivity to see beyond immediate goals, she imagines that money equals happiness rather than that money may provide a means to happiness—hence her expectations are disappointed later. In fact, her longings are repeatedly undercut by Dreiser. As she reaches each new plateau of wealth and success, she finds something lacking that only more wealth can provide and so imagines happiness to be just one level away: "She would live in Chicago, her mind kept saying to itself. She would have a better time than she ever had before—she would be happy"; "It cut her to the quick, and she resolved that she would not come here [Broadway] again until she looked better. At the same time she longed to feel the delight of parading here as an equal. Ah, then she would be happy"; "[The playhouse] was above the common mass, above idleness, above want, above insignificance. People came to it in finery and carriages to see. It was ever a centre of light and mirth. And here she was of it. Oh, if she could only remain, how happy would be her days."

Modern commentators have called such works *bildungsromans* or *erfahrungsromans* because the protagonist learns through experience. Arguably, however, Carrie learns very little. It might be more accurate to say that she is on a quest since she has the final goal of happiness in mind but lacks the knowledge of how or where to seek it. The quest is a universal archetype, and psychologists like Carl Jung have recognized that its object varies greatly but is not as pertinent as the quest itself, which is a desire to fill a void of basic human insecurity. For example, in *The Odyssey* Telemachus goes on a quest for news of his father Odysseus, who has been missing for nearly twenty years. He doesn't know his father (who left for Troy when Telemachus was an infant) and so doesn't love him or even miss him. And even though Athena knows Odysseus will soon return

and so Telemachus's dangerous journey is technically unnecessary, she sends him on the quest for the sake of his own manhood: "let him find news of his dear father where he may and win his own renown about the world" (*Od.* I. 120–22). The youth had been complaining:

> Were his death known, I could not feel such
>      pain—
> if he had died of wounds in Trojan country
> or in the arms of friends, after the war.
> They would have made a tomb for him, the
>      Akhaians,
> and I should have all honor as his son.
> Instead, the whirlwinds got him, and no glory.
> He's gone, no sign, no word of him; and I
>      inherit
> trouble and tears—and not for him alone,
> the gods have laid such other burdens on me.
>
> *(Od. I.281–89)*

The overriding goal of manhood in this epic society is *kleos* (glory), and Telemachus has none of his father's and none of his own so long as his mother's suitors occupy his home. Though he surely wishes for Odysseus's return, any number of solutions would satisfy his real need, which is a secure place for himself. Quests for the missing father, for hidden treasure, for a holy object, to return home or find a new one, all add up to the same thing in terms of archetypal psychology. Similarly, Carrie seeks a substitute for her true goal of happiness and security, the thing *her* society values above all else, money.

All quests involve obstacles. These can take the form of tests of strength, intellect, endurance, or will. Often they build character (as when Telemachus escapes the suitors' ambush at sea), or help a person see previous error, as when Odysseus speaks to Tiresias in the Underworld and learns that Poseidon hates him for the blinding of his son, the cyclopean Polyphemus. In his turn, Dreiser forces us to recognize that the actions of other people can be great impediments and a nearly overwhelming factor of determination, nearly equal to fate itself.

In Carrie's case the two men to whom she becomes mistress pose insidious obstacles since, like *The Odyssey*'s lotus eaters, they appear to represent quick and easy paths to happiness. Drouet tempts Carrie with money, and in extending her "first fall" over several scenes Dreiser masterfully demonstrates how external forces, chance, and will all subtly combine. In fact, the event is so anticlimactic that we may scarcely notice, with Carrie, that she has irrevocably

chosen a direction in life. This device was to become a Dreiserian hallmark and a major contribution to literary realism: characters mistake profound decisions as meaningless or minor, and so choose carelessly or without thought at all. In Greek epic and drama, such moments—Oepidus's demanding to know the mystery of his birth or Patroclus requesting to wear Achilles's armor into battle—eventuate in ruin, but force a "late learning"—protagonists and audience see the gravity of error in retrospect of calamity. By no means does this suggest fatalism, since proper consideration of one's decisions at the crucial juncture can always prevent tragedy.

Dreiser's technique of protracting moral failures is an antithesis of the kind of high drama exhibited when Mark Twain's Huck decides not to turn in escaped slave Jim: "It was a close place. I took it [the letter to Jim's mistress] up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: 'All right, then, I'll *go* to hell'—and tore it up" (270–71). Twain punctuates Huck's moral crisis through irony: the reader knows Huck will *not* incur divine wrath—go to hell—and that the crisis has been precipitated only through warped antebellum Southern values. However, it has not been illusory *to Huck*, just as Telemachus never knows that Athena protects him against the suitors' deathtrap. Inner growth occurs regardless of the seeming insignificance of external events.

The difference in Dreiser consists not so much in the scope of events as in the individual's reaction (or lack of) to them. Carrie is hardly equipped to perceive the trap being laid for her, as provincial and beaten down by circumstances as she is. The best she can manage is to waver between desire and some half-formed inhibitions: "He made her take [the twenty dollars]. She felt bound to him by a strange tie of affection now"; "She felt ashamed in part to have been weak enough to take it, but her need was so dire, she was still glad"; "Carrie finally decided that she would give the money back. It was wrong to take it"; "Carrie shook her head. Like all women she was there to object and be convinced. It was up to him to brush the doubts away and clear the path if he could." The pivotal decision of accepting Drouet's money and leaving her sister to live with him is extended over ten pages, though with hardly the concentration that William Dean

Howells gave to Lapham's decision between dishonesty and fraud during her overnight vigil. Instead, Dreiser diffuses the significant internal moments, represented by the brief sentences above, with superficial events—Dreiser's and Carrie's conceptions of Drouet, his light conversation with her, a scene in which Minnie suggests Carrie return to Columbia City, a trip to look at new jackets which is repeated with Drouet, and a dinner date—that deflect our and Carrie's own attention from her dilemma. Indeed, the precise moment of commitment passes without a reflective thought from either the narrator or Carrie:

> The saleswoman helped her on with [the jacket], and by accident it fitted perfectly.
>
> Drouet's face lightened as he saw the improvement. She looked quite smart.
>
> "That's the thing," said Drouet. "Now pay for it."
>
> "It's nine dollars," said Carrie.
>
> "That's all right—take it," said Drouet.
>
> She reached in her purse and took out one of the bills. The woman asked if she would wear the coat and went off. In a few minutes she was back and the purchase was closed.

Closed as well are Carrie's remaining options. Unemployed and thus paying no board, she cannot bring the jacket home to her sister. Yet she blinds herself to the fact that she has made a contract with Drouet: "The deeper she sank into the entanglement, the more she imagined that the thing hung upon the few remaining things she had not done. Since she had not done so and so yet, there was a way out." But the only alternative is laid out by the drummer: to take her own apartment, subsidized by him. "She thought a long time about this. Finally she agreed." Though this last narrative statement appears to show a moment of decision comparable to Huck's, there is nothing left to think about—Carrie only "imagines" a way out which is already closed. It is as if Huck had already mailed the letter and then sat down to think about the consequences.

It is crucial to notice the interaction of forces that has taken place. Drouet perceives Carrie's untoward circumstances, her narrow life with her sister and her lack of means. Through persuasion and a primitive psychological understanding, he manipulates Carrie into accepting his money. Chance events, her original illness and the "accidental" fit of the jacket, conspire to aid him. Finally, Carrie makes a decision not

to accept the money but then spends it voluntarily. There can be no denial of free will at this point, but Carrie yields to desire for instant gratification versus the consideration of long-term consequences. Aeschylus had similarly shown the abdication of will as a source of doom in *Agamemnon*. Upon his triumphant return from Troy, Agamemnon is begged by his adulterous wife Clytemnestra to walk on a crimson carpet, unwittingly to his death:

> *Cly*: Now, my beloved one,
> step from your chariot: yet let not your foot,
>   my lord,
> sacker of Ilium, touch the earth.
> . . .
> *Ag*: Such state becomes the gods, and none
>   beside.
> I am a mortal, a man; I cannot trample upon
> these tinted splendors without fear thrown in
>   my path.
> . . .
> *Cly*: O yield! The power is yours. Give way of
>   your own free will.
> *Ag*: Since you must have it—here, let someone
>   with all speed
> take off these sandals, slaves for my feet to
>   tread upon.
> And as I crush these garments stained from the
>   rich sea
> let no god's eyes of hatred strike me from afar.
>
> *(Agamemnon, 905–47)*

Though Carrie is hardly guilty of the damning *hubris* exhibited here, she has the same opportunity to make her own choice between moral imperative and human persuasion. In the end, however, not even the "late learning" which presumably comes to Agamemnon during his offstage murder lights on Carrie. Unreflectively riding the wave of events, she seldom looks back.

The entire pattern is repeated when Carrie leaves Drouet for Hurstwood. Rather than rehearse what has already been shown, however, it should prove far more useful to reflect on Dreiser's use of the timeless love triangle, also the subject of Aeschylus's drama. Drouet first introduces Carrie into conversation with Hurstwood as an object with which to impress the manager: "Thus was Carrie's name bandied about in the most frivolous and gay of places, and that also when the little toiler was bemoaning her narrow lot, which was almost inseparable from the early stages of this, her unfolding fate." Ironically, it is not her name which has been bandied—Drouet identifies her as "a little peach"—and the two men continue to objectify her in conversation after

conversation. Though each desires her, the idea is to present the facade of male indifference buttressed by the eternal notion that women are beneath notice. However, fated through Drouet's ambition to cultivate Hurstwood's favor, Carrie meets the manager. He compares favorably to the drummer, an indefatigable flirt who promises to marry Carrie but delivers only material comfort and spiritual neglect. Hurstwood does the same with his own wife.

During one of Drouet's trips Hurstwood visits Carrie and begins his seduction. One is reminded of Aegisthus, who seduces Clytemnestra while Agamemnon wars at Troy. Like Drouet, Hurstwood uses Carrie's restlessness as a substitute for affection for him:

> "You are not satisfied with life, are you?"
>
> "No," she answered weakly.
>
> He saw he was master of the situation—he felt it. He reached over and touched her hand.
>
> "You mustn't," she exclaimed, jumping up.
>
> "I didn't intend to," he answered easily.
>
> She did not run away, as she might have. She did not terminate the interview, but he drifted off into a pleasant field of thought with the readiest grace. Not long after, he rose to go and she felt that he was in power.

The same scene has occurred in countless works in all ages. Here it is significant that Carrie relinquishes her power willingly. She opens the door for the manager to press his suit. For example, Hurstwood contrives, through his social connections, to make Carrie's first stage appearance a success. His acquaintances respond "like Romans to a senator's call." She shines in her performance and the secret rift between the rival men deepens: "He walked away from the drummer and his prize, at parting feeling as if he could slay him and not regret. . . . 'The fool,' he said, now hating Drouet. 'The idiot. I'll do him yet. And that quick. We'll see tomorrow."

Though himself a force over Carrie, Hurstwood too subjects himself to fate and chance through prior choices. As manager of a popular Chicago watering hole, Hurstwood's most important role is to mingle with the affluent clientele. His life is entirely defined by social protocol. Struck in a loveless marriage, he dares not make mistakes:

> He could not complicate his home life, because it might affect his relations with his employers. They wanted no scandals. A man, to hold his

position, must have a dignified manner, a clean record, a respectable home anchorage. Therefore he was circumspect in all he did, and whenever he appeared in the public ways of an afternoon on Sunday. it was with his wife and sometimes his children. He would visit the local resorts or those nearby in Wisconsin and spend a few stiff, polished days, strolling about conventional places doing conventional things. He knew the need of it.

Like Agamemnon about to stroll on the carpet, Hurstwood "deprecate[s] the folly of the thing" that will bring about his own doom. Ironically, he knows of others who have been exposed: "It was all right to do it—all men do those things—but why wasn't he careful? A man can't be too careful. He lost sympathy for the man that made a mistake and was found out." But in his pursuit of Carrie he forgets his objectivity: "That worthy, on the contrary, had formulated no plan of action, though he listened, almost unreservedly, to his desires." Dreiser's narrator explains the unwritten laws with which the manager trifles:

> Many individuals are so constituted that their only thought is to obtain pleasure and shun responsibility. They would like, butterfly-like, to wing forever in a summer garden, flitting from flower to flower, and sipping honey for their sole delight. They have no feeling that any result which might flow from their action should concern them. They have no conception of the necessity of a well-organized society wherein all shall accept a certain quota of responsibility and all realize a reasonable amount of happiness.... Many such an individual is so lashed by necessity and law that he falls fainting to the ground, dies hungry in the gutter or rotting in the jail and it never once flashes across his mind that he has been lashed only in so far as he has persisted in attempting to trespass the boundaries which necessity sets.

The repeated word "necessity," a rough equivalent with the Greek *ananke*, connotes those things which are necessary for the greater good and so subject the individual. In the case of transgression, "life has been misunderstood." We have seen that Hurstwood understands well society's rules, and he has hitherto abided by them. His lapse, then, comes not through ignorance nor even some kind of character flaw. It is a miscalculation, a *hamartia*:

> He did not feel that he was doing anything which would introduce a complication into his life. His position was secure, his home life, if not satisfactory, was at least undisturbed; his personal liberty rather untrammeled. Carrie's

love represented only so much added pleasure. He would enjoy this new gift over and above his ordinary allowance of pleasure. He would be happy with her and his own affairs would go on as they had—undisturbed.

His literal *moira*, or "ordinary allowance of pleasure"—a dispensation from the urns of Zeus—fails to satisfy the manager. Many have seen his theft of ten thousand dollars from the tavern safe, the dramatic center of the novel, as the nexus of Hurstwood's decline. Yet it is only the *peripeteia*, the reversal of fortune brought on by this earlier *hamartia*, since he only does it in order to fly with her. His wife has found his affair out; she has locked him out of the house and obtained a lawyer; and she holds most of his assets in her name. He finds he cannot do anything to prevent the turn of events but "think," delay, and "wish over and over that some solution would offer itself." He, in his turn, has become "like a fly in a web." Even at this point there are avenues open to him—like obtaining his own lawyer—he does nothing until the fateful night he finds the safe ajar.

We might justifiably wonder if anything besides love or desire brings on Hurstwood's *hamartia*. In his case, the Greek adage "Whom gods destroy they first make mad" provides a clue. He even agrees to marry Carrie (who doesn't yet know he is already married) to convince her to leave Drouet:

> His passion had gotten to that stage now where it was no longer colored with reason. He did not trouble over little barriers of this sort in the face of so much loveliness.... He would promise anything, everything, and trust to fortune to disentangle him. He would make a try for Paradise, whatever might be the result. He would be happy, by the Lord, if it cost all honesty of statement, all abandonment of truth.

Dreiser's narrator refers several times to Hurstwood's loss of reason, expressed here as *ate*, delusion rooted in excess. Try as he might, he cannot induce the same rational loss in Carrie: "She was listening, smiling, approving, and yet not finally agreeing. This was due to a lack of power on Hurstwood's part, a lack of that majesty of passion that sweeps the mind from its seat, fuses and melts all arguments and theories into a tangled mass and destroys, for the time being, the reasoning power." Meanwhile, his lack of reason, or ability to make sound decisions takes on a unique form of determination.

Hurstwood's moment of crisis at the safe is almost painfully drawn out in the novel. As he closes up one night he discovers the safe has been left open by a careless cashier. The temptation to steal the money inside, thus enabling him to fulfill his rebellious fantasies, prompts him to remove the money and transport it back and forth from the safe to his office. The narrator mixes philosophic commentary right in with the spectacle:

> The wavering of a mind under such circumstances is an almost inexplicable thing and yet it is absolutely true. Hurstwood could not bring himself to act definitely. He wanted to think about it—to ponder it over, to decide whether it were best. He was drawn by such a keen desire for Carrie, driven by such a state of turmoil in his own affairs, that he thought constantly that it would be best, and yet he wavered. . . .

> He went over and restored the empty boxes. Then he pushed the door to for somewhere near the sixth time. He wavered, thinking, putting his hand to his brow.

> While the money was in his hand, the lock clicked. It had sprung. Did he do it? He grabbed at the knob and pulled vigorously. It had closed. . . .

> At once he became the man of action.

If we apply the concepts of the famous passage from Chapter VIII, in which Dreiser's narrator discourses on the power of instinct versus free will, directly to this scene, we see a strange consistency. The most prominent characteristic of both passages is "wavering"; if we take Hurstwood to be representative man here, his "reason," or need "to think it over" is at war with his "desire" for the rewards the money will bring, most notably Carrie. In his paralysis, or inability to act on his own, he becomes a "wisp in the wind", settling where the "forces of life" deposit him. Note the extreme ambiguity of the sequence "the lock clicked. It had sprung. Did he do it?" It is almost as if, in the face of his refusal to act, the "forces of life" deprive Hurstwood of agency and act for him. But on the other hand, we see him decide that "he would do it before he could change his mind." A paragraph later, he says, "I wish I hadn't done that. By the lord, that was a mistake." Hurstwood himself seems to accept responsibility at that moment. But at this crucial juncture, Dreiser's usually overobliging narrator refuses to decide the issue. We get cryptic phrasing and rhetorical questioning, just when we *want* answers.

In the face of such narrative ambivalence, there is nothing for readers to do but reach into their own repertoires, beliefs, and experiences, and extrapolate an answer. The Greeks might compromise by citing *ananke*, necessity—the fate that manifests itself, not remotely like *moira*, but in moments of crisis—as the force at work here, but modern readers have access to no such concept. For the reader that believes in free will and responsibility of the actor, Hurstwood is guilty. For the reader who sees life as ultimately beyond personal control, the manager is innocent. At least, these are the apparent choices, and while readers can afford to defer their decisions indefinitely, most critics do take a side.

But consider again Dreiser's stance in Chapter VIII. He tells us that man is guided sometimes by reason, sometimes by instinct, "erring" and "retrieving" at intervals. It is doubtful, during Hurstwood's apparent surrender to *instinct*, that Dreiser would apply the categories of guilt and innocence to Hurstwood at all, since "on the tiger no responsibility rests." It also seems likely that on another night Hurstwood might just as well have not taken the money, and gone home. As the narrator tells us, "The true ethics of the situation never once occurred to him." His only fear is whether he will be caught or not. And it is this fear that drives him to flight and the kidnapping of Carrie, and indeed, to his eventual death. At the moment he abdicates choice at the critical juncture (the closing of the safe), his subsequent choices begin to dwindle to the vanishing point. He never even allows himself to consider another course of action. And the fact that he appears determined for the rest of the novel tends to obscure the fact that *choice has at some point been available*, even though the protagonist does not avail himself of it. A third choice, somewhere between guilt and innocence, now becomes available to readers—that the protagonist's deterministic muddle is, in reality, self-imposed. Outside forces don't deprive him of choice, he won't accept choice, the primary manifestation of free will. Thus a kind of "variable" determinism becomes viable: the world goes on even when we refuse to, and can affect us whether we act or not.

After detectives track the fleeing couple and force the ex-manager to return most of the stolen money in exchange for amnesty from prosecution (all without Carrie's knowledge), they settle in New York City. Thus begins Hurstwood's mental and moral decline. He cannot accept

that burning his bridges through the original theft has irrevocably lowered his position in society. He rejects the idea of becoming a bartender. Like Agamemnon, he ensures *ate* (ruin) and *nemesis* (retribution) by his *hubris* (pride beyond merit). And like Odysseus returned home, he will eventually be humbled into beggary, though no god intervenes to reserve his transformation. He asphyxiates himself in a fifteen-cent flophouse, repeating the mantra he had learned looking for work, "What's the use?" In other words, he despairs that he can take effectual action any longer and chooses the only option left, a "distinguished decision" to choose the time and manner of his death, thus investing it with some vestige of honor.

In the face of Hurstwood's apathy Carrie realizes that "she herself had been drifting." He even meets her suggestions that she might obtain work as an actress with derision:

> "If I were you I wouldn't think of it. It's not much of a profession for a woman."
>
> "It's better than going hungry," said Carrie. "If you don't want me to do that, why don't you get work yourself?"
>
> There was no answer ready for this. He had got used to the suggestion.
>
> "Oh, let up," he answered.
>
> The result of this was that she secretly resolved to try. It didn't matter about him. She was not going to be dragged into poverty and worse to suit him. She could act.

Her resolution to act, in the dual sense of the word, marks the parting of their ways, and, more importantly, a major turning point of growth and fortune for Carrie. Even against the painful memories of her job searches in Chicago and repeated rebuffs at agencies and theaters, Carrie obtains a place as a chorus girl. Interestingly, though the play is not named, the chorus girls wear "pink fleshings," "imitation golden helmets," "military accoutrements," and carry short swords and shields. Carrie's looks and energy soon earn her the captaincy of the line, complete with "epaulets and a belt of silver." These "new laurels" mark the former country girl-turned-mistress as a warrior in her own right. Her rise to fame and fortune is marked by hard work and chance events. The contrast to Hurstwood's fatalism, his retreat to the "Lethean waters" of newspapers and Carrie's old rocking chair, and his lotus-eater-like addiction to

ease emphasizes the crucial role of free will in engaging the machineries of fate and chance.

By a creative blurring of disciplinary boundaries, then, of adopting the critical tools of classicists, which were well known to nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers but more and more alien to literary critics today, we can explore the idea that the works of so-called literary naturalists may not be, as has been charged over and over, wildly inconsistent. They may instead follow an ancient paradigm—one that explained human existence for a near-millennium and continued to occupy the likes of philosopher Lequyer, Renouvier, Bosanquet, and Bergson in France and C. S. Peirce and William James in America—and one that fell into disuse only relatively recently with disciplinary shifts and splits in the academy.

**Source:** Shawn St. Jean, "'Aye, Chance, Free Will, and Necessity': Sister Carrie's Literary Interweavings," in *Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Spring, 2001, pp. 240–56.

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# Neoclassicism

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1660

In England, Neoclassicism flourished roughly between 1660, when the Stuarts returned to the throne, and the 1798 publication of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads,* with its theoretical preface and collection of poems that came to be seen as heralding the beginning of the Romantic Age. Regarding English literature, the Neoclassical Age is typically divided into three periods: the Restoration Age (1660–1700), the Augustan Age (1700–1750), and the Age of Johnson (1750–1798). Neoclassical writers modeled their works on classical texts and followed various esthetic values first established in Ancient Greece and Rome. Seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century Neoclassicism was, in a sense, a resurgence of classical taste and sensibility, but it was not identical to Classicism. In part as a reaction to the bold egocentrism of the Renaissance that saw man as larger than life and boundless in potential, the neoclassicists directed their attention to a smaller scaled concept of man as an individual within a larger social context, seeing human nature as dualistic, flawed, and needing to be curbed by reason and decorum. In style, neoclassicists continued the Renaissance value of balanced antithesis, symmetry, restraint, and order. Additionally, they sought to achieve a sense of refinement, good taste, and correctness. Their clothes were complicated and detailed, and their gardens were ornately manicured and geometrically designed. They resurrected the classical values of unity and proportion and saw their
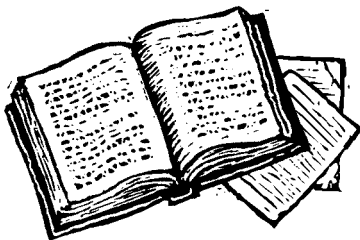
art as a way to entertain and inform, a depiction of humans as social creatures, as part of polite society. Their manner was elitist, erudite, and sophisticated. The brooding social unrest that culminated in the revolutions in the American colonies and in France toppled this artificial refinement, and in the wake of those wars emerged portraits of the single common worker or wanderer sketched against the vast natural landscape, a character that came to be one of the chosen subjects of the Romantics in the nineteenth century.

In the Restoration Age, in poetry, the classical forms of the heroic couplet and the ode became popular. With the opening of the theaters appeared plays written in couplets and others in prose that fell in the category of the comedy of manners. Major works include Milton's *Paradise Lost* (although it spans both baroque and restoration in its style and subject) and Paul Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. But Dryden's works, lesser by comparison to those by Milton and Bunyan, more anticipated the Augustan Age to follow. In this second period flourished the poetry of Alexander Pope, with his exquisite mastery of the couplet in *Essay on Man* (1734); many of Pope's lines became famous sayings that are familiar in modern times such as this one from *Essay on Criticism* (1711): "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." Also in the Augustan Age the rise of journalism and its way of evolving into and shaping fiction writing is visible in the work of Daniel Defoe, who began as a pamphleteer and ended by securing his place in the canon of great novelists with such famous works as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722), which are fictions appearing to be autobiographical. The Age of Johnson was dominated by Samuel Johnson and the consummate work of his is *The Dictionary of the English Language* (1745–1755). In drama, the comedy of manners continued to be popular, but in poetry, there was a rise of the ballad and sentimental poetry as written by Thomas Gray, William Cowper, Robert Burns, and George Crabbe, which in some ways anticipates the style and sentiment of the romantics to follow. Additionally, there appeared the novel of sensibility, particularly the work of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, which in their sensationalism and emotionality anticipate the Gothic novel of the nineteenth century.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### *Daniel Defoe (c. 1660–1731)*

Daniel Defoe produced his most important works during the Augustan Age, named for its writers who consciously attempted to emulate the work of the original Augustan writers, such as Virgil and Horace. He is also among those responsible for the creation of the English novel. Over the course of his lifetime, he worked as a journalist, pamphleteer, and essayist, writing as a social commentator for the merchant class. Defoe's work is a hallmark of the Neoclassical Age. It is didactic as well as analytical. Defoe wrote on politics, religion, and economics, and he drew from his social awareness when he wrote his novels, some of which were passed off as factual memoir.

Scholars estimate that Defoe's birth occurred sometime in 1660. He was born to James Foe, a tradesman and merchant, and Alice Foe; it is unclear why Daniel added the "De." Though his father was reasonably successful, he could not send his son to the best schools, as he was a Dissenter, member of a religious group that did not conform to the Church of England. In his adult life, Defoe worked as a businessman in land speculation, the import business, as an inventor, and in other endeavors.

During Defoe's life, England was politically driven by the monarchy and the Anglican Church, and, like his father, Defoe was a Dissenter and found need to defend his faith. Defoe participated in several rebellions, and, after a show of support during the Glorious Revolution, was honored with several positions, serving William of Orange from 1689 to 1702.

Defoe's religious beliefs prompted many of his writings, including several political pieces and pamphlets and some satirical poetry. It was *The Shortest-Way with Dissenters; or, Proposals for the Establishment of the Church*, a satire written in support of religious freedom, that earned him fame in 1702. In reaction to the work, Defoe found himself charged with libel, fined, and imprisoned until Robert Harley secured his release in 1703 in exchange for his services as a pamphleteer and undercover public propagandist for the government, which continued for roughly ten years.

*A Review of the Affairs of France, with Observations on Transactions at Home*, was a tri-weekly journal Defoe created in 1704. Though

*Samuel Johnson* *( Archive Photos | Getty Images.)*

he likely felt obligated to lean his review in favor of the government, his employer, it was still an essential vehicle of expression for the writer at the time. In the journal, Defoe offered his views on a variety of topics, including politics, economics, morality, and religion. His reporting techniques, social commentary, advice columns, and other features made *A Review of the Affairs of France, with Observations on Transactions at Home* a model publication for journalism into modern times.

*The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*, better known today as *Robinson Crusoe*, was published in 1719. It was his first novel and came to be his most recognized. Defoe is also responsible for writing several other novels, including *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, and *Roxana*, all of which are still in print in the early 2000s. In 1722, Defoe published his *A Journal of the Plague Year*, which purports to be a detailed account by a man who remained in London during the Great Plague of 1665; this highly detailed and informative work was intended to remind its eighteenth-century readers of what the plague was like and what measures people took to survive it. In modern times, the book is sometimes compared to Samuel

Pepys' diary, a factual journal kept by a man who actually did live through the 1665 plague in London. Ironically, Defoe's novel about the plague has more information in it regarding how the plague moved across the city and the statistics of mortality.

Defoe died April 26, 1731, in Moorfields, London, England.

### John Dryden (1631–1700)

John Dryden, a writer much of his age but little read in modern times, produced satires, comedies, tragedies, lyric poetry, farces, translations, literary criticism, political poetry, and essays. Identified by some scholars as England's first verse satirist, Dryden developed the verse satire and used the heroic couplet effectively as did his contemporaries.

Dryden was born August 19, 1631, in Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire, England. He was the son of Erasmus Dryden and Mary Pickering, land-owning gentry, and was well schooled in the classics, first attending Westminster School and then Trinity College, Cambridge, starting in 1650. Dryden was recognized for his poetry while in school, winning prizes for various poems. He eventually earned a B.A. in 1654, the same year his father died.

A year after his graduation, he left Trinity and eventually obtained a position in London working as some sort of civil servant under Oliver Cromwell. His first poem of any significance, a reaction to Cromwell's death, was "Heroique Stanzas to the Glorious Memory of Cromwell," (1659). Several poems followed, but his first lengthy poetic work was "Annus Mirabilis." The poem consisted of 304 quatrains (four-line stanzas) documenting English history, covering a recent war, the plague, and the Great Fire of London. *Mac Flecknoe*, published in 1682, was his first notable satire.

By 1663, Dryden had also begun to write plays. His first was *The Wild Gallant*, followed by *The Rival Ladies*, and then *The Indian-Queen, The Indian Emperour*. He also wrote a work of criticism *Of Dramatick Poesie: An Essay*, published in 1668, which actually was a defense of his own literary practice. Other works of criticism were published: in 1668, *A Defence of an Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, and in 1672, *Of Heroique Playes*. Both were written in response to the criticisms of Sir Robert Howard, who took issue with some of Dryden's theatrical conventions.

*Of Heroique Playes* shows his strong interest in writing an original epic, as does his *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1692). Although Dryden found no time to realize his epic, other essential works followed.

By 1668, Dryden was England's leading playwright, and shortly after the restoration of Charles II to the throne, he was appointed poet laureate. Throughout the remainder of his life, Dryden continued to produce critical works in response to the ever-changing tastes in literature. In addition, he produced some of his finest poetry, including "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" in 1684, and pieces that experimented with the beast fable. On May 12, 1700, he died and was buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

### Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

The Age of Johnson marked the end of the first period of Neoclassicism, and Samuel Johnson is the major author of the second one. Johnson was a man of many talents, including those of lexicographer, translator, journalist/essayist, travel writer, biographer, editor, and critic. He injected into the Neoclassical Age his own energy and enthusiasm, an appreciation of nature and the country life, and an ever-widening range of intellectual interests.

Born to Michael and Sarah Ford Johnson on September 18, 1709, at Lichfield in Staffordshire, Johnson spent most of his early childhood coping with illness. Poor financial circumstances left his family in a state of unrest. Despite a troubled childhood, Johnson demonstrated a keen intellect during his time at Lichfield Grammar School. He then attended Stourbridge Grammar School and eventually worked there.

The first poem Johnson wrote was "On a Daffodil, the First Flower the Author Had Seen That Year" in 1724. Mostly at Stourbridge he translated classical works, for example, the *Iliad*. He also wrote several poems, works demonstrating his talents through his experimentation with poetic conventions and his use of diction as well as rhythm. In 1728, Johnson attended Pembroke College, Oxford. There, as throughout the rest of his career, Johnson demonstrated a natural ability for writing poetry with incredible speed as well as precision.

His first attempt at writing professionally came when he moved to London in 1737 in an effort to complete and promote his blank-verse tragedy *Irene*. Johnson eventually began writing for *Gentleman's Magazine*, producing poetry of light verse as well as Latin and Greek epigrams. Next he turned to a popular contemporary poetic form—the imitation—to attempt to create his first independent piece. The art of imitation allowed the author to exercise creative freedom as he translated the original compositions of others. Johnson chose the Latin poet Juvenal and imitated his *Satura III*, writing on urban life in London. *London: A Poem, in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal* was published in May 1738. He published *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty Eight*, a second imitation, just a few days later. The success of these poems led to subsequent renderings of Juvenal's works and a steady stream of poetry from Johnson followed.

Johnson spent the next fifteen to twenty years working as a hack writer and journalist. He continued writing reviews, translations, and articles for *Gentlemen's Magazine* through the mid 1740s. Much of his work, at this time, was prose, although he did revise several poems, including "The Young Author," "Ode to Friendship," and "To Laura," which were published in the magazine in 1743 along with Latin translations such as *The Vanity of the Human Wishes* and *Satura X*.

During the latter part of his life, Johnson earned an honorary M.A. at Oxford (1755) for his *Dictionary of English Language*. In 1765, Trinity College, Dublin, also presented him with an honorary LL.D. By the time of his death, on December 13, 1784, Johnson had earned his place in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, near the foot of Shakespeare's monument. For modern readers, Johnson's persona seems to dominate this period, and that is because at least in part, they look back at Johnson through the eyes of his friend and biographer, James Boswell, whose best remembered work is his *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791).

### Molière (1622–1673)

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin was born January 15, 1622, in Paris, France, to a middle-class family; his father was an interior decorator for the royal court and passed this profession on to his son. In 1643, Molière took up a career in the theater, which meant relinquishing the commission his father gave him as well as the social standing to which he was born. He soon became head of the acting troupe he had joined and took on the stage name Molière. Molière served as actor,

lawyer, and playwright for the troupe. His troupe traveled the countryside and performed for twelve years before returning to Paris in 1658. In Paris, Molière quickly established himself in royal court as a premier actor and playwright. He was most famous for his farces although he preferred tragedies. *Tartuffe*, first staged in 1664, was one of his most controversial plays because it mocked high society. Although Molière had many enemies, he found protection in the favor of King Louis XIV and continued to work in the theater. He died on February 17, 1673, in Paris from tuberculosis after just finishing a performance of his play, *The Hypochondriac.*

### Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

Alexander Pope was born in London, England, on May 21, 1688, to a Catholic family. England's break with the Roman Catholic Church in the previous century meant that sentiment against Catholics in England was still strong. Pope attended school in secret until his family was forced to leave London and move to the Berkshire countryside in southwest England. Pope published his first poems in 1711 to great acclaim. This achievement brought him into literary circles, and he became friends with writers such as Jonathan Swift and Richard Steele. Pope's popular poem *The Rape of the Lock* was published in its entirety in 1714; his equally famous translation of Homer's *Iliad* appeared in serial form between 1715 and 1720. Pope had a successful and lucrative writing career, but he struggled with chronic ill health. He died on May 30, 1744, in London.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Of Dramatick Poesie: An Essay

*Of Dramatick Poesie: An Essay* (1668) represented John Dryden's challenges to the trends of English theater in the seventeenth century and is considered one of his best prose works. The significance of the piece lies in its argument concerning the development of the English theater, and it proved to be a driving influence.

In *Of Dramatick Poesie: An Essay*, four speakers, namely Crites, Eugenius, Lisideius, and Neander, drift down the Thames River as the English and Dutch wage a naval battle. Dryden presents his views in dialogue form. The use of several characters allowed Dryden to present

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS
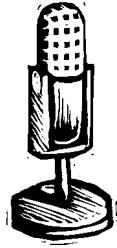
- *Gulliver's Travels* appeared as a television miniseries released by Hallmark Home Entertainment in 2000. This adaptation of the classic preserves the satire and wit of the original.
- *Robinson Crusoe* has been adapted for film several times, for example, in 1996, starring Pierce Brosnan.
- Molière's *Tartuffe* was staged for television by the Public Broadcasting Service in 1978 with an award-winning Broadway cast. Directed by Kirk Browning, this film stars Donald Moffat, Tammy Grimes, and Patricia Elliott. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from the Broadway Theatre Archive and Kultur Video.

the various aspects of his argument from these seemingly separate perspectives without explicitly endorsing a given opinion. The author offers clear positions on the issues discussed, for example, the merits of English theater versus that of the French and drama written in verse instead of prose. Dryden liked the dialogue as a form because it allowed him to explicitly consider various positions in an effort to ultimately support his own.

The characters in the essay are engaged in a discussion of classical conventions, as they are used by the French, and the value of the unities in English theater. The unities were strict rules of dramatic structure formulated by Italian and French writers during the Renaissance and loosely based on the dramatic principles of Aristotle. Presented as a dialogue, another classical convention, the work is as intellectually engaging as it is entertaining.

### Gulliver's Travels

Jonathan Swift saw overnight success with the 1727 publication of his politically charged satire *Gulliver's Travels*. It had all of the elements of a

*Daniel Defoe* *(Hulton Archive | Getty Images)*

*York, Mariner*, now recognized as simply *Robinson Crusoe*, was published in London by William Taylor on April 25, 1719. It was based on the adventures of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish sailor marooned alone on the island of Yernandez in the South Pacific. In terms of literary history, it is often called the first English novel.

Robinson Crusoe rejects his mercantile family in favor of a life at sea. After a number of adventures, including his encounters with pirates and an escape from slavery, Crusoe is caught in a hurricane. His ship is rendered useless as a result of the storm, and for the next twenty-eight years, he is stranded on an island in the Caribbean. The work documents Crusoe's struggle to survive in isolation.

*Robinson Crusoe* has many characteristics of a classical epic, with an identifiable hero, hard travel, separation from a homeland, and even small battles. Defoe assigns the character of Robinson Crusoe several admirable qualities, recognized, both in modern times and at the time of the book's publication, for his practicality, intelligence, and a well-balanced religiousness, among others. The book was even used for instructional purposes.

tempting read—mystery as well as political, social, and sexual scandal. So potentially controversial was its content, however, that Swift saw fit to publish the book anonymously.

Lemuel Gulliver is the main character of *Gulliver's Travels*, and the book is an account of his adventures in Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and among the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver finds himself towering over the inhabitants of Lilliput (they are only six inches high), and they refer to Gulliver as "Man-Mountain." Gulliver's size is a political issue, and, as he becomes more and more involved in Lilliput, demands are put upon him to aid the Lilliputians in a war against Blefuscu.

The plot is largely allegorical and comments indirectly on contemporary British politics. It did not take the public long to discover that the author was writing about England rather than Lilliput and the like or that the author of this satire was Jonathan Swift. Swift was not only active on the political scene but a well-known journalist with an easily recognizable style.

## Robinson Crusoe

A classic in its own right, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of*

## The Rape of the Lock

*The Rape of the Lock* is one of the best examples of the mock epic from the Neoclassical Age, which means that it takes a low subject and inflates it with epic grandeur. The difference between the insignificant action and the epic treatment is what makes for the comic effect. The work was published in 1712, when Pope was just twenty-three years old.

The story was written to smooth over the tensions that developed between two prominent families when Lord Petre cut a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair. In Pope's version, Belinda (Arabella Fermor) meets the Baron (Lord Petre), among others, at Hampton Court. Over coffee and tea, the Baron cuts the treasured lock, inviting a verbal attack from other women at the gathering who witness the crime. Belinda manages to throw snuff in his face before threatening him with a hairpin. At this point, the speaker interjects his own consolation to the victim, and at the work's end, he also points out that, though the lock is lost and cannot be recovered, it will be preserved on the moon (a common belief of the time concerning things lost) and may outlast even Belinda.

The work, in the tradition of the genre, mocks the events on which it was based by making light of them. Pope honors this minor tragedy in classical form and, in doing so, undermines the intensity of Arabella's experience. This is precisely because the trivialities of modern life fail to compare to the subject matter of classic epics, such as *Iliad*, the story of the siege of Troy, a battle that ensues because Paris has stolen away Helen from Menelaus, and her virtue and his honor must be defended. The hairpin in Pope's poem mocks by its insignificance the lethal weapons used in heroic battles such as the one fought at Troy.

### London

This work is an imitation, a popular contemporary poetic form used by Samuel Johnson. *London* was based on a translation of *Satura III* by Juvenal, a great satirical poet of ancient Rome. This work on urban life in London was the first piece Johnson created and published on his own, independent of the magazine he was working for in 1738.

The satire describes the difficulties of making an honest living in the city and then moves on to discuss the dangers of urban life. Johnson did not stick closely to the Juvenal text, however, but reworked it to accommodate his depictions of country life as a viable alternative for city dwellers. This celebration of country life is dictated by the time in which he wrote, a time when literature expressed a preoccupation with nature and life on the farm. Johnson also left out many of Juvenal's depictions of urban blight and poverty as well as the nuisances accompanying them, such as noise, crowds, traffic, and crime. Johnson also expanded *Satura III*, adding many contemporary political references to the introduction of the work. Following a common practice of the time, Johnson used his work as a platform for critique, in this case, pointed at Spanish efforts to squash British commerce, among other matters.

### Tartuffe

*Tartuffe* is Molière's most famous play. The word *Tartuffe* means religious hypocrite in French. This comedy tells the story of a wicked man named Tartuffe who gradually convinces another man, Orgon, to hand over his wealth, power, and family to Tartuffe. The king intercedes at the end, saves Orgon, and puts Tartuffe in prison. *Tartuffe* is written in rhyming couplets of twelve-syllable lines. It was first staged in 1664 at Versailles but was soon censored due to pressure from Molière's enemies. This play offended the Roman Catholic Church and members of the high society he was mocking, although King Louis XIV, Molière's sponsor, was not bothered by it. Nonetheless, *Tartuffe* was censored for five years. Molière's social commentary remains relevant in the twenty-first century and productions of *Tartuffe* continue to be staged.

## THEMES

### Intellectuals and Intellectualism

Devotion to the exercise or application of the intellect was important to the neoclassical writer. This tendency was an outgrowth of the classical tradition these writers sought to imitate. Writers such as Dryden, Johnson, and Pope, not wanting to limit themselves to one genre, engaged in experimentation to sharpen their own rhetorical abilities, imitating the conventions of classical poetic verse, drama, and rhetoric. In addition, these writers commented on a wide range of topics—political, historical, and social—demonstrating a wealth of civic knowledge. Intellectual expression was of greater value to the neoclassicist than the expression of feelings, and out of this desire came the satire and various forms of didactic (instructional) literature.

Often the writings of these authors were a printed form of debate, intellectual contests in print and journalism. Satirists would compete with one another, relying on sharp wit to savagely belittle their adversary. When John Dryden wrote *Of Dramatick Poesie: An Essay*, he both criticized the current trends of the English theater and defended himself. Sir Robert Howard immediately responded to the essay with some criticisms of his own. The result was a scathing rebuttal, *A Defence of An Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, in which Dryden attacked Howard's comments. Howard's response was fairly mild, almost as if he were surrendering.

### Social Protest

The seemingly unchecked actions and irresponsibility of the monarchy were a source of deep contention among its critics. The reigns of Charles II and his brother James II were mired in contradiction, their public faces never betraying their true intentions. There was also great opposition to the court influence of Robert Walpole, first Earl of Orford; a highly influential

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Browse through Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* and the *Oxford English Dicitionary*, noting differences in how words are defined. Then select a couple words and compare the definitions each publication offers. What do the differences between definitions tell you about differences between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

- Read one of Pope's essays, for example, *Essay on Man* or *Essay on Criticism*, and see how many familiar sayings you can find in it. Is there any difference between the meaning Pope saw in his now famous lines and the meaning they have in modern times?

- Read a biography of James Boswell and then look at his own biographical work, *The Life of Johnson*. What made Boswell the perfect person to write a life of Johnson? What disadvantages do you see in his doing this work, given his relationship to Johnson himself?

theories, as well as the rhetorical skills of the classicists as models. From the onset of the Restoration Age through the Age of Johnson, writers imitated classical forms such as the ode, the satire, and the epic. They also tended to favor rhymed couplets utilizing conventional poetic diction and imagery in their works.

Imitation was also a neoclassical genre. An imitation is a translation by which the translator takes certain artistic liberty with a classical work in an effort to produce a work that has contemporary relevance. Using the classical source as a point of reference, the translator often alters not only the language but the actual structure of the work, sometimes omitting or changing sections of it to suit contemporary tastes.

Imitation was a well-accepted art form, readily adopted by Restoration poets. Samuel Johnson was an imitator and chose the Latin poet Juvenal, imitating his *Satura III*, to express himself on urban life in London. Johnson took care to include Juvenal's words at the bottom of the pages of his *London*, wishing to preserve Juvenal's sentiments next to his own. Johnson preserved the original structure of the work but altered portions of it in order to voice his own views, which were more specific to his audience.

statesman, he all but assumed the role of king, gaining the confidence of George I and II.

Neoclassical writers repeatedly challenged the establishment, resorting to their own form of social protest, the written word expressed as satire, to inform, educate, and incite public outrage. In response to Walpole's flagrant abuse of power, the two popular political parties of the time, the Tories and the Whigs, formed a loose alliance against Walpole. Of those dissenters, Tory writers Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay, and Henry Fielding, and the Whig writer James Thomson formed an alliance bent on exposing Walpole publicly. The efforts of the small group of sharp-tongued intellectuals stung Walpole. He responded to the attacks by imposing censorship on the group.

## Imitation

The neoclassicists sought to imitate the classics, looking to the poetic conventions, the dramatic

## STYLE

### *Allegory*

An allegory is a narrative form in which symbolic characters or actions are used to convey a message or teach a lesson. Typically used to teach moral, ethical, or religious ideals, it was also used for political purposes. In the case of the neoclassicists, the latter was often the case, often in conjunction with satire.

Swift's criticism of English politics was so harsh that he felt it necessary to publish his work *Gulliver's Travels* anonymously. On the surface, the work is fiction, but on a deeper level it is an account of the bitter political struggles between the two major political parties of the early eighteenth century, the Tories and the Whigs.

Johnson lampoons those intimate with the British political scene in his depiction of certain characters. For example, the Lilliputian emperor is characterized as being tyrannical and corrupt and is also easily recognized as George I, king of England (1714–1727). The Lilliputian empress

stands for Queen Anne, who, offended by Swift's earlier satires, chose to prevent his advancement in the Church of England. The two parties in Lilliput, the Low-Heels and the High-Heels represent the Whigs and the Tories respectively.

### Didactic

This term describes works of literature that aim to teach some moral, religious, political, or practical lesson. The term usually refers to literature in which the message is more important than the form. The aim of many of the neoclassical writers was instruction, as many of them were moralists and critics of English politics, and all shared an interest in conveying their position. In the case of *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe's lesson for the young audience is that perseverance pays off.

*Robinson Crusoe* was recognized as a book of extraordinary value for children in its time. Many believed Crusoe to be an excellent role model for children. Steady, intelligent, spirited, independent, industrious, Defoe's character demonstrates all of these qualities in the face of great adversity and survives. Defoe's work has also been praised because of children's ability to relate to Crusoe and his persistence, delighting in the discoveries he makes and what he does to survive.

### Blank Verse

Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter (composed of lines of five two-syllable feet, or sets, with the first syllable unaccented and the second accented). Blank verse has traditionally been a popular form, aptly suited to the natural cadence of English.

Shakespeare used blank verse frequently in his plays and Milton's *Paradise Lost* is written in blank verse. Dryden used blank verse in *All for Love* (1678). Though the metrical form fell out of popularity in the later eighteenth century, it was revived by some of the Romantic poets.

### Mock Epic

This genre was a suitable form for neoclassicists who wanted to scorn contemporary subjects by belittling them with bombast. Pope, Swift, Dryden, Richardson, and others used mock epic to satirize social and political excesses of their age.

The classic epic is lofty, serious, and long. The poem relates the story of a national hero, a mythic or historical figure of great cultural importance. The setting is vast, and often there is some sort of divine intervention in human events. The hero has supernatural abilities and may visit the underworld to speak to other heroes now dead. The work is written in a lofty style, enriched by elaborate, extended metaphors and allusions to further elevate the subject. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an epic in the classical mode.

The mock epic employs many of the same classical conventions as the epic. The work is a long poem, employing a serious tone, using ornate language, extended metaphors, and classical allusions. But the subject matter is low or bawdy or ridiculous, decidedly not heroic, and in this contrast between manner and matter the satire achieves its comic effect.

Pope's "Rape of the Lock" is a good example of the mock epic. As duly pointed out by Frances Mayhew Rippy, in "The Rape of the Lock: Overview," Pope's work looks at modern concerns, finding them less heroic than those of the classical world. Rippy adds that the "Epic battles have become card games and snuff-throwing," and the "genealogy of weapons has become the history of Belinda's ornamental hairpin." Essentially, the work succeeds in satirizing the loss of a sense of what is important.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

The neoclassical period was framed by specific historical events. Scholars generally agree that the movement began with the return of the Stuarts to the English throne in 1660 and ended with the 1798 publication of *Lyric Ballads*.

### The Restoration Age (1660–1700)

England underwent a transformation at the outset of the Restoration, in strong reaction against Puritanism. The period was marked by a resurgence of scientific thought and investigation. It is at this point, with the infusion of French influences, that Neoclassicism begins to develop.

During the Restoration Age, the heroic couplet, a rhyming couplet written in iambic pentameter (a verse with five iambic feet), was the major verse form. The poetry itself was typically didactic or satirical in nature—the work's main aim was either to instruct some moral, religious, political, or practical lesson or to ridicule and attack some aspect of contemporary life. The ode was also widely used. An ode is a lengthy, lyrical,

rhyming poem addressing or praising some object, person, or quality in a lofty, noble style.

Prose took on a more modern style, as represented by Bunyan, Dryden, and Milton, principal writers of the age. Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* were among the major literary achievements of the period, and Dryden's work demonstrates a transition toward the Augustan Age. Locke's writings, more political in nature, represented the course of English thought during this time.

The Restoration Age also enjoyed the reopening of theaters. Both William Wycherly and William Congreve wrote dramas. The comedy of manners and the heroic drama developed as genres.

### The Augustan Age (1700–1750)
Classical ideas of common sense and reason took precedence over creativity fueled by emotion and imagination during the Augustan Age. Typically, literature produced in this time tends to be realistic, satirical, and moral. Authors like James Thomson continued to reflect in their writings a concern for the study of nature and science.

Poetry is carefully structured, as reflected in that the work of Pope, and the mock epic and verse essay are common. Defoe's journals, collections of essays, and periodicals such as the *Spectator* influenced English prose style. Swift's satires were popular as were the early novels of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, among others. Finally, the theater took a turn in character from a moralistic bent in favor of the sentimental comedy. In addition, classical and domestic tragedy dominated the stage.

### The Age of Johnson (1750–1798)
A period aptly named for Samuel Johnson, whose prose and critical works eventually led to the end of the neoclassical tradition, the Age of Johnson represented a transition from a focus on classical study/imitation to an interest in folk literature and popular ballads, which can be observed in Johnson's own writing.

During this time, the novel developed further, with Sterne and Mackenzie helping to fashion what came to be called the novel of sensibility. The Gothic novel was born in the works of Ann Radcliffe and Horace Walpole. Henry Brooke and William Godwin wrote novels steeped in distinct philosophical as well as political commentary. Shakespeare was exceedingly popular, and

both the sentimental comedy and the comedy of manners remained widely used forms. In addition, burlesque, pantomime, and the melodrama were in the forefront. Important dramatists of this time include Richard Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith; poets include William Collins and Thomas Gray.

The age experienced a growing interest in human freedom, intensified by both the American and French revolutions. An interest in the outdoors, a celebration of country life, and an engagement in an ever-widening circle of intellectual pursuits characterized the period, as did the development of several religious movements such as Methodism. It would be in this environment that the neoclassical tradition came to an end and English Romanticism began to take form.

### Comedy of Manners
The comedy of manners is a category of plays about the manners and conventions of an aristocratic, highly sophisticated society. The characters are usually types rather than individualized personalities, and plot is less important than the atmosphere. Such plays were an important aspect of late seventeenth-century English comedy. The comedy of manners was revived in the eighteenth century by Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Sheridan, enjoyed a second revival in the late nineteenth century, and endured into the twentieth century. Examples of comedies of manners include William Congreve's *The Way of the World* in the late seventeenth century; Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* in the eighteenth century. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in the nineteenth century and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Circle* in the twentieth century are modern examples.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The English climate during the neoclassical period was one of false appearances in both political and the public domains. Part of the masquerade involved a monarchy that was publicly sensitive yet privately ambivalent concerning many issues. There was also a *nouveau riche* middle-class, whose members were more interested in gentrifying themselves with refined clothing and manners than acknowledging the political conflicts swirling about them.

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1600s–1700s:** Oliver Cromwell's protectorate is overthrown, and after two decades in which England was without a sovereign, Charles II is crowned king.

  **Today:** As of 2008 Gordon Brown is the prime minister of England, and Queen Elizabeth II is the symbolic head of state under a parliamentary democracy.

- **1600s–1700s:** The most celebrated eighteenth century periodical, *The Spectator*, is founded by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele.

  **Today:** The Internet connects millions of households with a seemingly limitless number of newspapers, magazines, and periodicals at the click of a mouse.

- **1600s–1700s:** The rise of the English theater changes social patterns as English citizens from all classes begin to attend theatrical performances.

  **Today:** The DVD and development of home entertainment systems change the habits of many movie viewers, who, instead of visiting the theater, opt to stay home.

- **1600–1700s:** With the restoration of the English theater comes an intermingling of the social classes, and fashion becomes the focus as middle- and upper-middle class patrons of the stage imitate the monarchy in style and dress.

  **Today:** Overnight pop music sensations like Britney Spears set fashion standards for contemporary teens.

The history of the monarchy was fuel enough for a great deal of criticism on the part of the neoclassicists, and rightfully so. The hopes of the public were high for a leader who could promise relief from the religious and political struggles that plagued England. It is not surprising that a crowd gathered to cheer Charles II as he landed on the shores of Dover in May of 1660. Many felt that Charles's coronation in 1661 would signify an end to the civil and political unrest. However, he proved to be a man of contradictions.

The return of English control to the monarchy also fostered the opening of the London theaters in 1662. The new theaters were no longer located in the lower-class parts of town, as was often the case in the Elizabethan age, but were now between Westminster and the City of London. Attending these performances provided a chance for people of various economic levels to observe royalty and the well-to-do. The drama of the theaters also managed to overshadow a major naval defeat at the hands of the Dutch in 1673.

Charles II, at least on the surface, gave England much to hope for. Publicly, he professed a love of parliaments and expressed a hope for an independent Church of England. Privately, however, he often postponed parliaments, pushed for toleration of Catholics, and even converted to Catholicism on his deathbed. Similarly, James, Charles's brother and successor, initially pledged support of the Anglicans by promising to honor the national church and to end religious uniformity. Soon, however, he moved against Anglican interests. His attempts to convert the nation to Catholicism provoked William of Orange, his Dutch son-in-law, to organize an army. A confrontation occurred in November of 1688, causing James to flee to France.

The reign of King William III saw the restoration of the Church of England but also an England deep in debt from funding the revolution, inspiring much political grumbling and satire. Queen Anne, his successor, had what some historians have called a peaceful reign, inspired by consumer confidence and a sense of nostalgia. But after Queen Anne's death, King George I and his family were imported from Hanover,

Germany. He could only speak broken English and had little interest in English politics.

At that point, Robert Walpole chose to step in and manage the affairs of both George I and his successor, George II. Walpole, acting more as minister than advisor, overstepped his bounds, swaying party politics, making way for the Whigs to assume a dominant role. He was sarcastically dubbed "prime" minister, due to his arrogance and his politics. So tyrannical were his policies that the two main parties, the Whigs and the Tories, formed a temporary alliance against him. The pressure of military conflict ultimately led to Walpole's resignation.

George III ascended to the throne in 1760, and though his reign has been characterized as tumultuous, historians are quick to point out that during that time, Britain was the richest nation with the largest empire.

It was also a time of high fashion. As the middle class mingled with gentry, they strove to imitate what they saw as being their tastes. Wigs, scarves, silks, jewelry—all of these commodities were in demand and appeared in catalogs. Advertising was also a natural outgrowth of such consumerism and began to be a major source of financial support to periodicals. There was also a focus on politeness and self-control. Pope, Swift, and others would satirize what they saw as being frivolous or pointless attempts at self-promotion.

All of the diversion—the pomp and circumstance of the social classes, the drama of the theater, the drama of the monarchy—could not mask the ever-widening gaps between rich and poor. Nor could it avert the public outcry against the slave trade, which fueled much of England's financial strength as a superpower. These conflicts and others moved literature towards Romanticism.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Dubbed by many to be intellectual art, the works of neoclassical writers were praised for their didactic nature. Subsequent generations of readers marveled at the versatility of these writers who produced such a variety of work, including poetry, satires, odes, drama, prose, criticism, and translations. The works themselves commanded



Napoleon at St. Bernard *by neoclassicist painter Jacques-Louis David* (Painting by Jacques-Louis David. *Musée de Versailles. Reproduced by permission)*

greater admiration as examples elegance, simplicity, dignity, restraint, order, and proportion.

One rather negative assertion made on the part of critics is that imagination was intentionally repressed during the neoclassical period. To the contrary, Donald F. Bond, author of "The Neo-Classical Psychology of the Imagination," argues that although writers were concerned with the "dangers of an uncontrolled imagination, an examination of the psychological background of the period reveals an awareness of the validity of the imagination." Considering the mind as a "storehouse of images," he elaborates on his point by stating that "this aspect of the imagination, as the power whereby the mind is cognizant of external objects without direct sensory stimulus, is prevalent throughout the period."

Another problem of note is the rather fuzzy classification Neoclassicism is subject to. Depending upon the critic, the terms Classicism and Neoclassicism are thought to be sometimes interchangeable and sometimes not. James William Johnson's "What Was Neoclassicism?" explored the issue, taking the position that the research of his contemporaries has uncovered "a

vast range of literature simply ignored—or perhaps suppressed—by earlier critics." His conclusion was simply that "the resulting disparity between limited assumptions and expanded information has called into question the very possibility of formulating any critical schema that accurately describes the characteristics of English literature between 1660 and 1800."

Timothy Dykstal, in his examination of the work of female neoclassical authors Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier, defines Neoclassicism as the adoption of Classical techniques and values in an effort to critique contemporary behaviors. In "What Indeed Was Neoclassicism?" Donald Greene counters Johnson, dismissing his ideas as "tedious pseudo-problems, better left for journalists—and professors of literature—to play with if it amuses them."

# CRITICISM

## Laura Kryhoski

*Kryhoski is currently employed as a freelance writer. In this essay, Kryhoski considers critical opinions on the definition of Neoclassicism.*

The boundaries defining the neoclassical genre have been tested, questioned, and found wanting by many literary critics. Equally troublesome to many of these critics is the notion that a literary canon can be categorized strictly on the basis of what is a largely accepted, though narrowly focused. In the late 1960s, James William Johnson considered this idea in his work "What Was Neoclassicism." He was chiefly concerned with what he identified as a vast range of literature widely ignored in favor of a "limited, prejudged selection of Restoration and 18th Century literature."

Johnson contends that modern writers are also a threat, having no sense of aesthetic or principle akin to that of the neoclassicists, or even the Victorians, for that matter. Although this is an old argument, it continues to resonate today. Even the most respectable literary reference books will prove discerning as to just what differences exist between a classic and a "new" classic. Some literary dictionaries will go as far as to say that the terms Classicism and Neoclassicism are interchangeable, leaving the amateur (and perhaps even the seasoned) scholar to shake his or her head.

Donald Greene, in his reply to Johnson's work, "What Indeed was Neo-Classicism? A Reply to James William Johnson's 'What was Neo-Classicism?,'" also responds to what he sees as a somewhat troublesome form. Greene states that unlike other literary periods in history, the neoclassical age comes with "undistinguished credentials," without, what he calls, some of the big, generalizing terms used to define periods of significant literary importance. Greene feels that a substantial objection to the application of the term Classicism,, or any of its variants, is based on the understood basis of classification for such literature. Greene states simply that in the classification of such literature of the period, 1660–1800, it remains that

> if it means that people in the eighteenth century read widely in the Latin and Greek classics and were influenced by them, they did so equally, and sometimes more, in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and a good deal of the nineteenth centuries.

The whole idea that there was a sudden "revival" of Classicism is repellent to Greene and others. It has been noted that if there was such a period in English history, a period when Classicism was declared dead, in Greene's rather humorous words, "this is indeed some important news." He cites the efforts of one of the greatest writers of the years preceding what has been coined the "classical revival" in the history in England, namely those of Milton. The example is a compelling one because of Milton's stature in the literary community and in the Western canon as a whole. He is identified by Greene, and, undoubtedly, countless others, as one perhaps more profoundly schooled in the classics than "any other English author." Milton was also admired for his uses of classical Latin elegiac verse; his last publication mirrored a strict form of Greek tragedy to boot.

Shakespeare also seems to take a sort of nebulous position within the context of neoclassical conventions. Thora Burnley Jones, in her collection, *Neo-classical Dramatic Criticism, 1560–1770*, considers the acceptance of Shakespeare by Restoration playwrights such as Pope and Johnson. Jones asserts that such playwrights encouraged a "climate of opinion which ensured the acceptance of Shakespeare as the central figure in the English literary tradition." However, Shakespeare certainly did not fit within the conventional window of opportunity provided as a reference for describing the English neoclassicists.

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
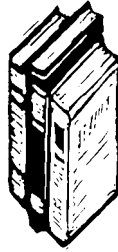
- In *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (1993) Merry E. Weisner discusses the experiences of women living between 1500 and 1750. The author focuses on women's roles in relation to general historical developments and the effects of such developments on women. Her work explores "women's private and domestic experiences." There is consideration of the physical experiences of women— menstruation, pregnancy, and motherhood—and the familial roles in which women tried to find meaning.

- *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (1990), edited by John Morrill, is a discussion of Oliver Cromwell's life, both personal and political. Cromwell died at the dawn of the Neoclassical Age, but he influenced political discourse in the decades that followed him. Cromwell has been celebrated as a champion of both religious and civil liberties and for his role in the defeat of Stuart tyranny. The book describes the phases of his career as citizen, soldier, and lord protector.

- *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1938), written by Ian Watt and reprinted in 2001, is a consideration of the relation between the growth of a reading public and the emergence of the English novel in the eighteenth century. Watt's study draws on the works of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, among other important novelists, to discuss the qualities of the English novel that distinguished it from other contemporary genres. His work is a classic description of the social conditions, changing attitudes, and literary practices dominating the period during which the novel became a dominant literary form. Watt's study also considers the audience the novel reached, its role in the book trade, and the evolution of English society during the eighteenth century.

- *The Literary Life and Other Curiosities* (1981), by Robert Hendrickson, is a collection of anecdotes, quotations, lists, and poems concerning books and their authors, including many from the neoclassical period. It's a wonderfully humorous and historically valuable work, offering unusual insight into writers such as Dryden and Swift. In his chapter titled "Wits, Wags, and Literary Weasels," Hendrickson explores the use of wit, pun, and hoax, offering very amusing anecdotes and examples.

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Yet Jones takes the author's style to task, citing, rather pointedly, his neoclassical qualities as a playwright. First, says Jones, Shakespearean plays had a certain degree of verisimilitude to them. He was able, with great depth and accuracy, to explore the human condition in a language that was all-inclusive, one that everyone could hear and be touched by. Shakespeare does not subscribe to the neoclassical principles of form, however. Critics often note Shakespeare's lack of concern for established classical form and for rules of decorum. He often mixed comedy with tragedy and completely ignored the unities. (Jones suggests the possibility that he knew nothing of such convention.) He also often lacked the level of style and elevation that other classicists shared as a common trait in their writings. Jones states that the third criterion defining the neoclassicist hinges on the idea of "art and morality." It is the task of the neoclassical writer to "indicate the way to a good life." Shakespeare is certainly guilty of this tendency, although his moralistic tendencies have been viewed as being somewhat misguided.

Shakespeare did have some faults when compared to those neoclassicists who followed

THE CONVENTIONS OF NEOCLASSICISM, NO MATTER HOW LOOSELY APPLIED, DO NOT SEEM TO WARRANT THE CLASSIFICATION OF SHAKESPEARE AS A NEOCLASSICIST."

him. Such faults seemed to clash against the very virtues that the neoclassicists strove to imitate. But the Augustan Age brought with it a marked interest in Shakespeare. Shakespeare somehow managed to rise above the fray, to continually be both recognized and excused for his deficits. Jones states that critics engage in "excusing his faults by the application of false historicism: he lived in barbarous times, spoke a less refined vernacular, shared the company of coarse players, and so on."

The convention in Augustan criticism of pitting Shakespeare against Aristotle is said to be a tradition of the age. For whatever reason, this did little, if anything, to ruin his critical reputation among other writers of the period. He is instead continuously excused for ignoring the rules of form precisely because he knew no better. Critics have often forgiven Shakespeare for his weaknesses with plot and structure, looking to his character sketches in order to grant the playwright redemption.

Shakespeare's critics make a case for the assertions set out by Johnson that critics are often blinded by their own personal interests. This is not to dispute the value of Shakespeare's contribution to literature; rather, it is only used to demonstrate the seemingly arbitrary assignment of values even those neoclassicists who were contemporaries of the age might assign an author in determining merit. For instance, in Jones's works, she recalls the preface to Pope's text on Shakespeare. The preface states that he transcended imitation, going beyond the interpretation of a common human experience (nature), and has "conjured up a golden world."

But Jones claims that Pope is merely repeating the established view that "Shakespeare's characterization is good because it is lifelike; it is individualized and it is consistent, drawn from

life and not from other writers." Pope's work about the playwright is interesting insomuch as he was pandering to an audience who loved Shakespeare. Pope forgives his excesses, attributing them to the types of audiences he answered to. As to his lack of education, Pope pointed to Shakespeare's level of wit and fancy, claiming that the abilities he had in both areas more than made up for his lack of scholasticism.

The conclusion Jones comes to is that despite the critical techniques of writers like Pope, there still exists an urge to apply neoclassical values to Shakespeare's work, regardless of the fact that such value judgments are in direct opposition with a felt response to the poetry. The conventions of Neoclassicism, no matter how loosely applied, do not seem to warrant the classification of Shakespeare as a neoclassicist. Again, the critics of neoclassical literature and form are not impervious to their own personal motivations and, as demonstrated by Pope, eschew critical response in an effort to forward their own personal agendas.

So who will redraw the lines of the genre, and what artists should be included? Should they be redrawn at all? To Donald Greene, at least, the matter is simply a matter of vision. Specifically, he warns of the dangers of looking too closely at individual instances where the convention might fit a person or idea, in favor of looking at the cultural landscape that inspires such movements.

**Source:** Laura Kryhoski, Critical Essay on Neoclassicism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Timothy Dykstal

*In this essay, Dykstal examines the neoclassical style used by Sarah Fielding in* The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable *and by Jane Collier in* An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting.

Why begin an essay aspiring to a cluster entitled "new approaches to the eighteenth century" by evoking the specter of *neoclassicism*, especially when the texts that it focuses on are by women? A literary mode rather than a genre, neoclassicism connotes a range of unfashionable aesthetic values: order, decorum, universal truth. Its critical fortunes may be contrasted with that of the romance, a once-neglected genre that has surged of late, especially with respect to women's studies. If studies of neoclassicism tended to exclude women and women
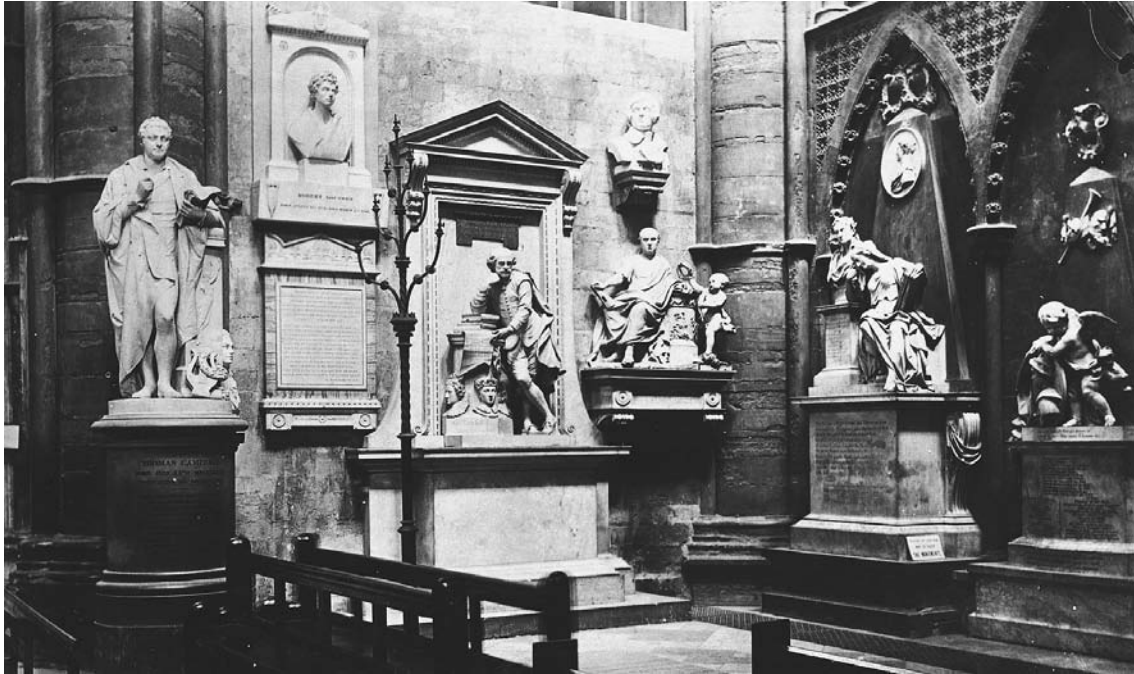
*Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey* (© Bettmann / Corbis)

writers, renewed attention to the romance, particularly to the way that it anticipates developments in the eighteenth-century novel, has reinvigorated eighteenth-century studies and restored women writers to their rightful place in the canon. But neoclassicism is a more useful rubric for describing certain eighteenth-century texts than mere summaries or even caricatures of it have suggested, even for women writers whom it might be thought to exclude, and it is particularly useful when the main thing those texts are doing is critiquing the romance and the expectations that it creates for a modern audience. In this essay, I would like to examine two of the more innovative fictions of Sarah Fielding and her collaborator Jane Collier as experiments in a neoclassical mode. These works do not adapt the values of the ancients to criticize the moderns: they have tough things to say about the ancients as well. But they do adopt the forms and techniques of classical writers to make their cases against modern audiences, particularly modern readers of the romance. They treat the classics as equals, and by doing so come closest to the spirit, if not the values—aesthetic and otherwise—of the ancients.

Joseph M. Levine's description of the ancient's side in the eighteenth-century "battle of the books"

can serve as a definition of the purest kind of neoclassicism:

> The best, the only political education, is a training in the classical authors. Latin and Greek are the keys to a treasure chest of wisdom and examples, unmatched by anything afterward. The student must model himself on his ancient predecessors for style and substance, in his speech and his behavior, and he is not likely to surpass them. Perfection can only be imitated.

*(Levine 1991, 5)*

The early Pope is paradigmatic here. In "An Essay on Criticism" (1711), he rails against the moderns—unworthy of even standing on the shoulders of the ancient giants—as he regularizes the past, taking the advice that is often fragmented in classical texts (Aristotle's *Poetics* and Longinus's *On the Sublime*, for example) and turning it into memorable couplets:

> Moderns, beware! Or if you must offend
> Against the Precept, ne'er transgress its End,
> Let it be seldom, and compell'd by Need,
> And have, at least, Their Precedent to plead.

*(Pope 1963, 149)*

Viewing the classical text as a collection of timeless truths, the Pope of the "Essay" vows to

> "…FIELDING AND COLLIER SHOW THEMSELVES ABLE TO TAKE ON THE ANCIENTS AS EQUALS, EITHER BY STEPPING THROUGH THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS ON THE WAY TO A KIND OF CHRISTIAN HUMANISM, OR BY RECALLING THE WAY THAT A CLASSIC TEXT BRINGS ITS READERS UP SHORT BY SEDUCING THEM INTO ULTIMATELY DESTRUCTIVE IMAGES OF THEMSELVES."

transgress the "Precept" only when authorized by the ancients themselves. This, then, is the classic meaning of *neoclassical*: not only a commitment to aesthetic values like the aforementioned order and decorum, but also an ideological stance that sees those truths as fixed rather than fungible.

In fact, there is relatively little literature in the eighteenth century that favors the ancients in this unqualified way, and (as Howard D. Weinbrot has definitively shown in *Britannia's Issue* [1993]) a fixed adherence to classical virtues, aesthetic or otherwise, was never the program of "British" writers. Pope himself, in his later imitation of Horace's "First Epistle of the Second Book" (subtitled "To Augustus") realizes that the classics get away with transgressions that hang the moderns, simply by virtue of being old:

> I lose my patience, and I own it too,
> When works are censur'd, not as bad, but new;
> While if our Elders break all Reason's laws,
> These fools demand not Pardon, but Applause.

*(Pope 1963, 640)*

Although he prefers what he calls "Paraphrase, or Translation with Latitude," John Dryden, in his preface to a translation of Ovid's *Epistles*, defines the practice of "Imitation," where the "Translator (if now he has not lost that Name) assumes the liberty not only to vary words and sence, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion: and taking only some general hints from the Original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases" (1956, 1.114–15). The kind of neoclassicism that I am describing here runs even more "division on the ground-work" of the

ancients than Dryden recommended: strictly speaking, what Fielding and Collier do with their models is not imitation. The most common way of reading *The Cry* is as an anti-romance; Collier's *Essay* is most easily seen as a parody of a female conduct-book. Certainly they are not "neoclassical" because their authors advance some unassailable standards of formal beauty. Yet it *is* useful to compare these texts to their classical models because they suggest that our passions and our interests need to be seen in a longer historical context than many novels and most romances are willing to see them, and because they provoke, and are provoked by, the rules for living that the ancients left to us.

Call these texts experiments in a neoclassical mode, then, generic experiments much like Swift's famous "Description" poems. In his "Description of a City Shower," Swift draws on the georgic in order to point out the disparity between Virgil's Roman countryside and the contemporary London street:

> Now from all parts the swelling kennels flow,
> And bear their trophies with them as they go:
> Filth of all hues and odours, seem to tell
> What streets they sailed from, by the sight
>   and smell.

*(Swift 1983, 114)*

The georgic, as Virgil established it, is a poem that makes rural labor attractive: like the pastoral it celebrates country life, but it does so in a way that makes clear that life would not be possible without industry. Swift's poem inverts that dynamic, washing clean the industry that supports city life with the "swell" of poetic description. Yet the whole poem is couched, as are Virgil's, as a practical bit of advice: Swift tells us, as Virgil might tell one of his husbandmen, that "Careful observers" who pay attention to the sights and sounds he describes will know "when to dread a shower." Swift is indebted to his classical model, and the poem depends for its effect on the implied contrast between a bucolic past and the bustling present, but he respects the georgic for the use he can put it to, not for any truth content it contains or any style it inviolably shows. Indeed, Swift himself violates neoclassical decorum by daring to throw "drowned Puppies" and "Dead cats" in with Virgil's bees and honey (1983, 114).

In the brand or mode of "neoclassicism" that I am outlining, in fact, there is a great ambition to make the ancients useful for an English

audience. When Catherine Secker, a friend of the "bluestocking" intellectuals Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot, died in 1748, Carter undertook a translation of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus from the Greek to help her friend Talbot deal with her grief. The consolation of this philosophy was a long time coming, for Carter stalled in her task when Thomas Secker, then Bishop of Oxford, complained that her initial attempts at rendering Epictetus's style were too smooth (Thomas 1991, 161). Epictetus was rough and conversational and should remain so, not only because that would have been truer to the philosopher's own ambition to oppose the "professional" philosophers of his day, but also because, as Secker wrote to Carter, Epictetus's "plain and home exhortations and reproofs . . . will be more attended to and felt, and consequently . . . do more good, than any thing sprucer that can be substituted in their room" (Carter 1808, 1.168). By 1758, Carter had produced a translation that was true enough both to spirit and style to remain standard until the twentieth century. Among Sarah Fielding's works, too, was a translation of the classical writer Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates* (1762), a work that she probably undertook after noting the success of Carter's translation (which sold more than 1000 copies by subscription [Myers 1990, 168]), and which she too found appealing for its pointed style and home truths (Bree 1996, 21–22). When the ancients were plainly useful in themselves, translation could suffice.

More commonly, though, the ambition to make the ancients useful meant making them— as Pope says in his "Advertisement" to "To Augustus"—"entirely English" (1963, 635). For John Gay, writing his dedicatory poem to the miscellany of neoclassical imitations compiled by the bookseller Bernard Lintot in 1712, that meant making the work both various ("The Muses *O'lio*") and linguistically accessible:

> Translations should throughout the Work be
>   sown,
> And Homer's Godlike Muse be made our own;
> Horace in useful Numbers should be Sung,
> And Virgil's Thoughts adorn the British
>   Tongue.
>
> *(Gay 1974, 1.38–39)*

Pope went even further, attracted to Horace not only for his air of easy authority, but also for the opportunity that imitation afforded him to work out a debased typology between the world of the ancients and his own. "The Reflections of *Horace . . .* seem'd so seasonable to the present Times," the contrast between the good patronage of Augustus and the bad ministry of George II so obvious, "that I could not help applying them to the use of my own Country" (1963, 634), he says. Again, Pope emphasizes the utility of neoclassical imitation: useful sometimes, as in the "Essay on Criticism," for making the rules of the ancients accessible to the moderns; useful other times, as in "To Augustus," for embarrassing them.

The standard history of neoclassicism is dominated by men, beginning (roughly) with Dryden and ending with Johnson, and includes Swift and Pope as well as writers like Prior, Addison, Gay, Akenside, and Goldsmith. But women were neoclassicists as well, and were drawn to the mode for all of the same reasons. They too liked the image—even if it was only that—of an age where literary merit was duly recognized, where order and decorum reigned, and where their present concerns were given historical consequence. At the same time, critics of the past and present, engaged in recovering the neoclassical commitments of women writers, notice the subtle ways that their use of the past differs from that of male writers. Echoing Samuel Holt Monk, who noted that "by virtue of their sex" women were "somewhat outside the tradition," and thus "able to criticize more independently than could men" (1935, 216), Jonathan F. S. Post and Anne K. Mellor write in their introduction to a recent collection of articles on women's poetry that "[G]ender difference frequently encouraged a sense of authorial distance or separation from the dominant tradition . . . " (2002, 5–6). Even when male poets like John Milton and Abraham Cowley are imitating Horace's famous fifth ode "To Pyrrha," for example, they steer fairly close to the original. Horace gazes on Pyrrha, a beautiful young woman preparing herself physically to break the heart of another youth, and remembers when he too was "shipwrecked" by her beauty: Cowley remembers his own wreck and assures himself that "there's no danger now for Me" (1967, 1.143), and Milton nostalgically hangs "My dank and dropping weeds / To the stern God of Sea" (1957, 10). But Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, imitating the same ode, more emphatically asserts her independence from past loves and losses:

> For me, secure I view the raging Main,
> Past are my Dangers, and forgot my Pain,
> My Votive Tablet in the temple shews
> The Monument of Folly past,

I paid the bounteous God my gratefull vows,
Who snatch'd from Ruin sav'd me at the last.

*(Montagu 1977, 302)*

Milton and Cowley pay their tributes to Neptune because they were once shipwrecked and survived; Montagu pays hers because she, "sav'd . . . at the last," just skirted the wreck. The difference *is* subtle, but it also keys on the gender difference: for an eighteenth-century woman—and Montagu does make the speaker of her poem a woman admiring the beauty of a man—to be "wrecked" was much more devastating than it would have been for a man. Similarly, the scholar and translator Carter asserts her independence from her admired Epictetus by subordinating his Stoicism to the truths of her Christianity. For Carter, Christianity offers hope to ordinary, fallible people, whereas Stoicism "insults human Nature . . . by enjoining and promising a Perfection in this Life, of which we feel ourselves incapable" (1758, xxiii). Women neoclassicists, like their male counterparts, are concerned to prove their legitimacy to speak within the tradition. At the same time, their gender gives them a certain freedom to challenge it.

What I have been outlining in these last few paragraphs is a neoclassical mode that aims to make the ancients useful for a modern, English audience; and a willingness, on the part of certain women writers, to *make* them useful by experimenting with—not just translating or transmitting—their truths. This is the context in which I shall examine the innovative fictions of Fielding and Collier. To be sure, their experimentation was not confined to the classics. In the sequel to her most popular novel, *David Simple* (1744), entitled *Volume the Last*, Fielding deconstructs the simple pieties of that sentimental novel in order to prove that "The Attainment of our Wishes is but too often the Beginning of our Sorrows" (1998). In *The Governess* (1749)—credited with being "the earliest known full length novel written specifically for young people" (Cadogan 1987, vii)—Fielding attempts to condition her juvenile readers before they acquire their bad habits of interpretation. But Fielding's (and Collier's) *The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable* (1754) dismisses several philosophical schools and mimics the structure of a Greek tragedy as it displays the essential selfishness of romantic love and the fatuous yearnings of audiences who read for it, and Collier's *An Essay on The Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* (1753) imitates the structure and rhetorical strategy of

Ovid's *Ars Amatoria (The Art of Love)* as it dissects just how tormenting love, and other kinds of dependency, can be. What these books have in common, as I said before, is their critique of the concept of romance: they want to demystify it as dangerous for women. They do that, in part, more by provoking than by invoking the authority of the classical tradition, using it to diagnose some problems of modern life.

Fielding begins *The Cry* by surveying the genres—ellegory, essay, romance, and novel— that a modern writer has to work with. She rejects allegory, mapping the spiritual world onto the temporal one, because it tends to the fantastic, and the essay because it can be tedious. Romances and novels, in contrast, are entertaining, but concentrate on action or plot, "and much rather would we chuse that our reader should clearly understand what our principal actors think, than what they do" (1986). She refuses, then, to classify her own fiction as any of these. The plot of *The Cry* does follow that of a fairly conventional romance: a virtuous young woman named Portia falls in love with a young man named Ferdinand, stays true to him as he wanders from her, and is rewarded for her faithfulness by marriage and happiness. Linda Bree notes what *is* unusual about Portia's story: unlike most romantic heroines, she is assertive enough to refuse to marry her lover until he proves to her that he deserves her love (1996, 92). But, as in a romance, or a novel, Portia does get her man in the end.

But the romance plot is not all, or even most, of the "narrative" of *The Cry*. The overt structure is that of a five-act play rather than a multi-chapter novel, and what "incidents and adventures" (Fielding 1986) there are compete with dramatically (and sometimes not-so dramatically) staged dialogue on both abstract philosophical, and concrete ethical, questions. For most of "Part the First," in fact, we hear very little of Portia, Ferdinand, and the other characters revolving around their courtship: Portia does declare that she loves Ferdinand, but she spends more time asserting the right of women to book learning, speaking "of the envy of Ben Johnson to Shakespeare", and, as she does often, inventing a new word to define an old behavior: "turba," to describe "all the evil passions, such as wrath, hatred, malice, envy, &c. which sometimes altogether possess the human breast." When she states these opinions, Portia is talking to the other main "character" of

*The Cry*, the character who best exemplifies "turba" in action: "the Cry" itself, a strange crowd of bad interpreters that Fielding models on the chorus of a Greek tragedy. Like that chorus, the Cry exists to voice the opinions of the public; unlike a classical Greek chorus, however, the opinions that the Cry expresses are usually inane rather than inevitable. Constantly interrupting Portia's story and challenging her telling of it, the Cry displays its typical behavior when Portia declares herself unable to hate another woman that Ferdinand may have fallen in love with, still wishing to be "instrumental to his happiness." Incredulous of what they call Portia's "romantic…affectation," the Cry puts a sarcastic spin on her words, saying that Ferdinand "would be mightily pleased to hear his mistress so tamely giving him up." By implying that her selflessness is really a self-interested attempt to make Ferdinand differently beholden to her, the Cry reduces Portia's admirable sentiment to just another attempt to gain an advantage in the game of love.

It is with these dialogues between the characters and the chorus, not the plot, that Fielding fulfills her stated purpose to "strike a little out of a road already so much beaten" with romances and novels (1986). They are central to her avowed purpose in this experimental fiction: to prove "*that to moderate, and not to inflame the passions, is the only method of attaining happiness.*" Bree, one of the few critics to have commented extensively on the book, concedes that "The Cry's opinions…are noisy, thoughtless, and ignorant," and that with this dramatic device Fielding is satirizing not only "contemporary playhouse audiences" but also "public opinion in general, including, possibly, those members of the public who have read *The Cry* without due attention to its moral message" (1996, 96). If anything, she understates the case. If we are typical romance or novel readers, always hungry for the cheap thrill or gratuitous plot twist, then we are exactly like the Cry, and Fielding is insulting *us*. As she continues in the introduction:

> If the heroine of a romance was to travel through countries, where the castles of giants rise to her view; through gloomy forests, among the dens of savage beasts, where at one time she is in danger of being torn and devour'd, at another, retarded in her flight by puzzling mazes, and falls at last into the hands of a cruel giant; the reader's face will be alarm'd for her safety…; and with what joy will he accompany her steps when she finds the right road, and gets safely out of the enchanted dreary forest! But the puzzling mazes into which we shall throw our heroine, are the perverse interpretations made upon her words; the lions, tigers, and giants, from which we endeavour to rescue her, are the spiteful and malicious tongues of her enemies…. Nor can this be effected, unless we could awaken the judgment to exert itself, so as to reject all the alluring bribes which the passions, assisted by the imagination, can offer.

*(Fielding 1986)*

To be sure, this does not make any reader simply equivalent to Portia's "enemies" among the Cry. But it does equate such an enemy with the typical reader of romance (or the novel), content to be fantastically entertained rather than intellectually challenged, and it does equate the susceptibility to being taking in by the "alluring bribes" of conventional fiction with the tendency to think up "perverse interpretations" and speak with "malicious tongues." If we react as a typical reader, we are reacting as does the Cry. The dramatic structure of Fielding's experimental fiction constantly implicates her audience in an act of dishonorable interpretation, and makes us ashamed of always thinking, and saying, the worst.

Fielding may borrow the device of the chorus from classical drama, but she uses it differently. If the chorus of a Greek tragedy exists, that is, to expose the hero's capacity for self-delusion, the Cry in Fielding's anti-romance exists to *be* exposed, as her audience, deluded in themselves. Mira Suzuki and others have seen how concerned Fielding was to correct the deficiencies in contemporary reading practices; what has not been seen, however, is how this concern is part of Fielding's larger project to "awaken" an audience weaned on romances and novels to "exert" its judgment altogether, to *think* independently. Indeed, Fielding suggests that a willingness to settle for the conventional wisdom is a fault, not just of romantic reading, but of a kind of unconscious classical learning. Ferdinand's brother Oliver, for example—an evil rake who attempts to lure Portia away from Ferdinand in his brother's absence—proves his capacity for self-delusion when he attributes the "success" of his affairs to "the force of his wise maxims." Specious—if classical—analogies, like that "between a military siege, and the progress of courtship" (1986), propel his sexual predation. Similarly, Oliver and Ferdinand's father Nicanor, when

he finds himself wounded in love, fails to put himself "into the hands of that skilful surgeon *Reason* to probe his wounds to the bottom," employing instead "that quack *Fallacy* to plaister them over at the top." He wants to heal himself the easy way, and Fielding implies that settling for the longstanding axiom is easier, if ultimately less effective, than actually "reasoning" things out for oneself through the hard process of self-examination. As Portia tells the Cry elsewhere, "when we toss about the sayings of philosophers, and do not take care to enter into their true meaning: we only disguise and cover over falsehood by the sanction of acknowledged authority." She does not mean that the "sayings of philosophers" are themselves "falsehoods," as she clarifies this point to the Cry; she means that philosophy is meant to be practiced, not just recited, and that merely reciting it, as axiomatic, is almost surely to "disguise and cover over falsehood," or to rationalize one's bad behavior. No philosophy, however ancient, says Portia—incidentally claiming the right of women, not just men, to deal with it—is meant to be "placed in the clouds not to be looked at by any mortal, especially by female eyes." It is meant to be lived, tested, experienced.

So concerned is Fielding with the difference between mere book learning and experience that she devotes an entire "act" of *The Cry* to teaching it. Part 4 of the novel is the story of Cylinda, the mistress on whom Nicanor has spent his family's fortune. The best educated person (including the men) in Portia's circle, Cylinda was reared by an indulgent father who taught her the principles of classical virtue but not the Christian religion, causing her subsequent reading over "many books of philosophy" to be rangy and undisciplined, guided by "no fixed principle" (1986). Although she fancies herself temporarily in love with her cousin, Cylinda's real preoccupation is with the progress of her own intellect, and she travels through various philosophical schools in search of a way of life that will gratify her sense of self-importance. She settles first on the modern optimism of the third earl of Shaftesbury, attracted by his determination "to exalt human reason", and "to prove that all nature is subject to our determination, and that no man hath a right to impose on us the belief of anything but what our penetration hath discovered, and our judgment approved." A wise mentor, however, soon shows Cylinda that, by his falling down in raptures at the infinite wisdom of the almighty,

Shaftesbury fails his own test of intellectual independence. From the Stoics, Cylinda learns that to invest oneself emotionally in another person is a losing proposition, because people disappoint you or fall away. She lives by *that* axiom until she falls in love with her last lover Eustace, for whom she abandons the "wisdom of keeping myself independent" with a passion all out of stoic proportion.

Progressively, Cylinda discovers not only that one cannot be a Shaftesburian or a Stoic these days, one cannot be a Skeptic or an Epicurean either. By repeating this pattern of first converting to a philosophical school and then falling away from it, Cylinda realizes the futility of philosophical learning—if not of philosophical thinking—altogether. The moral of Cylinda's story is that neither women nor men can gain wisdom by a cutrate survey of philosophical schools: it must be gained by living, loving, and losing. Portia, whose father educated her in the classics too, does not argue that women should abandon classical learning altogether. As long as it is not regarded as "the whole center of true wisdom," it can guide the sort of candid "enquiry" after truth that she (earlier) contrasts to the "discovery" of pre-ordained conclusions (Fielding 1986). At the beginning of her odyssey, Cylinda gravitates toward those philosophical schools that tell her what she already knows. What Cylinda realizes in the course of her journey is that she must submit herself to something, or rather to some-*one*, who will not. This is not an anti-feminist message, for even Eustace, the former Epicurean, "submits" in this fashion. In a letter that he writes to Cylinda after his wife takes him back, he expresses his amazement at how the latter "could talk of hope in a situation wretched enough to drive almost the strongest mind to distraction; whilst I with all my boasted philosophy, for the meer gratification of a wild appetite, had from raging jealousy suffered inexpressible torments." By itself, philosophy is inadequate to soothe the savage mind, but philosophy accompanied by the compassion of another just may be up to the task.

Understanding Cylinda's story as a comment on the importance of experience also provides a way of understanding the generic experiment that is *The Cry*. Readers who approach Fielding's fiction expecting a conventional romance will be sorely disappointed: like the chorus of the Cry, her audience does not get what it wants. But, if

readers submit themselves to the highly unconventional narrative of *The Cry*, they just might get what they need: Fielding's lesson about moderating the passions. This lesson, although stoic in tone, is not to be gained by merely reading the Stoics. It may however, be gained by reading a novel like *The Cry*, which depicts not only many characters disappointed in love, but also itself disappoints its readers if all they are looking for is narrative gratification. Fielding revives ancient philosophy in *The Cry* by forcing her audience to *experience* its truths, not just read about them. By critically examining the inadequacies of philosophical rules, at least considered apart from experience, she challenges her readers to examine themselves.

Collier's *Essay* is equally demanding of her readers, although she makes us work not through subverting her models but by *in*verting them. I would classify the *Essay*, in fact, as a satiric conduct book, a hybrid genre that stretches from Ovid to J. P. Donleavy's *The Unexpurgated Code* (1975), and which includes Jonathan Swift's *Directions to Servants* (1745), a precedent that Collier herself alludes to (Bilger 2003, 42). It claims to offer useful advice on life and love, and yet the advice it offers is so unpalatable that the reader would have to be a moral monster to take it. Before I explain the parallel to Ovid's conduct book, however, I shall explain how the satire in this difficult book works, and how it works differently than that in Swift's.

The ostensible audience of the *Essay* are those individuals who wish, as the title explains, to "ingeniously torment" their dependents for the perverse pleasure of it. The book is divided in half by the type of dependent being tormented. The first part of the *Essay*, as Collier explains, "is addressed to those, who may be said to have an exterior power from visible authority, such as is vested, by law or custom, in masters over their servants; parents over their children; husbands over their wives; and many others." The second part—the part that debunks romantic (and other kinds of) love—contains rules for tormenting those whose dependency arises "from the affection of the person . . . as in the case of the wife, the friend, &c." (2003). Throughout, Collier simply assumes that those in power will torment their dependents. That is not the same thing as saying that such relationships are bound to be tormenting. Although she speculates, for example, that the "unlimited power" that parents have over their children probably arose, historically, "from a knowledge of the great natural affection and tenderness, that is in almost every living creature towards its offspring," she adds that "to such parents as possess this *true* affection, I direct not my precepts; for where real love and affection towards the children (which must exert itself for their good) is in the heart, all my instructions will be thrown away" (my emphasis). In other words, Collier does occasionally suggest that real love and affection (if not romantic love) is possible among both unequals and equals, and that human beings are capable of treating each other decently. But her interest is clearly elsewhere. The generative satiric assumption of the *Essay* is that it will be avidly read by those people who do *not* love their dependents, and who want to hurt them besides.

For all of their perversity, the ways of tormenting that the *Essay* delivers—the "how-tos" of this how-to book—are indeed ingenious. If your humble companion—a dependent of the first type—is beautiful, for example, Collier advises you "to say so many mortifying things, as shall make her believe you don't think her in the least handsome. If her complexion is fair, call her Whey-face; if 'tis not of the whitest sort, you may tell her, she is as brown as Mahogany. . . . Thus, by right management, every personal perfection may be turned to her reproach" (2003). If you have a friend—the second type of dependent—whom you want to torment, you can make it unpleasant for her to be around you and then "upbraid" her for avoiding you; blame her for any misfortunes she may experience (while blaming the world for your own); and tell her "spiteful stories" that you have heard about her, all the while professing not to believe them. Generally, the ingenuity of Collier's advice arises from her ability to turn what the rest of the world considers virtues—such as the "loyalty" that would ignore the world's calumny—into sources of pain; and thus, while it may be easier to inflict cruelty on those who are legally dependent on you, it is ultimately more satisfying for the tormentor to inflict it on the emotionally dependent. Indeed, as she claims in Part 2, while many make the mistake of thinking "that the principal qualification" of a potential tormentee "is, his having a soft place in his head, . . . the chief thing to seek after is, the man who has a soft place in his heart."

Collier's sometimes tedious advice goes on for 234 pages in the second edition, and is so consistent to its own perverse logic that it is possible to admire its ingenuity while temporarily forgetting that it *is* perverse. But perhaps that is just the point. The satiric target of the *Essay* should be clear: Collier means to lash those who *are* cruel to their dependents, especially those who make a show of professing virtue while doing so. Occasionally, Collier will drop her satiric irony and simply say this. When she wants to prove that her advice is authentic, for example, she claims that her "regard for the reputation of my pupils" has led her to take it from those "exemplars . . . who are not the openly cruel and hard-hearted, but rather the specious pretenders to goodness, who, under an outcry about benevolence, hide the most malevolent hearts." There is a touch of irony at the beginning of this sentence—she cannot really have "the highest regard" for her pupils in the art of tormenting (2003)—but not much at the end of it: it is a direct hit on "pretenders to goodness." Also discernable is the norm—the standard of real virtue—against which Collier finds her satiric targets wanting. The concluding paragraph of Part 2, in fact, measures the target against the standard directly:

> Nay, what a strange creature did I once hear of! A young lady of title and fortune, who had servants, friends, and dependents, at her command, was afflicted with a painful disorder (which at last deprived her of her life) for near twelve years; yet never took the opportunity of one of those advantages, to say a cross or fretful thing to any one! . . . Should we not, my dear pupils, alarmed by the danger of such a shining exemplar, all assemble together, in order, by some envious detraction, to pull down this our greatest enemy? Alas! she is above our reach!
>
> *(Collier 2003)*

Although the world is full of ingenious tormentors, Collier implies in this passage, it also contains a few "strange creatures" who are kind, rather than cruel, to their dependents. They—together with parents who truly love their children, and the like—are the few good people in Collier's satire who serve to call out the many bad ones.

But, like much of the best satire—and here Swift does come to mind—the more one reads in Collier's *Essay*, the *less* clear the targets of its satire are. Even the above paragraph, addressed again to those tormentors who envy the virtuous

exemplar, concludes rather ambiguously: "Therefore we have no hope left, but in trying to reverse an old general observation, and in arduously endeavouring to shew, that these our precepts will be more forcible towards promoting the love of Tormenting, than the most royal and illustrious example will be, towards inculcating and teaching every Christian virtue" (2003). The hope expressed here, that a single example of kindness will not stand up against many examples of cruelty, may be vain, or it may not: at the very least, the statement tempers the frustration that the speaker had expressed, in the sentence just before, at being outclassed by the "shining exemplar," and raises the possibility that vice really is stronger than virtue. It also raises the possibility that those who are being satirized at the end of Part 2 are not only tormentors but also those do-gooders who actually hope, with their single examples of virtue, to prevail against them. If the *Essay* had an entirely stable satiric target, then this possibility would never arise: readers could sit safely back and bask in the glory of their own reflected virtue. And this is precisely what readers are wont to do. As Swift famously defined the genre in *The Battle of the Books*, "*Satyr* is a sort of *Glass*, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own; which is the chief Reason for that kind of Reception it meets in the World, and that so very few are offended with it" (1983, 140). No reader begins the *Essay* thinking that he or she will be the brunt of the joke. Its superficial pleasure (for all, I imagine, but the most perverse readers) is the pleasure of knowing oneself to be morally superior to the cruel ones being made fun of. But to read closer in the *Essay* is to realize that the joke, after all, may be on oneself.

And this is where Ovid's *Art of Love* comes in. The fact is that Swift's *Directions to Servants*, the satiric conduct book to which Collier's *Essay* is usually compared, fails as a model in an all-important respect. The *Directions* purports to be written by an ex-footman to his fellow servants, teaching them how better to cheat their masters. It confirms all the worst impressions that masters have of servants, and those who took pleasure in it were probably those who complained that good help was hard to find. It is thus, as Betty Rizzo says, "written from the establishment point of view" (1994, 45). But Collier's book defends the dispossessed. It may address its advice to masters—to those in control of relationships—but it is actually making them,

not their dependents, the satiric target. In this way, it operates more like Ovid's conduct book, which—as I will show—targets masters *as* it gives them advice.

It is clear that Collier would have had both the motive and the means to "imitate" Ovid. Although she and Sarah Fielding dismissively compared their educations in the classics to that of their notable friend, the classical scholar James Harris (Fielding and Fielding 1993), Henry Fielding, in a copy of Horace's works that he inscribed to Collier in 1754, praised her for possessing "an Understanding more than Female, mixed with virtues almost more than human" (Qtd. in Battestin 1989). Ovid was, *after* Horace, the most popular Latin author in eighteenth-century England (Mace 1996, 33). Indeed, the *Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue* lists sixteen editions of *The Art of Love* alone between 1700 and 1760, including a translation, in 1747, by Henry Fielding himself, entitled *Ovid's Art of love paraphrased, and adapted to the present time*. Only a few copies survive of this work that, according to Martin Battestin, gives "classical authority" to Fielding's personal "fascination with subjects illustrating the rawest sexuality, most especially the sexuality of women" (1989, 411–12). Moreover, Henry Fielding mocked in print the pretensions of women to classical learning, and apocryphally is said to have "teize[d] and *taunt*[ed]" Sarah for her efforts to improve her knowledge of the classics (381). It is possible, then, that Jane Collier defended her friend and the capacities of her sex by drawing on the classical text that Henry had previously used to denigrate it.

Again, *The Art of Love* is addressed to a cynical audience that wants instruction in an "art"—seduction—that, to moral readers, is distasteful at best and immoral at worst. Consider Ovid's advice to a man who wants to seduce a woman:

> Yield to resistance, yielding wins the day,
> Just play whatever part she bids you play,
> Damn what she damns, whate'er she praises, praise,
> Echo alike her "yeses" and her "nays."
> Laugh when she laughs, cry promptly when she cries,
> Let her give orders to your lips and eyes.
>
> *(Ovid 1990, 113)*

The key phrase in this passage, as in the entire poem, is Ovid's advice to "play whatever part" in the game of love that will allow the seducer to triumph over the resistance of the prey. There is no such thing as sincerity in this game, and no innocents: the lover is actively playing his part, but the beloved too (as we learn elsewhere in the poem) is passively "bidding" the part to be played. As Molly Myerowitz writes in her appropriately titled book about the poem, *Ovid's Games of Love*, "In Ovid's version of love, it is convention which empowers human relationships. . . . Each sex must be aware of the conventions; each is told to tacitly allow the opposite sex to act in accordance with convention" (1985, 28).

That is why, if we want to *remain* moral readers, we cannot allow ourselves to take *The Art of Love* seriously, for its instruction. Ovid himself warned against taking it seriously in *Tristia*, his later "defense" of the poem, which basically reduces the ways of reading it (as Myerowitz summarizes them) to two: "Either Ovid means what he says in his defense—it was all in fun—and the poem is a praiseworthy parody of the didactic genre, . . . or the poet means what he says in his poem—*ego sum praeceptor Amoris* [I am love's teacher]—and is to be condemned for immorality and callous licentiousness" (1985, 20). Just as no one would admit to reading Collier's *Essay* for real instruction in the art of tormenting, no one would admit to reading Ovid's *Art of Love* to learn how to be a better seducer. The pleasure in the poem, and in the *Essay*, is the pleasure of moral superiority, of feeling oneself better than the immoral or the cruel.

But Collier, at least, will not allow us that pleasure unmolested. Alison Sharrock and Duncan F. Kennedy have shown how reading Ovid's poem can itself be understood as an instance of seduction, a seduction into (in Sharrock's words) "a self image as a 'sophisticated reader,'" who recognizes that Ovid is playing a literary game with us, making it difficult for us to take his advice seriously and yet daring us to do so (1994, 261; Kennedy 2000, 174–75). There is nothing very damaging about that assumption in Ovid—a game is just a game—but to be such a "sophisticate" in Collier is to set oneself up for satiric attack. That there is pleasure to be had in tormenting should be obvious: the full title of the work promises to give us the "Proper Rules for the Exercise of that Pleasant Art," and in the introduction Collier draws an ingenious analogy between tormenting and benevolence, or "the true love of virtue," in that the former, like the

latter, is disinterested, "exercised for its own sake, and no other" (2003). But that already brings the virtue uncomfortably close to the vice, and later she even suggests that the pleasure of benevolence intensifies that of tormenting, that one can be simultaneously virtuous *and* cruel. It is less satisfying, that is, "To deny a common beggar your bounty which he asks" for that "can only be depriving him of a meal; but to give bountifully to a common beggar, and to deny assistance to your friend, is the highest gratification to a proud and cruel disposition." Now, if the show of benevolence ("to give bountifully to a common beggar") increases the real pleasure of tormenting ("to deny assistance to your friend"), then Collier is satirizing not just tormentors but the disinterested practitioners of benevolence—the image that sophisticated readers like to cultivate for themselves—as well, or at least implying that benevolence may not be as real (that is, as disinterested) as they think it is. The *Essay*, in other words, does not offer simple, stable support to the party of virtue. Rather, by being so relentless in its perverse logic and confronting the occasional perversity of supposedly disinterested professions of benevolence, it targets our own talent for tormenting. We are seduced by Ovid's poem, and held culpable by Collier's *Essay*.

While it seems, at first, that Collier is holding women more culpable for tormenting than men, the *Essay* is more indiscriminately corrosive than that. On the one hand, she says, "there is, in female friendship, a much more intimate connexion, and more frequent opportunities of practicing the subtle strokes of teasing, than amongst the men" (2003). On the other hand, and more profoundly, Collier is attacking the system of gender inequality in English society, a system that turns women (and others of the relatively powerless) into tormentors. As Audrey Bilger puts it, "What Colliers satire clearly illustrates is that a system based on power and subordination lends itself to manipulation and cruelty" (2003). At the beginning of her section "To the Husband," for example, Collier exclaims that "English wives" should actually be "happy . . . that the force of custom is so much stronger than our laws! How fortunate for them, that the men, either thro' affection or indolence, have given up their legal rights; and have, by custom, placed all the power in the wife!" (2003). Who is Collier's target here? She could be asserting, without irony, that the force of custom *is* stronger than the law, in which

case her target would be the powerful women who are the beneficiaries of that state of affairs, not the impotent men who have allowed it to happen. Or, she could be mocking, *through* irony, anyone who would believe that claim, a reading that would direct her critique at men, particularly those husbands who complain about how "dominated" they are by their wives. Either may be to blame, or both, but Collier's choice of models to imitate and to invert, both classical and modern, is wickedly appropriate. For this system of gender insubordination has been a long time building, and conduct books, which represent women as objects of seduction—like Ovid's—or mere receptacles of virtue—like Halifax's—have had a share in building it.

At any rate, and just as in *The Cry*, no reader—male or female—escapes the *Essay* unscathed. And in the end that is just the point of both books: to force the reader to undergo the process of self-examination that Fielding, in the introduction to *The Cry*, declared to be the purpose of her experimental fiction. They demand a "dialogical" response from their readers, provoking them in the same way that Socrates—the philosophical hero of Fielding's translation of Xenophon—provoked his followers, refusing to let them settle into the easy pleasures of romance or the moral superiority of the economically and emotionally powerful. But that dialogical response is not why I call them experiments in a "neoclassical" mode. Rather, in both these texts Fielding and Collier show themselves able to take on the ancients as equals, either by stepping through their philosophical schools on the way to a kind of Christian humanism, or by recalling the way that a classic text brings its readers up short by seducing them into ultimately destructive images of themselves. As they provoke their modern readers, that is, they provoke the ancients, not simply replicating but reanimating their truths.

Although she enjoyed neither of these books, Lady Montagu, in a letter often quoted by the few scholars who have commented on them, was prescient about that purpose: "I have read the Cry, and if I would write in the Style to be admir'd by good Lord Orrery, I would tell you the Cry made me ready to cry, and the Art of Tormenting tormented me very much" (1965–67, 3.88). Lady Mary does not, of course, intend her remark as a compliment, but Jane Collier may have taken it as such, and the disturbing "Fable" that

concludes the *Essay*—telling where the knowledge of this particular art has been gained—reveals why. "In the time when beasts could speak, and write, and read, the English language, and were moved with the same passions as men;" an "old poem" is found that describes physical pain every bit as acutely as the *Essay* describes mental torment. The poem is signed merely with the letter L. Together, the animals speculate about who its author may be. Various candidates are put forward—the lion for its "strength," the leopard for its "activity," and the lynx for its "fierceness"—but, in the end, the author is discovered to be the lamb, a traditional symbol of gentleness and meekness. How has the lamb acquired such powers of description? The horse explains: "it is impossible . . . that any beast, that has the feeling which our author shews for the tortured wretches . . . should ever make the ravages, which, it is notorious, are daily made by the three fierce competitors before us. . . . [I]t is from suffering, and not from inflicting torments, that the true idea of them is gained" (Collier 2003). Collier may end the *Essay* with this fable to put all the abuse it has heaped on its primary targets in context: if women, traditionally the lambs in English society, are also its tormentors, it is because they have suffered the worst. But it also offers a startling rationale for the unorthodox narratives of both *The Cry* and the *Essay*: if reading them makes *us* "suffer," frustrating our desires for narrative continuity and romance and satirically exposing our tormenting ways, it is only because such suffering creates consciousness. Fielding and Collier's experimental fictions may never have been wildly popular with readers like Lady Mary, but they do accomplish their didactic purposes in a weirdly successful way.

**Source:** Timothy Dykstal, "Provoking the Ancients: Classical Learning and Imitation in Fielding and Collier," in *College Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 3, Summer 2004, pp. 102–22.

### John Sitter

*In the following essay excerpt, Sitter considers what constituted "wit" during the neoclassicist period by examining philosophical writings of the times.*

> For thee explain a thing till all men doubt it,
> And write about it, Goddess, and about it.
>
> *(—Alexander Pope,* Dunciad*)*

Sooner or later in any discussion of neoclassical literature the word *wit*, if not the

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spaniel, splashes its way back to the hunter's side. That major authors of the Restoration and early eighteenth century prized and practiced wit is perhaps the one thing every succeeding generation has agreed on, although with widely differing evaluations of that achievement. Each retrospective estimate of Dryden or Pope seems, interestingly, to approach Dryden's view of one of his predecessors: "if we are not so great wits as Donne, yet certainly we are better poets." As Dryden's usage and the work of many modern scholars remind us, the value and definition of wit have been complex all along. Wit is Nature in ambiguity dressed—and so is Nature.

Despite the broad problems of historical semantics, readers continue to agree that Restoration repartee, *The Rape of the Lock*, Fielding's asides and prefaces, most of the poetry of Swift and Prior, and *The Beggar's Opera* all are witty. Whatever neoclassical wit is taken to be, it is likelier sought in Gay than Gray. It is not sought everywhere in the period—rarely in Defoe, scarcely in Richardson, for example—but wherever it is found the impression is generally one of hearing a shared language of the age, a shared rhetoric, rather than a clever ideolect. The examples mentioned range greatly but call to mind a familiar mixture of "common" sense, unconventional perspective, quickness, economy, and irreverence, to which no single writer (no Austen or Wilde, for example) has a unique claim in the period. This historical impression might be focused by looking for a moment at what might be called the epitaph of neoclassical wit, the couplet John Gay wrote for his tomb, and at the reaction it provoked in a young writer of a later generation, Samuel Johnson. The lines Gay asked Pope to put on his grave and that duly appeared in Westminster Abbey are these: "Life is a jest; and all things show it, / I thought so

once; but now I know it." Writing for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1738, Johnson finds this "trifling distich" more proper for the "window of a brothel" than for a monument. All people, he argues, do or do not believe in a future state of rewards and punishments. "In one of these classes our poet must be ranked. . . If he was of the latter opinion, he must think life more than a jest, unless he thought eternity a jest too; and if these were his sentiments, he is by this time most certainly undeceived. These lines, therefore, are impious in the mouth of a Christian, and nonsense in that of an aetheist." Nothing suggests that Gay saw any contradiction between making a good end and making a jest, or that friends such as Pope, Arbuthnot, and Swift found the epitaph trifling. Johnson's objections have their reason, but not the reason of his predecessors. The encounter is a reminder again of how often neoclassical wit plays upon mortality and how often it laughs at the oppositional logic of either/or. The common language Gay counted on was quickly disappearing.

While this episode suggests wit's passage, the more closely this ordering rhetoric is looked for the less explicit it seems to have been. Not only does "wit" itself have an array of meanings, as even the casual reader of *An Essay on Criticism* soon suspects, but it has its own oppositional story through the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. The best-known version is that of true wit versus false wit in Addison's series of *Spectator* essays (nos. 58–63), but Addison builds on Locke's earlier opposition of wit and judgment. Locke in turn was probably influenced by Malebranche, almost surely by Hobbes, perhaps by Boyle, and possibly by Bacon. Locke is a good place to begin not only because his oppositions seem to have been the most influential but also because a careful reading of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* shows that behind the desire to derogate or dignify wit lie issues far different from coffeehouse decorum. At stake are conflicting notions of intellectual coherence and competing versions of reality. After exploring Locke's dichotomy and its implications in his theory of knowledge, I shall turn to its subversion, respectively genteel and raucous, by Addison and Prior. Less suspicious of language than Locke, both Addison and Prior are more deeply sceptical of individual aspirations to an unmediated agreement of thinking and things.

## WIT AND JUDGMENT IN LOCKE

I shall imagine I have done some service to Truth, Peace, and Learning if, by any enlargement on this Subject, I can make Men reflect on their own Use of Language; and give them Reason to suspect, that since it is frequent for others, it may also be possible for them, to have sometimes very good and approved Words in their Mouths, and Writings, with very uncertain, little, or no signification. And therefore it is not unreasonable for them to be wary herein themselves, and not to be unwilling to have them examined by others.

In a later chapter of the same book Locke would attend to wit under the rubric "Of the Abuse of Words," but he had in fact discussed it at some length before deciding to take language as his province. This earlier passage from book 2 ("Of Ideas") is the one Addison put into broad circulation the morning of 11 May 1711 by quoting most of it in the fifth of six *Spectators* on wit:

If in having our *Ideas* in the Memory ready at hand, consists quickness of parts; in this, of having them unconfused, and being able nicely to distinguish one thing from another, where there is but the least difference, consists, in a great measure, the exactness of Judgment and clearness of Reason, which is to be observed in one Man above another. And hence, perhaps, may be given some Reason of that common Observation, That Men who have a great deal of Wit, and prompt Memories, have not always the clearest Judgment, or deepest Reason. For *Wit* lying most in the assemblage of *Ideas*, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant Pictures, and agreeable Visions in the fancy: *Judgment*, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in repeating carefully, one from another, *Ideas* wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by Similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another. This is a way of proceeding quite contrary to Metaphor and Allusion, wherein, for the most part, lies that entertainment and pleasantry of Wit, which strikes so lively on the Fancy, and therefore [is] so acceptable to all People; because its Beauty appears at first sight, and there is required no labour of thought, to examine what Truth or Reason there is in it. The Mind, without looking further, rests satisfied with the agreeableness of the Picture, and the gayety of the Fancy: And it is a kind of affront to go about to examine it, by the severe Rules of Truth, and good Reason; whereby it appears, that it consists in something, that is not perfectly conformable to them.

This passage is worth considering more carefully than has been the modern habit. Kenneth MacLean, in what is regrettably still the standard work on Locke and eighteenth-century literature, points to the influence of the dichotomy but refers to it as a "detached bit of psychology" of "obviously little significance" in Locke's philosophy, a view more recent commentators seem to endorse by passing on in silence. Even literary critics as alert to Locke's metaphorical valences as is Paul de Man (1979) tend to proceed directly to book 3 and the explicit remarks on language. My view is that this piece of psychologizing is thoroughly attached to the tensions in Locke's argument throughout the *Essay* and that understanding those tensions can help in the reading of several neoclassical works of wit in something more of the spirit their authors writ. . .

It is clear that metaphor marks the appetite of wit for similarities, while judgment patiently seeks out differences. The place of allusion may seem less obvious, however, first because it is not necessarily associated with wit in particular (as distinguished, for example, from scholarly writing or sermons), and secondly because Locke gives no plain counterpart to it other than judgment's "whole way of proceeding." But it is clear that allusion is still on Locke's mind when he discusses wit again in book 3. This section is again long, but I quote it whole in the interests of care rather than quickness:

> Since Wit and Fancy finds easier entertainment in the World, than dry Truth and real Knowledge, *figurative Speeches*, and allusion in Language, will hardly be admitted as *an* imperfection or *abuse* of it. I confess, in Discourses, where we seek rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement, such Ornaments as are borrowed from them, can scarce pass for Faults. But yet, if we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetoric, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat; and therefore however laudable or allowable Oratory may render them in Harangues and popular Addresses, they are certainly, in all Discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where Truth or Knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault, either of the Language or Person that makes use of them. What, and how various they are,

> will be superfluous here to take notice; the books of Rhetorick which abound in the world will instruct those who want to be informed: Only I cannot but observe, how little the preservation and improvement of Truth and Knowledge is the Care and Concern of Mankind; since the Arts of Fallacy are endow'd and preferred. 'Tis evident how much Men love to deceive, and be deceived, since Rhetorick, that powerful instrument of Error and Deceit, has its established Professors, is publickly taught, and has always been had in great Reputation: And I doubt not but it will be thought great boldness, if not brutality in me, to have said thus much against it. *Eloquence*, like the fair Sex, has too prevailing Beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And 'tis in vain to find fault with those Arts of Deceiving, wherein Men find pleasure to be Deceived.

The opposition of "truth" and "rhetoric," it has been argued, has been essential to philosophy's self-definition since Plato's attack on the Sophists; philosophy is distinguished by not being rhetoric or poetry. Locke's particular "plain-style" aversion to the "arts of fallacy" is familiar. This passage emphasizes the values implicit in Locke's earlier distinction, since the quasi-psychological opposition of wit and judgment now becomes the openly ethical contest of wit and fancy on one side (the syntax of the first sentence merges them) against knowledge and truth on the other. . .

The first sentence of the earlier passage associates wit with "having our *ideas* in the memory ready at hand" but judgment with "having them unconfused and being able nicely to distinguish one *thing* from another" (my emphasis). This silent slide from ideas to things is crucial to Locke's dichotomy and, as I shall try to show, a clue to greater problems within the *Essay*. The attribution to wit of the "artificial and figurative application of words" and of "allusion" implies, of course, contrary ways of proceeding in the world of judgment, knowledge, and truth. What exactly are these contraries? Presumably the first would be the natural and literal application of words, and the second would be unallusive language.

In short, Locke's charged opposition of wit and judgment entails three major claims: (1) we can know and speak of things as they are; (2) we can (and should) speak naturally and literally; (3) we can (and should) speak without allusion. The question is whether there is really any space in Locke's *Essay* for any of the three assumptions.

Put another way, in light of Locke's rigorous contributions to epistemology, to the study of language, and to ethics, what are we to make of his supposition that we can and should seek an unartificial language free of allusion and illusion? The boundaries between the epistemological and linguistic-ethical claims Locke makes in attacking wit are less clear than my listing of them may suggest, but I shall try to consider them in the order enumerated above.

I have already suggested that the general difficulty behind Locke's claim that judgment distinguishes *things* or that it guides us in speaking of "things as they are" stems from the commitment of the *Essay* as a whole to the view that what we know are (only) our ideas. Since able readers of Locke from Thomas Reid to the present have commented on the tension between that commitment and Locke's equally strong belief that our senses give knowledge of the external world, it is possible to concentrate selectively on a few of the *Essay's* moments of attempted reconciliation in order to see the range of Locke's ideas about ideas. Seeing that range may help in understanding Locke's occasional vehemence, because it stretches, sometimes awkwardly, from ideas as "mental Draughts" or "Pictures of Things" to ideas as barely legible signs.

In his discussion of "clear and obscure, Distant and Confused Ideas," Locke launches at once into visual metaphor—"the Perception of the Mind, being most aptly explained by Words relating to the Sight"—in order to argue that "our *simple ideas* are *clear*, when they are such as the objects from whence they were taken did or might in a well-ordered sensation or perception, present them" (2.29.2). This painstakingly worded statement seems to offer more certainty than it provides. It sounds as if clear ideas are visual copies ("taken") of objects viewed in the way a normal person perceives them. But if in place of the words Locke italicizes we attend to *as* and *might*, we find that what seemed a generic or causal account of the origin of clear ideas is a conditional description of them based on a simile: Ideas are clear when they are kinds of mental images *like* those that normal viewers *might* have registered had they been there.

The fate of *simple* ideas is noteworthy because while Locke is habitually ready to grant that *complex* ideas are things we make up to think and talk with ("fictions of the mind")

rather than direct perceptions, he is understandably less willing to sever the mimetic link between simple ideas and the external world. At his most scrupulous, however, he does sever most of it. Not only is "likeness" to things in the world restricted to simple ideas, it is narrowed still further to simple ideas of "primary qualities" of body (solidity, extension, figure, motion, and number as opposed to colors, sounds, tastes, and so on). It would seem that only Newton spent most of his time having ideas "like" the world. Such ideas "*are resemblances*" of bodies and "these patterns do really exist." The rest "*have no resemblance* of them at all. There is nothing like our *Ideas* existing in the bodies themselves." It is in this chapter that Locke's "idea" becomes more like the response to a sign than like a picture. Most simple ideas of sensation are "no more the likeness of something existing without us than the names that stand for them are the likeness of our *ideas*, which yet upon hearing they are apt to excite in us."

Our experience, in other words, is closer to reading or listening to speech than to looking at things. We have, with the exception of primary qualities, access not to objects but to signifiers. Had Locke pursued this model of experience consistently, rather than the complex of visual metaphors noted earlier, the *Essay* would be a very different book. As it is, the linguistic analogy surfaces at several revealing points, often in negative terms, as in the remarks on wit or rhetoric. Before going further it is necessary to underscore the significance of the analogy here by recalling that Locke is perhaps the first major analyst of language to stress that the relation of signifier to signified is not divinely instituted or mimetic but "perfectly arbitrary." What the linguistic analogy implies, then, is a functional, convenient but wholly ungrounded relation of idea and world.

At this point we can begin to see Locke's denigration of figurative expressions and allusions in the context of his uneasiness about language in general. There are moments in Locke, as will be seen, where words alone are certain truth, but many more, and more explicit ones, of linguistic skepticism: "For he that shall well consider the *Errors* and Obscurity, the Mistakes and Confusion, that is *spread in the World by an ill use of Words*, will find some reason to doubt whether Language, as it has been employ'd, has contributed more to the improvement or hindrance of

Knowledge amongst Mankind." Locke's suspicion of what he terms the "cover of wit and good language" runs deeper than the currents of plain-style Puritanism or scientific polemic. The tension between Locke's thinking of ideas as pictures or as interpretations of signs (or correspondingly of objects available to us as things or as signifiers) is played out at large in the *Essay* as a tension between truth as residing in perceptions or in propositions. The explanation I want to try to illustrate is this: having reached the uncomfortable insight that our experience of "things" is in fact the experience of signifiers, Locke seeks to manage the radical implications of the linguistic analogy by reverting to the model of perceptions and pictures and by stipulating impossibly strict standards for proper language. If experience may just be a language, then language itself had best be kept determinate. It should (against all odds) speak of things as they are.

Locke's treatment of language in book 3 of the *Essay* strikes most readers as remarkably free of theories of origin and (and perhaps therefore) surprisingly consistent on the arbitrariness of the relation between signified and signifier. Hans Aarsleff claims more than chronological priority for Locke (1982). To be sure, language is God's gift to humanity, but the terms remain general: language is defined as the totality of all natural languages and as their use by the totality of speakers. Unlike vast numbers of his contemporaries and many later writers, Locke nowhere in the *Essay'* s chapters on language speculates about how Adam and Eve communicated, the Tower of Babel, or, except dismissively, mysterious or mystical connections between names and things named. However pious his intentions at large (the "main end of these inquiries" being "knowledge and veneration" of the "Sovereign Disposer of all things", for purposes of philosophic discussion there is no linguistic paradise lost. Where an Adamic myth surfaces instead is in Locke's notion of a language of judgment that names things as they are, without figure and, as only Adam could, without allusion.

Locke's contradictions on the subject of figurative language in book 3 have been brilliantly illustrated by de Man, and the issue of metaphor in the *Essay* as a whole can best be considered in connection with the responses to Locke of Addison and Prior. For now at least a partial answer emerges to the question of what allusion has to do with figurative speech in Locke's opposition

of wit and judgment. Like "eloquence" and other "artificial" uses of language, allusions lack original innocence, are in fact the most emphatic figure of this lack, of having fallen into time. Return briefly, then, to the question of how an ideal of an unallusive language fits so uneasily with Locke's arguments elsewhere in the *Essay*.

The two arguments that run counter to the unallusive norm are linguistic and epistemological, although again the boundaries are not always distinct. The linguistic is relatively simple. When discussing language directly Locke argues, consistently, that since words have "naturally no signification" the "*idea* which each stands for must be learned and retained by those who would exchange thoughts and hold intelligible discourse with others." What such learning and retention of common usage amounts to is a continual series of allusions, namely to the usage of past and present speakers. Most of these allusions are of course unconscious, and any conventional notion of language implies the ability to make them, even the inability to *not* make them most of the time. But Locke goes further to recommend conscious allusions. If we would seek "propriety of speech" as indeed we should since words are "no man's private possession by the common measure of commerce and communication," we will find propriety by studying and imitating the usage of our linguistic predecessors: "The proper signification and best use of Terms is best to be learned from those, who in their Writings and Discourses, appear to have had the clearest Notions, and apply'd to them their Terms with the exactest choice and fitness."

Let me acknowledge at once that my use of "allusion" may well be broader than Locke intended and that he might have been thinking not of the shared use of words but of distinctive phrases and sentences—something closer to quotation. But it is also clear that in the attacks on wit in books 2 and 3 he is not criticizing the citation of authorities, something he does attack elsewhere but as characteristic of Scholasticism rather than of wit, fancy, or eloquence. It may be that he means something close to what allusion usually means in modern literary discussion, that is, intentional reference to previously used phrases or verbally established contexts for the complication of present meaning. And if it may be added that allusion often complicates by suggesting at least a fleeting parallel, it may be seen why Locke repeats the word in the same breath

with "figurative speeches" and "similitude." But when all of this has been granted, it remains true that Locke's notion of a wholly direct and unallusive discourse belongs to a less sophisticated theory of language than to the secular one he works out. While we can speak of some writers, for example, as more allusive than others, there is no logical place for a use of language "quite contrary" to allusion. In view of Locke's account of language as the sum of common conventions, a speech that is the opposite of allusive speech would seem to belong to a world of neither wit nor judgment but desire.

If the allusiveness Locke denigrates is in fact central to his theory of language, is it also central to his theory of knowledge? Much of the *Essay* can be read as a succession of attempts to answer no to this question, to put the knower and the known in a direct relation, unmediated by community or language. Before considering a few of the efforts to find extralinguistic certainties in book 4, let us turn to a final episode in the discussion of language that seems already an epistemological episode as well. Locke is discussing the names of "mixed Modes," that is, several ideas of "sorts or Species of Things", and arrives at the interesting observation that, unlike simple ideas, these complex ideas usually become known to us *after* we have learned the words for them.

> I confess, that in the beginning of Languages, it was necessary to have the *Idea*, before one gave it the Name: and so it is still, where making a new complex *Idea*, one also, by giving it a new Name, makes a new Word. But this concerns not Languages made, which have generally pretty well provided for *Ideas*, which Men have frequent Occasion to have, and communicate: And in such, I ask, whether it be not the ordinary Method, that Children learn the Names of mixed Modes, before they have their *Ideas*? What one of a thousand ever frames the abstract *Idea of Glory* and *Ambition*, before he has heard the Names of them?

With the rare exceptions, then, of new coinages, the large range of ideas that make converse of any complexity possible are learned by a process of allusion. The vocabulary of these ideas exists first as a vocabulary.

I have been arguing that Locke's criticism of the figures and allusions of wit is part of an uneasiness about language at large and that his criticism was sharpened by the suspicion that knowledge and language are inseparable. Locke would not concede their inseparability.

What he says instead, explaining how he came to write book 3, is that he found that knowledge and words had "so near a connexion" that "very little" could be "said clearly or pertinently" about knowledge without first observing the "face and manner of signification" of words. Because knowledge is, in Locke's suggestive phrase, "conversant about truth," it has "constantly to do with propositions." While it ends "in things," it arrives there "so much by the intervention of words" that they seem "scarce separable" from general knowledge. "At least they interpose themselves so much between our Understandings, and the Truth, which it would contemplate and apprehend that, like the *Medium* through which visible Objects pass, their Obscurity and Disorder does not seldom cast a mist before our Eyes, and impose upon our Understandings." The progress of actions attributed to words is striking: words intervene, then interpose, and finally impose.

In a landscape so populated or where, to take a later metaphor, so many have wandered "lost in the great Wood of Words", mathematics often looks like the safest way out of allusion and illusion. "By abstracting their Thoughts from Names, and accustoming themselves to set before their Minds the *Ideas* themselves . . . and not sounds instead of them," mathematicians have escaped most of the "perplexity, puddering, and confusion" of other fields (ibid.). If we would "but separate the *Idea* under consideration from the Sign that stands for it" moral knowledge would be "as *capable of real Certainty*, as Mathematics." I shall return to Lockes admiration for mathematical method in discussing Prior's response to the *Essay*, but the general point is simply that the main appeal of mathematics for Locke seems to be that it offers not a world of symmetry unencumbered by matter, or (as one might expect), more direct access to primary qualities, but an escape from words.

Locke's desire for extralinguistic certainty shows forth even when he argues more fully the point that truth resides in propositions. The chapter in which he does so, "Of Truth in General", is one of the most curious in the *Essay*, primarily because of Locke's insistence on a distinction between mental and verbal propositions, "truth of thought" and "truth of words." For it turns out that when he begins by defining truth as "nothing but *the joining or separating of Signs, as the Things signified by them, do agree or disagree one with another,"* Locke is not at all

making the same definitional move that Hobbes had made in declaring that "*true* and *false* are attributes of speech, not of things. And where speech is not, there is neither *truth* nor *falsehood. . .* Truth consisteth in the right ordering of names in our affirmations." For Locke, on the contrary, the "signs" joined or separated to make propositions can be either words *or* ideas: "So that Truth properly belongs only to Propositions: whereof there are two sorts, viz. Mental and Verbal; as there are two sorts of Signs commonly made use of, *viz. Ideas* and Words." This is a most unusual definition of "idea," I believe unprecedented in the *Essay* to this point. (Although I have argued that some of Locke's descriptions of ideas imply that they are like our responses to signs, the synonyms he himself normally uses are phantasms, notions, perceptions, pictures, and so on.) This odd twist allows Locke, however, to go on to assert the necessity of considering truth of thought and truth of words "distinctly one from another."

Necessary as it may be, two difficulties are conceded. The first is that as soon as we begin to describe mental propositions in words they become verbal propositions (a problem analogous to trying to observe oneself without being self-conscious, say, which does not usually lessen the belief that one has periods of unselfconsciousness). The second, much greater difficulty Locke poses to his own distinction appears to undo it entirely: "And that which makes it *harder to treat of mental* and verbal *Propositions separately*, is That most Men, *if not all* [my emphasis], in their Thinking and Reasonings within themselves, make use of Words instead of *Ideas*, at least when the subject of their meditation contains in it complex *Ideas*." Having opened the possibility that all propositions of much complexity are verbal rather than purely mental, Locke vacillates in the rest of this brief chapter between extremes, wishing at one point that those who speak on subjects like religion, power, or melancholy (all of them remarkably complex ideas) would "think only of the Things themselves" rather than their words, and at another point restricting his definition of truth further to only verbal propositions: "*Truth* is the marking down in Words, the agreement or disagreement of *Ideas* as it is."

> Every one's Experience will satisfie him, that the Mind, either by perceiving or supposing the Agreement or Disagreement of its *Ideas*, does tacitly within it self put them into a kind of

Proposition affirmative or negative, which I have endeavoured to express by the terms *Putting together* and *Separating*. But this Action of the Mind, which is so familiar to every thinking and reasoning Man, is easier to be conceived by reflecting on what passes in us, when we affirm or deny, than to be explained by Words.

Locke's meaning seems to be that our habit of making nonverbal propositions can be better imagined nonverbally than explained verbally. In other words, the proposition that we habitually make tacit propositions is most clear as a tacit proposition.

### ADDISON, PRIOR, AND LOCKE'S DICHOTOMY

If Locke's opposition of wit and judgment involves as many problems as the previous section claims (and a few more will be suggested here), it is material to ask why it ever attracted Joseph Addison. That we cannot know Addison's motivation as he sat to the pages that would become *Spectator* 62 does not preclude some guesses. There is the general prestige of the *Essay*, and there is Addison's particular interest in bringing philosophy from the closet to the coffeehouse. Moreover, Locke's opposition has the appeal of familiar wisdom (so-and-so is "clever" but not thoughtful, or "steady" but not quick) suddenly bolstered by modern analysis ("and hence perhaps may be given some reason . . .") and looking for the moment as if it might offer an exhaustive characterological dichotomy (a recurrent fantasy neatly satirized in the quip, "There are two kinds of people: those who divide things into two and those who don't"). Neither eighteenth- nor twentieth-century intellectuals are immune to the charms of such a prospect. But it is probably safer to modify the question about Addison to *how* he found Locke's dichotomy attractive. How much of it does he accept, how does he use it, and how does it look when he has finished?

Like the rest of the series, *Spectator* 62 contrasts "true" wit and "false" wit. Addison begins it by referring to Locke's "admirable Reflection upon the Difference of Wit and Judgment, whereby he endeavours to shew the Reason why they are not always the Talents of the same Person." He then quotes all of the passage from 2.11.2 quoted earlier, except the first sentence, replaced by his summary, and the last sentence and a half, thus ending with Locke's observation that through metaphor and allusion wit "strikes so lively on the Fancy, and is therefore acceptable to all People." The passage, then,

that Addison commends as the "best and most philosophical Account that I have ever met with of Wit" has already changed clothes for the meeting. His introduction neutralizes Locke's explanation of why men of wit are often not good judges (Locke says nothing of wit being beyond the reach of men of judgment) to a distinction of talents. And in silently ignoring the latter part of Locke's section he suppresses Locke's *regret* that wit is so "acceptable to all people," a fact due to its requiring "no labour of thought" and not being up to the rigor of "truth or reason." Similarly, there is no mention in the essay of Locke's attack on wit, figurative language, and allusion in book 3 (quoted above).

To what he does quote, Addison adds and qualifies. Locke's is the best (previous) explanation of wit, "which generally, tho' not always, consists in such a Resemblance and Congruity of Ideas as this Author mentions. I shall only add to it, by way of Explanation, That every Resemblance of Ideas is not that which we call Wit, unless it be such an one that gives *Delight* and *Surprize* to the Reader: These two Properties seem essential to Wit, more particularly the last of them." The reserve clause ("generally, though not always") can be held, with Addison, until the conclusion of his consideration of Locke. Before going there it is worth noting, first, that Addison's "Resemblance and Congruity of Ideas" replaces Locke's assertion that wit is an "assemblage of ideas" based on "any resemblance or congruity" the assembler can find, and, second, that Addison's emphasis on the "surprize" of wit suggests pleasure from the discovery of real resemblance in place of Locke's "beauty…at first sight." Both alterations are important for Addison's later propositions. "That the Basis of all Wit is Truth" and that a beautiful thought has "its Foundation in the Nature of Things."

The essential claim of most of the rest of Addison's essay, where he appropriates Locke's dichotomy between wit and judgment into his own between two kinds of wit, is that true wit is true. The point is explicit but sometimes lost sight of because "true" wit can be taken to mean something like "genuine" or "pure" wit and because Addison also uses contrasts like "Gothic" versus "natural"; but the starker terms are "Falsehood" and "Truth." The phrase probably quoted most often in summarizing Addison's position is "true Wit consists in the resemblance of Ideas, and false Wit in the

Resemblance of Words." What he actually says is that this description covers the examples he has just cited ("according to the foregoing Instances"), among which figure prominently the familiar targets, such as shaped verses, acrostics, quibbles, and puns. The attack on puns (which false wit might call an argument ad homonym) is usually best remembered because it fits so readily the distinction between resemblances of words and resemblances of ideas. But *similarity* of ideas is not the basis of all true wit, as Addison's conclusion makes clear:

> I must not dismiss this Subject without observing, that as Mr. *Locke* in the Passage abovementioned has discovered the most fruitful Source of Wit, so there is another of a quite contrary Nature to it, which does likewise branch it self out into several Kinds. For not only the *Resemblance* but the *Opposition* of Ideas does very often produce Wit; as I could shew in several little Points, Turns and Antitheses, that I may possibly enlarge upon in some future Speculation.

Perhaps if Addison had returned to the opposition of ideas in a later essay this passage would by now have attracted more notice. Standing almost as an afterthought, its casual tone is as disarming as the suave appearance of agreement with Locke earlier in the essay. Here Addison does much more than shift Locke's emphasis. If it is true that wit discerns differences as well as similarities, then the dichotomy between wit and judgment collapses. Having enlisted it in an argument for the truth of wit, Addison leaves Locke's distinction, so to speak, without judgment.

It may be coincidence that Addison characterized the wit of opposition as "quite contrary" to the more familiar sort Locke had described. Accident or allusion, the phrase suggests their distance, since it is the one Locke used to oppose not one kind of wit to another but the ways of difference and similitude. My brief discussion of *Spectator* 62 no doubt reveals the judgment that Addison knew exactly what he was doing. But judgment, as Locke eventually argues in some passages to which it is now time to turn, should be distinguished from knowledge.

The fourth book of Locke's *Essay*, "Of Knowledge and Opinion," begins with the proposition that because the mind's only immediate object is its own ideas, knowledge is "nothing but *the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas*.

In this alone it consists. Where this Perception is, there is Knowledge, and where it is not, there, though we may fancy, guess, or believe, yet we always come short of Knowledge." In fact, as Locke everywhere emphasizes, we usually do come short of knowledge. Fancying, as we have seen, has nothing to do with knowledge, but we must often guess or believe in order to "know" how to live. "He that in the ordinary Affairs of Life, would admit of nothing but direct plain Demonstration, would be sure of nothing, in this World, but of perishing quickly." Rarely in the presence of certainty, our guesses and beliefs in this "twilight" of probability are guided by judgment, the subject of a late chapter (14).

To understand Locke's account it is necessary to see what is at stake. The starting point of book 4 makes clear that knowledge—like truth, its expression in propositions—is conversant about similarities of ideas ("agreement") as well as about differences. The difference between wit and knowledge in this respect seems to be that wit *makes* similarities and knowledge *perceives* them. The question, which Addison helps indirectly to focus, is whether the same is true of judgment. Is judgment closer to knowledge or to wit?

Locke does what he can to close the gap between judgment and knowledge by associating them with each other as much as possible, and, as we have seen, the attacks on wit and eloquence in books 2 and 3 provide occasion to use judgment, truth, reason, and knowledge as near synonyms. Whatever the discriminations to be made elsewhere among the four terms, Locke seems to fuse them to compose whatever it is that is "quite contrary" to wit. Judgment ("being able nicely to distinguish") and knowledge ("perception" of agreement or disagreement) are closely associated elsewhere by Locke's tendency to speak of perceiving and distinguishing as the same thing: the mind recognizes separate ideas "at first view," for example, "by its natural power of Perception and Distinction."

A broader association of judgment with knowledge by virtue of what "it" is opposed to operates in the chapter "Of the Reality of Knowledge," where Locke contrasts the knowledge of a "sober" man and a man of the "most extravagant Fancy in the world." How do these two differ, Locke imagines his reader asking, if knowledge is only the internal agreement or disagreement of one's own ideas? Like the original contrast of judgment and wit, this opposition of

sobriety and fancy signals a great deal of strain. Locke's answer to the question is that our knowledge is limited but consists of "two sorts of *Ideas*, that, we may be assured, agree with things," simple ideas and all complex ideas except those of substances. What he in fact argues is much narrower: simple ideas "*are not fictions* of our Fancies" because they represent things to the extent "ordained" by the "wisdom and will of our Maker," in the way we are "fitted" to perceive them; complex ideas have all the "*conformity necessary to real knowledge*" because they are "*archetypes* of the mind's own making" and were never "intended to be the Copies of anything." When, after several paragraphs on the desirability of separating ideas from words, Locke concludes that we have "certain real knowledge" whenever "we are sure those ideas agree with the reality of things," the words come uncomfortably close to his later dismissal of enthusiasts: "They are sure because they are sure." The chapter ends in a tone weirdly reminiscent of *A Tale of a Tub:*

> Of which agreement of our *ideas* with the reality of things having here given sufficient marks, I think I have shown wherein it is, that *Certainty, real Certainty*, consists. Which, whatever it was to others, was, I confess, to me heretofore, one of those *Desiderata* which I found great want of.

When Locke finally comes to write of the judgment directly rather than by way of "contraries," it is still on the side of truth, but the fundamental association with knowledge no longer holds. The brief chapter (4.14) concludes with a new refinement.

> Thus the Mind has two Faculties conversant about Truth and Falsehood:
>
> First, *Knowledge*, whereby it certainly perceives and is undoubtedly satisfied of the Agreement or Disagreement of any *Ideas*.
>
> Secondly, *Judgment*, which is the putting *Ideas* together, or separating them one from another in the Mind, when their certain Agreement or Disagreement is not perceived, but *presumed*. . . And if it so unites or separates them as in Reality Things are, it is *right Judgment*.

In this scheme knowledge perceives but judgment puts together and separates. At least half (and if Addison is right, all) of its operations, then, seem less contrary than kindred to the "assemblage of ideas, and putting those together" previously assigned to wit. The function of the original dichotomy seems in retrospect to have been to protect the "good" assemblages (complex

ideas, for example) from the taint of fiction and to make a firmer claim on "things as they are" than the Lockean way of ideas can consistently justify. Having in this chapter momentarily opened the possibility that judgment may after all proceed rather like wit, Locke attempts to close it in the last sentence with the sudden introduction of "*right Judgment*." It might fairly be objected that if we can have right and wrong judgment we can have right and wrong—or true or false—wit as well. In that case, wit and judgment are not distinct actions but different manners: one "quick," the other "careful." To Matthew Prior, at least, Locke's judgment would seem a name for slow wit.

Prior's "A Dialogue between Mr: John Lock and Seigneur de Montaigne" was not published until this century. By far most of the best of its roughly ten thousand words are given to Montaigne, whose urbanity and ranging observation are plainly more sympathetic to Prior than is Locke's earnest introspection. When Locke objects that as the "loosest of writers" Montaigne naturally undervalues "my close way of Reasoning," Montaigne replies: "All the while you wrote you were only thinking that you thought; You and Your understanding are the *Personae Dramatis*, and the whole amounts to no more than a Dialogue between John and Lock." And the shortcomings of monodrama are as plain as the maxim that "he that does not talk with a Wiser Man than himself may happen to Dye Ignorant." "Really who ever writes in Folio should convince people that he knows something besides himself, else few would read his Book, except his very particular Friends." When Locke again criticizes Montaigne's lack of method, this time enlisting Chanet, Scaliger, and Malebranche for support, Montaigne says: "I have observed that there is Abcedarian Ignorance that precedes Knowledge, and a Doctoral Ignorance that comes after it. . . Method! our Life is too short for it."

Despite the breezy antipathy of these exchanges, references to arguments and examples from all four books of the *Essay* show that Prior read it with care if not respect. He is particularly attentive to Locke's suspicion of figurative language and allusions. Prior approaches allusion by having Locke boast that while Montaigne's writing is a collection of stolen goods, "I spin my Work out of my own thoughts." The claim predictably leads Montaigne to "allude" to

*The Battle of the Books* and play Swift's bee to Locke's spider, with an additional shake of the metaphor: "But to come nearer to you, Mr: Lock, You like many other writers, Deceive your Self in this Point, and as much a Spider as you fancy your Self, You may often cast your Webb upon other Mens Textures." Locke answers that if he has been anticipated in some points without knowing it, "what I write is as much my own Invention as if no Man had thought the Same thing before me," while Montaigne simply copied materials from his commonplace book. To this Montaigne replies laconically: "Why the best One can do is but compose, I hope you do not pretend to Create." Finding Locke undaunted, Montaigne charges him with unwitting allusion:

> Your Ideas, as you call them . . . were so mixed and Blended, long before You began to write, in the great Variety of things that fall under their Cognizance that it was impossible for You to Distinguish what you Invented from what You Remembered. . . . When you Seem to have least regard to Orators and Poets you have recourse to both for your very turn of Style and manner of Expression. Parblew Mr. Lock, when you had writ half your Book in favor of your own Dear Understanding you quote Cicero to prove the very Existence of a God.

In another part of this long speech, Montaigne asserts that Malebranche, like Locke, warned against misleading the judgment with figurative language but was in fact wise to ignore his own advice: "the Strength of his Argument consists in the beauty of his Figures." This claim, that figurative language discovers rather than covers an author's judgment, conveys the radical difference between Prior and Locke. It emerges more resonantly in a passage that gains point when we recall that Locke's suspicion of language had led to celebrations of mathematics; on at least four occasions he had paused in particular to hope that philosophy would attain an "instrument" of "sagacity" approaching algebra. In this exchange Montaigne has just attacked Locke with two analogies, one of them taken from the *Essay*:

> *Lock*. Simile upon Simile, no Consequential Proof, right Montaigne by my Troth. Why, Sir, you catch at Similes as a Swallow does at Flies.
>
> *Montaigne*. And you make Similes while you blame them. But be that as it will, Mr. Lock, arguing by Simile is not so absurd as some of

You dry Reasoners would make People believe. If your Simile be proper and good, it is at once a full proof, and a lively Illustration of Your matter, and where it does not hold the very disproportion gives You Occasion to reconsider it, and You set it in all it's lights, if it be only to find at least how unlike it is. Egad Simile is the very Algebra of Discourse.

This simile (or "metasimile") falls so neatly that it may seem, as Locke would say (the actual Locke), a "kind of affront to go about to examine it by the severe -rules of truth and good reason." Locke's point is that the obvious inappropriateness of such an examination is itself an admission that wit is not "conformable" to the way of judgment. But whatever Prior thinks of Locke's method, he invites the reader to apply the test of truth, maintaining in fact that all similes issue such invitations. If a simile succeeds in being at once "full proof" and "lively illustration," it conveys knowledge (as Locke's agreement of ideas); if it does not, it calls judgment into action ("gives . . . occasion to reconsider") and will lead to knowledge (as Locke's disagreement of ideas). Bad similes may lower our estimate of a work; but for the reader a simile "works" whether it succeeds or fails.

Prior clearly assumes a less vulnerable reader than Locke's, one whose judgment will be quickened rather than outdistanced by wit's quickness. Exactly how much more he assumes in the passage is difficult to determine, but it seems likely that he might expect the reader who would examine the comparison of algebra and simile to be thinking of algebra as more than a shorthand notation. Considering algebra generally as the study of functions rather than fixed quantities (and the word seems to have had at least this currency), "the algebra of discourse" suggests the working-out of relationships within language. This is another way of claiming, with Addison, that wit has verity as well as brevity; in other words, it not only paints pictures but contemplates general relations. If the philosopher's desire is ultimately the Hobbesean one that words be used as the wise man's "counters" rather than as the fool's "money", to seek an extralinguistic discovery procedure for moral philosophy is simply to turn one's back on the higher mathematics already at hand in the liveliest uses of language.

With different emphases but complementary doubts, Addison and Prior both question Locke's devaluation of wit and the opposition of wit to judgment. Challenging the claim that discrimination is peculiar to judgment, Addison points politely to the collapse of the dichotomy. Prior more explicitly raises the problem of any such dichotomy (regardless of which side is "privileged") by questioning whether making similitudes and making distinctions are really separable acts of mind. This is the fundamental question at the level of common sense, and common sense sides, I believe, with Locke one moment and Prior the next: yes, we sometimes "distinguish," sometimes "assemble," and can "distinguish" between the operations; no, we cannot differentiate without comparing and vice versa. But behind this armchair antinomy the problem dividing Locke from Addison and Prior can be seen as a question with particular pertinence to our own era and criticism: does it make more sense to think of "things as they are" as represented (perhaps badly) by language or as constituted by language?

The preceding commentary suggests at several points that Locke's accounts of language in general and of figurative language in particular are efforts to reclaim indirectly an access to pre- or extralinguistic "things" that other parts of his *Essay* seal off. In suggesting now that Addison and Prior are deeply skeptical of the attempt to get past language to something firmer, I do not mean to convert them into proto-Nietzschean or proto-Derridean rhetoricians of contradiction. From the perspective of poststructuralism, both are grounded in "logocentrism." Both believe that in the beginning was the Word, the authorial will originating all subsequent meaning. Neither would know what to make of the idea that this belief should be reinscribed as "In the always-already are words." Nor would either be likely to hear more than burlesque in Beckett's version, "In the beginning was the pun." But at the same time, neither Addison nor Prior seems to share Locke's nostalgia for things and ideas untouched by words or for truths too tacit to enter the shared figures and allusions of language. If these differences are significant, then it seems we would need to speak of logocentrisms in neoclassical writing (and presumably in other literary periods) for the term to be historically useful; in the monolithic singular it is, like Locke's "wit," less descriptive of variable rhetorical practices than protective of its rhetorically constructed opposite.

**Source:** John Sitter, "About Wit: Locke, Addison, Prior, and the Order of Things," in *Rhetorics of Order: Ordering the Rhetorics in English Neoclassical Literature*, edited by J. Douglas Canfield and J. Paul Hunter, University of Delaware Press, 1989, pp. 137–57.

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# *Postcolonialism*

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1960

The term "Postcolonialism" refers broadly to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture, and human identity itself are represented in the modern era, after many colonized countries gained their independence. However, some critics use the term to refer to *all* culture and cultural products influenced by imperialism from the moment of colonization until the twenty-first century. Postcolonial literature seeks to describe the interactions between European nations and the peoples they colonized. By the middle of the twentieth century, the vast majority of the world was under the control of European countries. At its peak in the late nineteenth century, according to *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* the British Empire consisted of "more than a quarter of all the territory on the surface of the earth: one in four people was a subject of Queen Victoria." During the twentieth century, countries such as India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Canada, and Australia won independence from their European colonizers. The literature and art produced in these countries after independence became the subject of "Postcolonial Studies," an area of academic concentration, initially in British universities. This field gained prominence in the 1970s and has been developing ever since. Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said's critique of Western representations of the Eastern culture in his 1978 book, *Orientalism,* is a seminal text for postcolonial studies and has spawned a host of theories on the subject. However, as the
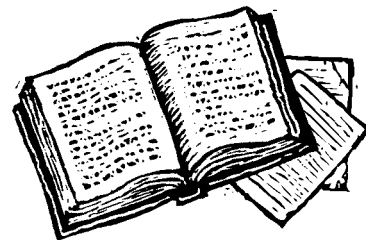
currency of the term "postcolonial" gained wider use, its meaning was expanded. Some consider the United States itself a postcolonial country because of its former status as a territory of Great Britain, but it is generally studied for its colonizing rather than its colonized attributes. In another vein, Canada and Australia, though former colonies of Britain, are often placed in a separate category because of their status as "settler" countries and because of their continuing membership in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Some of the major voices and works of postcolonial literature are Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient* (1992), Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988), Isabelle Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982), J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* (1990), Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), and Eavan Boland's *Outside History: Selected Poems, 1980–1990*.
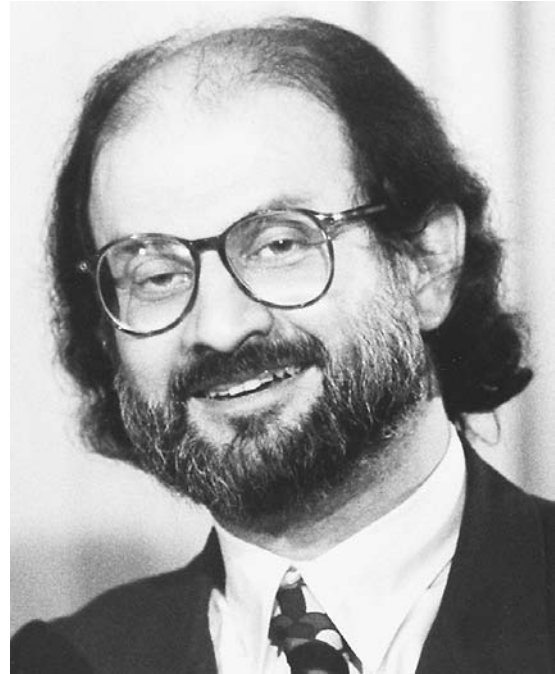


*Salman Rushdie* (AP Images)

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Chinua Achebe (1930–)

Chinua Achebe was born November 16, 1930, in the Igbo village of Nneobi in Nigeria. His parents were Christian converts from their native religion. Achebe began to write fiction while attending university, and his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), garnered him international acclaim as well as criticism. Drawing in his Igbo and Christian backgrounds, Achebe writes about the tensions between the people and values of the native Igbo and the Christian colonizers. Achebe writes in English, which some argue is the language of colonizers. In the late 1960s, he became involved in Nigerian politics for a few years but frustration over corruption made him quit politics and move to the United States for a time. He has lived and worked at universities in Nigeria and the United States for more than thirty years. In 1990, he was paralyzed from the waist down by a car accident. His later books include the non-fiction collection of essays *Home and Exile* (2000) and *Collected Poems* (2004). He was awarded the Man Booker International Prize in 2007 for his literary achievement.

### J. M. Coetzee (1940–)

John Michael Coetzee was born on February 9, 1940, in South Africa. His father, a government worker who lost his job because he disagreed with South Africa's apartheid policies, was an early influence in the writer's life. Coetzee completed a bachelor of arts degree in 1960 from the University of Cape Town and a master of fine arts degree in 1963. In 1969, he received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Texas at Austin. He has worked in academia for most of his adult life, holding teaching positions at the University of Cape Town, the State University of New York in Buffalo, Johns Hopkins University, and Harvard University. Coetzee retired from teaching at the University of Cape Town in 2002 and relocated to Australia where he became a citizen four years later.

As a white writer living in South Africa during apartheid, Coetzee developed powerful anti-imperialist feelings. His novels, deeply influenced by postmodern ideas of representation and language, illustrate the insidious ways in which dominant groups seek to impose their culture and thinking on conquered peoples. For example, his first novel, *Dusklands* (1974), tells two distinct but parallel stories: one of the

workings of the United States State Department during the Vietnam War and the other Jacobus Coetzee's conquest of South Africa in the 1760s. Coetzee's own alienation from his fellow Afrikaners is evident in his novels, most of which focus on the thoughts and actions of a single character put in an untenable situation. Coetzee's Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1984), set in racially divided Cape Town, tells the story of gardener Michael K who, after taking his dying mother to the farm on which she was raised, lives happily until he is accused by the government of aiding guerillas. Coetzee's early novels, however, are not polemical. Rather, they are allegorical, underscoring the timeless nature of human cruelty.

Coetzee's other novels include *From the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1982), *Foe* (1987), *Age of Iron* (1990), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), and *Disgrace* (1999), for which he received his second Booker Prize. In addition to the Booker Prizes, Coetzee has been awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Faber Memorial Award in 1980, the Jerusalem Prize in 1987, and the Mondello Prize in 1994. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003. Coetzee is also a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. In addition to his novels, Coetzee has written collections of essays and edited and translated a number of other books. His memoir, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*, was published in 1997. He published the novel *Diary of a Bad Year* in 2007.

### Frantz Fanon (1925–1961)
Frantz Fanon was born July 20, 1925, in the French colony of Martinique and left in 1943 to fight with the Free French in World War II. A psychiatrist, Fanon was interested in the emotional effects of racism and colonization on blacks. Fanon considered himself French, but his experience as a black man in France caused him to rethink his ideas about culture and identity. In 1952, he published *Black Skin, White Masks*, originally titled "An Essay for the Disalienation of Blacks." With the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961, Fanon established himself as a leading critic of colonial power and a voice for violent revolution. As head of the psychiatry department at Blida-Joinville Hospital in Algeria in 1953, Fanon saw firsthand the kind of psychological damage done to the tortured and the torturers during the Algerian war for independence. Fanon resigned his post and worked

openly with the Algerian independence movement in Tunisia. He was an important influence on thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Homi Bhabha, and Edward Said. Fanon died December 6, 1961, of leukemia at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, where he had sought treatment.

### Jamaica Kincaid (1949–)
Born Elaine Potter Richardson on the island of Antigua, May 25, 1949, Jamaica Kincaid was educated in the British school system of the colony. In 1967, Antigua achieved self-governance, and in 1981 it became an independent country of the Commonwealth. Kincaid moved to New York City, where she studied photography at the New York School for Social Research and began writing for magazines, including *Ingenue* and the *New Yorker*. Much of her writing displays her disdain for all things English and the inability of native Antiguans to resist British cultural imperialism. In her book about Antigua, *A Small Place* (1988), Kincaid describes the island as follows:

> Antigua is a small place, a small island.... It was settled by Christopher Columbus in 1493. Not too long after, it was settled by human rubbish from Europe, who used enslaved but noble and exalted human beings from Africa... to satisfy their desire for wealth and power, to feel better about their own miserable existence, so that they could be less lonely and empty—a European disease.

In addition to *A Small Place*, Kincaid has published a number of novels, including *Annie John* (1986); *At the Bottom of the River* (1992); *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996); *Lucy* (1990); *My Brother* (1997); and *Mr. Potter: A Novel* (2002). Invariably, Kincaid writes about women's experiences with other women and the effects of colonialism and patriarchy on women's self-image.

### Li-Young Lee (1957–)
Li-Young Lee is one of the leading poetic voices of the Chinese diaspora writing in the United States. A profound sense of loss and nostalgia and a questing for and questioning of one's national or ethnic identity often characterize diasporic writing. Lee was born August 19, 1957, in Jakarta, Indonesia, to Richard K. Y. Lee and Joice Yuan Jiaying, the granddaughter of China's provisional president, Yuan Shikai, elected in 1912 during the country's transition

from monarchy to republic. Before moving to Indonesia, Lee's father was the personal physician to China communist leader Mao Zedong. In 1959, the Lees left Indonesia after President Sukarno, for whom Lee's father had been a medical advisor, began openly persecuting the country's Chinese population. After wandering through the Far East for five years, the family immigrated to the United States, settling in Pennsylvania. With publication of his first collection of poems, *Rose*, in 1986, Lee garnered widespread attention from critics, who were moved by the mix of tenderness, fear, and longing in his portraits of his family, especially his father. *Rose*, for which Lee received New York University's Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Award, was followed in 1990 by *The City in which I Love You*, which was the 1990 Lamont poetry selection of the Academy of American Poets. In addition to the two titles mentioned above, Lee has written a critically acclaimed memoir, *The Winged Seed* (1995), which reads like an extended prose poem. In 2008 Lee published the collection of poems *Behind My Eyes*.

### Michael Ondaatje (1943– )

Born on September 12, 1943, in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), to Mervyn Ondaatje and Doris Gratiaen, Michael Ondaatje was educated at St. Thomas College in Colombo and Dulwich College in London, where he moved with his mother. Between 1962 and 1964, Ondaatje attended Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec, and he eventually took his bachelor of arts degree at the University of Toronto in 1965. In 1967, he received a master of fine arts degree from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Ondaatje taught at the University of Western Ontario, London, between 1967 and 1971, and was on the English faculty at Glendon College, York University in Toronto, Ontario, after 1971.

A novelist, critic, and poet, Ondaatje is best known for his 1992 novel, *The English Patient*, which details the interactions of characters of various nationalities during the last days of World War II. The novel explores the relationships between past and present, individual and national identity, and how those relationships shape a person's idea of home. The novel was adapted into an internationally acclaimed film in 1996. Ondaatje has received a number of awards for his writing, including the Ralph Gustafson Award, 1965; the Epstein Award, 1966; and the President's Medal from the University of

Ontario in 1967; and the Canadian Governor-General's Award for Literature in 1971, 1980, and 2007. In 1980, he was awarded the Canada-Australia Prize, and in 1992 he was presented with the Booker Prize for *The English Patient*. In 2007 Ondaatje published the novel *Divisadero*, which tells the story of three siblings whose lives have diverged following a family trauma.

### Salman Rushdie (1947– )

Born into a prosperous Muslim family in Bombay, India, on June 19, 1947, Ahmed Salman Rushdie was raised in a liberal atmosphere in which education was valued. His parents, Anis Ahmed Rushdie, a Cambridge-educated businessman, and his mother, Negin, a teacher from Aligarh, India, migrated from Kashmir before Rushdie was born. Rushdie grew up reading Western comic books and watching Disney movies as well as films made in Bombay. By his tenth birthday, he knew he wanted to be a writer. Rushdie attended Rugby in England at age thirteen and in 1965 enrolled in King's College, Cambridge. In 1968, he graduated with a Master of Arts degree in history. After graduation, Rushdie moved to Karachi, Pakistan, to join his family, who had moved there in 1964.

In Karachi, Rushdie wrote advertising copy by day and worked on his fiction at night. His first major success as a writer was his novel, *Midnight's Children*, which won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1981 and brought Rushdie international fame. Weaving personal experience with history, Rushdie traces Indian history from 1910 until 1976. His 1983 novel, *Shame*, a satire of the Pakistani elite, was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1984. In 1988, Rushdie published his most well-known work, *The Satanic Verses*. Calling the book blasphemous, many governments banned the novel, and Muslims throughout the world protested. Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's spiritual leader, declared a judicial decree, known as a fatwa, sentencing Rushdie to death. Rushdie immediately went into hiding. In 1998, the Iranian government withdrew the fatwa against Rushdie, but it was renewed by Khamenei in 2005.

Rushdie continued to write, exploring the intersections of history, culture, religion, and identity. In 1990, he published *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and, in 1994, *East, West*, a collection of his short stories. In 2005 he published *Shalimar the*

*Clown* followed in 2008 by *The Enchantress of Florence*. He was awarded a knighthood for his contributions to literature by Queen Elizabeth II in 2007.

### *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942– )*

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is one of the leading theorists of postcolonial literary theory. Born February 24, 1942, in Calcutta, West Bengal, Spivak took a bachelor of arts degree in English from the University of Calcutta and then left India for graduate work at Cornell University, from which she received both her master's degree and Ph.D. in comparative literature. Spivak's dissertation director was Paul de Man, one of the leading scholars of deconstructionist theory. Spivak's academic career was launched after she translated Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) into English and wrote its preface. In addition to her work on Derrida, Spivak has authored a number of critical texts and edited numerous collections of essays, including *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* (1999); *Death of a Discipline* (2003); and *Other Asias* (2007). Spivak has given numerous interviews on her thinking about Postcolonialism and teaching. These interviews are more accessible than her own writing, which her critics often call unreadable.

### *Derek Walcott (1930– )*

Born January 23, 1930, on St. Lucia, a former British colony of the Windward Islands in the Lesser Antilles, Derek Walcott was educated in the British school system but lived the life of an impoverished colonial. Given that he was son of an English father and an African mother, Walcott's mixed racial heritage provides him with a unique understanding of postcolonial culture. Already a practicing poet, Walcott began writing drama after graduating from the University College of the West Indies. Walcott's writing grafts Caribbean, African, and Latino sources onto European traditions of poetry and drama to elegantly express the complexities of the postcolonial condition. Indeed, critics have sometimes faulted him for relying *too* much on Western literary traditions. Walcott's themes include the injustices of racism, colonial oppression, and the search for a coherent and stable identity and past. Walcott, who taught at Boston University after 1981, began to explore the theme of exile in his writing. When the Swedish Academy awarded him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, it noted Walcott's contributions to Caribbean theater and praised his book-length poem, *Omeros* (1990), which retells Homer's *Odyssey* from a Caribbean perspective, using native characters to explore events in colonial history. Walcott's numerous collections of poetry include *The Castaway, and Other Poems* (1965), *The Bounty* (1997), and *Selected Poems* (2007). Among his best-known plays are *Henri Christophe: A Chronicle in Seven Scenes* (1950), *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967), and *Viva Detroit* (1990).

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Breath, Eyes, Memory

In her 1994 novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Haitian-born Edwidge Danticat examines themes of migration, gender, sexuality, and history, common themes of postcolonial literature. The novel follows the exploits of Sophie in her battles to carve an identity out of disparate languages and cultures, such as Creole, French, and English, and to adapt to American ways in the Haitian diaspora after she arrives in Brooklyn, New York. Danticat's emphasis on women's experience makes her a leading younger voice of postcolonial feminism. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was an Oprah Book Club selection and helped Danticat to be named one of the Best Young American Novelists by *Granta* magazine in 1996.

### Ceremony

Leslie Marmon Silko's 1977 novel, *Ceremony*, is widely considered to be one of the most important works of Native American literature written. Silko's novel celebrates the traditions and myths of the Laguna Pueblo people while examining the influence of white contact on Pueblo storytelling. As a people who continue to live under a form of colonial rule (i.e., the United States) yet who have achieved a degree of autonomy, Native Americans occupy a special place in postcolonial discourse.

### Decolonizing the Mind

Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o's 1986 *Decolonizing the Mind* is part memoir, part treatise, describing the storytelling traditions of his people and the ways in which the British colonial educational system attempted to eradicate Gikuyu language and culture, effectively colonizing the mind of

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- British director Isaac Julien adapted Algerian revolutionary Frantz Fanon's classic text, *Black Skin, White Mask*, into a film of the same name in 1996. It was released by California Newsreel. The film features interviews with family members and friends, documentary footage, readings from Fanon's work, and dramatizations of crucial moments in Fanon's life.

- Michael Ondaatje's novel, *The English Patient*, was adapted into a film in 1996, directed by Anthony Minghella. It won nine Academy Awards, including best picture.

- Director Mira Nair's film *Mississippi Masala* (1991) explores the racial tensions between immigrant Indians from Uganda and resident African-Americans in the South. Nair's film *The Perez Family* (1993) follows the lives of Cuban refugees who came to the United States in the Mariel boatlift of 1980.

*Edward Said* *(© UPI / Bettmann / Corbis)*

native Kenyans. Thiong'o writes: "I believe that my writing in Gikuyu . . . an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples."

### Disgrace

J. M. Coetzee's 1999 novel, *Disgrace*, is set in Cape Town, South Africa, and explores the themes of racial justice, crime, revenge, and land rights in post-apartheid South Africa. Apartheid refers to the 317 laws enacted by Dr. D. F. Malan's nationalist party in the late 1940s and early 1950s. These laws legally strengthened already existing racial segregation and economic, political, and social domination by whites. The plot revolves around David Lurie, a divorced white university professor expelled from his school for sexual harassment. Shortly after Lurie moves to the country farm of his lesbian daughter Lucy, local blacks rape her. The story concerns Lurie's response to that

incident. Coetzee received his second Booker Prize for the novel. A film based on *Disgrace* starring John Malkovich was scheduled for release in 2008.

### The English Patient

Michael Ondaatje's 1992 novel, *The English Patient*, explores many of the primary themes of postcolonial discourse, including the intersections between individual and national identity and how the dialogue between the two shape consciousness. The novel is set in a villa in Florence and follows the lives of a young woman and three men, all from different countries, as they revolve around the badly burned English patient who lies dying in an upstairs room. The novel was adapted into an internationally acclaimed film in 1996.

### Midnight's Children

Salman Rushdie's 1981 Booker Award-winning novel, *Midnight's Children,* weaves his personal history into the history of India, using a narrator, Saleem Sinai, who was born in 1947, the year of Rushdie's birth and India's independence. Rushdie employs a number of narrative devices, including Hindu story telling, Magic Realism, and a style analogous to the "Bombay talkie," a

type of Indian film, to underscore how difficult it is to write history and to show the many opportunities that independence offered the country, many of which have been squandered. *Midnight's Children* secured Rushdie's reputation as a writer of international stature, but Rushdie also offended many Indians for depicting Indira Gandhi, the prime minister of India, as a tyrant. Rushdie revised the novel and apologized. His 1988 novel, *The Satanic Verses*, brought Rushdie even more trouble, as Muslim fundamentalists considered the novel blasphemous of Islam and the prophet Mohammad. The Indian government banned the book, mass protests against it sprung up around the world, and Ayatollah Khomeini, the spiritual leader of the Iranian revolution, issued a *fatwa*, a judicial decree sentencing Rushdie to death.

## Rose

Li-Young Lee's first collection of poems, *Rose*, published in 1986, provides a glimpse into the consciousness of the Chinese diaspora. Lee, whose parents emigrated from China to Indonesia and then with their family to the United States, was born in Jakarta. His poems, though deeply personal and full of family history, show the devastating emotional and psychological effects that forced emigration has on both families and individuals. The atmosphere of "silence" in Lee's poems illustrates the writer's own shame in his inability to speak the language of his new country.

## A Small Place

In her 1988 book, *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid draws on her personal experience of growing up on the British island colony of Antigua to express her contempt for the ways in which British colonialism destroyed her country. In particular, she focuses on the British educational system and how it attempted to turn Antiguans into English. Kincaid also reserves blame for Antiguans themselves, for their willingness to adopt the worst of British culture and ignore the best. She describes the country both before and after independence, suggesting that in some ways the country has been worse off since it became self-governing.

## Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is set in Africa at the turn of the twentieth century and explores the interaction between traditional African society and British colonialism. The protagonist, Okonkwo, a member of the Ibo tribe, struggles to understand and adjust to the changes brought by British control and Christianity. As of the early 2000s, more than eight million copies of the novel had been sold worldwide, and it had been translated into more than fifty languages. *Things Fall Apart* is also regularly included in academic courses in literature, history, and philosophy. In 1959, Achebe was awarded the Margaret Wrong Memorial Prize for the novel. Achebe's 1987 novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, examines the post-independence condition of a fictional West African country, showing how the legacies of colonialism continue to undermine the possibility for the country to unite.

## THEMES

### Racism

Racial discrimination is a theme that runs throughout postcolonial discourse, as white Europeans consistently emphasized their superiority over darker-skinned people. This was most evident in South Africa, whose policy of apartheid was institutionalized in national laws. These laws included the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act, which prohibited sexual intercourse and marriage between whites and blacks. The Groups Areas Act limited black access to areas reserved for whites. The only blacks permitted in these areas were workers, who first had to apply for state permission. The Population Registration Act categorized Africans into racial groups, which were based upon a person's appearance, education, and manners. Perhaps the most insidious of the apartheid laws were the Bantu Authorities Act and the Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents Act. The former relegated all Africans to their native lands and laid the groundwork for the denationalization of black and colored Africans. The latter required all Africans to carry identity papers containing a photograph, fingerprints, and work history. Strict penalties were meted out if a person could not produce a passbook. The fiction of Nadine Gordimer and Coetzee, both white South Africans, shows how apartheid devastated the country morally, emotionally, and economically. Coetzee's characters are often privileged whites who

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- In groups, list all the countries that were colonies or territories of another country (e.g., Great Britain, Portugal, France, United States) in 1900, 1939, and the early 2000s, and then note the date each achieved independence. Which territories or colonies have not yet achieved independence or have achieved only partial independence? Each group member research the independence movement(s) in one of those countries and report to the class.

- The principal overseas dependencies of the United States are the territories of Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Commonwealths of Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands. After researching the history of U.S. control of these territories, argue for or against their right to independence.

- Pretend that Cuba's government has been overthrown and that you have been named as a member of the committee charged with drafting a constitution for the new government. What declarations or articles will you argue should be included in the new constitution? Read the constitutions of other countries, including the United States, as part of your research.

- Read the novels *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and then write a paper from the point of view of Bertha Mason, taking into account what authors Charlotte Brontë and Jean Rhys reveal about this Caribbean woman who is dominated by her male relatives and the Englishman Edward Rochester. Give Bertha a chance in your paper to speak for herself about her life.

- The conflict of cultures is at the heart of much postcolonial literature. Think about a time when you came into contact with a culture you knew little about, and then write a short essay about that event.

are forced to acknowledge the material and psychological harm that apartheid has caused black Africans. Racism is a primary theme in the writing of Walcott, Kincaid, Fanon, and Danticat, as well.

## Language

In occupied countries, colonizers often controlled their subjects through imposing their language upon them and forbidding them to speak their own. Educational systems enforced this imposed restriction. Postcolonial writers address the issue of language in various ways. Some, like Danticat and Walcott, mix the language(s) imposed on them with their indigenous language, creating a hybrid tongue that underscores the fractured nature of the colonized mind. Others, such as wa Thiong'o, turned away from English to write exclusively in Gikuyu. wa Thiong'o argues that continued use of English only helps Africans to forget their own precolonial past. Yet another approach to language is Silko's who, in *Ceremony*, intersperses a conventional Anglophone narrative with Indian folk legends to create a novel that underscores how Native Americans have to create a coherent whole out of disparate ways of seeing, describing, and being in the world. Some critics worry that the postcolonial works studied in universities are chosen for their postmodern style, rather than for the ways in which they describe the real-world oppression of people from former colonies.

## Identity

In their desire to reclaim a past that had been taken from them, postcolonial writers often address the question of identity, either implicitly or explicitly in their work. However, doing so often requires using the language of the colonizers, which in itself complicates the drive to become the person they thought they were or should have become. The inability to return to a past now gone forever is a consequence of the notion of hybridity. Hybridity refers to the admixture of practices and signs from the colonizing and colonized cultures; it is a central fact of the postcolonial experience and is evident in almost all postcolonial texts. Colonizers are as much a part of the colonized as the colonized are of the colonizers. This cross-fertilization of cultures can be positive as well as dangerous, and writers often show an ambivalent attitude towards the phenomenon.

Hybridity challenges the idea that a person or a country has any essential "uncontaminated" or unchanging identity and that the desire to reclaim such an identity is rooted in an impossible nostalgia. This idea raises issues such as whether or not a colonized people can avoid adopting colonists' behavior and attitudes. Kincaid describes this phenomenon in *A Small Place*, showing how Antiguans have become "Anglicized" in their thinking. The idea of hybridity also challenges representations of colonized people, seen in descriptions such as "black consciousness," or "Indian soul," and the notion that "they" are all the same. Totalizing descriptions like these deny the difference among colonized people, as well as reinforce the constructed differences between them and their colonizers. Danticat's Sophie, for example, struggles to understand her own identity in the welter of language and culture into which she was born and through which she moves. Her migration to New York City further complicates her understanding of who she is, as she must now also come to grips with a diasporic Haitian culture, which is itself in flux.

## STYLE

### Point of View
Point of view refers to the eyes and sensibility through which a story is told or information is presented. Postcolonial literature challenges status quo Western points of view through using narrators who represent previously silenced or oppressed people. Since much literature from colonized countries was written from the colonizers'—usually male—point of view, it's not surprising that much postcolonial literature employs narrators who themselves are doubly oppressed, being both colonized by "outsiders" and being women. Silko, Danticat, Boland, and numerous other postcolonial writers express the particular difficulties women from colonized countries face, as they battle patriarchal attitudes and institutions of their oppressors as well as from their own people.

### Narration
Narration refers to how a series of events is told. The mode of narration is deeply intertwined with an author's style and subject matter. Some postcolonial novels are narrated in a relatively straightforward manner in which events are recounted chronologically. However, many postcolonial works adopt a postmodern approach to storytelling. Postmodern narration, in this sense, refers to the use of different points of view, multiple narrators, and blending of styles and genres to describe events and action. Rushdie employs a kind of postmodern narration in *Midnight's Children*, as does Danticat in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Silko in *Ceremony*. Critics often use "Postmodernism" to refer to literature and art produced after World War II that take modernist techniques to an extreme. Heavily affected by the brutality of Nazi atrocities during the war and the specter of nuclear holocaust, much postmodern literature shows an extreme pessimism of the human condition. With its hyper self-reflexivity, its often fractured and disjointed relaying of action, and its play on language, postmodern narration makes sense for postcolonial writers, many of whom are attempting to subvert colonial representations of their world and traditions.

### Setting
Setting refers to time, place, and culture in which the action of a story takes place. Features include geographic location, characters' physical and mental environments, cultural attitudes, or the historical time of the action. The setting for postcolonial literature varies from country to country, writer to writer, although a good many of the novels are set *after* the countries have declared their independence from Great Britain. Kincaid's *A Small Place*, for example, chronicles life after Antigua won the right to self-governance, and Coetzee's *Disgrace* is set in a post-apartheid South Africa, when the power relations between whites and blacks are shifting.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Literary Theory
Postcolonial theorists critically study both colonial texts and texts written after colonialism. One of the primary reasons postcolonial literature has become as popular as it has is due in large part to theorists such as Said, Spivak, Fanon, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Homi Bhabha, and others, who explain the significance of the literature in relation to history, politics, philosophy, and literary traditions and

discuss its place in contemporary society. Many of these theorists and critics are themselves from postcolonial countries and so speak with the authority of experience. Said, for example, is Palestinian; Spivak is from Calcutta, India; Fanon is from Martinique, a French colony. In challenging how writers and others have represented colonial subjects, these theorists seek to empower themselves and the literary projects of postcolonialists in their attempts to reshape perceptions and thinking about formerly colonized people and countries. The emergence of postcolonial studies as a field of academic inquiry and the popularity of postcolonial literature in the last thirty years or so is due in no small part to these theorists. The institutionalization of postcolonial studies has also come about at the same historical moment as poststructuralist theory, which challenges fundamental assumptions as to the nature of human identity, history, language, and truth itself.

## Film

As countries gained their independence from colonial powers, filmmakers sought to describe the experience of the new countries and the changes wrought by independence upon individuals and their respective states. Deepa Mehta, for example, a Canadian-based Indian director, challenges Indian traditions in films such as *Fire*, *Earth*, and *Water* (1996–2000), which seek to demystify the exoticism of India for foreigners and to interrogate the politics of sexuality in pre- and postcolonial India. Another well-known Indian director, Mira Nair, gained an international reputation with her film *Salaam, Bombay*! (1988), which documents the poverty and hopelessness of Bombay street children. Since then, Nair has directed films exploring racial tensions between immigrants and minorities in the United States. In films such as *Mississippi Masala* (1991) and *The Perez Family* (1993), Nair shows the hopes and aspirations of people from postcolonial countries and what becomes of them when they encounter a different kind of oppression in the country they believed would provide them with new lives. Another Indian director, Shyam Benegal, made films depicting the feudal, colonial, and patriarchal structures undergirding Indian society. For example, his 1996 film, *Making of the Mahatma*, describes the British colonial domain in South Africa, emphasizing the formative development of Gandhi. Other directors who explicitly address postcolonial themes in

their films include Farida Ben Lyazid, Ken Loach, Deepa Mehta, Ketan Mehta, Mira Nair, Peter Ormrod, Horace Ove, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, and Ousmane Sembene.

## Music

When colonizers have ruled a country for long periods of time, it is inevitable that their influence would manifest itself in the art and music of the colonized peoples. The hybrid culture of colonies often integrates both native material and material of the occupying forces. Because much of this music transcends national borders and cultural boundaries, it is often referred to as "World Music." In *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts*, Bruno Nettl lists three motivating behaviors expressed in the music of postcolonial non-Western countries: the first is "the desire to leave traditional culture intact, survival without change"; the second is "simple incorporation of a society into the Western cultural system"; and the third is "the adoption and adaptation of . . . products of Western culture . . . with an insistence that the core of cultural values will not change greatly and does not match those of the West." Examples of postcolonial music exhibiting cultural hybridity include Aboriginal pop music groups of the 1970s such as Yothu-Yindi, which combined elements of popular music and tribal ritual songs. In *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Martin Stokes, who writes this kind of music, shows the "restructuring of song texts by incorporating a mixture of ritual symbolism and concern with colonial hegemony." An example of a hybrid musical form that reflects the migration of peoples across national borders is Indian Ravi Shankar's blending of classical Indian music with Western sounds. Shankar became an international celebrity when he began performing with the Beatles' George Harrison in the 1960s. One album, called *Soundz of the Asian Underground*, features ambient music and hip hop songs played by Asian musicians with instruments native to their own culture.

## Amerind Literature

Amerind literature is the writing and oral traditions of Native Americans. Native American literature was originally passed on by word of mouth, so it consisted largely of stories and events that were easily memorized. Amerind prose is often rhythmic like poetry because it

was recited to the beat of a ceremonial drum. Examples of Amerind literature include the autobiographical *Black Elk Speaks,* the works of N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Louise Erdrich and Craig Lee Strete, and the poetry of Luci Tapahonso and Leslie Marmon Silko.

### Negritude

Negritude is a literary movement based on the concept of a shared cultural bond among black Africans, wherever they may be in the world. It traces its origins to the former French colonies of Africa and the Caribbean. Negritude poets, novelists, and essayists generally stress four points in their writings. First, black alienation from traditional African culture can lead to feelings of inferiority. Second, European colonialism and Western education should be resisted. Third, black Africans should seek to affirm and define their own identity. Fourth, African culture can and should be reclaimed. Many Negritude writers also claim that blacks can make unique contributions to the world, based on a heightened appreciation of nature, rhythm, and human emotions—aspects of life they say are not so highly valued in the materialistic and rationalistic West. Examples of Negritude literature include the poetry of both Senegalese Leopold Senghor in *Hosties noires* and Martiniquais Aime-Fernand Cesaire in *Return to My Native Land.*

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Post-World War II

Britain's loss of empire in the wake of World War II is arguably the single largest defining factor in the shaping of world politics in the last half of the twentieth century. Between 1945 and 1985, Britain lost almost all of its fifty formal dependencies in Africa, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Pacific, South-East Asia, and the Far East and withdrew from a number of countries in the Persian Gulf over which it exerted considerable influence. In the preceding three centuries, Britain had colonized numerous countries and lands, while competing for resources and markets with Holland, Spain, and France, each of which had its own colonies and territories. In the seventeenth century, Britain had gained control over the eastern coast of North America, eastern Canada, the Caribbean

Islands, and parts of Africa, which it used to acquire slaves, and had developed markets in India. The colonization of Ireland was also undertaken in earnest during this century. After the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815, Britain became the leading industrial power in Europe, whose world economic strength was supported by its superior military, especially its navy.

During the nineteenth century, the British Empire tottered. The abolition of slavery by Britain and its empire in the early part of the century and the emphasis on free trade created an unfavorable economic climate for Britain, and its dependencies became more and more of a burden to manage. However, Britain also viewed its imperialistic expansion as a moral responsibility, using Darwin's theories of evolution as a rationale for exerting greater control over India, Africa, and China. British writer Rudyard Kipling referred to this responsibility as "the white man's burden," meaning that it was the God-given duty of the British to civilize and Christianize people who were obviously incapable of governing themselves.

The sheer size of Britain's empire contributed to its downfall, as it simply did not have the resources—militarily, economically, or morally—to stem the rise of nationalist movements in its territories. After World War I, the size of the British Empire expanded even farther to include territories "won" from Germany and Turkey during the war, such as Egypt, for whom they became the "trustee." In 1931, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the Irish Free State formed the "Commonwealth of Nations," which backed Britain during World War II. After World War II, nationalist movements succeeded in ousting European colonizers from their countries. Numerous countries won independence from Britain, including India and Pakistan (1947), Ireland (1949), Egypt (1951), Kenya (1963), and numerous others. French colonies such as Chad, Benin, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Togo, Zaire, Somalia, Congo, Gabon, and Cameroon also declared independence in 1960, and Mozambique and Angola declared their independence from Portugal in 1975. Britain, however, isn't ready to cede all of its territories, as evidenced by their battle for the Falkland Islands, a group of islands in the south Atlantic about three hundred miles east of the Argentinean coast. Although Argentina has

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **1940s–1960s:** Numerous European colonies in Africa gain their independence including Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, Guinea, Chad, Benin, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Togo, Zaire, Somalia, Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, and Gambia.

   **Today:** Although these countries have declared their political independence from European powers, many of them are still virtually economic colonies of Western powers such as the United States. The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), for example, derives almost 14 percent of its production from Nigeria, which is dependent on oil for 80 percent of government revenue. However, Nigeria's dependence on Western money for its oil has also contributed to corruption, environmental degradation, and social unrest from tribes such as the Ogoni, who claim Shell's operations are polluting their land.

- **1940s–1960s:** Numerous colonies in Asia and the Middle East gain their independence, including Yemen, Malaysia, Myanmar, India, Pakistan, Kuwait, Israel, and Jordan.

   **Today:** Many of these countries continue to feud over land. India and Pakistan, for example, fight over the ownership of the Kashmir region, and the Palestinian people remain locked in a bloody battle with Israel for their own state.

- **1940s–1960s:** Numerous colonies in the Caribbean, Central America, and the South Atlantic gain their independence though remain a part of the British Commonwealth, including Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Antigua, and Trinidad & Tobago.

   **Today:** Many of these countries, such as Barbados and Jamaica, have become tourist destinations for Europeans and Americans, although the majority of the native population live in poverty.

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claimed the islands since the early 1900s, Britain has occupied and administered the islands since 1833, rejecting Argentina's claims. In 1982, the two countries went to war over the Falklands, which has a total population of about 2,000 people. Britain used its superior naval power to defeat Argentina, but not before Argentina lost 655 men and Britain 236.

In the last decade, another colonial empire has crumbled, this one more rapidly than the British Empire. Former Russian colonies, once a part of the United Soviet Socialists Republic, declared their independence from Russia. In 1990, the Congress of Deputies of Russia adopted the Declaration of Independence, and in 1991, Moldavia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Belarus, Uzbekistan Armenia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan declared independence but joined the Commonwealth of Independent States, a federation created to share resources and to interact on the basis of sovereign equality. Because of the lack of translations and the heavy censorship inside the U.S.S.R., which existed for years, little academic work has been done on the literature from these emerging countries.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

In his 1962 book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon laid the theoretical groundwork for much postcolonial theorizing to come.

*A statue of Daniel O'Connell who symbolized the fight for Irish independence in the nineteenth century (© David Reed | Corbis)*

Fanon condemns African revolutionary programs as insufficient and argues that a new world can come into being only with a violent revolution led by the rural African peasantry. The book develops themes introduced in Fanon's first book, *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952). In this book, Fanon uses his personal experience to show how the relationship between colonized and colonizer is normalized as psychology, resulting in emotional damage to both. A French-speaking native of the French colony of Martinique, Fanon argues that language plays a central role in shaping the consciousness of the colonized people. Fanon's work anticipated studies such as Said's *Orientalism* but has been heavily criticized for its portrayal of black women.

Said's 1978 study, *Orientalism*, one of the foundational texts of postcolonial studies, critiques Western representations of the East, arguing that since the nineteenth century, Western scholars have depicted "Arab" cultures as irrational, anti-Western, primitive, and dishonest. Orientalism, Said claims, is an ideology born of the colonizers' desire to know their subjects to better control them. Said argues, "To write about the Arab Oriental world...is to write with the authority of a nation ... with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute force." By showing how historians routinely present their "vision" of the Orient as objective and impartial, Said demonstrates how they deceive themselves just as their writing misrepresents others. Critics agree that Said's study remains one of the most important works of postcolonial theory written.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's writing has focused on the intersections of gender, ethnicity, representations of postcolonial and colonial subjects, and the place from which these representations are often made: the university. In an interview in *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990), Spivak says that she views her job as a postcolonial critic who also teaches as twofold:

> to see how the master texts need us in the construction of their texts without acknowledging that need; and to explore the differences and similarities between texts coming from the two sides which are engaged with the same problem at the same time.

Homi Bhabha's theory and criticism on Postcolonialism investigates the ideas of hybridity and ambivalence in postcolonial discourse, especially as they contribute to constructing national and cultural identities. In his 1990 study, *Nation and Narration* (1990), Bhabha uses a mix of psychoanalysis and semiotics to explore the ways in which Third World nations and nationalities have been constructed through narrative traditions that have also positioned them as inferior to the West. In his study, *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha discusses the "spaces" created by dominant social formations in the writings of Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer, among others. Chris Prentice presents a similar argument of postcolonial discourse in his examination of the work of Maori poet Robert Sullivan. Sullivan's work represents both his Maori heritage and his awareness of the politics of decolonization.

## CRITICISM

### Chris Semansky

*Semansky holds a Ph.D. in English from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and he is an instructor of literature and writing whose*

## WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Mark Crinson's *Empire Building: Orientalism and Victorian Architecture* (1996) examines how racial theory, as well as political and religious agendas, informed British architects and how Eastern ideas came to influence the West.

- In *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994* (2001), Okwui Enwezor has edited a collection of writing and images, including essays, studies, speeches, manifestos, and photographs, which document the cultural and political record of Africa from 1945 to 1994 and offer a glimpse into the ideologies that shaped the continent's history and life during the period.

- Andrew Gurr's *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature* (1981) defines "exile" as a feature of West Indian, African, Australian, and New Zealand literature written in English and surveys many of the major writers from these countries.

- In 2000, Oxford University Press released *World Cinema: Critical Approaches*, edited by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. This collection of essays on world cinema, much of it from postcolonial countries, addresses subjects such as concepts of national cinema, East Central European cinema, Anglophone national cinemas, and African cinema.

- George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) details his experiences as a West Indian in London and contains his well-known essay on Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, raising questions of canonicity, exile, and the relationship between the center and the margins.

- Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) is an early sociological study of the destructive impact of colonialism on both colonizers and colonized.

- In *Missionaries in India* (1998), author Arun Shourie focuses on the intentional misinterpretations of Hinduism by Christian missionaries and the harm those misinterpretations have caused the country.

- Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) is perhaps her most controversial work. Silko addresses many issues related to American Indians, including the European conquest of them.

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*essays, poems, stories, and reviews appear in publications such as* College English, Mississippi Review, New York Tribune, The Oregonian, *and* American Letters & Commentary. *His books include* Death, But at a Good Price *(1991) and* Blindsided *(1998). In this essay, Semansky considers the institutionalization of postcolonial literature.*

The adoption of postcolonial literature in the English curriculum of British and American schools in the last few decades has coincided with changes in how and why literature is studied. These changes include ideas about what texts should be included in class syllabi, issues of literary taste, and the purpose(s) of studying literature.

The writing studied in literature classrooms in the United States and Great Britain is often referred to as belonging to the canon. The term derives from the Greek word "kanon" and originally denoted the list of books in the New Testament and Hebrew Bible that came to comprise the Holy Scriptures. More recently, the phrase "literary canon" has been used to denote the "major authors," critics, and historians considered to be the most important for students to read. Surveys of the great works of Western civilization, for example, traditionally would

> **THE BRITISH, IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO 'EDUCATE' THE INHABITANTS OF THEIR COLONIES, USED THEIR OWN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE AS MODELS OF CIVILIZED AND SUPERIOR THINKING AND BEHAVIOR."**

include works by Plato, Aristotle, John Milton, William Shakespeare, and so forth, in short, works by heterosexual males of European descent. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, a number of events has challenged the assumptions embodied in the literary canon. These events include the civil rights movement in the United States, the women's liberation movement, and the accelerated unraveling of the British Empire in the wake of World War II. As more and different people began to assert their own rights to explore their heritage and express their identities, critics began to expose the ideological underpinnings of the literary canon and how those underpinnings served one group of people while excluding another. Since the 1960s, a number of critics have argued for the revision, or even the abolition, of the literary canons.

In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, Bill Ashcroft, Careth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin point to "the development of English as a privileged academic subject in the nineteenth century," arguing that its study "has always been a densely political and cultural phenomenon . . . called into the service of a profound and embracing nationalism." Nationalism refers to a favoring of the traditions, practices, language, myths, and rituals of a group of people who believe their way of life superior to that of others. By instituting its own school system into its colonies, the British used education as a primary means of controlling colonized people. Walcott, for example, a writer of African, Dutch, and English descent, grew up in St. Lucie of the West Indies reading Milton, Spenser, Shakespeare, and other British writers. He was taught to think like a British person and to develop British tastes. His notion of what made "good" literature, then, was in

large part defined by his British education. Indigenous people were "other," defined by and through their difference from the colonizers. The idea of "otherness" has helped to foster the notion that Third World countries are backward, inferior, and uncivilized. The editors of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* summarize the insidiousness of colonial literary education as follows:

> As it inculcates Western Eurocentric values, literary education supports a kind of "cultural colonization," creating a class of colonial subjects often burdened by a double consciousness and by divided loyalties. It helps Western colonizers rule by consent rather than violence.

In many cases, however, colonized countries had no national literature of their own, no literary tradition, no concept of literature itself, and so there was no basis of comparison for colonized people, many of whom could neither read nor write. Some of these colonies had strictly oral storytelling traditions and no history of written language. The British, in their attempts to "educate" the inhabitants of their colonies, used their own language and literature as models of civilized and superior thinking and behavior.

During the independence movements of British colonies and after colonies declared their independence, natives of former colonies attempted to establish their own literary traditions. The writing produced by postcolonial natives is often a literature of resistance that integrates Western modes of writing and narrative with local traditions and ways of knowing. Walcott's plays such as *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954), for example, mixes West Indian language and customs with elements of Greek drama. And Walcott's establishment of the Little Carib Theatre Workshop, later renamed the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, was an attempt to provide native West Indian writers with a place to develop and produce plays about their own history and culture.

However, writing about one's own history and culture after centuries of colonization, for Walcott as well as for other postcolonialists, has proved a difficult, virtually impossible task. Representing the relationships between precolonial cultures and imperial cultures necessarily includes the acknowledgement of culture's hybrid nature and the futility of ever recovering a "pure" past. The idea that all cultures are representations and the result of political forces at work shows up in the postmodern forms and

*Sign in South Africa before the end of apartheid* (AP Images)

styles that postcolonial writers such as Walcott, Coetzee, Rushdie, and so forth have chosen to "depict" the postcolonial condition. Although the meaning of the term "postmodern" is as hotly debated as the term "postcolonial," in reference to postcolonial writing it denotes writing that mixes genres and, often, languages, integrates traditional Western forms with indigenous materials, and foregrounds how identities are social constructions rather than essential features of people, countries, or cultures.

As style, the postmodern is most often embodied in the novels of postcolonial writers rather than, say, poetry or drama, and it is the novel to which postcolonial critics pay most attention. The novel, as a kind of writing that attempts to create and people its own world with elaborate characterizations, plots, and detailed setting, is apropos for writers motivated with reshaping public as well as personal history. Coetzee's novels, for example, especially *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1982), which is set in an imaginary empire not unlike South Africa, employs postmodern strategies and devices to foreground their status as works of fiction, while at the same time suggesting a political stance towards a real place and policy, that is,

South African apartheid. Postcolonial literature that overtly uses postmodern compositional strategies is not without its detractors; however, critics often claim that it can send the message that oppression and colonialism are a part of the human condition and will always be here. In his review of Coetzee's novel, Irving Howe comments on Coetzee's universalizing approach towards describing South Africa's predicament:

> That 'a heart of darkness' is present in all societies and a beast 'lurks within each one of us' may well be true. But such invocations of universal evil can deflect attention from the particular and at least partly remediable social wrongs Mr. Coetzee portrays. Not only deflect attention, but encourage readers, as they search for their inner beasts, to a mood of conservative acquiescence and social passivity.

The inclusion of postcolonial literature in English departments in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia in the last few decades has also been part of the move away from the study of literature per se and towards the study of culture broadly conceived. Some colleges and universities are even abandoning literature departments altogether and replacing them with cultural studies departments, whose courses include literature, heavy doses of theory of

various stripes—literary and other—historical documents, movies, and texts not traditionally studied in literature classrooms. Some of the questions raised by the study of postcolonial literature include the following: Which writers speak best for the postcolonial nation? How does postcolonial literature ask readers to reexamine their own notions of history and "otherness"? In what language should the postcolonial writer write? Is America itself a postcolonial country, and if so, what does that say about Americans' authority to theorize about the postcolonial condition?

The shift in focus in Western schools away from the study of English and American literature and towards curricula that embrace an international worldview using a variety of texts has been for the good. Such curricula allow people whose voices have previously been stifled to speak out and allow artifacts previously ignored to be studied. This inclusion of new texts and writers can (potentially) make English departments agents of social change, rather than simply arbiters of literary taste.

**Source:** Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on Postcolonialism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## Arnold Krupat

*In the following essay excerpt, Krupat explains that while Native American literature contains a lot of Postcolonial attributes and ideologies, it should not be classified as Postcolonial literature because Colonialism still exists in the Americas.*

In the current climate of literary studies, it is tempting to think of contemporary Native American literatures as among the postcolonial literatures of the world. Certainly they share with other postcolonial texts the fact of having, in the words of the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, "emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial Centre." Yet contemporary Native American literatures cannot quite be classed among the postcolonial literatures of the world for the simple reason that there is not yet a "post-" to the colonial status of Native Americans. Call it domestic imperialism or internal colonialism; in either case, a considerable number of Native people exist in conditions of politically sustained subalternity. I have

> **BUT EVEN THOUGH CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN FICTION IS PRODUCED IN A CONDITION OF ONGOING COLONIALISM, SOME OF THAT FICTION NOT ONLY HAS THE LOOK OF POSTCOLONIAL FICTION BUT ALSO . . . PERFORMS IDEOLOGICAL WORK THAT PARALLELS THAT OF POSTCOLONIAL FICTION ELSEWHERE."**

remarked on the academic effects of this condition in the first chapter; here I note the more worldly effects of this condition: Indians experience twelve times the U.S. national rate of malnutrition, nine times the rate of alcoholism, and seven times the rate of infant mortality; as of the early 1990s, the life expectancy of reservation-based men was just over forty-four years, with reservation-based women enjoying, on average, a life-expectancy of just under forty-seven years. "Sovereignty," whatever its ultimate meaning in the complex sociopolitical situation of Native nations in the United States, remains to be both adequately theorized and practically achieved, and "independence," the great desideratum of colonized nations, is not, here, a particularly useful concept.

Arif Dirlik lists three current meanings of the term *postcolonial*. Postcolonial may intend "a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies," it may claim to offer "a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism"—what Dirlik refers to as "global capitalism," marked by the "transnationalization of production"—and it may, most commonly in the academy, claim to provide "a description of a discourse on the above-named conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products of those conditions." Is any one of these meanings useful to describe contemporary Native American literature? Dirlik's first sense of the postcolonial will not work because, as already noted, the material condition of contemporary Native "societies" is not a postcolonial one. His second sense might perhaps come a bit nearer, inasmuch as Native societies, although still in a colonial situation, nonetheless

participate in the global economy of a world "after the period of colonialism." To give a fairly undramatic anecdote, in Santa Fe, Native Americans sell traditional ceramic work and jewelry (including "traditional" golf tees) across the street from where non-Native people offer the "same" wares made in Hong Kong. In something of a parallel fashion, Lakota people travel to Germany and Switzerland to promote tourism at Pine Ridge. As for the last of Dirlik's definitions, little discourse surrounding Native American literature, to the best of my knowledge, has been self-consciously aware of having been formed "by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products" of the postcolonial. (And the "nationalist" Native critic seeks to reject any formation whatever according to these "orientations.") Perhaps, then, it may not be particularly useful to conceptualize contemporary Native American literature as postcolonial.

But even though contemporary Native American fiction is produced in a condition of ongoing colonialism, some of that fiction not only has the look of postcolonial fiction but also, as I will try to show in the second part of this chapter, performs ideological work that parallels that of postcolonial fiction elsewhere. Here, however, I want to suggest a category—the category of anti-imperial translation—for conceptualizing the tensions and differences between contemporary Native American fiction and "the imperial center." Because historically specifiable acts of translative violence marked the European colonization of the Americas from Columbus to the present, it seems to me particularly important to reappropriate the concept of translation for contemporary Native American literature. To do so is not to deny the relationship of this literature to the postcolonial literatures of the world but, rather, to attempt to specify a particular modality for that relationship.

To say that the people indigenous to the Americas entered European consciousness only by means of a variety of complex acts of translation is to think of such things as Columbus's giving the name of San Salvador to an island he *knows* is called Guanahani by the natives—and then giving to each further island he encounters, as he wrote in his journals, "a new name." Columbus also materially "translated" (*translatio*, "to carry across") some of the Natives he encountered, taking "six of them from here," as he remarked in another well-known passage, "in

order that they may learn to speak." Columbus gave the one who was best at learning his own surname and the first name of his firstborn son, translating this otherwise anonymous person into Don Diego Colon.

Now, any people who are perceived as somehow unable to speak when they speak their own languages, are not very likely to be perceived as having a literature—especially when they do not write, a point to which we shall return. Thus, initially, the very "idea of a [Native American] literature was inherently ludicrous," as Brian Swann has noted, because Indian "languages themselves were primitive." If Indians spoke at all, they spoke very badly (and, again, they did not write). In 1851, John De Forest, in his *History of the Indians of Connecticut*, observed, "It is evident from the enormous length of many of the words, sometimes occupying a whole line, that there was something about the structure of these languages which made them cumbersome and difficult to manage."

Difficult for whom, one might ask, especially in view of the fact that De Forest himself had not achieved even minimal competence in any Native language. Further, inasmuch as these were spoken languages, not alphabetically written languages, any estimate that single words occupied the length of "a whole line" could only depend on De Forest's decision to write them that way. De Forest's sense of the "cumbersome and difficult" nature of Indian languages, as I have noted, implies that any literature the Natives might produce in these languages would also be "cumbersome and difficult." Perhaps the Natives would do better to translate themselves or be translated, to "learn to speak"—in this case, to speak English—in order to have a literature. De Forest was wrong, of course, although what most people know as Native American literature today consists of texts originally written in English.

Almost half a century after DeForest, as late as 1894, Daniel Brinton—a man who actually did a great deal to make what he called the "production" of "aboriginal authors" visible to the dominant culture—nonetheless declared, "Those peoples who are born to the modes of thought and expression enforced by some languages can never forge to the front in the struggle for supremacy; they are fatally handicapped in the race for the highest life." The winners in the "race for the highest life," therefore, would

be the race with the "highest" language; and it was not the Indians but rather, as Brinton wrote, "our Aryan forefathers" who were the ones fortunate enough to be endowed "with a richly inflected speech." As Kwame Anthony Appiah explained in reference to Johann Gottfried von Herder, the *Sprachgeist*, "the 'spirit' of the language, is not merely the medium through which speakers communicate but the sacred essence of a nationality. [And] Herder himself identified the highest point of the nation's language in its poetry," in its literature. "Whoever writes about the literature of a country," as Appiah elsewhere cited Herder, "must not neglect its language." For those like the Indians with "primitive" languages, there would seem to be little hope, short of translation, for the prospects of literary achievement. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the linguistic determinism expressed by Brinton—and, of course, by many others—worked against the possibility of seeing Native Americans as having an estimable literature at exactly the moment when the texts for that literature were, for the first time, being more or less accurately translated and published.

But here one must return to the other dimension of the translation issue as it affects Native American literatures. For the problem in recognizing the existence of Native literatures was not only that Natives could not speak or, when they did speak, that their languages were judged deficient or "primitive" but also that they did not write.

Here I will only quickly review what I and others have discussed elsewhere. Because *litterature* in its earliest uses meant the cultivation of letters (from Latin *littera*, "letter"), just as *agriculture* meant the cultivation of fields, peoples who did not inscribe alphabetic characters on the page could not, by definition, produce a literature. (They were also thought to be only minimally capable of agriculture in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, but that is another story.) It was the alteration in European consciousness generally referred to as "romanticism" that changed the emphasis in constituting the category of literature from the medium of expression, writing—literature as culture preserved in letters—to the *kind* of expression preserved, literature as imaginative and affective utterance, spoken or written. It is only at this point that an oral literature can be conceived as other than a contradiction in terms and the unlettered Indians recognized as people capable of producing a "literature."

For all of this, it remains the case that an oral literature, in order to become the subject of analysis, must indeed first become an object. It must, that is, be textualized; and here we encounter a translation dilemma of another kind, one in which the "source language" itself has to be carried across—*trans-latio*—from one medium to another, involving something more than just a change of names. This translative project requires that temporal speech acts addressed to the ear be turned into visual objects in space, black marks on the page, addressed to the eye. Words that had once existed only for the tongue to pronounce now were to be entrusted to the apprehension of the eye. Mythography, in a term of Anthony Mattina's, or ethnopoetics has been devoted for many years to the problems and possibilities involved in this particular form of media translation.

Translation as a change of names—as a more or less exclusively linguistic shift from "source" to "target" language—may, historically, be traced in relation to the poles of identity and difference, as these are articulated within the disciplinary boundaries of what the West distinguishes as the domains of art and social science. Translators with attachments to the arts or humanities have rendered Native verbal expression in such a way as to make it appear attractively literary by Western standards of literariness, thereby obscuring the very different standards pertaining in various Native American cultures. Conversely, translators with attachments to the social sciences have rendered Native verbal expression in as literal a manner as possible, illuminating the differences between that expression and our own but thereby obscuring its claims to literary status. I have elaborated on these matters elsewhere, and so I will here turn from considerations of the formal implications of translation practices to their ideological implications. I want to explain what I mean by anti-imperial translation and why it seems to me that a great many texts by Native American writers, though written in English, may nonetheless be taken as types of anti-imperial translation.

I base my sense of anti-imperial translation on a well-known, indeed classic text, one that I have myself quoted on a prior occasion. The text is from Rudolph Pannwitz, who is cited in Walter Benjamin's important essay "The Task of the Translator." Pannwitz wrote, "Our translations,

even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works...The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue." My use of Pannwitz was influenced by Talal Asad's paper, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology," originally presented at the School for American Research in 1984 and published in James Clifford and George Marcus's important collection *Writing Culture* in 1986. As will be apparent, I am much indebted to Asad's work.

Asad's subject, like mine, is not translation in the narrow sense but rather translation as cultural translation. The "good translator," Asad wrote, "does not immediately assume that unusual difficulty in conveying the sense of an alien discourse denotes a fault in the latter, but instead critically examines the normal state of his or her own language." Asad notes the fact that languages, if expressively equal, are nonetheless politically "unequal," those of the Third World that are typically studied by anthropologists being "weaker" in relation to Western languages (and today especially in relation to English). Asad remarks that the weaker, or colonized, languages "are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around." Asad cites with approval Godfrey Lienhardt's essay "Modes of Thought" and quotes Lienhardt's exemplary explanation of anthropological translation: "We mediate between their habits of thought, which we have acquired with them, and those of our own society; in doing so, it is not finally some mysterious 'primitive philosophy' that we are exploring, but the further potentialities of our thought and language." This sort of translation, Asad affirms, should alter the usual relationship between the anthropological audience and the anthropological text, in that it seeks to disrupt the habitual desire of that audience to use the text as an occasion to know *about* the Other, a matter of "different *writings and readings* (meanings)" in order to instantiate the possibility that translation, as a matter "of different uses (practices)," can be a force moving us toward "*learning to live another form of life.*"

My claim is that Native American writers today are engaged in some version of the translation project along the broad lines sketched by Asad. Even though contemporary Native writers write in English and configure their texts in apparent consonance with Western or Euramerican literary forms—that is, they give us texts that look like novels, short stories, poems, and autobiographies—they do so in ways that present an "English" nonetheless "powerfully affected by the foreign tongue," not by Hindi, Greek, or German, of course, and not actually by a "foreign" language, inasmuch as the "tongue" and "tongues" in question are indigenous to America. The language they offer, in Asad's terms, derives at least in part from other forms of practice, and to comprehend it might just require, however briefly, that we attempt to imagine living other forms of life.

This is true of contemporary Native American writers in both literal and figurative ways. In the case of those for whom English is a second language (Luci Tapahonso, Ray Young Bear, Michael Kabotie, Ofelia Zepeda, and Simon Ortiz are some of the writers who come immediately to mind), it is altogether likely that their English will show traces of the structure and idioms of their "native" language, as well as a variety of linguistic habits and narrative and performative practices of traditional expressive forms in Navajo, Mesquakie, Hopi, Tohono O'odham, and Acoma. Their English, then, is indeed an English, in Pannwitz's words, "powerfully affected by the foreign tongue," a tongue (to repeat) not "foreign" at all to the Americas. Here the Native author quite literally tests "the tolerance of [English] for assuming unaccustomed forms," and an adequate commentary on the work of these writers will require of the critic if not bilingualism then at least what Dell Hymes has called some "control" of the Native language.

Most Native writers today are not, however, fluent speakers of one or another of the indigenous languages of the Americas, although their experiences with these languages are so different that it would be impossible to generalize. (E.g., Leslie Marmon Silko certainly heard a good deal of Laguna as she was growing up, just as N. Scott Momaday heard a good deal of Jemez, whereas many of the Native American writers raised in the cities did not hear indigenous languages on a very regular basis.) Yet all of them have indicated their strong sense of indebtedness

or allegiance to the oral tradition. Even the mixed-blood Anishinaabe—Chippewa—writer Gerald Vizenor, someone who uses quotations from a whole range of comtemporary European theorists and whose own texts are full of ironic effects possible only to a text-based literature, has insisted on the centrality of "tribal stories" and storytelling to his writing. This is the position of every other contemporary Native American writer I can think of—all of them insist on the storytelling of the oral tradition as providing a context, as bearing on and influencing the writing of their novels, poems, stories, or autobiographies.

In view of this fact, it needs to be said that "the oral tradition," *as it is invoked by these writers*, is an "invented tradition." It can be seen, as John Tomlinson has remarked, "as a phenomenon of modernity. There is a sense in which simply recognizing a practice as 'traditional' marks it off from the routine practices of proper [*sic*] traditional societies." This is not, of course, to deny that there were and continue to be a number of oral traditions that "really" existed and continue to exist among the indigenous cultures of the Americas. Nor is it to deny that some contemporary Native American writers have considerable experience of "real" forms of oral performance. I am simply noting that "the oral tradition" as usually invoked in these contexts is a kind of catchall phrase whose function is broadly to name the source of the difference between the English of Native writers and that of Euramerican writers. This "tradition" is not based on historically and culturally specific instances.

A quick glance at some of the blurbs on the covers or book jackets of work by contemporary Indian writers makes this readily apparent. When these blurbs are written by non-Indians (and most are, for obvious reasons, written by non-Indians), reference to "the oral tradition" usually represents a loose and vague way of expressing nostalgia for some aboriginal authenticity or wisdom, a golden age of wholeness and harmony. When these blurbs are written by Native Americans—this generalization I venture more tentatively—they are (to recall the discussion I offered in the first chapter of this book) a rhetorical device, a strategic invocation of what David Murray has called the discourse of Indianness, a discourse that has currency in both the economic and the political sense in the United States. Once more, to say this is in no way to deny that the narrative modalities and practices of a range of Native oral literatures, as well as the worldviews of various Native cultures, *are* important to many of the texts constituting a contemporary Native American literature, and not merely honorifically, sentimentally, or rhetorically.

Anyone who would make the claim that a particular Native text in English should be read as an instance of cultural translation must offer a specific demonstration of how that text incorporates alternate strategies, indigenous perspectives, or language usages that, literally or figuratively, make its "English" on the page a translation in which traces of the "foreign tongue," the "Indian," can be discerned. If one then wants to claim that this translation is indeed an anti-imperial translation, it becomes necessary to show how those traces operate in tension with or in a manner resistant to an English in the interest of colonialism.

**Source:** Arnold Krupat, "Postcolonialism, Ideology, and Native American Literature," in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, edited by Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, University of Mississippi Press, 2000, pp. 73–94.

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    This accessible study surveys new writing in cultures as diverse as India, Australia, the West Indies, Africa, and Canada and details many of the debates that animate postcolonial discourse.

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    This anthology provides the most comprehensive selection of texts in postcolonial theory and criticism to date, featuring ninety of the discipline's most widely read works. All the well-known theorists such as Said, Spivak, and Homi Bhaba are represented as well, and their essays have been edited for clarity and accessibility.

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    Said's study of how the West has historically represented the Arab world ranks as one of the most important works of postcolonial theory.

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    This anthology offers writing from more than two hundred writers and is the most comprehensive selection of anglophone postcolonial writing ever published in one volume. Thieme organizes the sections according to regions including Africa, Australia, Canada, Caribbean, New Zealand and South Pacific, South Asia, South-East Asia, and Trans-Cultural Writing. Thieme also provides a useful introduction explaining his text choices and strategy of organization.

# *Postmodernism*

Postmodernism is the name given to the period of literary criticism that developed toward the end of the twentieth century. Just as the name implies, it is the period that comes after the modern period. But these are not easily separated into discrete units with specific dates as centuries or presidential terms are limited. Postmodernism came about as a reaction to the established modernist era, which itself was a reaction to the established tenets of the nineteenth century and before.

What sets Postmodernism apart from its predecessor is the reaction of its practitioners to the rational, scientific, and historical aspects of the modern age. For postmodernists this took the guise of being self-conscious, experimental, and ironic. The postmodernist is concerned with imprecision and unreliability of language and with epistemology, the study of what knowledge is.

An exact date for the establishment of Postmodernism is elusive, but it may be said to have begun in the post-World War II era, roughly the 1950s. It took full flight in the 1960s in the face of global social and political unrest. In 1968 it reached an early zenith with the intense student protests in the United States and France, the war for independence in Algeria, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The beginning of space exploration with the launch of *Sputnik* in 1957, culminating in the 1969 landing of men on the

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

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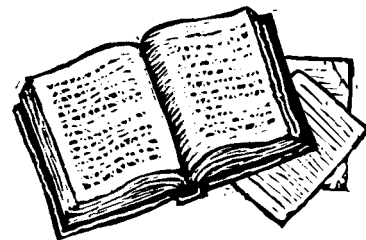
moon, marks a significant shift in the area of science and technology.

At the same time, Jacques Derrida presented his first paper, *Of Grammatology* (1967), outlining the principles of deconstruction. The early novels of Kurt Vonnegut Jr. and Alain Robbe-Grillet were published; Ishmael Reed was writing his poetry. The Marxist critics, Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, who saw a major shift in the social and economic world as a part of the postmodern paradigm, were beginning their creative careers. As time progressed, more and more individuals added their voices to this list: Julia Kristeva, Susan Sontag, and, in popular culture, Madonna. (In her openly sexual music and music videos she broke down the limits of sexuality and femininity. Still, while some believe that her career is a setback for feminist movement, others believe that she opened the doors to a wider acceptance of female and human sexuality.)

In a speech at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on July 4, 1994, Vaclav Havel, then president of the Czech Republic, said:

> The distinguishing features of such transitional periods are a mixing and blending of cultures and a plurality or parallelism of intellectual and spiritual worlds. These are periods when all consistent value systems collapse, when cultures distant in time and space are discovered or rediscovered. They are periods when there is a tendency to quote, to imitate, and to amplify, rather than to state with authority or integrate. New meaning is gradually born from the encounter, or the intersection, of many different elements.
>
> This state of mind or of the human world is called postmodernism. For me, a symbol of that state is a Bedouin mounted on a camel and clad in traditional robes under which he is wearing jeans, with a transistor radio in his hands and an ad for Coca-Cola on the camel's back.

This speech outlines the essence of Postmodernism in all its forms: the mixing, the disintegration, and the instability of identities.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Donald Barthelme (1931–1989)

Donald Barthelme Jr. was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 7, 1931. In 1949 he enrolled at the University of Houston as a
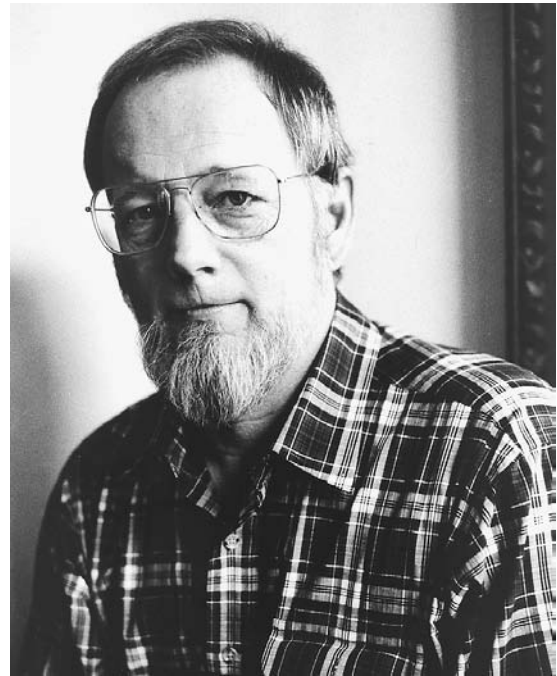


*Donald Barthelme* (© *Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission*)

journalism major and worked on the staff of the *Daily Cougar* as an editor. After spending time in the U.S. Army he returned to Houston where he worked for several newspapers. In 1962 he went to New York where he had articles and stories published in *New Yorker* magazine. He won many honors and awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, National Book Award, National Institute of Arts and Letters Zabel Award, Rea Short Story Award, and the Texas Institute of Arts and Letters Award. Barthelme died of throat cancer July 23, 1989, at the age of fifty-eight.

Barthelme has been characterized as an avant-garde or postmodernist who relies more on language than plot or character. He is well known as a short story writer, novelist, editor, journalist, and teacher. His publications include: *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*, 1964, *City Life*, 1970; *Sixty Stories*, 1981; and *The King*, 1990.

### Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

Jacques Derrida was born in El Biar, Algeria, on July 15, 1930. He earned several undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Paris, Sorbonne. He also did graduate study at Harvard University from 1956 to 1957. He

taught at many of the finest universities in the West: University of Paris, Sorbonne; Johns Hopkins University; Yale University; University of California at Irvine, Cornell University, and City University of New York.

His work beginning in the 1960s effected a profound change in literary criticism. In 1962 Derrida first outlined the basic ideas that became known as deconstruction. The publication was a lengthy introduction to his 1962 French translation of German philosopher Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*. The full strategy of deconstruction is outlined and explained in his difficult masterwork, *Of Grammatology*, published in English in 1967. It revealed the interplay of multiple meanings in the texts of present-day culture and exposed the unspoken assumptions that underlie much of contemporary social thought. Derrida was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2003 and died in Paris, France, on October 8, 2004. He continued to write and publish up until his death.

### Terry Eagleton (1943–)

Terence Eagleton was born on February 22, 1943, in Salford, England. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge, from which he received a bachelor of arts in 1964. He earned his Ph.D. from Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1968. He has taught at Cambridge and at Oxford and served as a judge for poetry and literature competitions.

As one of the foremost exponents of Marxist criticism, Eagleton is concerned with the ideologies found in literature, examining the role of Marxism in discerning these ideologies. His early publications include: *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, 1975; *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 1976; *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, 1976, among others. His later publications include: *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir*, 2001; *After Theory*, 2003; and *How to Read a Poem*, 2007. His concise *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 1976, discusses the author as producer, and the relationships between literature and history, form and content, and the writer and commitment. He is a leading advocate of the inclusion of social and historical issues in literary criticism.

### Michel Foucault (1926–1984)

Michel Foucault was born in Poitiers, France, on October 15, 1926, and received a diploma in 1952 from École Normale Superieure and the University of Paris, Sorbonne. He taught philosophy and French literature at the universities of Lille, Uppsala, Warsaw, Hamburg, Clermont-Ferrand, Sao Paulo, and the University of Tunis between the years 1960 and 1968. Foucault taught at the University of Paris, Vincennes, France, from 1968 to 1970. From 1970 until his death in 1984, he was chairman of History of Systems of Thought at College de France. The best known of his publications are *The History of Sexuality*, 1976; *The Use of Pleasure*, 1985; and *The Care of the Self*, 1987.

Foucault used what he called the archaeological approach in his work to dig up scholarly minutia from the past and display the "archaeological" form or forms in them, which would be common to all mental activity. Later he shifted this emphasis from the archaeological to a genealogical method that sought to understand how power structures shaped and changed the boundaries of "truth." It is this understanding of the combination of power and knowledge that is his most noteworthy accomplishment.

Foucault died of a neurological disorder on June 25, 1984, in Paris, France.

### Fredric Jameson (1934–)

Fredric Jameson was born on April 14, 1934, in Cleveland, Ohio. He attended Haverford College and Yale University and received a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1956 and his Ph.D. in 1959. He taught at Harvard University; the University of California, San Diego; at Yale University; at the University of California, Santa Cruz; and at Duke University. He received many awards and fellowships, including Rotary Fellowship, Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, Fulbright Fellowship, two Guggenheim Fellowships, Humanities Institute Grant, and the William Riley Parker Prize.

Jameson is the leading exponent of Marxism in the United States. In *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, he raises concerns about the way contemporary culture is constructed. His 1983 article, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," provides basic groundwork for much of his version of Marxist criticism.

### Julia Kristeva (1941–)

Julia Kristeva was born in Silven, Bulgaria, on June 24, 1941. Her formal education began in French schools in Bulgaria, where she earned her

diploma at the Université de Sofia, and ended in 1973 at the University of Paris VII, where she received her Ph.D. After that, she taught at several universities and established a private psychoanalytic practice in Paris. She received both the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres and the Chevalier de l'Ordre du Merite. Kristeva received the Holberg International Memorial Prize in 2004 and the Hannah Arendt Award for Political Thought in 2006.

Kristeva is renowned as a writer, educator, linguist, psychoanalyst, and literary theorist and is also considered one of the most influential thinkers of modern France. Kristeva bases her work on two components of the linguistic operation: the semiotic, which expresses objective meaning; and the symbolic, the rhythmic and illogical aspects of meaning. What she calls "poetic language" is the intertwining of these elements. It is these same tenets that form the basis for postmodern criticism. She has been embraced by many feminist writers because of her writings on social issues, but Kristeva's relationship to feminism has been one of ambivalence. Two of her most important publications are *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (published in 1969, translated in 1980) and *New Maladies of the Soul* (published in 1993, translated in 1995), a collection of essays. She has also written several novels, one of which is *Murder in Byzantium* (2006).

## Toni Morrison (1931–)

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, to a black working-class family. She studied humanities in college, obtaining her bachelor of arts in 1953 from Howard University (a distinguished black college) and her master of arts from Cornell University in 1955. Morrison married Harold Morrison in 1958 and the couple had two sons before divorcing in 1964. Morrison has worked as an academic, an editor, a critic, and continues to give lectures.

After the publication of her first novel in 1970, Morrison's writing quickly came to the attention of critics and readers who praised her richly expressive style and ear for dialogue. She received the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for her novel *Beloved* (1987) and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993.

Morrison has written novels, plays, and nonfiction essays, including *The Bluest Eye* (1969);

*Sula* (1973); *Song of Solomon* (1977); *Tar Baby* (1981); *Dreaming Emmett* (1986, play); *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (1992); *Book of Mean People* (2002); and *A Mercy* (2008). Morrison has also edited and/or collaborated on several volumes with other authors.

## Thomas Pynchon (1937–)

Thomas Pynchon was born May 8, 1937, in Glen Cove, Long Island, New York. He served two years in the U.S. Navy before graduating from Cornell University in 1959 with his bachelor's degree in English literature. While at Cornell, Pynchon began to write short fiction, publishing his first story immediately after graduation. Pynchon's first novel, *V.*, was published in 1963 and won an award for best first novel from the William Faulkner Foundation. *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Pynchon's third novel, is one of his most acclaimed and is often held up as a major work of postmodernism. Pynchon won a 1974 National Book Award for *Gravity's Rainbow* and narrowly missed winning a Pulitzer. Other novels by Pynchon include *Mason & Dixon* (1997) and *Against the Day* (2006). He writes about history, mathematics, imperialism, and religion, although his books range even further afield in theme and subject matter. Pynchon is a reclusive person who eschews public appearances or interviews; even his residence is unknown.

## Ishmael Reed (1938–)

Ishmael Reed was born on February 22, 1938, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He attended State University of New York at Buffalo from 1956 to 1960. Reed has written numerous novels, short stories, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, essays, literary criticism, and history, and he has been accorded many honors and awards, including the nomination for Pulitzer Prize in poetry in 1973 for *Conjure: Selected Poems, 1963–1970*. He has taught at many colleges and universities and at prose and poetry workshops across the United States.

His novels include: *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*, 1967; *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*, 1969; *Mumbo Jumbo*, 1972; *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*, 1974; *Flight to Canada*, 1976; *The Terrible Twos*, 1982; *Reckless Eyeballing*, 1986; *The Terrible Threes*, 1989; and *Japanese by Spring*, 1993.

He has written much poetry, including *catechism of d neoamerican hoodoo church*, 1970; *Conjure: Selected Poems, 1963–1970*, 1972; *Chattanooga:*

*Poems*, 1973; *A Secretary to the Spirits*, 1977; and *New and Collected Poems*, 1988.

His poetry captures the rich texture of the novels in its combinations of street and academic languages and dialects and slang. Reed includes many references to mythologies and to cultures apart from his own.

### Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922–2007)

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on November 11, 1922. He attended Cornell University, Carnegie Institute of Technology (later Carnegie-Mellon University), and the University of Chicago where he earned his master of fine arts degree in 1971. From 1942 to 1945 he was in the U.S. Army, Infantry, including some time as a prisoner of war (he received the Purple Heart).

He worked as an editor for the *Cornell Daily Sun*, 1941 to 1942; as a police reporter in 1947 for the *Chicago City News* Bureau; in the public relations department of the General Electric Company, Schenectady, New York, 1947 to 1950; and as a freelance writer beginning in 1950.

Vonnegut taught at Hopefield School in Sandwich, Massachusetts; the University of Iowa Writers Workshop; Harvard University; and at the City College of the City University of New York. In 1986 he was a speaker at the hearing of the National Coalition against Censorship briefing for the attorney general's Commission on Pornography.

He has received many honors and awards. He is the author of many novels, essays, and other writings, including plays and articles for magazines and journals. His novels include: *The Sirens of Titan*, 1959; *Mother Night*, 1961; *Cat's Cradle*, 1963; *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater; or, Pearls before Swine*, 1965; *Slaughterhouse Five; or, The Children's Crusade*, 1969; and a collection of short stories, *Welcome to the Monkey House*, 1968. Subsequent novels include *Jailbird*, 1979, and *Timequake*, 1997. A collection of essays *A Man without a Country* was published in 2005.

His writing is filled with biting satire and irony. Many of his characters find their way into several of the novels. Kilgore Trout appears in *Breakfast of Champions*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, as well as others; the Tralfamadorians show up in *Sirens of Titan* and in *Slaughterhouse Five*. He frequently quotes from Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*.

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- *Conjure: Music for the Texts of Ishmael Reed* sets the poetry of Ishmael Reed to music. The selections are from Reed's collection of poetry published in 1972. This adaptation has received high acclaim by reviewers from *Absolute Sound* and the *Philadelphia Enquirer*.

- Many of Vonnegut's stories have been made into movies. The most famous is the cult classic *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1972). It was directed by George Roy Hill and stars Michael Sacks. It won a Hugo Award in 1973 for Best Dramatic Presentation. As of 2008, this movie was available on DVD from Universal Studios.

- Morrison's novel *Beloved* was made into a major motion picture of the same name in 1998. It was directed by Jonathan Demme and stars Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover. As of 2008, *Beloved* was available on DVD from Walt Disney.

Vonnegut died on April 11, 2007, from brain injuries after a fall a few weeks prior. A posthumous novel, *Armageddon in Retrospect*, was published in 2008.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Beloved

When Fredric Jameson said, in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," that postmodern society has reached the end of its awareness of history, he stirred up a great controversy. Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved* (1987) asks a similar question about the postmodern society's understanding of history.

*Beloved* is the story of one ex-slave's relationship with her children, herself, and the world around them. There are two considerations about the historical accuracy of the novel. The first is the use of contemporaneous accounts of

*Kurt Vonnegut Jr.* (AP Images)

slavery and, the second, Morrison's imaginative recreation of the slave society. The conflict between these two arises from the concern that the version of slavery written by the ruling white class is flawed and that a fictional story is by definition unreal.

Two events in the novel raise this issue: the first is the moment Paul D sees the newspaper clipping of Sethe and remarks, "That ain't her mouth." If the news reports are not accurate, including the pictures, then the novel has relied on flawed data and it is thereby flawed.

The second incident is the scene in which Beloved lures Paul D into the shed to have sex. There is a stack of newspapers in the shed, a symbolic juxtaposition of the real and the imagined. The poststructuralist view that reality is a function of discourse is challenged in these scenes. The sources of discourse are unreliable (newspapers, photos, fictional accounts of events) and that leads to the conclusion that there is no reliable explication of "reality" present in these scenes and, by extrapolation, in the novel itself.

## Cat's Cradle

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. is one of those authors who defy easy categorization, though it might be appropriate to call him an eclectic postmodernist. But the difficulty of identifying him or his works within a trend or movement remains. If one work is representative of his philosophy, it is his 1974 book *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons (Opinions)*. (These concepts are also found in *Cat's Cradle*, 1963.) This collection of opinion is not his best or most important, but it locates in its title the three most important aspects of his writing. Wampeters are objects around which the lives of otherwise unrelated people revolve, for example, the Holy Grail or the National Championship (in college football). Foma are harmless comforting truths such as "Prosperity is just around the corner"; "There's a light at the end of the tunnel"; and "Everything's going to be all right!" Granfalloons are a proud and meaningless association of human beings, for example "The Veterans of Future Wars" or the "Class Colors Committee."

In many of his works Vonnegut pokes fun at the quirkiness of normal life and the grand institutions of society. He infuses his novels with a sense of humor, with the exception of *Slaughterhouse Five*, which is based on the bombing of Dresden during World War II.

*Cat's Cradle* is a humorous and sharp-edged novel that takes major institutions of society to task for their vapidity and shallowness: religion, the military, and science. Jonah lives in the Caribbean where the only religion tolerated is Bokononism. It is based on the teachings and songs of Bokonon, most of which are in a Caribbean dialect and sung to a calypso beat.

Jonah finds out about a corrupted production of crystals at a chemical plant that changed the way ice crystals are formed. Instead of forming ice at 32 degrees Fahrenheit (called ice-one), the process was transformed eventually creating ice-nine that freezes (crystallizes) at 130 degrees. The book tackles the problems of science gone awry, a military that saw an opportunity for a doomsday weapon, and the religion that tried to make some philosophic sense of it all.

The chief image in this novel comes from its title, a cat's cradle, the finger game played by two people with a loop of string that can become twisted and tangled and end of the game. But if the game is played correctly, it will return to its original form and "All will be well" (a Foma!).

## Conjure: Selected Poems, 1963–1970

Reed's 1972 book of poetry contains prose poems, didactic poems, and short poems offering comments

on very specific incidents such as the poem "Report of the Reed Commission" which reads:

> i conclude that for
> the first time in
> history the practical
> man is the loon and the
> loon the practical man
>
> a man on the radio just
> said that air pollution
> is caused by jellyfish.

Not all of his poetry is this transparent and humorous. Some, for example, "catechism of d neoamerican hoodoo church," explore what he sees as the oppressive nature of the American society in which he lives. His reference to "Hoodoo" (which is a variation of Voodoo) is a common theme in most of his writings. It combines aspects of conjuring, magic, and Voodoo, which he claims will help African Americans and people in the Third World rid themselves of the oppressive nature of contemporary western civilization.

The opening paragraph includes a statement confronting established value systems. "i refused to deform d works of ellison and wright." In this refusal he raises concerns about social demands and instructs others in ways to confront similar demands.

Throughout these poems he uses a kind of written language that more completely approximates the language of common people. In "catechism" stanza 1, he writes: "we who hv no dreams permit us to say yr name/ all day. we are junk beneath yo feet." The look on the page may seem unusual or even wrong, but if the line is said aloud the normal sounds of everyday speech result. Another technique in the poems in *Conjure* is repeated lines, phrases, or words to emphasize the passage. These repetitions derive from an oral tradition of storytelling, learning scriptures, and hymns.

## Of Grammatology

The beginnings of deconstructionism are found in Derrida's introduction to his 1962 French translation of German philosopher Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, and were later expanded in two major works, *Of Grammatology* (1967) and *Writing and Difference* (1967). *Of Grammatology* is a difficult book that contains the basis for deconstructive analysis of language. Two of the more important issues raised in the book are: logocentrism of language; and the use of binary oppositions (sets) in western culture.

Logocentrism gives precedence to the spoken word over the written word. Derrida says that philosophies that claim that speech is a more natural form of language give speech the position of primacy. By doing so, writing is reduced to a secondary position. His argument is not that writing is not secondary but that speech is not primary, a tricky way of equalizing these two components of language without setting up another binary set.

Some may claim that writing is merely recorded speech, but Derrida argues the opposite: speech is a form of unrecorded script. Here again he makes a careful argument to avoid the establishment of new hierarchies. The specific concern that he raises in this discussion is what he calls "centering," the process of giving one term (the first of a set) more importance than another.

He shows that any text, no matter what kind, can be read in ways different from what it seems to be saying, which is the central proposition in his book. Communication is an unending series of textual meanings that arise and are subverted within themselves. Then the process repeats. The result of these repeated subversions of meaning is that no text is ever stable. Any stability in a text is merely illusory.

The basis of his discussion is the signifier/ signified relationship that comes from structuralism. He raises the specter of the difficulties of interpreting the relationships between the signifier (the word) and the signified (the object). This is the problem of writing, where a written word represents a spoken word that in turn represents the object. The movement from the one to the other is the structure of the meaning, but because this movement conceals and erases itself during the very act of movement, it remains unstable. He says: "There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language." Hence, since a text has so many different meanings, it cannot have one single meaning. This is the basic conundrum of deconstruction: The very act of deconstruction is unstable and the results are indeterminate.

## Gravity's Rainbow

Pynchon's postmodern novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), is set at the end of World War II and tells the story of a quest to find the Schwarzgerät, an

unknown device that will be installed in a special rocket. *Gravity's Rainbow* is considered a difficult book to read because of its unconventional approach to plot, its cast of more than 400 characters, and its use of specialized scientific knowledge. It has attracted both admiration and criticism: It won the National Book Award in 1974, but its recommendation for a Pulitzer Prize in literature was vetoed by the Pulitzer board and Pynchon's novel narrowly missed winning.

## Overnight to Many Distant Cities

Barthelme is a noted minimalist fiction writer. In his collection *Overnight to Many Distant Cities* (1983) are several notable short stories. "Cortes and Montezuma" shows the minimalist character of Barthelme's writing style. Minimalism is a style that uses a small amount of text to create the tale. Much of this story consists of short rapid-fire sentences, some of which have only three words, giving the reader a sense of urgency. In this manner, Barthelme retells the history of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, using themes of trust and breaking trust.

Another story from the same collection, "The first thing the baby did wrong ... ," is a humorous parable about the difficulties of living with immutable rules. A family of three has a rule that the child will be confined to its room for four hours for every page that is torn out of a book. This rule backfires because the child tears pages out at every chance the child gets. Eventually, the child owes the parents eighty-eight hours. The narrator says, "If you made a rule you had to stick to it." This points to the absurdity of a society that lives by rules that are not understood or well thought out before they are enforced.

### *"Postmodernism and Consumer Society"*

In his 1983 essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Frederic Jameson explains his idea of Postmodernism, its basic principles, and what caused it to occur. He discusses what he calls pastiche and schizophrenia as they relate to "the emergent social order of late capitalism." Pastiche is the loss of personal identity, which may be the result of capitalism and bureaucracies that place no importance on the individual. Another aspect of this loss of identity lies in the possibility that there is no way for writers and artists to create new styles because "they've already been invented." The other focus of the essay, schizophrenia, is the clash of narratives resulting from the combination of the past and future in the present. Throughout this essay and others, Jameson takes considerable notice of the impact of capitalism on the course of social progress and current artistic expression.

## Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art

Julia Kristeva introduces gender politics into the postmodern discussion in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, first published in French in 1969 and translated into English in 1980. She proposes that unconscious drives are major factors in communication and language. She explains that in creating a text by writing, the author releases unconscious selves and destroys the former notion of a solid, traditional, logical self. She considers the formative possibilities of a feminine voice that can result.

Kristeva looks at this issue of the feminine voice in the context of the dissolution of binary sets discussed by Derrida. She asserts that if customary language usage privileges one sex over another, as in the male/female set, it opens up the possibility of the marginalized sex eventually being eliminated from all discussions, though, at the same time, it provides means for women to raise their concerns if they use their status outside the mainstream.

## THEMES

### *Deconstruction*

Deconstruction, the term, was created by Derrida, and it defines the basic premise of Postmodernism. It does not mean destruction, but rather it is a critique of the criteria of certainty, identity, and truth.

Derrida says that all communication is characterized by uncertainty because there is no definitive link between the signifier (a word) and the signified (the object to which the word refers). Once a text is written it ceases to have a meaning until a reader reads it. Derrida says that there is nothing but the text and that it is not possible to construe a meaning for a text using a reference to anything outside the text. The text has many internal meanings that are in conflict with themselves (called reflexivity or self-referential) and as a result there is no solid and guaranteed meaning to a text. The text is also controlled by what is not in it (referents outside the text are not a part of its

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- How have the ideas of disintegration, instability, and/or textual uncertainty (in the postmodern use of these terms) had an effect on you? Describe the issues and put into your own context a narrative describing how you perceive things to be different because of these ideas. Speculate on how things might have been different had these ideas not made an impact on you.

- Take your favorite piece of literature and deconstruct it. Show, to the best of your understanding, what the author might have meant in the text. Then show how that meaning might be quite a different thing. Use a short text for this exercise.

- Take a standard text and do a "special" reading of it. For example, examine a text from a feminist perspective or from a Marxist perspective or from another special point of view of your own choosing.

- Critique your favorite television program showing the postmodern features of an individual show or of a series of shows. To ensure analytical accuracy, videotape the shows you examine. Be specific in your discussion, explaining in detail how the chosen features are postmodern and how they contribute to the success (or failure) of the show or shows in question. You might want to consider how the ads that splice the program offer multiple commentaries on the program, or how it

might be true that the discourse within the program is amplified or complicated by the ads it contains.

- Postmodernism has had an important role in the development of the MTV phenomenon. Select some music videos and describe them in terms of a postmodern aspect (e.g., social/economic influence, feminism, instability of texts regarding meaning, blurred lines between the "real" world and the "fictive" world in the video). Videos from the very early days of MTV might be compared with those now being broadcast, showing the postmodern trends in the development of videos. In your discussion be specific in the conclusions you derive from your study. Put these conclusions into theoretical terms.

- Rent the movie *Full Frontal*, released by Miramax Films in 2002 and starring Julia Roberts, and analyze it as a work of Postmodernism. You might care to focus on the way the movie plays with viewers' expectations of frame, the line between what is the film and what is not the film; or when is an actor an actor playing someone else and when is an actor playing himself; or the way disruptions in the timeline affect the various meanings action can be understood to have. Movie buffs may enjoy exploring the ways the film comments on other films.

meaning). The consequence of this position is that there can be no final meaning for any text, for as Derrida himself says: "texts are not to be read according to [any method] which would seek out a finished signified beneath a textual surface. Reading is transformational."

He comments on issues of identity in Western civilization that derive from the reliance on binary oppositions. These are sets that establish a hierarchy that privileges the first over the

second. He calls them "violent hierarchies," and states that they give precedence (called centering) to the central term (the first) and they marginalize the remaining term. In a set "up/down" the implication is that "up" is preferable to and is better than "down." In more significant ways the "centering" in the man/woman set establishes the first as the most important and marginalizes the second. This result has important ramifications in social constructs.

The last of these three concepts that he addresses is the nature of truth. Because he doubts the ability of language to convey any absolute meaning, there results an impossibility of language to establish a "transcendental universal" or a universal truth. It is this notion that is often misunderstood as a statement of his rejection of a God. Rather it is a statement that simple languages are incapable of identifying God linguistically.

### Disintegration

One of the main outgrowths of Postmodernism is the disintegration of concepts that used to be taken for granted and assumed to be stable. These include the nature of language, the idea of knowledge, and the notion of a universal truth. The application of deconstruction to the understanding of language itself results in disintegration of that very language. Even these words are not stable in the sense that they cannot convey an unalterable message. The consequence of this is that once language is destabilized the resultant knowledge that comes from that language is no longer a stable product. The end result therefore is that there can be no universal truths upon which to base an understanding or a social construct.

In literary works, authors often disrupt expected time lines or change points of view and speakers in ways that disrupt and cause disintegration in the very literature they are writing. *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon is a good example of this technique.

In contemporary entertainment, television in particular, there has been a disintegration of the line that separates reality from fiction. Recent fictional dramas have included responses to the terrorist attacks from September 11, 2001. In other television shows from the last quarter of the twentieth century, contemporaneous events have been included in the story lines. Discussions of the political and social events of the Nixon years were a mainstay of the show *All in the Family* and during the 1992 presidential campaign there was a generous use of material from the *Murphy Brown Show* in real political conversation. In these and other situations the reality/fiction line was blurred significantly.

### Cultural Studies

One major impact of Postmodernism on the structure of college and university courses is the introduction of multiculturalism and cultural studies programs. These are sometimes directly related to specific areas on the planet (Far Eastern studies, South American studies, or conglomerate areas such as Pan-African studies) and sometimes to specific-focus groups (Gay/Lesbian studies, Women's studies, Chicano studies). Often these are not limited by political concerns and boundaries but are economically and socially organized, a major concern expressed in the writings of Jameson, Eagleton, and other Marxist critics.

### Multiculturalism

Another aspect of multiculturalism is combining specific interest areas into one area of study. This aspect of Postmodernism broadens the experiences of college students through the study of literature and history of peoples from other parts of the world. Classes whose structures combine sometimes disparate elements are found in these new departments. For example a study of prisons and prison literature might be combined with literature from third world countries under the broad label of Literature of the Oppressed. Cultural studies may also include topics such as Arab-American studies or Women in European Literature.

## STYLE

### Schizophrenia

An important aspect of Postmodernism in literature and entertainment media is the relaxation of strict time lines, sometimes called discontinuous time. Often an author constructs a sequence of events that have no time relationships to each other. In literature this requires the reader to create a time line, which the author may disrupt later in the story. In some TV shows this is particularly important when the time line would have two events happening at the same time. Therefore, the writers show one event then show another that happened at the same time as the first. This kind of temporal disruption is called "schizophrenia" by Jameson.

### Recurring Characters

Some authors introduce a single character into several different works. Vonnegut does this with Kilgore Trout and Tralfamadorians, who appear in several of his novels.

### Irony

Irony is a specialized use of language in which the opposite of the literal meaning is intended. Its former use often had the intent to provoke a change in behavior from those who were the object of the irony. But for the postmodernist the writer merely pokes fun at the object of the irony without the intention of making a social (or other kind of) change.

### Authorial Intrusion

Occasionally an author will speak directly to the audience or to a character in the text in the course of a work—not as a character in the tale but as the writer. Vonnegut does this in several of his novels, including *Breakfast of Champions*.

### Self-Reflexivity

Many literary works make comments about the works themselves, reflecting on the writing or the "meaning" of the work. These works are said to be self-conscious. In some instances the work will make a comment about itself in a critical way, making a self-reflexive comment on the whole process of writing, reading, or understanding literature.

### Collage

This style is characterized by an often random association of dissimilar objects without any intentional connection between them or without a specified purpose for these associations. For example, the rapid presentation of bits and pieces from old news tapes that are often used at the beginning of news programs is a collage. While it intends to introduce the news, it is not the news nor is it any hint of the news to come.

### Prose Poetry

This idea seems to be a contradiction in terms but it is an effective style of writing. The passage looks like a paragraph of prose writing, but the content is poetic in language and construction. Rather than being a literal statement, the language in this paragraph is more figurative.

### Parody and Pastiche

Oftentimes writers will take the work of another and restructure it to make a different impression on the reader than that of the original author. Some writers lift whole passages from others, verbatim, resulting in something quite different from the original writer's material.

Parody is the imitation of other styles with a critical edge. The general effect is to cast ridicule on the mannerisms or eccentricities of the original.

Pastiche is very much like parody but it is neutral, without any sense of humor. It is the imitation or a pasting together of the mannerisms of another's work, but without the satiric impulse or the humor. Jameson says that because there is no longer a "normal" language system, only pastiche is possible.

### Simulacra

The term simulacra comes from Plato and means "false copy" or a debased reflection of the original that is inferior to the original. Author Jean Baudrillard claims that a simulacrum is a perfect copy that has no original. The postmodernists use this technique of copying or imitating others without reservation or hesitation. They treat it as just another process in their creative effort.

Many science fiction movies deal with simulacrum characters. In *Alien*, one of the crew members, Ash, is an android, but one of such high quality that it is only revealed when he/it is cut and the blood is a white liquid. The "replicants" from *Blade Runner* are simulacra who desire a longer life. Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is a simulacrum character with many human traits, but one who wants to have human emotions, too.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

As might be expected in a relatively new philosophic movement, there are a variety of different understandings, proposals, and approaches reflecting on the particular interests of writers and contributors to that new philosophy. Postmodernism's origin in the aftermath of World War II was not a universally scripted event. By the time Derrida and others were presenting their major papers on the basics of Postmodernism, many others were already approaching these concepts in individual ways. Additionally, as time moved on and Postmodernism developed as an accepted area of discussion, the basic ideas of Postmodernism were branching off into many facets of contemporary life. Among these variations are feminism and gender studies, Marxism and political studies, and Poststructuralism.

## Feminism

Feminist readings in Postmodernism were initiated as a way to consciously view and deconstruct ideas of social norms, language, sexuality, and academic theory in all fields. Feminist theorists and writers (and they were not all women, for example, Bruce Appleby, professor emeritus of Southern Illinois University, was a long-standing contributor to feminist writings and theory) were concerned with the manner in which society assumed a male bias either by direct action—for example, paying women less for doing the same job, or by inaction—using the term "man" to mean all of humankind. In either case, the female segment of society was excluded. Even the modernist penchant for binary sets for discussions, good/bad, white/black, established an unspoken hierarchy that made the first of the set more important than the second. In that way the "male/female" set defined the female half as being less important or inferior to the male half of the set. This pattern was not acceptable to many feminist writers and to those in the subsequent feminist movement. Feminist writers and theorists attempted to separate the ideas of sex (which is biological) and gender (which is a social construct), and use those ideas as a lens through which to deconstruct language, social mores and theories, economic policies, and long-standing historical policy.

## Marxism

It is not much of a stretch to move the discussion of gender discrimination into a discussion of class discrimination, which is the focus of many Marxist critics. While some issues are different, it is easy to see that bias based on gender is just as destructive as the elitism in a society based on class differences.

Political Marxism is a topic that causes strong emotional opinions, especially among those who see it as a threat to Western political systems. However, the basic issues that drove Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to formulate their theories in the nineteenth century remain valid in a discussion of literature and art and the relationship between class and the arts in a society. Marxist critics assert that the products of artistic endeavors are the results of historical forces that are themselves the results of material and/or economic conditions at the time of the creation of the art.

Art then becomes the product of those who control the economic and the intellectual production of the society. Therefore, the nature of the description of an era in human history is the product of the dominant class at the time the description is given. The late twentieth-century era called postmodern is so labeled by the dominant class. (It is important to note that since the that era has not as of the early 2000s come of age, the eventual naming of it may shift if the dominant class also shifts. What that shift may be is unknown at this time.) This concept has been reduced to the simple statement that the victor writes the story of the battle.

An enlightening example concerning this process is *The Wind Done Gone*. This novel is a retelling of the story of the American Civil War through eyes of the African-American slave in the southern United States. It tells Margaret Mitchell's story *Gone with the Wind* from another perspective. Granted this is a pair of novels, but the factual basis behind each is the history of the Civil War. For Mitchell it is history through the eyes of the white southerner; for Alice Randall it is through the eyes of the slave in that same southern society.

## Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a term often used interchangeably with Postmodernism. While these two terms share a number of philosophic concepts, there are some differences that need to be explained. Structuralism is rooted in a theory of language that was derived from the teachings of Swiss-born linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, which were published as the *Course in General Linguistics* (in 1913 in French; in 1966 in English). These publications are a set of reconstructions of his teachings from the class notes of many of his students. As the label of the philosophy indicates, it is concerned with the underlying structures of language and meaning. The structuralists "confined the play of language within closed structures of oppositions," according to Steven Best and Douglas Kellner in their book, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. Saussure posited that language functions in a self-referential manner and has no "natural" relation to external reality. This movement also believes, according to Claude Levi-Strauss, that texts are universal (even if the meanings of the texts are indeterminate) and that texts are found in all activities. This is construed to include the

personal life histories of individuals, which are called their "texts."

The main technique used by the structuralists in their investigations of language is the study of semiology, or the study of signs and symbols. They say that all language is arbitrary and that the culture determines the relationship between the signifier (a word) and the signified (the object). The word *book* is arbitrary and does not have any direct and irrefutable relationship to the object it is used to signify. That relationship comes from the culture alone. Additionally, the structuralist examines the underlying construct of language and is concerned with determining what is called the meta-structure, a universal structure that could be found in all language systems.

The poststructuralist responds to these investigations with the Derridean concept that there is not a universal structure and that the structures of language are indeterminate, just as the language (text) itself is. They give the signifier primacy over the signified, which opens the door to the indeterminacy of other postmodern considerations.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Postmodernism is an outgrowth of Modernism just as Modernism itself was an outgrowth of the enlightenment project of the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, authors, composers, architects, and other intellectuals rebelled against the strictures of older forms and ways of doing things. Architects began creating more functionally oriented buildings; composers created different methods of organizing musical sounds to create new music; authors felt similarly constricted and reacted against old styles and formats of poetry and fiction. Out of this came the likes of the Bauhaus architects, Arnold Schoenberg and Anton von Webern in music, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound in poetry, and Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, and James Joyce in literature.

In the years following World War II, a new impetus in the arts and philosophy emerged that eventually resulted in Postmodernism. Writers were reluctant to fall into similar traps of conventionalization against which the modernists rebelled a generation before. They felt that the modern movement had now, through canonization, become the "old guard" and they wanted something different, more invigorating. Fiction writers such as Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon, and Kurt Vonnegut Jr. began to experiment in their novels. Poets such as Ishmael Reed wrote in new forms and created new poetic styles. Composers such as John Cage experimented with new forms of and approaches to music-making, often using new sound-generating techniques. Along with this came a dissatisfaction with the old ways of looking at the issues of reality, language, knowledge, and power.

Derrida is likely the most important and controversial of the postmodern critics. His two 1967 works, *Writing and Difference*, and *Of Grammatology*, laid the groundwork for the concept known as deconstruction. Another French philosopher, Michel Foucault, presented his first major paper on the subject, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, in 1966. These men were followed by the Marxist critics Jameson and Eagleton, both of whom saw Postmodernism in terms of its social and economic ramifications.

Also coming out of the 1950s and the 1960s was a new approach to popular cultural arts. Among those artists who made significant impact on their art form were the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and The Rolling Stones. These rock groups experimented with new sounds, combinations of entertaining lyrics, and lyrics with some political or social implications. In the 1960s and early 1970s folk rock performers like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Judy Collins, and Pete Seeger led the way with their passionate political lyrics. In films, attitudes shifted and the role of the film changed from a more purely entertainment function to a medium with social or political emphases. These genres, including the "art film" and the sexually explicit film, reacted to the old requirement for a continuous narrative and abandoned it in favor of more disjointed and nonlinear presentations.

At the same time, television was emerging from the shadows of being "radio with pictures" to being an important medium on its own. The 1950s saw the introduction of the situation comedy, for example, *I Love Lucy*, and the variety show, such as *The Ed Sullivan Show*. But by the end of the 1960s these were giving way to less formal programs and moving into the beginnings of postmodern television with programs such as *All in the Family* and *Laugh In*. Also at this time

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1920s–1930s:** The modernist philosophic paradigm can be expressed as the following: search for the truth.

  **Today:** The postmodernist philosophic paradigm is expressed in the following way: there is no identifiable truth.

- **1920s–1930s:** Modernists believe that the artist is not the preserver of the culture; rather the artist is the creator of culture. The art of the modernist is experimental, innovative, and formally complex. Art is a unique object and a finished work authenticated by the artist and validated by agreed-upon standards. "The Photograph never lies."

  **Today:** Art is repetitive and uses familiar or ready-made objects or mechanical reproductions of objects. The artist does not believe that art or the artist occupies a special place apart from the rest of society. Art is a process, a performance, a production, using combinations of media. There are no agreed-upon standards. In the postmodern world, with digital imaging, photos and video can be altered completely or created completely, leaving the question, "What is reality?"

- **1920s–1930s:** Writers are very conscious of the act of writing and try to leave a permanent result in the reader's mind with their product. The novel is the dominant form of fiction writing. The author determines the meaning of the novel for the reader.

  **Today:** Postmodern writers become aware that language is not as permanent as the modernists believed and that their product is not a stable one. As Derrida claims, speech is more secure than written language because the producer of the text is present to give it immediate meaning. Since meaning is indeterminate, the meaning of a novel is unknown.

- **1920s–1930s:** Art is created to shock the audience. The cubism of Picasso and the risqué novels of James Joyce are examples of these shocking creations. Once art is completed, it is a stable work of art.

  **Today:** Art is less shocking and more an incomplete artifact of the artist. "Performance art" is an example: People "live" in a store window or in a glass walled house revealing their everyday life to a passing public.

- **1920s–1930s:** Work in factories is for the husband; home life is for the wife who keeps the house and raises the children.

  **Today:** Men and women work at the same tasks, including firefighting and construction work; however, pay scales for women are not equalized in all areas.

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news became more entertaining with the introduction of the news magazine show, *60 Minutes.*

Through all of these innovations and introductions of new approaches to old idioms, there occurred a disintegration of the separation of reality and fiction. Television entertainment began to include deliberate references to current events; rock songs took on the role of political commentary; and fiction became less narrative and more obscure, less realistic and more intellectually fantastic (not to be confused with children's fantasy worlds).

The combination of the forces of suspicion, disintegration, and uncertainty led to the emergence of the postmodern world. World social situations are visited with a mouse click; economic pressures by individuals demanding specialized products have reduced the "target consumer" to ever smaller units. As Vaclav Havel noted, seeing a Bedouin on a camel in typical Arab dress, wearing jeans beneath, listening to a CD through an ear piece and drinking a soft drink is no longer odd or unexpected. The

fragmented nature of the postmodern world has created a new culturally diverse and, at the same time, culturally mixed world. Television brings war into viewers' living rooms. It shows the horror of collapsing buildings; on reality shows, it gives the consumer a window to the most intimate and tender moments in a person's life, and it reduces all of this to a slickly packaged product for the purpose of getting higher ratings and more profits through advertising.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The exact date Postmodernism began may never be known. It was first mentioned in a text by Federico de Onís in 1934. This use was not widely known and received little attention by the wider community of writers. The word was used by Arnold Toynbee in 1954 in his *Study of History, Volume 8*. But it did not move into mainstream thought and criticism until 1959 with the publication of the article "What is Modernism" by Harry Levin.

Postmodernism then took the form of a theoretical concept as a discussion point in university classrooms. These discussions were directed at the state of the development of various art forms including literature, painting, music— and particularly, how these were changing.

In literature, writers such as Vonnegut and Barthelme were experimenting with new ideas of how to create their novels. Poets like Reed, Allen Ginsburg, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti were also experimenting with new poetic ideas.

In painting, major shifts were occurring as painters were moving from the cubist styles into some of the less formal styles exemplified by the works of Jackson Pollack. For Pollack and others, art shifted from an intellectually driven pursuit of an intended result to a kind of art that just happened. The drip and splash paintings of Pollack show this very well. Other types of art forms to emerge included the collage and the pastiche forms of representation. In both of these the artist used items already made and combined them into a single artistic statement. The works of Andy Warhol are prime examples of these practices, including his *32 Campbell's Soup Cans* and the multiple images of Marilyn Monroe.

In music the introduction of electronically generated sounds created a shift in the course of music development. Vladimir Ussachevsky's first experiments with electronic sound seem very primitive to audience in the early 2000s, but in 1951 these creations were stunningly different. They were not always welcomed, and the more mainstream composers dismissed these efforts as insignificant and unimportant. The works of John Cage are also important to this new era, including his "composition" for several radios on stage, each tuned to a different station.

Similar events happened in the course of language discussions, especially with the presentation of two works by Derrida, *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*. The combination of these two works established a new philosophic approach to the study of language and knowledge (the search for truth) called deconstruction. Basically this is an approach that reveals the instability of language and says that a stable meaning of a text is indeterminate. The author does not determine the meaning of the text because there are contradictions within the text that alter the meanings of the text in an unending cycle of text/meaning, followed by new text/meaning, and so on.

This concept and the ramifications of it have been the subject of much concern. On one end of the critical spectrum, Derrida and deconstruction have been accused of trying to destroy Western civilization. On the other end of the spectrum, he and deconstruction have been hailed as heroes by showing the difficulties of communication because of the underlying instabilities and uncertainties of language. Despite the attacks, condemnations, and praise, deconstruction has shaken the whole area of epistemology to its core. Whether the critic embraces or denies the concepts of deconstruction, he or she must begin with an acknowledgment of its existence and either build an argument on it or build an argument from a position opposing it.

In the early 2000s, the concept of Postmodernism widened to include discussions of social, economic, historical, political, recreational, and other aspects of contemporary life, as argued by Kimberly Chabot Davis in her study of Morrison's novel *Beloved*. Just as deconstruction examined the relationship between language and meaning, postmodernist concepts in these areas examine the relationship between the different facets of cultural life.

*Scene with Kimberly Elise, Oprah Winfrey, and Thandie Newton from a 1998 film adaptation of* Beloved *by Toni Morrison* (© Corbis Sygma)

## CRITICISM

### Carl Mowery

*Mowery holds a Ph.D. in composition and litera-ture from Southern Illinois University. In this essay, Mowery examines narrative techniques in postmodern fiction.*

One facet of Postmodernism that sets it apart from Modernism is the attitude that post-modern authors bring to fiction. While the mod-ernist was concerned with precision both in language and presentation, the postmodernist breaks with these established practices. Time lines are often disrupted, leaving it to the reader to determine the order of events. At other times narrative expectations are upset as the author either contradicts the narrative or intrudes delib-erately into the story line.

The way an author tells a story is through a narrator. Generally the narrator is not the author but a created persona with a personality, a behavior pattern and special reasons for telling the story in the manner it is being told. For

example, the narrator of the Edgar Allan Poe story "The Tell Tale Heart" desperately tries to convince the reader that he is not crazy.

These narrators fall into one of the follow-ing categories: first person narrator; third person omniscient narrator; third person limited narra-tor; dramatic narrator (a phenomenological nar-ration that makes no comment on or judgments about any of the actions or scenes in the tale); and in some circumstances the stream of con-sciousness narration (a specialized narration in the first person through the mind and thoughts of that person). However, there are notable var-iations to these types. In "A Rose for Emily" Faulkner used a first person plural ("we") nar-rator. In this story the townspeople tell the tale.

The only contact a reader has with a tale is through "the act of its being told (or retold)" by the narrator, according to Henry McDonald in "The Narrative Act: Wittgenstein and Narratol-ogy." Therefore, the reader must have a sense of the narrator's reliability. If the narrator is lying or telling the story in a slanted fashion, the reader must then come to grips with that fact and make a

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Barbara Creed, the author of "From Here to Modernity: Feminism and Postmodernism" connects feminist theory with Postmodernism in her short essay in *Screen*. She compares the writing of two authors, Alice Jardine and Craig Owens, seeking a solution to the problem of the intersection of feminist and postmodern theories. Creed points out that while both authors come at this topic from different points of reference, both they and Creed agree that there is a common ground and a legitimate intersection of these theoretical philosophies. Her conclusions are that these philosophies are important, relevant, and connected but that they should not try to explain everything in a "totalizing theory."

- *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society* (2000), by Arthur Asa Berger, contains information that will facilitate a study of the advertising world. He examines the cross-pressures between advertisements and various social, economic, and cultural factors.

His deconstruction of the now famous 1984 Macintosh TV ad is included in this text.

- *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, by David Rabe, startled the theatergoing public in 1971. This postmodern play is a story of a naïve recruit's initiation into war. It won Rabe an Obie and was hailed by the *New York Times* as "rich in humor, irony and insight." It is both brutal and hilarious, making intense critical comments on the Vietnam War and the military establishment in general. It is published along with *Sticks and Bones* by Grove Press in the 1972 volume *The Vietnam Plays*. Rabe won a Tony for his 1995 play *Hurlyburly*.

- *The Magus,* by John Fowles, was published in 1966 after the author worked on it for twelve years; it was revised and republished in 1977. The novel explores subjects of mysticism and psychoanalysis, which were particularly popular when the novel was first published. *The Magus* was made into a film in 1968, directed by Guy Greene and starring Michael Caine. The film was a famous failure.

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judgment about the story from that vantage point. This does not mean that a story cannot be understood even if the storyteller is lying; it means that the reader must reconcile knowing about a lying narrator with the information that the narrator presents. Ludwig Wittgenstein said, "The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing." Therein lies the task of the perceptive reader: to locate and to understand the nature of the fictive world and to recognize the "truth" of that fictive world and to separate it from an unreliable presentation of it. The reader must determine the grounds for identifying that "truth."

An important aspect of the narrative presence is the structure it takes. In "The first thing the baby did wrong . . . ," by Donald Barthelme, the narrator tells his story in monologue style. In

the story the father describes his baby's behavior in a first person continuous narrative that describes how she is punished for tearing pages out of books. The monologue uses a familiar tone, referring to the audience as "you" to create a sense of intimacy ("She got real clever. You'd come up to her where she was playing.") and to request sympathy for the parents' dilemma with the baby's actions. As the baby seems to enjoy her punishment, the father's narrative reveals frustration and a resolve to maintain rules set by the parents. In this story the narration is a simple one drawing the audience into the family circle and asking for sympathy.

Sometimes the narrative gives the reader a sense of being a part of the story as it unfolds. In the story "Montezuma and Cortez," Barthelme

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> ADMITS TO LYING."

uses the continuous present to tell the story. It opens: "Because Cortez lands on a day specified in the ancient writing, because he is dressed in black, because his armour is silver ... Montezuma considers Cortez to be Quetzalcoatl." The remainder of the story maintains this use of present tense, which gives the reader a sense of immediacy and an eye-witness-to-history feeling about the tale. The reader is not told the story after the fact, but as it happens—like a live television show narrated by an announcer.

Other narrative structures include epistolary novels (novels that use a series of exchanged letters to report the story), diaries, or outline forms. The latter two are adopted by Barthelme. "Me and Miss Mandible" uses the diary format, taking the reader through the events of the story day by day. "Daumier" is in an outline form, with occasional topics indicated to tell the reader what the next section of the story will be about.

In these short story examples, the reliability of the narrator is kept at a high level. Also the author remains outside the story. But for many stories, this is not the case. Two novels that contain examples of authorial intrusions and that raise questions about the narrator's truthfulness and thereby the truth of the story itself are *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera and *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* by Marguerite Duras.

Authors often deliberately disturb the comfortable expectations of the reader. In many postmodern works the authors make direct statements to the reader, at times confronting the characters in the novel. Wendy Lesser, in her essay "The Character as Victim," wrote that among contemporary writers "the prevailing idea appears to be that authors and their characters are in direct competition." This notion is at odds with previous approaches to fiction, which keep the author out of the story. But for the postmodern writer these intrusions have become more normal. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera writes, "Tomas saw her jealousy ... as a burden ... he would be saddled with until not long before his death." The foreshadowing shows the author's knowledge of the mortality of his own character. This phrase ends a longer passage during which Tomas has become jealous of Tereza's success as a photographer. Kundera interrupts the passage by telling the reader that Tomas will die soon. This comment seems also a kind of jealous reaction: Kundera is jealous of his own character's successes and deflates that success by telling the reader of Tomas's impending death. Lesser confirms this by stating that "the author knows too clearly and powerfully what he wants to say. Nobody else ... has a chance to say otherwise." Nobody has the opportunity to be too successful or to be too important. Kundera will not allow it.

Kundera also makes repeated comments that are outside the context of the story line. These authorial intrusions are often comments on various aspects in the novel. For example, in chapter 16 of Part Five, he writes, "Several days later, he was struck by another thought, which I record here as an addendum to the preceding chapter." The "I" in this sentence is Kundera, who has intruded into his story, telling the reader that he will make comments about an occurrence in the previous chapter.

In this self-reflexive way Kundera refers directly to the novel itself. He writes: "And once more I see him the way he appeared to me at the very beginning of the novel." Later he comments, "In Part Three of this novel I told the tale of Sabrina." These interruptions by the author do what E. L. Doctorow claims is "the author deliberately [breaking] the mimetic spell of his text and [insisting] that the reader should not take his story to heart or believe in the existence of his characters." This act of destroying what has just been created occurs often in the works of postmodern authors.

Knowledge of the identity of the narrator assists the reader in making a connection with the story. The narrator in Barthelme's "The first thing the baby did wrong ... " is the father, identified only as "I." But nothing further is needed. The narrator in *Lol Stein* is Jack Hold,

who is reluctantly identified late in the novel. At the end of one section Duras has written: "Arm in arm they ascend the terrace steps. Tatiana introduces Peter Breugner, her husband, to Lol, and Jack Hold, a friend of theirs—the distance is covered—me." In this hesitant, circuitous way, the narrator is identified, in the third person by himself!

In Kundera's novel the narrator is never identified, leaving the reader to wonder if there is one or if the author himself is really telling the tale. But as Maureen Howard says, "Whoever the narrator may be, he's an entertaining fellow, sophisticated, professional, very European." Even though the reader does not know his identity, enough of his personality is present so his name does not matter.

Whoever the narrator is, it is imperative that the reader understands whether or not that narrator is telling the truth. Jack Hold, Duras's narrator, tells the tale of Lol but without a sense of certainty, saying things like, "I seem to remember," or "I doubt it," or "I can't say for sure." This imprecision (or indecision) leaves the reader without a sense of knowing what is really going on. Adding to the reader's uncertainty are additional phrases like: "My opinion," "I invent," and "I no longer know for sure." An additional complication to this is the fact that these imprecise statements have no effect on the narrator's attitude to story telling. He does not apologize for these lapses but ignores them after admitting them.

The most disturbing aspect of Jack Hold's narration is his admission, "I'm lying." Another passage includes the line, "I desperately want to partake of the word which emerges from the lips of Lol Stein, I want to be a part of this lie which she has forged." Further confusing the reader is the contradictory statement: "I didn't lie." In this story the narrator does not evade the issue of lying; he takes notice of it and moves ahead with the story.

In his novel, Kundera taxes the reader with the following statement: "The way he rushed into his decision seems rather odd to me. Could it perhaps conceal something else, something deeper that escaped his reasoning?" This is an admission by Kundera (the one asking the question here) that he does not know what is going on with a character of his own creation. How could a character's behavior seem odd to the author who has created that character? This asks the



*An early postmodern event was the film* 2001: A Space Odyssey, *directed by Stanley Kubrick* (The Kobal Collection | The Picture Desk, Inc.)

question: If the author does not know what is going on in the story, how can the reader expect to know? Recalling the earlier notion that Kundera confronts his own characters, in this instance the character seems to have won.

By the end of such statements the reader has no stable basis upon which to establish the veracity of the story. No "truth" can happen in the tale in which the narrator does not know what is going on, the author does not know what is going on, or where the narrator of the story admits to lying. The reader does not know what to believe. Here is the uncertainty of Wittgenstein's "groundlessness of believing." The reader does not know where to base an understanding of the fictional world the author has created.

A consequence of the self-reflexive aspects of these novels is that the reader is constantly being reminded that "it is a fiction," according to Terry Eagleton in "Estrangement and Irony." These reminders disturb the reader's ability to make the mental leap called the suspension of disbelief, which allows a reader of fiction to become immersed in the story and to care

about the characters and their condition. Without this leap, the reader is more willing to dismiss both the tale and the characters.

These are just some of the manifestations of postmodernist concerns about the nature the truth in fiction. Jacques Derrida has noted that since language is unable to convey an absolute meaning, there results the impossibility for language to establish an absolute "truth." In fiction that "truth" is the creation of the author. Because postmodern authors disrupt their stories, intrude in them, and in some cases confront their own creations, there can be no "truth" in that fictional world.

**Source:** Carl Mowery, Critical Essay on Postmodernism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Kimberly Chabot Davis

*In the following essay, Davis asserts that Morrison's novel* Beloved *is a seminal postmodern work combining fiction, history, and social protest.*

When they asserted that our postmodern society has reached the "end of history," theorists Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Francis Fukuyama launched a compelling debate that has persisted for over a decade. They argue that we no longer believe in teleological metanarratives, that our concept of history has become spatial or flattened out, and that we inhabit a perpetual present in which images of the past are merely recycled with no understanding of their original context. In short, they think that postmodern culture has lost a sense of historical consciousness, of cause and effect. Jameson, in particular, sees literary postmodernism as a by-product of this new worldview. Such a controversial stance has, of course, provoked numerous antagonists to speak out. Linda Hutcheon, for example, has written two studies of "historiographic metafiction," suggesting that much of postmodern fiction is still strongly invested in history, but more importantly in revising our sense of what history means and can accomplish. My project is to examine how Toni Morrison's acclaimed historical novel *Beloved* (1987) enacts a hybrid vision of history and time that sheds new light on issues addressed by Jameson and Hutcheon in their theories of the postmodern—topics such as the "fictionality" of history, the blurring of past and present, and the questioning of grand historical metanarratives. I argue that while the novel exhibits a

> POSTMODERN THEORIES NEED TO BE MODIFIED TO ACCOMMODATE TEXTS LIKE *BELOVED* WITH AN OVERT POLITICAL AGENDA OF SOCIAL PROTEST, AND TO RECOGNIZE THESE FICTIONS AS CONTRIBUTIONS TO A THEORETICAL DISCOURSE OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE."

postmodern skepticism of sweeping historical narratives, of "Truth," and of Marxist teleological notions of time as diachronic, it also retains an African American and modernist political commitment to the crucial importance of deep cultural memory, of keeping the past alive in order to construct a better future. Morrison's mediations between these two theoretical and political camps—between postmodernism and African American social protest—enable her to draw the best from both and make us question the more extremist voices asserting that our postmodern world is bereft of history.

Since the term postmodern has been at the center of many highly charged cultural debates, I am aware that describing *Beloved* as such, even as a "hybrid" postmodern novel, is a gesture that might draw criticism. Clearly, the novel's status as part of the African American tradition of social protest, and Morrison's investments in agency, presence, and the resurrection of authentic history, seem to make the novel incompatible with poststructuralist ideas at the root of postmodernism. Morrison herself has spoken out against a postmodernism that she associates with Jameson's terms. In my view, however, Morrison's treatment of history bears some similarity to Hutcheon's postmodern "historiographic metafiction," but her relationship to this discourse is affected by her aim to write "black-topic" texts. Morrison acknowledges that history is always fictional, always a representation, yet she is also committed to the project of recording African American history in order to heal her readers. Instead of a playful exercise in deconstructing history, Morrison's *Beloved* attempts to affect the contemporary world of the "real." While the novel should not

simply be assimilated into the canon of postmodernism, Morrison's work should be recognized as contributing a fresh voice to the debates about postmodern history, a voice that challenges the centrism and elitism of much of postmodern theory. *Beloved* reminds us that history is not "over" for African Americans, who are still struggling to write the genealogies of their people and to keep a historical consciousness alive.

The relationship of African American writers and their work to the discourse of postmodernism has been hotly contested, and there has unfortunately emerged a dichotomy that I would like to question. This relationship has become even more vexed since the Nobel Prize committee bypassed postmodern guru Thomas Pynchon to select Toni Morrison as their 1993 literature winner. Morrison claimed her prize as a victory particularly for African Americans. Black critics such as Barbara Christian continue to argue that Morrison's work must be understood as an expression of African American forms and traditions, and are concerned that "the power of this novel as a specifically African American text is being blunted" as it is being appropriated by white academic discourse (Christian 6). I too share her suspicion of the increasingly popular move to read Morrison's fiction through the lens of postmodernism, poststructuralism, or "white" academic theory, a tactic that underestimates the crucial importance of Toni Morrison's black cultural heritage to any interpretation of her works. While we must question the tactics of critics like Elliott Butler-Evans, who simply and somewhat blindly plot poststructuralist and postmodernist theory onto Morrison's "black-topic texts," we should be equally wary of concluding that postmodernism is a "white" phenomenon. Any claim that the lives of black people have nothing to do with postmodernism ignores the complex historical interrelationship of black protest and liberal academic discourse. As Andreas Huyssen, Kobena Mercer, and Linda Hutcheon have noted, racial liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s (as well as the feminist movement) contributed to the loosening of cultural boundaries that is seen as characteristically postmodern. White liberal theorists of postmodernism and African American critics often share an oppositional relationship to the bourgeois state or to the universalizing "objectivity" of some humanist intellectuals. A rigid demarcation between postmodern texts and African American texts merely perpetuates a false dichotomy of academic theory and social protest, ignoring that they emerged in response to a similar set of lived conditions.

I do not seek simply to join the fray of critics who unequivocally claim Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* for one side or the other (postmodernist or "antipostmodernist" social protest) while leaving the text's ambiguities and ambivalences unexplored. Deborah McDowell argues that the theory/practice hierarchy equates theory with men and marginalizes black women to the realm of social protest, and she calls for a "counterhistory ... [that] would bring theory and practice into a productive tension that would force a reevaluation of each side" (256). I am attempting here to enact that counterhistory, to investigate how Morrison's fiction speaks to postmodern theory and, more importantly, allows us to reevaluate this discourse. I do not aim to measure *Beloved* against the authority of postmodern theorists, but rather to examine how each has represented the spectre of history differently, and to suggest the difference that race can make.

In her novels, interviews, and essays, Toni Morrison has expressed opinions and agendas that resound with the concerns of both critical camps—both postmodernist theorists and African American and feminist critics seeking social agency. Feminist and African American critics have often dismissed postmodernism's philosophical questioning of foundationalism and essentialism as being incompatible with their sociopolitical criticism (Fraser 20–21). Morrison herself acknowledges and occasionally reifies this rift by defining herself in interviews as an antipostmodernist author of black-topic texts, written to pass on agency to her black readers ("Living Memory" 11). Certainly, Morrison's works seem to be defined by the prefixes "pre" or "re" rather than "post"; in *Beloved*, she is more concerned with origins, cycles, and reconstructing agency than with decadence and self-parody. Both *Beloved* and her novel *Jazz* are set in time periods of birth and regeneration—the age of Reconstruction after the Civil War and the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

Despite her reluctance to associate her work with postmodernism, I believe that Morrison has produced the kind of hybrid cultural work that socialist feminist Donna Haraway calls for. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women,* Haraway writes:

Feminists have to insist on a better account of the world. ... So, I think my problem and "our" problem is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own "semiotic technologies" for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world. (187)

Haraway underscores the urgent need for new and better "her-stories" that might empower women but that are still informed by poststructuralism's denaturalizing critique, and for narratives that attempt to approximate "true history" while remaining aware of the limits and impossibility of truth or of any historical metanarrative. Morrison's work can be compared to Haraway's in its recognition of this dual process; although Morrison demystifies master historical narratives, she also wants to raise "real" or authentic African American history in its place. She deconstructs while she reconstructs, tapping the well of African American "presence." As Anthony Hilfer has suggested, Morrison's novels offers a "both-and," dialectical, indeterminate character, a doubleness that Linda Hutcheon would argue is itself a distinctly postmodern strategy (Hilfer 91).

Despite the indeterminacies of her fiction, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can be read as an overt and passionate quest to fill a gap neglected by historians, to record the everyday lives of the "disremembered and unaccounted for" (274). Rejecting the artificial distinction between fiction and history, Morrison considers artists to be the "truest of historians" ("Behind the Making" 88). In "Site of Memory," Toni Morrison explicitly describes the project of writing *Beloved* as one of fictional reconstruction or "literary archeology" (112), of imagining the inner life of the slave woman Margaret Garner, her source for Sethe. While working on *The Black Book* (1974), a collection of cultural documents recording African American "history-as-life-lived," Morrison discovered a newspaper clipping about Garner, a runaway slave who had murdered her children at the moment of capture. Like Denver's efforts to reconstruct the past through storytelling, Morrison's narrative has succeeded in "giving blood to the scraps ... and a heartbeat" to what had been merely an historical curio (*Beloved*). The desire to uncover the historical reality of the African American past fuels Morrison's fictional project of literary archeology: "you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" ("Site" 112). Working to fill in the gaps left by the constrained slave narrative genre, she attempts "to rip the veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate'" in order "to yield up a kind of a truth" (110, 112).

Although this last phrase suggests that Morrison pursues authenticity in her historical renderings, I will argue that she accepts the poststructuralist critique of the idea of a single totalizing Truth or History. While she sees herself as a creative historian who reconstructs, Morrison also works to deconstruct master narratives of "official history" in *Beloved*. Mae Henderson describes the novel as a counternarrative to the "master('s) narrative" (79), one example of which is the newspaper account of Margaret Garner's deed, a document that reappears in the novel as a harsh official alternative to Sethe's emotional interpretation of events. In this novel, the appearance of the newspaper clipping is one of the few intrusions of the dominant culture's process of historical documentation. Morrison drops only a few references to historically recognizable "encyclopedia" events of the period; for example, the Fugitive Slave Bill, the historical fact that provokes Sethe's infanticide, is mentioned only in parentheses. Even more striking is her rendering of the Civil War, the apocalypse of American national history, as a minor, inconsequential event in the lives of these former slaves. As Denver lovingly remembers the gift of Christmas cologne she received as a child, she mentions casually and offhandedly that she received it during "one of the war years." Paul D's haunting memory of the chain gang in Alfred, Georgia, outweighs the significance of his participation in the war, of which we learn only in the last few pages of the book. The private realities of persecution and daily survival matter more to Sethe and Paul D than any dates or public documents worthy of note in a history textbook. Paul D recognizes that prejudice and racism certainly did not end with the Emancipation Proclamation or the surrender of the Confederate Army: "The War had been over four or five years then, but nobody white or black seemed to know it." Marilyn Sanders Mobley suggests that the fragments of recognizable history in *Beloved* "punctuate the text and ... disrupt the text of the mind which is both historical and ahistorical at the same time" (196). While I agree that these historical facts appear as interruptions, I would argue that the minds of Sethe

and Paul D are never "ahistorical." Rather, Morrison attempts to redefine history as an amalgamation of local narratives, as a jumble of personal as well as publicly recorded triumphs and tragedies.

Morrison's commitment to historical remembering arises from her concern about the ignorance of and even contempt for the past that she sees in both contemporary African American and postmodern culture. In an interview in 1988, she remarked: "the past is absent or it's romanticised. This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to terms with, the truth about the past" ("Living Memory" 11). While working on *The Black Book* in the early 1970s, Morrison expressed disdain for the Black Power movement's creation of new myths and their retreat to ancient African myths of the "far and misty past" ("Behind the Making" 87). More relevant to the process of liberation, she felt, was knowledge of the 300-year history of African Americans. In the 1988 interview, Morrison applauded the emergence of a new body of historical fiction by black writers, and she found it ironic "that black writers are descending deeper into historical concerns at the same moment white literati are abolishing it in the name of something they call 'post modernism.' . . . History has become impossible for them" (11). Morrison seems here to accept Fredric Jameson's negative portrayal of postmodernism—a definition contested by Hutcheon and others—as historical "depthlessness" and "a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality" (*New Left Review* 58). Back in 1974, Morrison also expressed concerns that would be echoed by Jameson, a concern that real history was being replaced by historicism—the textualizing of time as a mere representation, as a simulacrum (to use Jean Baudrillard's formulation). Sounding rather Marxist, Morrison bemoaned the "shallow" myths of the black liberation movement's Afrocentrism, "because our children can't use and don't need and will certainly reject history-as-imagined. They deserve better: history as life lived," which Morrison was attempting to record in *The Black Book* ("Behind the Making" 88).

Although in 1974 Morrison sounds like a Jamesonian precursor, criticizing contemporary literature's historical travesties, in *Beloved* she has offered a different conception of the relationship between history and fiction, acknowledging that all history is "imagined," and that all knowledge of the past is derived from representations, such as *Beloved* itself. As Donna Haraway seeks better scientific stories, Morrison attempts to draw a historical portrait closer to "life lived," but she recognizes that no totalizing truth can ever be reached. Morrison's fictional works offer a different theory of "postmodernist history" than does Jameson, and critics who try to read Morrison's work through Jameson's lens end up misreading the novels. Elliott Butler-Evans uses scanty textual support to argue that *Tar Baby* is postmodern (in Jameson's definition) because it offers "a displacement of history by 'historicism,' in which the past is reread and reconstructed in the present" (152). As Linda Hutcheon has pointed out, the fundamental problem with Jameson's formulation is his rigid distinction between authentic history and inauthentic historicism. Jameson describes our postmodern society as one "bereft of all historicity, whose own putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles . . . the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (*New Left Review* 66). For Morrison, history and "historicism" are one and the same, and her work offers a necessary correction to Jameson's theories, precisely because she questions the assumption that there is a knowable reality behind the inauthentic simulation or representation.

Moments of self-reflexivity in her text remind the reader that Morrison is also constructing a textual representation of the past, just as historians did before her. When Paul D is confronted by the newspaper account of Sethe's deed, the reader is made aware that textual documents often—or always—fail to capture life exactly as it is experienced. Although he cannot read, Paul D finds the representation of Sethe's face to be inauthentic: "that ain't her mouth." While Paul D is wrong in denying the truth of Sethe's infanticide, his reaction to the picture of Sethe makes the reader aware of the difference between a real-live original and any simulation, either photographic or textual. At the same moment, however, the possibility of distinguishing between the real and the reproduction is rendered unstable, and the very concept of authenticity is put into question as Paul D doubts both the white culture's representation and his own knowledge of the real woman, Sethe. In this scene, Morrison seems to be revising her previous belief that the documents collected in *The Black Book* could offer authentic history as

life lived; now she suggests that a fictional account of the interior life of a former slave might be more historically "real" than actual documents, which were often written from the perspective of the dominant culture. While Morrison reminds us of the slippage between signifier and signified in the scene with the newspaper clipping, she also calls attention to the fact that the past is only available to us through textual traces, such as *Beloved* and *The Black Book*. Newspapers—as a figure for discourse itself—make one other appearance in the novel. They are stacked in a pile in the woodshed, the pivotal space in which Sethe kills her baby, and where the resurrected *Beloved* lures Paul D to have sex; the printed words of the newspapers are metaphoric spectators to the "real" action of this fictional story. This metaphor allows Morrison simultaneously to point out the gap between representation and reality and to suggest that we can only know the past through discourse. She seems to concur with the poststructuralist view that reality is a function of discourse, yet does not let this point pacify her into accepting the representations that exist—the voyeuristic news accounts and the constrained slave narratives. I would argue that Morrison's sociopolitical project is the idea that new representations can change our perceptions of historical reality.

Morrison's choice of epigraphs also reflects her dual response to the representation/reality dialectic. Hutcheon argues that the inclusion of paratextual materials, such as epigraphs, serves both to "remind us of the narrativity (and fictionality) of the primary text and to assert its factuality and historicity" (*Politics* 85). Morrison's choice of two epigraphs underscores this dialectic; one points to the historical "fact" of the Middle Passage, the other to a text (the Bible) that has often been received as fact. While the Scriptures themselves blur the boundary between fact and fiction, the "60 million and more" statistic is an estimation gleaned from historical records. Although the Middle Passage was a horrific historical reality, the estimated number is not a verifiable fact because the deaths of slaves were often deemed unworthy of recording. All the lives lost can never be accounted for, because our access to history is always limited by words and by those who have control of textual production. Thus, in beginning her novel with these epigraphs, Morrison seems both to ground her fictional work in historical reality and also to question the

possibility of ever finding the historical referent outside of or preceding representation.

As an artist, Morrison places a great deal of faith in the power of representation to determine our perceptions of reality. For her, the character of Beloved has become a piece of living history—words made into flesh. According to Morrison, she drew Beloved as a composite of the dead child of Margaret Garner, and of a "dead girl" from a Van der Zee photograph—a girl who had been murdered by a jealous ex-lover ("A Conversation" 583–84). Morrison remarked passionately in an interview:

> bit by bit I had been rescuing her from the grave of time and inattention. Her fingernails might be in the first book; face and legs, perhaps, the second time. Little by little bringing her back into living life. So that now she comes running when called . . . she is here now, alive.

*("A Conversation" 593)*

Morrison's commitment to resurfacing the dead and paying tribute to black Americans of previous generations has made her works particularly poignant to African American readers. With the novel's newly acquired place in the canon of American literature, Morrison's representation has helped to contribute to the historical consciousness of Americans, just as the television miniseries *Roots* did in the 1970s. The popularity of *Beloved* and the healing power of its representation may have enlarged our culture's understanding of black women's history and of the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction era.

To ground my argument that Morrison's fiction has much to contribute to a postmodern theoretical debate about history and representation, I will turn to a close reading of the novel and suggest that its thematic interest in temporality relates to larger concerns about history. If Morrison's career reveals both a desire for "authentic" history-as-life-lived and the postmodernist realization that history is a fictional construct, the plot of her novel *Beloved* is marked by a parallel dialectic: the mind's struggle between remembering and forgetting the past. *Beloved* is a novel about the traumas and healing powers of memory, or "rememory" as Sethe calls it, adding a connotation of cyclical recurrence. Sethe's ambivalent relationship to her cruel past creates a kind of wavelike narrative effect, as memories surface and are repressed. On the one hand, "Sethe worked hard to remember . . . as close to nothing

as was safe. Unfortunately her brain was devious," offering her memories of the beauty of Sweet Home rather than of her children. Painfully aware that she lacks control of her memory, Sethe also attempts to repress, to "start the day's serious work of beating back the past." The ghost child Beloved represents the "return of the repressed" past that demands to be worked through and not forgotten. Although the novel proves Sethe wrong in her belief that "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay", the text also contends that neither must the past consume us. With Beloved's entrenchment at 124 Bluestone, Sethe's life begins to ebb away, her strength sapped by the swelling ghost daughter, a figure for the threatening past. Morrison suggests that dwelling on one's own past, or the collective past of the slaves, can strangle your present as Beloved nearly strangles Sethe in the Clearing.

Toni Morrison's novel endorses neither a Marxist obsessive, teleological historical remembering nor a "postmodernist" forgetting of the past, and suggests instead that both processes are necessary to move into the future. The simultaneity of remembering and forgetting is evident in Sethe's state of mind after Beloved's return: "her mind was busy with the things she could forget." At the end of the novel, the ambiguity of the repeated phrase "It was not a story to pass on" also enacts the simultaneity of moving forward and looking back, since "passing on" has two meanings: sharing the tale with future generations and walking on by and forgetting the story. Thus, although Morrison promotes a delving into the historical past, she realizes that the past must be processed and sometimes forgotten in order for one to function in the present and to "pass on" to the future. Her earlier statements, when working on *The Black Book*, about the crucial need for knowledge of recent history have been qualified in *Beloved,* which teaches that a historical memory also has its costs, resulting often in the reopening-rather than the healing—of old psychic wounds.

One way to free oneself from the horrors of the past is to reenact and reconfigure the past in the present, as Sethe does with an icepick at the end of the novel, attacking not her own children this time but the white man Bodwin, whom she perceives as a reincarnation of her slave master Schoolteacher. Mae Henderson argues that this reconfiguration of the past delivers Sethe, who "demonstrates her possession of rather than by

the past," and thus exorcizes *Beloved* (Henderson 80). While Henderson rightly asserts the importance of a "mediation between remembering (possession) and forgetting (exorcism)," she seems to grant more subversive powers of agency to Sethe than the close of the novel actually suggests (82). After this attempt to reenact "the Misery," Sethe is hardly healed, whole and "reborn," as Henderson argues, but has resigned herself to die rather than live as a "bleak and minus nothing" (*Beloved*). Sethe admits that "something is missing . . . something more than Beloved." While Henderson celebrates her as a subversive heroine and revisionist historian who has achieved the power to change the past, she ignores the fact that Sethe is still haunted by her complicity with whites at the end of the book, as she recalls that she compliantly "made the ink" that allowed Schoolteacher to delineate her "animal" characteristics. Morrison, I believe, presents a more balanced and postmodernist view by acknowledging both Sethe's complicities and her subversions, and recognizing that Sethe has limited power to revise or erase the past.

Many critics have read the ending (and the expression "pass on") as an indication that Sethe is healed and Beloved put back in her place, but I find that the last chapter denies such a simplistic closure. Morrison ends the novel with the word "Beloved," suggesting that the past is a lasting presence, waiting to be resurrected: "Down by the stream in back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go . . . should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit." Although the ending suggests partial healing, the spectre of the past remains, waiting to resurface. I find *Beloved* ending similar to Hutcheon's description of the postmodern historiographic novel: "the past is not something to be escaped, avoided, or controlled . . . the past is something with which we must come to terms and such a confrontation involves an acknowledgment of limitation as well as power" (*Politics* 58).

While Henderson's analysis is often insightful, I find her view to be one-sided, because she ignores the novel's postmodernist suspicion of coherent and logical historical narratives that attempt to smooth over the disorder of lived experience. I disagree with her suggestion that this novel creates coherence out of the lives dismembered by slavery. She writes: "If dismemberment deconstitutes the whole . . . then re-memory functions to re-collect, re-assemble, and organize into a meaningful sequential whole through . . . the

process of narrativization" (71). Henderson uses words like "cohesive" to describe Sethe's narrative, an adjective that seems inappropriate for a novel that rejects closure and facile narrative solutions. In opposition to Henderson, Emily Miller Budick cogently argues that gaps left by a tragic past are not easily filled or smoothed over in this work: "recovering the missing [child] . . . reconstituting in the present what was lost in the past, will not, this book insists, restore order and logic to lives that have been interrupted by such loss" (131).

I would argue along with Budick that Morrison's novel does not aim to fill in all the gaps of the historical past; the result of her literary archeology is not a complete skeleton, but a partial one, with pieces deliberately missing or omitted. Because the reconstruction is not total, the reader is engaged in the process of imagining history herself. Although Morrison's historical project is to unveil the "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (*Beloved*), many things nevertheless remain inaudible or buried in the novel, and these gaps can be read as characteristically postmodern. When Paul D confronts Sethe with the newspaper clipping about the murder of her child, Sethe is unable to give voice to the unspoken: "she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask." Of course, she continues to try to pin it down throughout the rest of the novel, but rather than a complete and seamless product, the process of putting some of her memory into words is stressed here.

Rather than the "meaningful sequential whole" that Henderson finds, I see a text with many holes and gaps, a testament to the incoherence of "life lived," especially the life of a freed slave. For example, the novel begins with Howard and Bugler, but we never learn their fate, or that of their father Hale. Who was the girl whose red ribbon Stamp Paid finds attached to a raft? This novel never forgets or underestimates the difficulty of representing the lives of the disremembered and unaccounted for, "the people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons." The Middle Passage, in which "sixty million and more" slaves died, is another significant gap that looms on the horizon, and can only be obliquely alluded to in the novel's epigraph, in Sethe's buried memories of her mother's story, and in *Beloved*'s postmodern fragmented narrative that blends the historical past and present.

*Beloved*'s disjointed narrative, composed of phrases with no punctuation, calls attention to the visual spaces on the page, a metaphor for the gaps in the storytelling. In *Beloved*'s narrative, "it is always now", and Morrison combines imagined scenes of life on the slave ships with details from Beloved and Sethe's stories:

> the little hill of dead people . . . the men without skin push them through with poles the woman [Sethe] is there with the face I want the face that is mine . . . the woman with my face is in the sea her sharp earrings are gone.

Barbara Christian has written of *Beloved* as a novel giving voice to this "unspeakable event" of the Middle Passage, an event almost erased from American cultural memory (6). Although I agree that Morrison has attempted to imagine this "terrible space" in American history, the gap cannot be completely bridged, and the psychic trauma on the slave ships can only be narrated elusively.

Unlike a traditional novelistic development of teleological, "sequential and meaningful" narration, Toni Morrison's narrative technique stresses the fact that black Americans, particularly freed slaves, did not experience time or history as an ordered and linear sequence of events. Morrison's narrative techniques are echoed in the novel by Denver, who weaves stories, constructing "out of the string she had heard all her life a net to hold Beloved" (76). Both Morrison and Denver weave a porous net with their storytelling, leaving gaps to allow some of the mysterious and unspeakable past to escape narration, to flow on through. Morrison both recognizes the important healing powers of narration, yet understands the limits of representation and of the storytelling process. Hutcheon finds this dual response to narration to be postmodern:

> A plot, be it seen as a narrative structure . . . is always a totalizing representation that integrates multiple and scattered events into one unified story. But the simultaneous desire for and suspicion of such representations are both part of the postmodern contradictory response to employment.
>
> *(*Politics *68)*

This indeterminacy and double movement contribute to the richness of Morrison's text, enabling it to engender a plethora of critical interpretations, often at odds with one another.

As I have suggested, Linda Hutcheon clearly finds Morrison to be a postmodernist writer with a dialectic quality and a deconstructive political project—to write new "ex-centric" definitions of history from the margins. Working with a more generalized concept of postmodernism than does Hutcheon, Anthony Hilfer presents an important warning to critics who view Toni Morrison's work as a response to, or derivative of, academic postmodernism: "Morrison derives her indeterminacies not from French postmodernism nor from the new, oddly dematerialized forms of Marxism but from the center of African American culture . . . jazz" (93). In an interview with Nellie McKay, Morrison remarked: "Classical music satisfies and closes. Black music does not do that. Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord. And it agitates you . . . I want my books to be like that" (McKay 429). Although it is significant that Morrison finds the sources of her indeterminacies in jazz, and not theories of the postmodern developed by white academics, their similarities arise out of shared conditions of urbanity and the chaos of modern life. Toni Morrison herself acknowledges this similarity: "Black women had to deal with 'post-modern' problems in the nineteenth century and earlier . . . certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability" ("Living Memory" 11).

Although Morrison seems to stand against postmodernism and poststructuralism by claiming to write an "authentic" African American history of slavery that aims to reconstruct a stable sense of self for her characters, Morrison's narrative strategies nonetheless share some affinities with postmodern fiction, as described by Linda Hutcheon. But I do not mean to suggest that Morrison's work can be grouped comfortably alongside postmodern writers such as Milan Kundera or Thomas Pynchon. Hutcheon herself is guilty of marginalizing African American writers in her books; after extended readings of texts by white men, she merely refers to Morrison and Ishmael Reed as participants in the same postmodern historiography. Elliott Butler-Evans runs into this problem when he simply attempts to graft Jameson's criteria for postmodern fiction onto Morrison's novel *Tar Baby*, which he claims exhibits "pastiche and collage as structuring devices; the emergence of a schizophrenic textual structure; a displacement of history by 'historicism'" (152). Although Morrison's work contains strong doses of irony, *Beloved*'s overwhelmingly serious tone and overt political project make it difficult to describe as parody or playful pastiche. Nothing less than the reconstruction of the erased history of the African American people motivates Morrison, rather than playful exercises in form, however politically subversive these aesthetic innovations may be. In my view, race signifies more than Butler-Evans and Hutcheon acknowledge. Hutcheon locates the politics of postmodernism in its aesthetics but ignores agency and the subversive political content that Morrison and other African American novelists aim for. I argue that the politics of Toni Morrison's texts can be found both in her aesthetic strategies and in the kind of historical consciousness that her characters enact as they struggle with their own temporality.

The critical commentary about Morrison's decision to develop a circular, nonlinear narrative technique offers a useful case study of the competing trends in the critical reception of *Beloved.* Many critics cite the following passage, in which Sethe's concept of time becomes clear as she evades Paul D's questions about the newspaper clipping:

> Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. . . . Because the truth was simple, not a long-drawn-out record of flowered shifts, tree cages, selfishness, ankle ropes and wells.

Deconstructionist critics read this passage as a rejection of "long-drawn-out" linear and teleological historical narratives, in favor of a circular experience of time without a center. For example, Catherine Rainwater argues that Morrison's circular patterns are postmodern because they are never completed (Sethe "could never close in") and thus deny traditional narrative closure (101). Barbara Hill Rigney has found Morrison's circular narrative to be an example of Julia Kristeva's concept of "woman's time" as circular (nonphallic) and cyclical, reflecting the natural cycles of reproduction and the seasons (76). In answer to poststructuralist critics, Barbara Christian notes that in African cosmology, time is nonlinear, and thus Morrison's and Sethe's circling finds root in an ancestral worldview rather than in the work of Derrida (13). Feminist and poststructuralist readings that celebrate the nonlinear narrative forget that circles are also laden with ominous symbolism in an African American context,

since they recall the circles of iron (and nooses) surrounding the necks of slaves, particularly the "neck jewelry" that Paul D was forced to wear. Thus, while all of these critics agree that Toni Morrison uses a circular narrative technique to subvert a linear reading of time and history, each accounts for her motives differently.

Placing questions of authorial intent aside, I believe that the text itself portrays circularity in both a positive and a negative light, as both an accurate reflection of the mind's "rememory" process and as a treadmill from which one must escape in order to move forward in time. Rejecting a linear time-consciousness, Sethe expresses her belief that time is spatial and operates like a wheel, and that past events are waiting to recur:

> I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. ... Places, places are still there. ... The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again.

The belief that "nothing ever dies" haunts Sethe as she tries desperately to protect Denver from reliving the events of her past. Sethe attempts to subvert this recurring cycle by creating a kind of "timeless present" in her home, where she hopes the past can no longer hurt Denver or Beloved. Sethe wants to "hurry time along and get to the no-time waiting for her" at 124, where her infanticide has been erased by the miraculous return of Beloved. Morrison accompanies Sethe's discovery of Beloved's true identity with a textual shift from the past tense (which dominates the novel before this point) to the present tense: "this day they are outside." Although Sethe hopes that her timeless world has put a stop to the cycle in which the past can return to haunt, 124's no-time represents a different kind of vicious circle—with the past, present, and future collapsed into one.

Both Sethe's concepts of a timeless present and the spatial time from which she wants to escape are echoed in Fredric Jameson's discussion of postmodernism. In an interview, Jameson summed up the thesis of his book *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* with the remark that "time has become a perpetual present and thus spatial" in postmodern culture (Stephanson 46). Retaining a Marxist desire for teleology and linearity, Jameson regrets the postmodern flattening of time, arguing that it deprives people of a "true" sense of history, of cause and effect, of "deep phenomenological experience" (*Postmodernism* 134). He is nostalgic for "the great high modernist thematic of time and temporality, the elegiac mysteries of duree and memory [found in the works of Faulkner] . . . we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic" (*Postmodernism* 16). Morrison is more willing than Jameson to entertain the possibility of spatial time as an authentic experience rather than a loss or a mere "simulacrum." In her essay "The Site of Memory," she uses the metaphor of the archeological site to refer to memories of the past, as if they were a place that one could visit to mine for bits of history. As Mobley has argued, *Beloved*'s narrative, lacking punctuation, suggests the "seamlessness of time, [and] the inextricability of the past and present, of ancestors and their progeny" (196). The concept of history in *Beloved* is not flattened but rather takes on extra volume to contain the cultural memories of ancestors, to which we can have access only through imagination.

Rather than exhibiting "historical depthlessness," Morrison's works may be seen as modernist (in Jameson's terms) because they respect the importance of deep memory and explore the relationship between the past and the present. On the other hand, her novels also exhibit a postmodern skepticism of teleological narratives and of the modernist myth of forward progress espoused by Marxists. Because she rejects a modernist diachronic view of history, Morrison explores the idea of a more synchronic, spatial experience of time. Her spatial sense of time can be read not only as a postmodern form of temporality, but it could also be viewed as an expression of the temporal experiences of African Americans, who are often denied a future and are therefore haunted by or retreat to the past. Sethe is clearly frustrated and "boxed in" by time; she cannot construct an ordered timeline of her life, so she attempts her experiment of living only in the present, as do many hopeless inner-city youth.

Although Morrison embraces a more synchronic concept of time than does Jameson, she concurs with him in rejecting the timeless world of 124 Bluestone, a timelessness that both identify—wrongly, I think—with postmodernism. While she suggests that time need not be perceived as linear, it nevertheless must be respected and dealt with. From his experience on the chain gang, Paul D learned that living only in the

present moment is like not living at all, because life means "caring and looking forward, remembering and looking back." Although Sethe believes she has created an idyllic no-time at 124, Stamp Paid finds the house to be encircled by strange "voices that ringed 124 like a noose". The timeless circle must be broken or Sethe and Denver will be strangled, their future erased. I disagree with Mobley, who reads the last dialogue in which the voices of the three women merge as the final word and concluding message of the text, a message that "the past, present, and future are all one and the same" (Mobley 196). This reading of time as wholly synchronic ignores the text's attempt to preserve some temporal boundaries (however permeable) and to prevent the swirling eddy around 124 from turning into a black hole. Morrison's theoretical conception of temporality is best expressed through the figure of the wheel—of a circle rolling forward (or occasionally backward) through time, while continually kicking up the dust of the past. Although wheels are circular, I do not believe that Morrison pursues a sense of wholeness that her circular narrative strategy might suggest, because the circles are never completed, the center never reached, and the "rememory" process always unfinished. The figure of the wheel can instead be translated into a progressive temporal strategy for a postmodern society—a strategy of learning from the past but not being paralyzed by its lessons, of forging a loose and flexible synthesis out of the fragments of history, of reaping the benefits of both a diachronic and a synchronic sense of time.

The lessons about history and temporality offered by Toni Morrison in her masterwork should and must be critically discussed in relationship to academic discourses about postmodernism. Postmodern theories need to be modified to accommodate texts like *Beloved* with an overt political agenda of social protest, and to recognize these fictions as contributions to a theoretical discourse of contemporary life. As bell hooks argues in her essay "Postmodern Blackness," there is a crucial need for black-topic texts to be read in light of poststructuralist and postmodernist theory and its indeterminacies, while maintaining attention to the texts' specific messages for black readers. Like hooks, I believe that such a culturally powerful discourse as postmodernism should not be left in the hands of the elite few. Although many postmodern theorists emphasize "difference," the literary category is often used by critics to refer to a sealed set of texts, usually produced by white men. I would like to see postmodernism continue to be a site of contestation for meaning, cultural power, and political change. *Beloved* poses a challenge to neat theories because it balances on the cusp between two worldviews, subverting the dichotomy between African American social protest (based on a modernist ideology) and a postmodernist questioning of metanarratives about history and time. It is precisely the ambivalences of this novel that make it "beloved" by so many critical groups, but these indeterminacies themselves seem to resist the many and varied critics who have tried to claim Morrison for their very own. I believe that it is more important to explore what her representations have to offer to all of us, simultaneously.

**Source:** Kimberly Chabot Davis, "'Postmodern Blackness': Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the End of History," in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 2, Summer 1998, pp. 242–60.

## Larry McCaffery

*In the following introduction excerpt, McCaffery discusses Postmodernism's precursors and origins.*

**THE EVOLUTION OF POSTMODERNISM: SOME PRECURSORS AND BACKGROUND**

As I've already suggested, there is no sharp demarcation line separating modernism and postmodernism, and the alleged differences between the two become especially difficult to pinpoint if one is examining the development of fiction in a global context and not just focusing on what has been occurring in the United States. (The impulses behind the experimentalism of, say, Latin American or Eastern European fiction are clearly different from those that motivated U.S. authors in the 1960s.) In the United States what occurred in the postmodern outburst of the 1960s seemed very radical in part because fiction in the United States during the previous 30 years had seemed, for the most part, conservative aesthetically. This is not to say that experimenting wasn't taking place in the United States at all during this period—some of the great innovators of the previous generation continued to explore new forms (Faulkner, Stein, Fitzgerald), and a few newcomers with an experimental bent appeared (Djuna Barnes, Kenneth Patchen, Nathaniel West, John Hawkes, Jack Kerouac); but for the most part, U.S. authors during this period were content to deal with the key issues of their day—the Depression, World

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War II, existential angst—in relatively straight-forward forms. The reasons behind this formal conservatism are certainly complex, but part of its hold on writers has to do with the way the times affected many writers, especially the sense that with such big issues to be examined authors couldn't afford the luxury of innovative strategies. At any rate, for whatever reasons in the United States from the period of 1930 until 1960 we do not find the emergence of a major innovator—someone equivalent to Beckett or Borges or Alain Robbe-Grillet or Louis Ferdinand Céline—except in the person of perhaps post-modern fiction's most important precursor, Vladimir Nabokov, who labored in obscurity in this country for 25 years until the scandal of *Lolita* made him suddenly very visible indeed (though for all the wrong reasons). As a result, by the late 1950s the United States was just as ripe for an aesthetic revolution as it was for the cultural revolution that was soon to follow. The two are, of course, intimately related.

Much of the groundwork for the so-called postmodern aesthetic revolution had already been established earlier in this century in such areas as the theoretical work being done in philosophy and science; the innovations made in painting (the rejection of mimesis and fixed point perspective, the emphasis on collage, self-exploration, abstract expressionism, and so on); in theater in the works of Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Genet, even Thornton Wilder; the increasing prominence of photography, the cinema, and eventually television, which coopted certain alternatives for writers while opening up other areas of emphasis. And if one looks carefully enough, there were many modernist literary figures who had called for a complete overhaul

of the notion of representation in fiction. It is a commonplace to note that *Tristram Shandy* is a thoroughly postmodern work in every respect but the period in which it is written, and there are dozens of other examples of authors who explored many of the same avenues of experimentalism that postmodern writers were to take: for instance, the surreal, mechanically produced constructions of Raymond Roussel; the work of Alfred Jarry, with its black humor, its obscenity, its confounding of fact, fiction, and autobiography, its general sense of play and formal outrageousness; André Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, with its self-reflexiveness and self-commentary; Franz Kafka's matter-of-fact surrealistic presentation of the self and its relationship to society (significantly, Kafka's impact on American writing was not strong until the 1950s); William Faulkner, with his multiple narrators and competing truths, and whose own voice is so insistently foregrounded throughout his fiction as to obliterate any real sense that he is transcribing anything but his own consciousness; and, looming over the entire literary landscape, is the figure of James Joyce, the Dead Father of postmodern fiction, who must be dealt with, slain, the pieces of his genius ritually eaten and digested.

The wider social and political forces that galvanized postmodern writers and provided a sense of urgency and focus to their development were similar, in some ways, to those that provided such a great impetus to artistic innovation during the 1920s. In both Cases, an international tragedy—World War I for artists in the 1920s, and Vietnam (along with a host of more diffused insanities, like the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the ongoing destruction of the environment) for postmodern American writers—created the sense that fundamental reconsiderations had to be made about the systems that govern our lives. Such systems included the political, social, and other ideological forms that had helped lead us to the position we were in, and also the artistic forms through which we could express a sense of ourselves and our relationship to the world around us. Thus, World War I was a global disaster of such unprecedented proportions, and had been produced by the very features of society that were supposed to ennoble and "civilize" us (reason, technology), that artists were forced to rethink the basic rationalistic, humanistic principles that had formed the basis of Western art since the Renaissance. One predictable response to the

view that reality had become a fragmented, chaotic "Wasteland" was to turn to art as a kind of last retreat, a last source of reason, stability, and harmony. (One thinks of the magnificently ordered private systems of Joyce, Yeats, Pound, Proust, and Hemingway.) Another tactic was to develop art that turned its back on the barbarism and entropy of reality and explored instead the more abstract, rarified realm of art itself; here was a place where poets could examine language without regard to referents, where painters could explore the implications of lines, shapes, textures, and colors freed from outer correspondences. A third possibility was the development of artistic strategies that affirmed rather than denied or ignored the disorder and irrationalism around it, that joined forces with the primitive, illogical drives that Freud claimed lay within us all—the strategy of the dadaists and surrealists in painting and poetry, and of a few fiction writers as well (Anaïs Nin, Céline, Robert Desnos, Michel Leiris). Interestingly enough, all three tendencies would be evident in postmodern fiction 40 years later: the huge, intricately structured work (Pynchon, William Gaddis, Barth, Don DeLillo, Coover, Joseph McElroy, Alexander Theroux); the work that concerns only itself, its own mechanisms, the pure relationship of symbol and word (in William H. Gass, Richard Kostelanetz, Robert Pinget, Coover, Steve Katz, Barthelme); and the fractured, delirious text whose process mirrored the entropy and fragmentation outside (William S. Burroughs, Barthelme, Raymond Federman, Kathy Acker). The difference between the two periods, then, is finally one of degree—the degree to which contemporary writers have turned to these strategies, the degree to which they have moved away from realistic norms (even in elaborately ordered works), especially in the degree to which artifice, playfulness, and self-consciousness—features not so common to the innovative fictions of the 1920s—have been consistently incorporated into the fabric of postmodern fiction.

It probably seems initially peculiar that postmodernism emerged in the 1960s rather than in the years that immediately followed World War II. It may be that the war, with its Hitlers and Mussolinis, its Hiroshimas and Normandy Beaches and Dresdens, its other unthinkable horrors (the concentration camps, collective suicides, and so on), was too dreadful or overwhelming to be directly confronted. In any case,

the great innovators of the 1940s and 1950s tended to be, at least at first glance, nonsocially conscious writers. Beckett, Borges, and Nabokov—the three authors from this period who were to have the most direct impact on postmodern writing—all appeared to turn their backs on the world outside in favor of a movement inward, toward the world of language, dream, and memory, to examine the nature of subjective experience, of the way words beguile, mislead, and shape our perception, of the way imagination builds its own realm out of symbols. I emphasize the word "appear" in these three cases because all three of these authors were, in fact, very much political writers in a very basic sense, for each was profoundly aware of the importance that language plays in shaping the world around us, the way power-structures use this world-building capacity of words, the way that reality and commonsense are disguised versions of ideologies that are foisted on individuals by institutions that profit from the popular acceptance of these illusions. From this perspective, the postmodern emphasis on subjectivity, language, and fiction-making is hardly as irrelevant, self-indulgent, and narcissistic as many unsympathetic critics have charged. Indeed, many of the most important postmodern works, for all their experimentalism, metafictional impulses, self-reflexiveness, playfulness, and game-playing, have much more to say about history, social issues, and politics than is generally realized.

Another writer very aware of the need to examine the role of language within larger contexts was George Orwell, whose *1984* remains the most famous fictional treatment of political language manipulation. *1984*, which grew out of science fiction's dystopian tradition and which was specifically influenced by Yevgeny Zamiatin's remarkable experimental novel, *We* (a "postmodern" novel published in 1920), points to another important tendency in postmodern fiction: the increasing attention being paid by serious, highly sophisticated authors to paraliterary forms such as science fiction and detective fiction—forms that proved attractive to the postmodern spirit partly because mimesis was never their guiding concern to begin with. Such genres were thus free to generate forms and conventions that were entirely different from those of traditional fiction, and that proved to be surprisingly rich and suggestive. Developments in these paraliterary forms need to be examined more

thoroughly by scholars—there are fertile areas of investigation into, for example, the use of pornographical conventions by Acker, Coover, Samuel Delany, and Clarence Major (not to mention Nabokov); or the appropriation of detective novel forms by many postmodern writers (Nabokov, Stanislaw Lem, Michel Butor, Robbe Grillet, William Hjortsberg, McElroy). But the most significant evolution of a paraliterary form has been that of science fiction. Long respected in Europe and never as clearly separated from literature there as it has been in the United States (cf. the European tradition of H.G. Wells, Zamiatin, Karel Čapek, Olaf Stapledon, Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Arthur C. Clark, J.G. Ballard), SF emerged in the United States from its self-imposed "ghetto status" into a major field of creative activity during the 1960s. Although many literary critics remain suspicious of and condescending toward SF, it is obvious today that a number of the most significant postmodern innovators have been SF writers. This is certainly the case with Philip K. Dick, a writer misunderstood both inside and outside his field. Because his publishers forced him onto a treadmill of rapid-fire production, Dick's novels are always plagued by a certain amount of sloppiness, lack of verbal grace, and two-dimensional character portrayals. Nevertheless, Dick had a brilliant fictional imagination capable of inventing plots of considerable intricacy and metaphorical suggestiveness. In his best works—*The Man in the High Castle, Martian Time-Slip, Ubik, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*—he devised highly original central plot structures that deal with many of the same issues common to postmodernism: metaphysical ambiguity, the oppressive nature of political systems, entropy, the mechanization of modern life.

Similarly, other major SF figures—including Ursula LeGuin, Delany, Gene Wolfe, John Varley, Lem, Roger Zelazny—have been creating complex, ingenious fictional forms that tell us a great deal about the fantastic world around us but that do so with structures whose conventions and language differ fundamentally from that of "mundane fiction" (as Delany refers to it). Indeed, one indication of the richness and diversity of this field can be seen in the number of "mainstream" authors who have turned to SF—Doris Lessing, Anthony Burgess, Italo Calvino, Marge Piercy, Thomas Berger, Nabokov, Raymond Federman, and dozens of others.

There were, of course, other developments occurring before 1960 that would influence the direction of postmodernism. One of the most important of these has been the rapid emergence of the cinema and television as major artistic forms. It is probably no accident that postmodern experimentalists were the first generation of writers who grew up immersed in television, or that many of these writers were as saturated with the cinema as their forefathers had been with literature. The specific influences of television and the movies on postmodern fiction are diffuse, generalized, difficult to pinpoint, but obviously an awareness of the process through which a movie is presented—its rapid cutting, its use of montage and juxtaposition, its reliance on close-ups, tracking shots, and other technical devices—is likely to create some deeply rooted effects on writers when they sit down at their collective typewriters. (The process is also symbiotic: Eisenstein's theory of montage had a profound effect on an entire generation of writers, but so did Flaubert's use of montage in the famous "country-fair" scene in *Madame Bovary* affect filmmakers.) And as important as movies and television were in suggesting to writers what could be put in to their works was the example they supplied for what could be left out profitably. Not only did writers quickly realize that television and the cinema could deal with certain narrative forms more effectively than fiction (photography had similarly made certain forms of painting instantly obsolete), but a number of cinematic shorthand devices proved useful in fiction as well. Audiences trained in the conventions of the nineteenth-century novel may have required certain connections, certain details and transitions, but cinematic directors quickly discovered that many of these could be eliminated once the audience became acquainted with a different set of conventions. (Consider a typical cinematic juxtaposition of a man walking up a street and a shot of him sitting in the interior of a house—there's no need to supply the sights he saw on his walk, a view of the house approaching, the pause while knocking on the door or inserting the key, and so on.) Similarly, the pacing of television—and of television commercials, whose significance is also substantial in this regard—is directly apparent in many postmodern works (one thinks of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Ragtime*, of Coover's and Barthelme's short fiction, of Manuel Puig and Jonathan Baumbach). The more specific influences of individual

directors cannot be discounted: Jean-Luc Godard probably had as much impact on the imaginations of writers during the 1960s as any literary figure; and in various ways, movies like *8*, *Blow Up*, *Belle de Jour*, *Repulsion*, *2001*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and a host of other innovative films, have deeply imprinted themselves in the body of postmodern fiction.

**THE POSTMODERN AWAKENING: 1960–1975**

The early 1960s saw the publication of a number of fictional works that indicated that American fiction was heading in some very different directions than it had been during the preceding 25 years. Signaling this change in aesthetic sensibility was the appearance within a relatively short period of time (1960–1965) of a number of major works that decisively broke with the traditions of conventional realism. These key works included John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960) and *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963), Donald Barthelme's *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* (1964), and Robert Coover's *The Origin of the Brunists* (1965). These works were all produced by young, obviously ambitious writers (Nabokov is an exception, in terms of age). This fiction owed its unusual effects to a wide variety of sources, such as the absurdist theater (which had been flourishing in New York's Off-Broadway scene during the late 1950s), jazz and rock and roll, pop art, and other developments in the avant-garde art scene, the growing appreciation of Kafka and other experimenters (many of whom were first being translated during this period: Céline, Robbe-Grillet, and the other French New Novelists, Jean Genet, Borges, Günter Grass), the energy and hot-wired delirium of the Beats. The result was a peculiar blend of dark humor, literary parody, surrealism, byzantine plots full of improbable coincidences and outrageous action, all presented in a dazzling variety of excessive styles that constantly called attention to themselves. Postmodern fiction had arrived.

What was to characterize the direction of postmodern fiction during the rest of the decade—the push to test new forms of expression, to examine conventions and solutions critically and seek new answers, to rethink so-called natural methods of organizing perception, expose their ideological origins, and pose new systems of organization—was hardly born in an ivory-towered, academic vacuum. The art of the 1960s, including the postmodern fiction, reflected the basic ways in which the ideologies on which the U.S. order had traditionally relied, together with the cultural values by which it rules, were in deep turmoil. Fiction reflected the sense, shared by many of our most thoughtful and articulate citizens, that we had been led (and misled) into the age of nuclear nightmare, into Vietnam, into ecological apocalypse, into political oppression, and into an insane and immoral sense of values that devalued human beings by glorifying abstractions and the inanimate—all this in the name of certain labels and covert ideologies that badly needed overhauling. A natural extension of this feeling was the desire to tear down the ruling ideologies (political, sexual, moral, social, aesthetic, all of which proved to be remarkably integrated) and reveal them for what they were: arbitrary structures imposed as a result of various complex, historical, and economic forces, instated into societies as natural and commonsensical, all of which served, in one way or another, to reinforce the status quo and insure the continued world view (and hence the continued power) of those who established these ideologies. Thus, the aggressive, radicalized poetics of postmodernism was an extension of a larger sense of dissatisfaction and frustration. "Don't trust anyone over 30" was an expression commonly heard among young people in the 1960s who were fed up with the content and structure of their lives. A similar distrust of one's "elders" was equally apparent in postmodern fiction writers.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new generation of writers had firmly established itself. During this period experimental fictions appeared by authors who were eventually characterized by critics as being postmodern in outlook: William Gass' *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country*, Jerzy Kosinski's *Steps*, Robert Coover's *Universal Baseball Association* and *Pricksongs and Descants*, John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Peter Handke's *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Steve Katz's *The Exagggerations of Peter Prince*, Donald Barthelme's *City Life*, *Snow White*, and *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts*, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America*, Tom Robbins' *Another Roadside Attraction*, Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing*, Rudolf Wurlitzer's *Nog*, Nabokov's *Ada*, and Joseph McElroy's *A*

*Smuggler's Bible*. The point is not that these authors approached the issue of fictional innovation in a fundamentally unified fashion. Rather, quite the opposite was true: writers were busy exploring a host of innovative strategies, many of them very different in intent and effect. (One can hardly imagine, for example, two works so opposed in aesthetic orientation as, say, Federman's *Double or Nothing* and Gass' "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country.") What these experimentations did share, however, was a general sense that fiction needed to acknowledge its own artificial, constructed nature, to focus the reader's attention on how the work was being articulated rather than merely on what was happening. Distrustful of all claims to truth and hypersensitive to the view that reality and objectivity were not givens but social or linguistic constructs, postmodern writers tended to lay bare the artifice of their works, to comment on the processes involved, to refuse to create the realist illusion that the work mimics operations outside itself. In the ideology of realism or representation, it was implied that words were linked to thoughts or objects in essentially direct, incontrovertible ways. On the other hand, postmodern authors—operating in an aesthetic environment that has grown out of Saussaurian linguistics, Wittgenstein's notion of meaning-as-usage, structuralism, and deconstructive views of language—tend to manipulate words as changeable entities determined by the rules of the particular sign-system (the fiction at hand). Hardly a translucent window on to an object (the world, reality) or a mind, the language in many postmodern texts becomes "thickened," played with and shown off, and frequently becomes just another element to be manipulated by a self-conscious author.

Other conventions of the realist narrative were challenged. The notion of the unified subject living in a world of stable essences (one of the cornerstones of traditional fiction) was one such notion that was frequently mocked by postmodern authors, either by so obsessively emphasizing the schizophrenic, subjective nature of experience as to obliterate the distinction between subject and reality (as in Philip Dick or Jonathan Baumbach or Federman) or by creating characters with no definable personality or who changed from scene to scene (as with Ronald Sukenick's figures who change "like a cloud," or Ron Silliman's prose experiments in which narrator and setting disappear into the process of language selection).

The commonsensical distinction between fact and fiction, author and text, also became increasingly difficult to make. "Real" authors began making increasingly common excursions into their fictional worlds (as Vonnegut did in *Breakfast of Champions* and Fowles did in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or as Sukenick and Federman and Katz did in nearly all their works); fragments of real events, real reportage, and news often became incorporated into works, collage-fashion, making it impossible to untangle what was being made up from what had really happened. (Here one thinks of Barthelme, Burroughs, Vonnegut, Harold Jaffe, Coover, and William Kennedy.) This tendency to break down the seam between the real and the invented, or to deny the relevance of this distinction altogether, was also evident in the writing of the New Journalists, like Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, and Hunter Thompson. These authors, along with other writers who blurred the fact/fiction dichotomy (Robert Pirsig in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, Peter Handke in *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, V. S. Naipaul in *In a Free State*, and so on), not only employed various conventions borrowed from fiction to heighten a sense of drama and plot development, but they also thrust their own subjective responses into the forefront of their works rather than making claims that their texts were objective. Likewise, the distinction between poetry and prose was also often dissolved, not just by fiction writers who emphasized poetic qualities in their prose (Gass, Barry Hannah, Stanley Elkin, Nabokov, Hawkes), but also by poets who began to explore longer forms of prose. (See Ron Silliman's discussion of this important phenomenon in this volume.) Even the familiar "look" of books—the conventions of typography, pagination, and other visual elements that actually govern the process of reading itself—was freely tampered with, in works of such visual ingenuity as Federman's *Double or Nothing*, Katz's *The Exagggerations of Peter Prince*, Gass' *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*, Julio Cortázar's *Ultimo Rundo*, Barthelme's *City Life*, or Butor's *Mobile*. In short, virtually all of the elements that make the reading experience what it is were being reexamined by postmodern experimenters during the 1960s. Not surprisingly, many of the experiments proved to be dead ends or were rapidly exhausted and then discarded. This seems to be the case with the New Novel

experiments and with a lot of the typographical experimentation, for example. But even these innovations were useful in that they suggested avenues that writers need no longer explore.

## POSTMODERN CRITICISM

As should be evident from the focus of the two critical articles dealing with postmodern criticism and from the critics I selected to be included in the individual author entry section, I have tried to emphasize critical thought that shares features of postmodern thought rather than focusing on criticism that deals with postmodern fiction. Indeed, it seems evident to me that many of the same principles and tendencies that were shaping the direction of postmodern fiction are central to the development of the most important critical schools of the past 25 years: structuralism, deconstruction, and Marxist-oriented criticism. (For a good overview of this interaction, see Charles Caramello's *Silverless Mirrors: Book, Self & Postmodern American Fiction*.) For example, the Marxist and structuralist emphasis on the constructedness of human meaning is similar to postmodern fiction's sense that reality is not given and that our way of perceiving it is hardly natural or self-evident. Terry Eagleton's fine summary of the chief tenets of structuralism in his survey of critical thought, *Literary Theory* helps clarify the interrelationship between structuralism and postmodern aesthetics very clearly. Structuralism, he notes, emphasizes that:

> Meaning was neither a private experience nor a divinely ordained occurrence: it was the product of certain shared systems of signification. The confident bourgeoisie belief that the isolated individual subject was the fount and origin of all meaning took a sharp knock: language predated the individual, and was much less his or her product than he or she was the product of it. Meaning was not "natural," a question of just looking and seeing, or something eternally settled; the way you interpreted your world was a function of the languages you had at your disposal, and there was evidently nothing immutable about these. Meaning was not something which all men and women everywhere intuitively shared, and then articulated in their various tongues and scripts; what meaning you were able to articulate depended on what script or speech you shared in the first place. There were the seeds here of a social and historical theory of meaning, whose implications were to run deep within contemporary thought. It was impossible any longer to see reality simply as something "out there," a fixed order of things which language merely reflected.

For structuralism, then, reality and our experience of reality need not necessarily be continuous—a view that is intimately connected with postmodern fiction's refusal to rely on fixed notions of reality, its emphasis on reproducing the human being's imaginative (subjective, fictional) responses to what is "out there" rather than trying to convince the readers that they are experiencing a transcription of reality unfiltered by a mediating process. Roland Barthes' early ventures into structuralist criticism produced a notion that also bears some striking relevance for what would develop in fiction during the 1960s. For example, Barthes' analysis of the healthy sign is directly applicable to what postmodern authors suggest about healthy fiction: in both cases the artifact is healthiest which draws attention to itself and to its own arbitrariness—one that makes no effort to pass itself off as natural or inevitable but that, in the very act of conveying a meaning, communicates something of its own relative, artificial status as well. Thus, very much like postmodern fiction writers, Barthes rightly perceives that one of the functions of ideologies and power-structures of all sorts is always to convert culture into nature—to make it appear that conventions, signs, and social realities are natural, innocent, commonsensical. The obvious literary analogy to this natural attitude can be found in realist fiction, which implies that it possesses the means (a natural language) to represent something else with little or no interference with what it mediates. Such a realist sign is for Barthes—and for the postmodern authors of the 1960s—essentially unhealthy, for it proceeds by denying its own status as a sign in order to create the illusion that we are perceiving reality without its intervention.

Deconstruction and poststructuralism, as developed by Derrida, Paul de Man, Barthes, and others, was essentially an attempt to topple the logic by which a particular system of thought (and behind that, a whole system of political structures and social institutions) maintains its force. By demonstrating that all meaning and knowledge could be exposed as resting on a naively representational theory of language, poststructuralism provided still another justification for postmodernism's emphasis on the free play of language, of the text-as-generating-meaning. The later Barthes (as in *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1973) suggested that only in writing (or in reading-as-writing) could the individual be freed momentarily from the tyranny of structural meaning, from ideology, from theory. As

Eagleton notes, one product of this emphasis on the unnaturalness of signs was admittedly the tendency by some poststructuralists (and some fiction writers) to flee from history, to take refuge in the erotic play of writing/reading, and conveniently to evade reality and all political questions completely:

> If meaning, the signified, was a passing product of words or signifiers, always shifting and unstable, part-present and part-absent, how could there be any determinate truth or meaning at all? If reality was constructed by our discourse rather than reflected by it, how could we ever know reality itself, rather than merely knowing our own discourse? Was all talk just talk about talk? Did it make sense to claim that one interpretation of reality, history or the literary text was "better" than another?

Such questions cut to the heart of the debate that was to rage during the mid- to late 1970s about the moral responsibility of fiction—a debate most famously summarized in the series of public discussions between the late John Gardner, whose study *On Moral Fiction* sparked considerable public interest in this issue, and William Gass, whose eloquent defense of fiction's irrelevancy to conditions outside the page (in *Fiction and the Figures of Life*) became a seminal aspect of postmodern aesthetics. (The Gass-Gardner "Debate" in *Anything Can Happen*) The outline of this debate centered on Gardner's claim, echoed by a number of other critics (perhaps most effectively in Gerald Graff's *Literature Against Itself*), that postmodern experimentalism, with its willful artifice and subjectivity, its metafictional impulses and emphasis on the play of language, is fundamentally trivial, vain, self-absorbed, and narcissistic. Gass, on the other hand, took essentially the familiar art-for-art's-sake position but developed his views with considerable rigor, supporting them with theories of language and aesthetics formulated by Wittgenstein and Max Black (both of whom Gass had studied under at Cornell), Paul Valéry, and Gertrude Stein. Words, said Gass, are the writer's chief concern, for the writer's final obligation is to build something (a world of language, with its own rules and systems of transformations), not to describe something. One senses in Gass a longing for a safe and human refuge in this world of language, a place controlled and purified, an escape from an ugly, petty reality in which history becomes a destructive monument to human greed, in which discourse has been degraded into instruments of commerce, politics, and bureaucracy.

Paradoxically, then, although Gass's emphasis on fiction as an interaction of signifiers had a liberating effect on the formal concerns of postmodern authors, there was also a potentially troubling elitism about his position, with its emphasis on formal complexity and beauty, and its lack of self-irony and play. This tendency is also obvious (and troubling) when one examines the important Yale School of Critics (Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, de Man, and, with some reservations, Harold Bloom). These latter critics have argued, often brilliantly, that literary language—indeed, all forms of discourse—constantly undermines its own meaning. But in their tendency to view all elements of reality, including social reality, as merely further texts to be deconstructed as being undecidable, there emerges the sense that one has found a means to demolish all opinions without having to adopt any of one's own. Perhaps the key factor that needs to be emphasized in this regard is that, as Derrida and Barthes, among others, have demonstrated, there is no fundamental opposition between a fiction that emphasizes its unnaturalness, its arbitrariness, that reveals (and revels in) its *différances*, and one that deals with history, politics, and social issues in a significant fashion. Indeed, by opening up a radical awareness of the sign systems by which men and women live, and by offering exemplars of freely created fictions that oppose publicly accepted ones, postmodern fiction contains the potential to rejoin the history which some claim it has abandoned. Thus, although most critics have been largely blind to the political thrust of postmodern experimentalism, it will surely soon be recognized that the fiction of Barthelme, Coover, Sukenick, Federman, Gaddis, Barth, Pynchon, DeLillo, Silliman, and other innovators of postmodernism is very much centered on political questions: questions about how ideologies are formed, the process whereby conventions are developed, the need for individuals to exercise their own imaginative and linguistic powers lest these powers be coopted by others.

## POST-POSTMODERNISM: THE EVOLUTION OF CONTEMPORARY CONSCIOUSNESS

If a single work may be said to have provided a model for the direction of postmodern fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, it is probably García Maárquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a work that admirably and brilliantly combines experimental impulses with a powerful

sense of political and social reality. Indeed, Már-quez's masterpiece perfectly embodies a tendency found in much of the best recent fiction—that is, it uses experimental strategies to discover new methods of reconnecting with the world outside the page, outside of language. In many ways, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is clearly a non-realistic novel, with its magical, surreal landscape, its dense reflexive surface, its metafictional emphasis on the nature of language and how reality is storified from one generation to the next, its labyrinthine literary references, and other features. Yet for all its experimentalism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* also is a highly readable, coherent story, peopled with dozens of memorable characters; and it also urgently speaks to us about political, historical, and psychological realities that are central to our experience. It thus becomes an emblem of what postmodernism can be, being self-conscious about its literary heritage and about the limits of mimesis, developing its own organic form of experimentalism, yet managing to reconnect its readers with the world around them. When one examines some of the major works that have appeared since 1975—Barth's *Letters*, for example, or Gaddis' *JR*, or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, or William Kennedy's *Ironweed*—one can see a similar synthesis at work.

This synthesis between experimentalism and more traditional literary concerns is explainable on many levels. Partly it has to do with the predictable, dialectical process that seems to govern most revolutions (aesthetical and otherwise), with the radicalism of one era being soon questioned, reexamined, and then counterattacked by more conservative attitudes. If the public spirit of rebellion, distrust, and unrest was reflected in the disruptive fictional forms of the 1960s, so, too, has the reactionary, conservative political and social atmosphere of the late 1970s and early 1980s inevitably been manifested in the literature of this period. This is not to say that experimentalism has dried up completely, but certainly it is obvious that authors today are less interested in innovation per se than they were ten or fifteen years ago—especially innovation in the direction of reflexive, nonreferential works. And, of course, the source of this shift in sensibility lies beyond the political climate alone. For one thing, the experimental fervor that seemed to sustain postmodernism for several years has been subjected to repeated counterattacks by authors and critics (one thinks of Gardner, Carver, Gore Vidal, and

Graff). More significantly, we find authors simply exploring new grounds, different methods of innovation, redefining notions like realism and artifice in much the same way that, for example, photorealists did in painting. This is a familiar scenario: so-called artistic revolutions have a natural life span, and they are inevitably succeeded by a new artistic situation, with its own demands and needs, its own practitioners who do not share the enthusiasms of the previous group and who are anxious to define themselves as individuals in their own way. Thus, when we examine a number of the highly regarded writers who have emerged since 1975—authors like Ron Hansen, Ian McEwan, Frederick Barthelme, William Kennedy, Toni Morrison, Jayne Anne Phillips, Stephen Dixon, Raymond Carver, or Ann Beattie—we discover a very different aesthetic sensibility in their work than that which characterized earlier postmodern writers, a sensibility that seems interested in what I would term experimental realism. (Note that Professor Jerome Klinkowitz presents a different notion of this term in his article in this volume.) By experimental realism I mean fiction that is fundamentally realistic in its impulses but that develops innovative strategies in structure (the nonendings of Beattie, Carver, Barthelme, the absence of character and plot in Silliman), language (the poetic prose of Phillips or Maxine Hong Kingston or Marilynne Robinson, the collage-assemblage of Silliman), the use of unusual materials (as with the use of "found" materials in Beattie, the manipulations of legend and history in Hansen, Kennedy, Leslie Silko, and Kingston), and so on. Of course, some of the sense of the decline of experimentalism results from our greater familiarity with the innovative strategies that once seemed so peculiar and difficult. Because later fiction which uses these experimental strategies seems more familiar and hence less threatening, its subsequent appearance is less likely to be remarked on—it is, in fact, no longer considered to be experimental at all. To take an obvious example, it might not occur to most readers or critics to discuss John Irving's *The World According to Garp* as an experimental novel, although it obviously employs many of the same metafictional techniques—the book-within-a-book, the interweaving of fiction and reality, playful self-references to its author's previous works—that other, more radical texts were using back in the 1960s. This isn't to say that Irving's book isn't experimental or metafiction—it clearly is; it just may seem beside the point to label it as such.

Much the same point can be made about many of the best works of fiction that have appeared in the United States from 1975 to 1984. Books like Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*, Alexander Theroux's *Darconville's Cat*, John Barth's *Sabbatical*, Ann Beattie's *Falling in Place*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Jailbird*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, William Kennedy's Albany trilogy, and John Calvin Batchelor's *The Further Adventures of Halley's Comet* (to give just a sampling) incorporated postmodern experimental strategies into their structures so smoothly that they have often been seen as being quite traditional in orientation. Naturally, more radical experimental works continue to be written, but with a few notable exceptions—most of the books published by the Fiction Collective, the remarkable prose experiments of Ron Silliman, Lyn Hejinian, Barrett Watten, and Charles Bernstein, Joseph McElroy's *Plus*, Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew*, Kathy Acker's "punk novels," Walter Abish's works—most of the important, vital fiction of the last decade were neither exclusively experimental in an obvious, flamboyant manner, nor representational in a traditional, realist sense. Again, this situation recapitulates what we see in the other arts, in which the advances and new directions adopted by artists of one period (say, the break with representation and fixed perspective in painting) are gradually assimilated by artists of succeeding generations until a new period of stagnation arises which subsequently produces a new revolution. Thus, like the operations that are endlessly forming and transforming the nature of reality itself (and the nature of our lives within this flux), the transformations of art will surely continue, heedless of the desires of critics for clear patterns, unassailable definitions, and useful labels.

**Source:** Larry McCaffery, "Introduction," in *Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide*, edited by Larry McCaffery, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. xiv–xxviii.

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This short text explains in simple terms some of the major aspects of Postmodernism. It is easily accessible to the interested student of postmodern thought.

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# Realism

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1860

The realist movement in literature first developed in France in the mid-nineteenth century, soon spreading to England, Russia, and the United States. Realist literature is best represented by the novel, including many works widely regarded to be among the greatest novels ever written. Realist writers sought to narrate their novels from an objective, unbiased perspective that simply and clearly represented the factual elements of the story. They became masters at psychological characterization, detailed descriptions of everyday life, and dialogue that captures the idioms of natural speech. The realists endeavored to accurately represent contemporary culture and people from all walks of life. Thus, realist writers often addressed themes of socioeconomic conflict by contrasting the living conditions of the poor with those of the upper classes in urban as well as rural societies.

In France, the major realist writers included Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant, among others. In Russia, the major realist writers were Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy. In England, the foremost realist authors were Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope. In the United States, William Dean Howells was the foremost realist writer. Naturalism, an offshoot of Realism, was a literary movement that placed even greater emphasis on the accurate representation of details from contemporary life. In the United States, regionalism and local color fiction

in particular were American offshoots of Realism. Realism also exerted a profound influence on drama and theatrical productions, altering practices of set design, costuming, acting style, and dialogue.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### *Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850)*
Honoré de Balzac is recognized as the originator of French Realism in literature and one of the greatest novelists of the nineteenth century. Balzac was born Honoré Balssa on May 20, 1799, in Tours, France. He spent much of his adult life in Paris, where he frequented many of the notable literary salons of the day and began to use the last name de Balzac. Balzac supported himself through writing, typically spending fourteen to sixteen hours a day on his craft. He was a man of great charisma and lived to the excesses of life, abusing coffee and rich food in order to work longer hours. His life's work comprises a series of some ninety novels and novellas collectively entitled *La Comédie humaine* (*The Human Comedy*). Balzac died following a long illness on August 18, 1850, leaving his wife of five months with mountains of debt.

### *Charles Dickens (1812–1870)*
Charles Dickens is known as an early master of the English realist novel and one of the most celebrated and most enduring novelists of all time. Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England, on February 7, 1812. He lived and worked in London as a law clerk, court reporter, and newspaper journalist. Following the publication of his first novel, *Pickwick Papers* (1836), Dickens soon became the most popular author in England.

Dickens's major novels include *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Riots of 'Eighty* (1841), *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation* (1848), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times: For These Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1861), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). His Christmas story *A Christmas Carol* (1843) remains an ever-enduring classic. Dickens died of a paralytic stroke in Kent, England, on June 9, 1870.
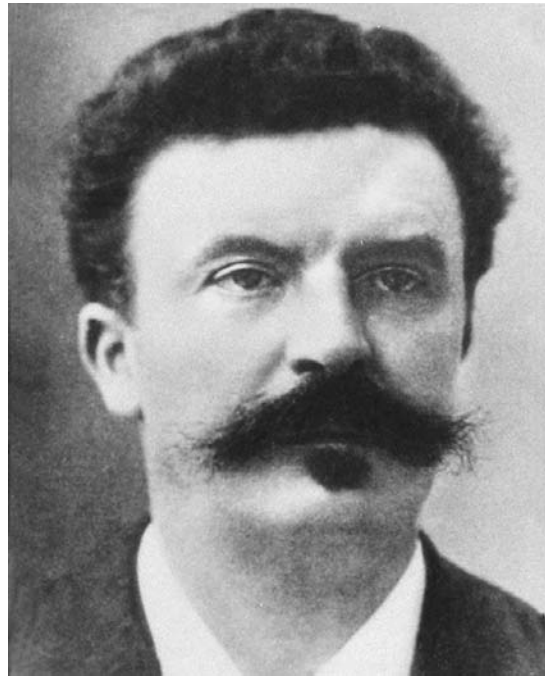


*Guy de Maupassant* (*Public Domain*)

### *Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881)*
Fyodor Dostoevsky (also spelled Dostoyevsky) is known as a major author of Russian realist fiction and one of the greatest novelists of all time. Dostoevsky was born October 30, 1821, in Moscow, Russia. He received a degree in military engineering in 1843 but resigned his post in order to pursue a career in writing. His first published work was a translation from French into Russian of Balzac's novel *Eugénie Grandet*. Dostoevsky's original novella *Bednyye lyudi* (*Poor Folk*), published in 1846, immediately gained the admiration of the leading Russian writers and critics of the day.

In 1849 Dostoevsky was arrested for his association with a group of socialist intellectuals. After eight months in prison, he was given a death sentence and, along with several other prisoners, led out to be shot by a firing squad. However, at the last moment the sentence was reversed, and the prisoners were allowed to live; this mock-execution had been designed as a form of psychological torture. Dostoevsky was then sentenced to four years in a Siberian prison followed by six years in the army. After serving this ten-year sentence, he went on to a successful career as a novelist and journalist.

Dostoevsky's fiction had a profound influence on the literature, philosophy, psychology, and religious thought of the twentieth century. His novels are celebrated as masterworks of psychological Realism in their portrayal of individuals haunted by their own dark impulses. Dostoevsky's greatest works include the novels *Prestupleniye I nakazaniye* (1866), translated as *Crime and Punishment*; *Idiot* (1868); *Besy* (1872), translated as *The Possessed*; *Dnevnik pisatelya* (1873–1877), translated as *The Diary of a Writer*; and *Brat'ya Karamazovy* (1880), translated as *The Brothers Karamazov*, as well as the novella *Zapiski iz podpolya* (1864), translated as *Notes from the Underground*. Dostoevsky died in St. Petersburg, Russia, on January 28, 1881, of complications from emphysema.

### George Eliot (1819–1880)

George Eliot is the pen name of Mary Ann (or Marian) Evans, one of the most outstanding novelists of English Realism. Eliot was born in Warwickshire, England, on November 22, 1819. After the death of her mother, Eliot took on the role of her father's caretaker. After her father died, she moved to London to support herself as a freelance writer and then as editor of the *Westminster Review*. In the role as editor she became acquainted with a circle of free thinkers, including some of the major philosophical and literary minds of the day, such as Herbert Spencer. Eliot's major works include *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1871–1872), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Eliot died suddenly of heart failure in London, England, on December 22, 1880.

### Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880)

Gustave Flaubert is known as the consummate writer of French Realism. Flaubert was born on December 12, 1821, in Rouen, France. He spent most of his adult life at his family estate in Croisset, where he devoted his life to writing. Flaubert became acquainted with many of the important writers of the day, including George Sand, Émile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, Guy de Maupassant, and Ivan Turgenev. His major works include the novels *Madame Bovary* (1857), *Salammbo* (1863), and *L'Education sentimentale* (1869; *Sentimental Education: A Young Man's History*), as well as the volume *Trois Contes* (1877), a compilation of three short stories. Flaubert died from a stroke in Croisset on May 8, 1880.

### William Dean Howells (1837–1920)

William Dean Howells is considered the foremost American realist writer of the nineteenth century. Howells was born March 1, 1837, in Martin's Ferry, Ohio. In 1860 he wrote a biography of then-presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln. After Lincoln was elected, Howells was given a consulship in Venice, Italy, which he held from 1861 to 1865. Upon returning to the United States, he worked as assistant editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine from 1866 until 1871, then as chief editor until 1881.

Howells earned distinction as a highly influential literary critic, championing the realist writing of American authors Henry James, Mark Twain, and Stephen Crane as well as European authors Ivan Turgenev, Henrik Ibsen, Leo Tolstoy, and Émile Zola. Howells's major works include *A Modern Instance* (1882), *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), *Annie Kilburn* (1888), and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). Howells died in New York City, New York, on May 11, 1920.

### Henry James (1843–1916)

Henry James was born April 15, 1843, to an upper-class family in New York City. He had an affinity for literature and languages and traveled around Europe as a young man. He considered a career in law but decided upon writing instead. He was soon contributing to periodicals such as the *Nation,* the *Atlantic Monthly,* and the *New York Tribune*. He lived abroad from 1880 to 1905 and was a declared bachelor. In fact, James never married and his letters have revealed that he was discretely homosexual. He was good friends throughout his life with Edith Wharton, also a novelist and a socialite from New York City. James became a British citizen in 1915 in protest of the U.S. refusal to become involved in World War I. He died less than a year later, on February 28, 1916, in London, England, from complications from a stroke that occurred in December. "The Turn of the Screw," a famous ghost story by James, is about a governess working at an estate in rural England who tries to exorcise the ghosts from the lives of her two young wards. James's most prominent works include *Daisy Miller* (1878), *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *Wings of the Dove* (1902), and *The Ambassadors* (1903). His work is characterized by depictions of conflict between American and European values.

### Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893)

Guy de Maupassant is known as a major practitioner of Naturalism and Realism and an exceptionally fine short story writer. Maupassant was born August 5, 1850, near Dieppe, France. When the Franco-German war broke out in 1870, he left law school to serve in the military effort. When the war ended in 1871, Maupassant continued his law studies and began a career in the French bureaucracy. Maupassant developed an important literary apprenticeship under Gustave Flaubert, who also served as a father figure. Flaubert introduced the young writer to major literary figures of the day, including Émile Zola, Ivan Turgenev, Edmond de Goncourt, and Henry James.

With the publication of his story "Ball of Fat" (1880), Maupassant gained immediate literary success and was able to quit his job in order to write full time. He went on to publish some three hundred short stories and six novels as well as several nonfiction books and a volume of poetry. Maupassant's major volumes of short stories include *La maison Tellier* (1881), translated as *The Tellier House*; *Mademoiselle Fifi* (1883); *Contes de la bécasse* (1883), translated as *Tales of the Goose*; *Clair de lune* (1884); *Les soeurs Rondoli* (1884), translated as *The Rondoli Sisters*; *Yvette* (1884); *Toine* (1886); *Le Horla* (1887); *Le rosier de Madame Husson* (1888), translated as *The Rose-Bush of Madame Husson*; and *L'Inutile beauté* (1890), translated as *The Useless Beauty*. His most important novels include *Une vie* (1883), translated as *A Woman's Life*; *Bel-Ami* (1885), translated as *Good Friend*; and *Pierre et Jean* (1888), translated as *Pierre and Jean*.

As a result of contracting syphilis, Maupassant suffered increasing mental and psychological instability. He died in a nursing home on July 6, 1893, at the age of forty-two.

### Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910)

Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy (also spelled Tolstoi) is known as a major Russian realist writer and one of the most eminent novelists of all time. Tolstoy was born in the Tula Province of the Russian Empire on September 9, 1828. His mother died before he was two years old. By the time Tolstoy was nine, his father had also died. Tolstoy's first publication, *Detstvo* (1852; *Childhood*), is a nostalgic work of fiction based on the early years of his life.

In the early 1850s, Tolstoy joined the military and fought in the Crimean War (1853–1856). In the late 1870s, he experienced a religious conversion and developed ideas of Christian faith that were at odds with the Russian Orthodox church, from which he was excommunicated in 1901. His religious ideas included a devotion to nonviolence that later influenced Mahatma Gandhi, the great twentieth-century Indian nationalist and proponent of nonviolent resistance.

Tolstoy's greatest novels are *Voini i mir* (1869; *War and Peace*) and *Anna Karenina* (1877). His *Smert Ivana Ilicha* (1886; *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*) is considered one of the greatest examples of the novella, or short novel form. He died of pneumonia in the province of Ryazan on November 20, 1910.

### Émile Zola (1840–1902)

Émile Zola, one of the greatest novelists of all time, was the founder of Naturalism in literature, which was a further development of Realism. Zola was born in Paris, France, on April 2, 1840, and grew up in Aix-en-Provence in southern France. Zola's father died when Zola was still in grade school. After his first novel was published in 1865, Zola quit his job as a clerk at a publishing company in order to support himself as a writer. Inspired by Balzac's *The Human Comedy*, Zola set out to write what became a twenty-novel series entitled *Les Rougon-Macquart* (*The Rougon-Macquarts*).

Zola became associated with the painters Paul Cézanne (a boyhood friend) and Edouard Manet as well as the French Impressionist painters Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Pierre-August Renoir. He also became acquainted with major literary figures of the day including Gustave Flaubert, Edmond Goncourt, Alphonse Daudet, and Ivan Turgenev. In 1880 Zola oversaw the publication of a collection of short stories by six naturalist authors titled *Les Soirées de Médan* (*Evenings at Médan*), after the location of his home at Médan, outside of Paris, where his circle of naturalists met.

In 1888 Zola became famous for his literary intervention in the Dreyfus affair, a highly controversial political event that dominated French political debates for twelve years. In an article titled "J'Accuse" ("I Accuse"), Zola defended the rights of a Jewish military officer, Alfred Dreyfus, who had been falsely accused of espionage. Zola has since been celebrated as a champion

against anti-Semitism and an important influence on French public opinion. Zola died of accidental asphyxiation in Paris, France, on September 29, 1902.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Anna Karenina

*Anna Karenina* (1873–1877), by the Russian realist writer Leo Tolstoy, is considered one of the greatest novels of all time. The story concerns the intrigues of three Russian families: the Oblonskys, the Karenins, and the Levins. In the Oblonsky family, the husband, Stiva, is unfaithful to his wife, Dolly. The Oblonskys are the subject of Tolstoy's famous opening line in *Anna Karenina*: "All happy families resemble each other; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

The Karenin family is disrupted when Anna Karenina (the feminine version of the last name Karenin) leaves her husband and child because of an affair she is having with Aleksey Vronsky, a young military officer. The third element of *Anna Karenina* concerns the young Konstantin Levin and his courtship of Dolly's sister Kitty. The character of Konstantin embodies one of Tolstoy's major philosophical values: that the best life is lived through the daily events of honest work, a stable family, and a domestic situation, and that intellectualizing about life is useless.

### *"Ball of Fat"*

"Ball of Fat," originally "Boule de suif," is considered the masterpiece of Guy de Maupassant. "Ball of Fat" was first published in 1880 in *Les Soirees de Médan* (*Evenings at Médan*), a volume of stories by six different authors writing on the subject of the Franco-German War of 1870–1871. In "Ball of Fat," a prostitute is traveling by coach with several other passengers, all of them French, to flee German occupation of the city of Rouen. At first the other passengers are friendly with the prostitute because she has food, which they want her to share with them. When they stop for the night at a hotel, a German military officer threatens to not let them continue their journey unless the prostitute satisfies his lust. Not wanting to consort with the enemy, the prostitute at first refuses to consent to his wishes. However, in order to ensure their own safe passage, the other passengers manipulate her into giving in to the German officer. Afterwards, the other passengers

ostracize the prostitute for succumbing to the officer. "Ball of Fat" is a notable example of Maupassant's mastery at economical composition in the short story form.

### Crime and Punishment

*Prestupleniye i nakazaniye* (1866; *Crime and Punishment*), by the Russian realist writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, is considered one of the greatest novels of all time. In *Crime and Punishment* a young intellectual, Raskolnikov, uses philosophical reasoning to justify his plan of murdering an old woman for her money. After the murder, however, Raskolnikov is filled with a sort of spiritual dread. Meanwhile, a detective who believes Raskolnikov to be the murderer manipulates him into confessing his crime. When Raskolnikov is convicted and sent to prison in Siberia, the woman who loves him, Sonya Marmeladova, follows him to live near the prison. Influenced by Sonya, Raskolnikov experiences a religious conversion while in prison. Dostoevsky is celebrated for his detailed psychological study of the character Raskolnikov, tracing the complex and minute factors which motivate his crime.

### Daisy Miller

Henry James's early novella *Daisy Miller* (1878) tells the story of a young, beautiful American woman abroad in Europe. In Switzerland, she is introduced by her brother to a man named Winterbourne. She is friendly and flirtatious, which confuses Winterbourne and displeases other Europeans in their social circle. Despite himself, Winterbourne pursues Daisy. After Switzerland, they reunite in Rome. Daisy's shocking behavior continues, and Winterbourne attempts to rein her in since it is clear that her family will not intercede. He finds her at the Colosseum one evening and tells her that they cannot be together because it is now clear to him that she is not his equal in status. He also warns her to not be out at night or she will catch a fever. Daisy indeed becomes ill and dies within days. Winterbourne regrets his decision to break with her. *Daisy Miller* was an immediate success and continues to be popular among James's works. James revised and republished the novella in 1909; however, many still prefer the original.

### David Copperfield

*David Copperfield* (1849–1850) is one of the most popular and enduring of the novels of Charles Dickens, and it was the author's personal

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- Many realist novels of Charles Dickens have been adapted to film in a variety of productions dating as far back as the 1930s. *David Copperfield* was adapted to film in 1935 (with George Cukor directing) and in 1970 (with Delbert Mann directing).

- Many of Dickens's novels have been recorded on audiocassette. *David Copperfield* was recorded by Media Books Audio Publishing in 1999 with Ben Kingsley reading. In 2002, a twenty-six cassette edition was released by Audio Partners Publishing Corporation with Martin Jarvis as the reader.

- The major works of Dostoevsky have been adapted to film in several different productions and recorded on audiocassette. *Crime and Punishment* was adapted twice to film in 1935 (one of these a French production) and in 1970 in a Russian production.

- An audiocassette recording of *Crime and Punishment* was read by Michael Sheen for Naxos of America in 1994.

- Many of Eliot's novels have been adapted to film and recorded on audiocassette. *Middlemarch* was adapted to film as a made-for-television movie, directed by Anthony Page, in 1994.

- *Middlemarch*, read by Nadia May, was recorded on audiocassette by Blackstone Audio Books in 1994.

- Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* has been adapted to film many times. The first English version appeared in 1949 and was directed by Vincente Minnelli. Tim Fywell directed a made-for-television version in 2000.

- *Madame Bovary* was recorded by New Millennium Audio, read by Glenda Jackson, in 2002.

- Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* was adapted to film in 1935, starring Greta Garbo; in 1947, starring Vivien Leigh; in 1974, as a ballet; and in 1985, starring Christopher Reeve.

- *Anna Karenina* was recorded on audiocassette by Bantam Books for the "BBC Radio Presents" series in 1999.

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favorite. *David Copperfield* is a semi-autobiographical work. *David Copperfield* is most noted for the early chapters describing childhood experiences. Among these is a description of Dickens's experience of being taken out of school as a child to work in a factory in London while his father was imprisoned for unpaid debts. In *David Copperfield*, Dickens addresses the social injustices of urban poverty and industrial labor.

## Germinal

The novel *Germinal* (1885) is considered the masterpiece of Émile Zola, a French realist writer and the originator of the school of Naturalism in literature. *Germinal* is set in a mining town and portrays the socioeconomic tensions between the working-class miners and the upper-class mine owners. The novel depicts the effects of a

workers' strike on the mining community and addresses major political theories of the day, such as Marxism, socialism, and trade unionism. Zola uses the metaphor of a monster to describe the coal mine, which devours the workers who enter it. In *Germinal*, Zola accurately represents the conditions of the two separate social spheres as well as tackling important political debates regarding inequalities in socioeconomic class.

## A Hazard of New Fortunes

*A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), by the foremost American realist, William Dean Howells, is regarded as one of the author's most important novels. *A Hazard of New Fortunes* takes place in New York City and concerns a group of people trying to start a magazine. Howells was inspired by his reading of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to write a long novel, wide in scope and containing

*A scene from a film adaptation of* David Copperfield *by Charles Dickens* ( *The Kobal Collection | The Picture Desk, Inc.* )

many characters. The result includes fifteen major characters and is notable for Howells's depiction of many sectors of society in New York City during the 1890s as well as his rendering of the flow of life in a city teeming with people. Howells expressed strong socialist views in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, and many of the characters represent differing points on the spectrum of American political opinion.

## The Human Comedy

*The Human Comedy*, originally *La Comédie humaine* (1842–1855), is the collective title for a grouping of some ninety novels and novellas by Honoré de Balzac. In his fiction, Balzac portrays all levels of French society with impressive accuracy. He is noted for the vast number of different characters created in his fiction, numbering some three thousand throughout *The Human Comedy*. Balzac introduced the literary device of including many of the same characters in several different novels. In managing this diverse range of characters, Balzac was a master of characterization, portraying in minute detail the psychological and sociological minutiae that make up each individual's personality and determine his or her actions. *The Human Comedy* addresses themes of socioeconomic class, ambition, and obsession.

## Madame Bovary

*Madame Bovary* (1857), by Gustave Flaubert, is considered a masterpiece of French realist fiction. *Madame Bovary* is the story of a middle-class woman whose rampant consumerism, debt, and extramarital affairs lead to tragedy and her suicide. *Madame Bovary* was first published in installments in a magazine in 1856. In 1857 Flaubert was taken to court by the French government which charged that the novel was obscene. However, his lawyer convincingly defended his case and *Madame Bovary* was published in book form soon afterward. The novel is noted for Flaubert's narrative objectivity and the psychological detail by which he accounts for the course of events initiated by his characters.

## Middlemarch

*Middlemarch* (1871–1872), by George Eliot, is a masterpiece of English realism. *Middlemarch* is set in a small fictional town in rural England and is noted for the detail with which Eliot depicted characters from all walks of life. While *Middlemarch* includes many major characters, the central figure of the story is Dorothea Brooke, a young woman who marries an older clergyman and religious scholar because she hopes to do something meaningful with her life. Eliot

explores the idea that an individual may aspire to accomplishing something significant only to be defeated by the press of social convention or some flaw of character. Such individuals may leave small marks on history but in the larger social record they remain unknown. *Middlemarch* is considered a high point in the development of the novel, elevating the form with its intellectual and metaphoric complexity.

## THEMES

### Class Conflict

One of the major themes addressed by realist writers is socioeconomic class conflict. Many realist writers, in their efforts to depict characters from all levels of society, highlighted differences between the rich and the poor.

In *David Copperfield*, by Dickens, the protagonist experiences the suffering of impoverished children forced to work in urban factories. In *Germinal*, Zola focuses on the conflict between working-class miners and wealthy mine owners, which erupts in a labor strike. In the process, Zola considers various political theories about the conditions of the working class. In *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, Howell portrays characters from various places on the spectrum of American political thought who come into conflict over their efforts to start a magazine. At the end of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, a young man is killed during the violence that erupts in a workers' strike. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy portrays conflicts between the Russian landowners and the serfs who work their land. Many realist authors thus addressed social, economic, and political concerns through their depictions of socioeconomic class conflict.

### The City

Many realist novelists sought to depict various aspects of life in the rapidly industrializing nineteenth-century city. Balzac, in the novels of *The Human Comedy*, is often noted for his extensive and accurate portrayal of society, culture, and commerce in Paris during the mid-nineteenth century. Howells, in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, has been praised for his detailed depiction of the diverse flow of human life in New York City. Dickens set much of his fiction in London, describing specific streets, buildings, and neighborhoods in his novels. Russian realist

## TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- The Parnassian poets were a major offshoot of the realist movement in literature. Research one of the following poets of the Parnassian movement: Leconte de Lisle, Albert Glatigny, Theodore de Banville, François Coppée, Leon Dierx, or Jose Maria de Heredia and provide a brief biography of this poet as well as an overview of his literary career and major works. Discuss how the poet employs the elements of Realism in the poem.

- The realist movement in literature was first inspired by the paintings of the French artist Gustave Courbet, particularly his paintings "The Stone-Breakers" and "Burial at Ornans." Learn more about the life and work of Courbet. Write an essay providing a biography of Courbet and overview of his artistic career. Then describe one of his paintings and explain the elements of Realism in the painting.

- Realism in literature developed simultaneously with major developments in still photography during the second half of the nineteenth century. Research the history of photography between 1830 and 1900. What major technical discoveries and inventions characterized photography during this period? What types of photographs were being taken during this period? Find reproductions of early photographs from this period and discuss the style of photography in comparison to photography in your own time and culture.

- The nineteenth century was a time of significant industrial and political development. Choose an English novel of provincial life and analyze it as a portrait of how country people viewed the advent of the railroads or the redistricting of voting districts.

writers Tolstoy and Dostoevsky described various elements of society in Moscow and St. Petersburg in their novels. Realist fiction thus

often has a documentary quality to the extent that these writers have accurately reported the details of a specific historical era in the development of the modern city.

### Philosophy and Morality

Realist novelists often address the related themes of religion, philosophy, and morality in their works of fiction. While realist novels are known for their accurate descriptions of various physical details, many of them are also highly theoretical in their presentation of various religious and philosophical debates. The Russian realist Tolstoy, for example, included characters in his novels that grapple with complex questions regarding Christian faith and the meaning of life. The Russian realist Dostoevsky also created fictional characters who carry on extended philosophical discussions and debates about Christian morality. In such novels as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky was particularly concerned with the moral, ethical, and religious issues raised by characters who commit crimes such as murder. In a famous scene of *The Brothers Karamazov*, one character carries on an imaginary debate with the Devil, who visits him in the form of an aging gentleman. In *Crime and Punishment* a young man who has committed a murder that he justified by his philosophical reasoning later finds redemption through Christian faith.

### Marriage and the Family

Realist novelists often focused on the dynamics of marriage and family life in different sectors of society. Extramarital affairs are the subject of such major works of realist fiction as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, both novels about married middle-class women whose affairs lead to social catastrophe and suicide.

Realist fiction often focuses on several sets of families or couples within a single novel. *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* focus on three families. Eliot's *Middlemarch* also focuses on the family and marital dynamics within several different households. Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* focuses on four brothers (including one illegitimate half-brother) and their father, whom one of them has murdered. Dickens often wrote about orphans who were without family but who eventually find people who function as surrogate families. In their portrayals of marriages and families, realists explored various social and psychological

factors contributing to the quality of domestic life in the nineteenth century.

## STYLE

### Narrative Voice

The term narrative voice refers to the way in which a story is told. Many realist writers sought to narrate their fictional stories in an omniscient, objective voice, from the perspective of a storyteller who is not a character in the story but rather an invisible presence who remains outside the realm of the story. Realist writers hoped thereby to create accurate portrayals of objective reality. The French realists in particular—Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, and Maupassant—sought to describe the subject matter of their fiction in clear, detailed, accurate terms, devoid of judgment or moralizing on the part of the narrator.

### Setting

Setting is an important element of Realism in literature. Realist writers sought to document every aspect of their own contemporary cultures through accurate representations of specific settings. Realist novels were thus set in both the city and the country, the authors taking care to accurately portray the working and living conditions of characters from every echelon of society. Thus, realist novelists documented settings from all walks of life in major cities such as London, Paris, New York, Boston, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. The living and working conditions of peasants and serfs in rural settings throughout England, Russia, and France were also depicted in great detail by major realist authors.

Realist writers also set their fictional stories in the midst of specific historical events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* is set during the French Revolution. The volume *Evenings at Médan* contains six short stories by six different authors, all set during the Franco-German war of 1870–1871. Eliot's *Middlemarch* is set in a fictional town in the context of major political debates over social reform which took place in England during the first half of the nineteenth century. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is set in the historical context of the Napoleonic wars between Russia and France during the early 1800s.

## Characterization

Many realist writers have been celebrated for their masterful creation of a wide range of characters from all walks of life. Balzac, in his novel series *The Human Comedy*, created an encyclopedic range of characters representing every aspect of contemporary French society. In some ninety novels making up *The Human Comedy*, Balzac created over three thousand different characters. Balzac was also innovative in his use of the same characters in different novels, so that a character who is the protagonist of one novel may show up as a minor character in another novel.

Zola, inspired by Balzac's *The Human Comedy*, represented many aspects of French society through his twenty-volume series *The Rougon-Macquarts*, which centers on one family over several generations. Howells, inspired by the French and Russian realists, included in his novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* fifteen main characters, each representing a different place on the spectrum of American political thought. Dickens is also known for his many unforgettable characters, such as the miserable miser in *A Christmas Carol*, who have become enduring figures in Western culture.

Realist novelists are also celebrated for the impressive psychological detail by which their fictional characters are portrayed. Dostoevsky and Flaubert, in particular, are known for their mastery at delving into every nuance of a character's psychology in order to explain the complex array of factors which contribute to the motivation of that character. In their efforts to represent characters from all walks of life, realist novelists were masterful in their use of dialogue, capturing regional dialects as well as differences in the speech patterns of people from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Naturalism

Naturalism was an important offshoot of Realism, although many critics agree that the differences between the two movements are so minimal that Naturalism is actually a subcategory of Realism. In fact, the two terms are often used interchangeably. Naturalism extended and intensified the tenets of Realism in that the naturalist writers sought to apply the evolutionary principles of Charles Darwin to their fiction. They believed that the course of each individual's life is determined by a combination of his or her hereditary traits and the historical and sociological environment into which she or he was born. Each character is thus essentially a victim of circumstance and has little power to change the course of his or her life.

The naturalist writers, led by the French novelist Zola, extended the values of Realism to even greater extremes of objectivity in their detailed observations and descriptions of all echelons of contemporary life. Zola's 1880 article "The Experimental Novel," the manifesto of literary Naturalism, describes the role of the author as that of a scientist examining a specimen under a microscope. In 1880 Zola edited the volume *Evenings at Médan*, a collection of stories by six authors in his circle of naturalists who met regularly at his home in Médan. Followers of Zola's school of Naturalism include Maupassant and Joris-Karl Huysmans in France as well as the German playwright Gerhart Hauptmann and the Portuguese novelist Jose Maria Eca de Queros.

The influence of Naturalism was not seen in American literature until the later writers Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser. Naturalism also found its proponents and practitioners in theater and painting.

### The Parnassian Poets

The Parnassian poets who emerged in France during the 1860s were another offshoot of the realist movement in literature. The term Parnassian comes from the title of an anthology of poetry to which major poets of this movement contributed; the anthology *Le Parnasse Contemporain* was published in three separate volumes between 1866 and 1876.

The Parnassian poets developed their ideals as a reaction against the emotional outpouring of Romantic poetry. In their poetry, the Parnassians strove for emotional restraint and precise, objective descriptions of their subject matter. The leader of the Parnassian poets was Leconte de Lisle. Other major poets of the Parnassian movement include Albert Glatigny, Theodore de Banville, Francois Coppée, Leon Dierx, and Jose Maria de Heredia. The Parnassians exerted a significant influence on the poetry of Spain, Portugal, and Belgium.

### American Regionalism and Local Color Fiction

In the United States, during the post-Civil War era, important subcategories of Realism were

Regionalism (also called Midwestern Regionalism) and local color fiction. The regionalist authors were mostly from the Midwestern United States and wrote stories focused on the hardships of rural Midwesterners as well as the inhabitants of the Midwestern city of Chicago. Important regionalist authors are Hamlin Garland, Theodore Dreiser, and Sherwood Anderson. Local color fiction, which is similar to Regionalism, focuses on the local customs, traditions, dialects, and folklore of small town and rural America. Important local color writers include Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Kate Chopin.

## Realism in Painting

The most important artist associated with Realism was the French painter Gustave Courbet (1819–1877). Courbet's works of art were the primary inspiration for the development of Realism in literature. Courbet brought new subject matter to painting when he depicted the realities of workers and peasants in stark, realistic images. Courbet asserted that art should accurately represent reality and the common man, rather than idealized images. His most famous paintings include "The Stone-Breakers" (1849), which depicts two men performing manual labor in a rural setting, and "Burial at Ornans" (1849), which depicts the funeral of a peasant and includes over forty individual figures. Because of his daring break with artistic convention, Courbet fought for recognition by the art world. In 1855, rejected by a major exhibition in France, Courbet put on his own exhibition of paintings that he labeled "realist." Courbet's Realism had a profound influence on many writers as well as artists throughout Europe. Realism exerted a major influence on nineteenth-century painting in the United States, where it was most notably practiced by Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins. Realism continued to exert a profound influence on various schools of painting of the early-twentieth century.

## Socialist Realism

The socialist realism school of literary theory was proposed by Maxim Gorky and established as a dogma by the first Soviet Congress of Writers. It demanded adherence to a communist worldview in works of literature. Its doctrines required an objective viewpoint comprehensible to the working classes and themes of social struggle featuring strong proletarian heroes. A

successful work of socialist realism is Nikolay Ostrovsky's *Kak zakalyalas stal* (*How the Steel Was Tempered*). Socialist realism is also known as social realism.

## Urban Realism

Urban realism is a branch of realist writing that attempts to accurately depict the often harsh facts of modern urban existence. Some works by Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Emile Zola, Abraham Cahan, and Henry Fuller feature urban realism. Modern examples include Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* and Ron Milner's *What the Wine Sellers Buy*.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The realist movement in literature exerted a profound influence on the literature of France, Russia, England, and the United States in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. During this period, each of these nations experienced major political and social upheavals as well as periods of relative stability and liberal social reform.

## France

France went through several major social and political upheavals during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the Revolution of 1848 Emperor Louis-Phillipe was deposed as a result of a popular uprising, and his nine-year old grandson was named as the new emperor of a new parliamentary government known as the Second Republic. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of the more famous former emperor and military commander Napoleon Bonaparte, was elected the first president of the Second Republic. Louis-Napoleon ruled as president of France from 1848 until 1852. However, because the French constitution stated that no president could serve more than one four-year term, Louis-Napoleon staged a coup of his own government at the end of his term so that he could remain in power. In 1852, Louis-Napoleon proclaimed the Second Empire of France and had himself named Emperor Napoleon III. Napoleon III ruled the Second Empire until 1871, when a popular revolt heralded the end of the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic, ruled by a popularly elected president. The Third Republic of France remained relatively stable until 1940

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **1840–1900:** France experiences several major changes of government. With the Revolution of 1848, France enters the era of the Second Republic. From 1852 until 1870, the French government is known as the Second Empire. After the revolution of 1871, France enters the era of the Third Republic which lasts until 1940. During the periods of Republic, all adult males in France are granted the right to vote in political elections. Women in France do not have the right to vote.

  **Today:** Since 1959, the French government is known as the Fifth Republic, a constitutional democracy ruled by an elected president. Women as well as men have full voting rights. France is a member of the European Union, an organization that as of 2007 has 27 member nations united by common economic and political interests to promote peace, security, and economic prosperity.

- **1850–1900:** Russia is an empire ruled by a succession of autocratic czars. In 1861 a major societal reform is enacted with the emancipation of the serfs.

  **Today:** At the end of the twentieth century Russia emerged from the era of communist rule, which lasted from the revolution of 1917 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Women and men have full voting rights. Since 1991 the former Soviet Union consists of some twelve independent nation states, of

  which Russia is the largest and most powerful. The nations of the former Soviet Union belong to a coalition known as the Commonwealth of Independent States.

- **1850–1900:** England is ruled by a parliament and prime minister under a sovereign queen. As of 1833 slavery has been abolished in England. Various reform laws vastly expand the number of white men granted the right to vote. Women in England do not have the right to vote.

  **Today:** England is ruled by a prime minister and parliament. The queen remains an important figurehead but holds little real political power. Women and men have full voting rights. England is a member of the European Union, a 27-member organization of member nations united by common social, economic, political, and security interests.

- **1850–1900:** The United States is a constitutional democracy ruled by an elected president. It experiences major internal conflict during the Civil War. After the Civil War, slavery is abolished and all African-American men are granted the right to vote. Women do not have the right to vote.

  **Today:** The United States government has remained a stable democracy since the revolution of 1776. Women and men have full voting rights.

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when, during World War II, Germany invaded and occupied France. During periods of the various French republics, all adult males in France were granted the right to vote in political elections.

## *Russia*

The Russian government was one of the few in Europe that remained relatively stable throughout the nineteenth century. While revolutions

swept through Europe in the year 1848, the Russian Empire experienced no such political upheaval. Russia during this time was ruled by a succession of autocratic czars. Czar Alexander II ruled during the period of 1855 to 1881, when he was assassinated in a car bombing by an anarchist activist. Czar Alexander III ruled from 1881 to 1894. The last Emperor of Russia was Czar Nicholas II, who ruled from 1894 until the Russian Revolution of 1917, when he and his

family were assassinated. A major social reform took place in Russia in 1861, when the peasant serfs, who were essentially slaves under the control of wealthy landowners, were legally emancipated and granted the right to own land.

### England

England during the nineteenth century was characterized and stabilized by the reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1901, known as the Victorian era. While the queen remained the sovereign ruler of England, much of the nation's politics were carried out by Parliament under a prime minister. Toward the end of the century, the office of prime minister became the predominant political force in England, as the role of the queen in national politics receded.

Throughout the nineteenth century the English government diffused revolutionary pressures by passing a series of major reforms, including the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1885. These reforms included numerous changes in public policy and political structure, significantly expanding access to education, protecting the rights of laborers, and widening the sphere of political enfranchisement. Through expanded voting rights, an increasingly large segment of the adult male population was granted the right to vote in political elections. In addition, slavery was abolished in 1833. Toward the end of the century, organizations pressing for women's voting rights began to gain momentum.

### United States

Although the United States has remained stable as a constitutional democracy with an elected president ever since the American Revolution of 1776, not every citizen in the nation had equal rights during the nineteenth century. In the beginning of the century, only white men had the right to vote. Until the end of the Civil War, most African Americans in the United States were slaves to white southern plantation owners. Because they were not considered full citizens, slaves did not have the right to vote. The United States experienced major social and political rupture in the mid-nineteenth century during the Civil War. In the Civil War the southern states seceded from the Union over the issue of slavery. The Civil War ended with victory by the North and the U.S. government thus asserting the Union and officially ending the institution of slavery in the United States.

The period after the Civil War is known as the era of Reconstruction, during which the South faced many social and political struggles over issues of race and the rights of the African Americans newly released from slavery. During this period, a constitutional amendment granted all adult males the right to vote, regardless of race. Women, however, were still denied the right to vote, and a national movement to lobby for women's right to vote, eventually known as the woman's suffrage movement, gained momentum.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The realist movement in literature had a broad-sweeping and profound affect on international literature throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century.

Many realist novelists were nationally and internationally recognized, within their lifetimes, to be among the greatest writers of the century. The public reception of many major realist novels was overwhelmingly positive. In general, realist novels were commercially successful throughout France, Russia, and England, to the extent that many major realist writers were able to support themselves entirely from the proceeds of their publications. In England, Dickens achieved unprecedented, and perhaps unsurpassed, popularity with the public. John R. Reed explains how Dickens employed metonymy, or the use of a name of an attribute to represent the thing itself, to create a kind of symbolism for the gritty, realistic worlds his characters inhabited. In Russia, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were widely revered for their literary accomplishments. In France, Balzac, Maupassant, Flaubert, and Zola were all recognized as major literary figures.

While many realist novels were popular with the reading public, the unabashed view of contemporary society and unadorned representation of contemporary culture expressed by the realists were criticized in some corners as indecent and morally repugnant. In France, for example, the forces of government censorship stepped in to prosecute Flaubert for the publication of *Madame Bovary*, a tale of marital infidelity, based on the grounds that it violated what are considered laws of morality and decency. In a court of law, however, Flaubert's novel was

*Child labor was common in factories in the nineteenth century* (National Archives and Records Administration)

found not guilty, and the scandal only increased the book's popularity.

Realist writers are widely celebrated for their mastery of objective, third-person narration. C. P. Snow, in *The Realists*, has described the powerful, "intelligent" narrative voice and sociological accuracy of realist novels as their most prominent contribution to literature. Snow observes in *The Realists: Eight Portraits* that "In great realistic novels, there is a presiding, unconcealed interpreting intelligence," by which the fictional characters are "examined with the writer's psychological resources and with cognitive intelligence." By contrast, some critics of the late-twentieth century have pointed out that the realist's ideal of narrative objectivity is belied by the personal style and subjective attitudes of the individual novelists. These commentators argue that the very notion of individual narration style implies the imprint of the author's subjective perceptions on the work he produces.

Many realist novels are considered to be reliable sociocultural documents of nineteenth-century society. Critics consistently praise the realists for their success in accurately representing all aspects of society, culture, and politics contemporary to their own. Critics often point to the work of Balzac as a representative example of this aspect of realist literature. Snow applies such statements in regard to Balzac to the entire body of realist fiction:

> Engels said that Balzac told us more of the nature of French society in his time than all the sociologists, political thinkers, historical writers in the world. The same could be said of other realists as they dealt with their time and place.

In addition to literature, Realism has exerted a profound and widespread impact on many aspects of twentieth-century thought, including religion, philosophy, and psychology. Realist writers, particularly Flaubert and Dostoevsky, are celebrated for their acute attention to the complexities of human psychology and the many factors contributing to human motivation. Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, attributed his own theories in part to the influence of Dostoevsky's psychological novels. In the mid-twentieth century, the pacifism espoused by Tolstoy in his novels profoundly influenced Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India's nonviolent movement for national independence.

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, the major realist novelists continue to be regarded as some of the greatest writers ever to have lived, and their masterpieces among the greatest literary accomplishments of all time.

However, the value of the realistic aesthetic to literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has become a topic of heated debate among contemporary literary critics. In a 1989 article, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," published in *Harper's* magazine, novelist Tom Wolfe observed that, beginning in 1960, Realism fell out of fashion as a literary aesthetic in the United States. Wolfe traced the decline of Realism in American fiction, commenting, "By the early 1960s, the notion of the death of the realistic novel had caught on among young American writers with the force of a revelation." Wolfe, however, offered a counter argument to this antirealistic trend in American literature, asserting that a return to Realism in fiction, based on journalistic observations of contemporary life, is essential to the continuing vitality of American literature. Referring to the journalistic efforts of the nineteenth-century realist writers, Wolfe commented, "Dickens,

Dostoyevski, Balzac, Zola, and Sinclair Lewis assumed that the novelist had to go beyond his personal experience and head out into society as a reporter." It is this sociocultural, journalistic quality of realist fiction, Wolfe argued, that continues to be an essential ingredient of great fiction today. Wolfe asserted:

> At this weak, pale, tabescent moment in the history of American literature, we need a battalion, a brigade, of Zolas to head out into this wild, bizarre, unpredictable, Hogstomping Baroque country of ours and reclaim it as literary property.

Many critics have since responded, both positively and negatively, to Wolfe's landmark statement on the continuing value of Realism to the vitality of literature.

## CRITICISM

### Liz Brent

*Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture and works as a freelance writer. In this essay, Brent discusses the realist movement in theater and drama.*

#### REALISM IN THEATER AND DRAMA

The realist movement in literature had a profound influence on all aspects of dramatic writing and theatrical production during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Realist theater moved away from exaggerated acting styles and overblown melodrama to create theatrical productions truer to the lives of the people in the audience. The major realist playwrights treated subjects of middle-class life in everyday, contemporary settings, featuring characters that face circumstances akin to those of average people. The term Realism, when applied to theater, is often used interchangeably with Naturalism.

Zola inaugurated the development of realist theater throughout Europe when, in 1867, he declared the need for a new type of theatrical production that eliminated artificiality and sought to accurately reproduce the details of daily life. His play *Therese Raquin*, a theatrical production of his 1867 novel, was produced on the stage in 1873 and marks the beginning of realist theater. Interestingly, several of the French authors who became major writers of realist fiction were failures as playwrights. Flaubert, Turgenev, Goncourt, and Daudet all wrote plays that failed in theatrical production. As a result, they

### WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- *Howells and the Age of Realism* (1954), by Everett Carter, provides discussion of author and literary critic William Dean Howells and his significance to the development of Realism in American literature.

- Kate Chopin is one of the most important realist writers of nineteenth-century fiction. Her most famous work is *The Awakening* (1899), which explores the conflicts between the traditional role of wife and the independent aspirations of a female artist.

- *Introduction to Russian Realism* (1965), by Ernest J. Simmons, is a collection of essays on Realism in Russian literature and includes essays on Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov.

- *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought* (1968), by Leszek Kolakowski, provides a history of positivism in nineteenth-century thought. Positivism was an important influence on the development of the realist movement in literature.

- Mark Twain, the pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, was a pioneer in the use of realistic speech patterns, notably through the use of dialectical speech. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer's Comrade* (1884) illustrate his use of colloquial speech.

- *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art* (1984), by Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, offers discussion of Romanticism and Realism in nineteenth-century art.

- *"Middlemarch": A Novel of Reform* (1988), by Bert G. Hornback, is a discussion of the political and social views represented in Eliot's realist masterpiece *Middlemarch*.

- *"War and Peace": Tolstoy's Mirror of the World* (1995), by Rimvydas Silbajoris, provides critical discussion of Tolstoy's famous novel.

> **THE STAGECRAFT OF REALIST THEATER EMPHASIZED THE REPRESENTATION OF REALISTIC DETAILS FROM EVERYDAY LIFE. LONG-STANDING TRADITIONS OF SET DESIGN WERE THUS ALTERED BY REALIST DRAMATISTS IN THE EFFORT TO MOVE AWAY FROM ARTIFICIALITY AND TOWARD NATURALISM."**

jokingly gave themselves the epithet *auteurs sifflés*, meaning "hissed authors," because their plays were so bad they got hissed off the stage by disgruntled audiences. Nonetheless, the realist movement in literature gave rise to some of the greatest playwrights and most celebrated plays in history.

### THE REALIST PLAYWRIGHTS

The realist movement led to major changes in the dialogue written by playwrights and the manner in which actors delivered their dialogue. Playwrights began to write dialogue in a more natural style that mirrored the casual speech patterns of everyday conversation rather than the stilted, formalized speech of traditional theater. They addressed serious dramatic themes with plays set in contemporary times and concerning characters from everyday life. Realist playwrights often raised public controversy by addressing taboo social issues, such as marital infidelity and venereal disease. The greatest realist playwrights include Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky in Russia, August Strindberg in Sweden, and Henrik Ibsen in Norway. Other realist playwrights of note include Henry Becque, Eugene Brieux, and Georges Porto-Riche in France, Gerhart Hauptmann in Germany, and B. M. Bjornson in Norway.

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) was the foremost Russian realist playwright of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Chekhov wrote in naturalistic detail about the uneventful lives of the Russian landed gentry in an era of economic and social decline. His play *The Seagull* was first performed in 1896, when it was so unfavorably received that it was nearly hissed off the stage. However, when the Moscow Art Theater performed *The Seagull* two years later,

applying newly developed principles of realist acting and staging to their production, it was an immediate success. Chekhov's other major realist plays include *Uncle Vanya* (1896), *Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), the latter two written specifically for the Moscow Art Theater. Maksim Gorky (1868–1936) was another major Russian realist playwright. His most celebrated play, *The Lower Depths* (1902), concerns a character from the lower echelons of Russian society.

Two Scandinavian playwrights, Ibsen (1828–1906) and Strindberg (1848–1912), are among the most celebrated realist dramatists of their time. Ibsen wrote realist plays concerning dark moral undercurrents running beneath the placid, mundane surface of middle-class family life. He addressed such topics as infidelity, suicide, and syphilis in plays that were criticized in his home country as morally depraved but celebrated throughout Europe as masterpieces of realist drama. Ibsen's major plays include *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Hedda Gabler* (1890), and *The Master Builder* (1892). The Swedish playwright Strindberg is equally celebrated for his works of realist drama. In his plays, Strindberg attacked conventional society in harsh terms of biting social commentary. He is also noted for his stark psychological Realism and mastery of naturalistic dialogue. Strindberg's major realist plays include *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888), and *Creditors* (1888).

### REALIST THEATERS

In accordance with the development of Realism, a number of small, private theaters were founded throughout Europe for the purpose of producing realist plays. The most influential of these new theaters were the *Théatre-Libre* ("Free Theater") in France, the *Freie Bühne* ("Free Stage") in Germany, The Independent Theatre Club in England, and the Moscow Art Theater in Russia.

The *Théatre-Libre* was founded in Paris in 1887 by Andre Antoine for the purpose of staging works of naturalist, or realist, drama. Antoine had been influenced by both the realist novels of Zola and the innovations of the Meiningen Theater Company in Germany. In its first season, the *Théatre-Libre* produced a set of one-act plays. With the production of a play by Tolstoy in the theater's second year, the *Théatre-Libre* became an international influence on the theater world.

Works by many of the major realist playwrights from throughout Europe were showcased at this theater, including those of Becque, Brieux, Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, Bjornson, and Porto-Riche. In less than ten years of its existence, the *Théatre-Libre* housed the production of some one hundred plays by fifty different playwrights. Although the *Théatre-Libre* eventually failed due to financial difficulties, Antoine went on to become an important film director in 1914.

In Berlin, the *Freie Bühne* theater, modeled after the *Théatre-Libre*, was founded in 1889 for the purpose of staging realist drama to a select private audience. The *Freie Bühne*, founded by Otto Brahm, staged plays by Ibsen, Hauptmann, Tolstoy, Zola, and Strindberg. Brahm's theatrical productions focused on the representation of everyday reality through naturalistic acting styles, dialogue, and set designs. Realist drama quickly caught on with the general public in Germany, and mainstream commercial theaters began to stage realist plays as well. In 1894 Brahm was made director of the Deutsche Theater and incorporated the *Freie Bühne* as an experimental division of this larger, established theater.

The Independent Theatre Club was founded in London in 1891 to produce works of realist drama. Jacob Grein, who founded the Independent Theatre Club, modeled it after the *Théatre-Libre* as a private theater catering to a small, select audience of writers and intellectuals. The Independent Theatre, as it is generally called, produced plays by Ibsen as well as by the English playwright and drama critic George Bernard Shaw. In 1891 the Independent Theatre was disbanded.

The Moscow Art Theater Company, founded in 1898, represents the pinnacle of realist theater. The Moscow Art Theater was founded by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko for the purpose of producing dramas in accordance with their ideals regarding realist theater. Stanislavsky became the head of the Moscow Art Theater and its defining artistic force. One of the earliest productions of the Moscow Art Theater was Chekhov's *The Seagull*. *The Seagull* had been a complete failure in a production several years earlier, because traditional production was not suited to Chekhov's realist play. Under the direction of Stanislavsky, however, *The Seagull* was an instant success. Thereafter, the playwright Chekhov and The Moscow Art Theater under Stanislavsky became inextricably associated as representative of realist theater at its best. The Moscow Art Theater also produced the works of such major realist playwright's as Gorky, Hauptmann, and Tolstoy.

### REALIST ACTING

To accommodate the realist play, a new style of acting was needed. Acting styles in realist theaters were thus altered, instructing actors to deliver their dialogue in a more naturalistic manner, rather than the exaggerated, melodramatic style of traditional stage acting. In order to accomplish this, Stanislavsky developed an innovative method of acting that emphasized the natural expression of emotion on the part of the actor. This new acting method, known as the Stanislavsky Method, or Method Acting, exerted a profound influence on theatrical and film acting of the twentieth century.

Changes in theatrical acting style were facilitated by the introduction in 1885 of electric lighting on the stage. Since 1825, stages had been illuminated with gas lighting, but the use of electric lighting made small gestures and facial expressions of the actors more readily visible to the audience. As a result, exaggerated styles in acting were no longer a technical necessity for communicating with the audience.

### REALIST SET DESIGN AND STAGECRAFT

The stagecraft of realist theater emphasized the representation of realistic details from everyday life. Long-standing traditions of set design were thus altered by realist dramatists in the effort to move away from artificiality and toward Naturalism.

One of the first innovations of realist stage design was in the shape of the stage itself. Traditionally, stage sets did not reproduce the dimensions of actual rooms but included a backcloth and stage wings. Realist stage sets, however, began to include a "box" shape, reproducing the dimensions of an actual room, with a ceiling and three walls—the fourth wall being open to face the audience. The first "box set" stage design was utilized by English actress and singer Madame Vestris in 1832.

Realist set design, costuming, and use of props were further characterized by excessive attention to the reproduction of realistic details from everyday life. The *Théatre-Libre* included in one production real meat hanging from hooks during a scene set in a butcher shop. The realist productions of the English dramatist T. W.

*Russian peasants waiting for a ferry, circa 1905* *(Hulton Archive / Getty Images)*

Robertson came to be called "cup-and-saucer" dramas, because they often included scenes of family meals in which the actors actually ate. Other realist productions included live animals. The American producer David Belasco, for example, once brought a real flock of sheep onto stage in a religious play.

Although the dominant works of realist literature were novels, the innovations of realist theater during the 1880s and 1890s exerted a profound and lasting influence on all aspects of playwriting and theatrical production throughout the twentieth century.

**Source:** Liz Brent, Critical Essay on Realism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### John R. Reed

*In the following essay, Reed explores Dickens's use of metonymy, the naming of a thing by one of its attributes.*

Very early in *Oliver Twist*, Oliver makes the famous blunder of begging for more food, an offense that promptly brings him before the board of commissioners of the workhouse. When Bumble the beadle confirms that Oliver has asked for more after consuming the supper allotted by the dietary, "the man in the white waistcoat" declares: "That boy will be hung … I know that boy will be hung." Nobody controverts the man in the white waistcoat; Oliver is instantly confined and a notice is posted on the outside gate of the workhouse advertising his availability for apprenticeship to any trade. The gentleman in the white waistcoat asserts himself again: "'I never was more convinced of anything in my life,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, as he knocked at the gate and read the bill next morning: 'I never was more convinced of anything in my life, than I am, that that boy will come to be hung'." This episode might have ended chapter 2, but the young

> IN THE REALIST TRADITION, METONYMIC CONNECTIONS HELP TO IDENTIFY CHARACTERS WITH SOCIAL PLACE, OCCUPATION, AND MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL ABILITY."

Dickens does not drop the subject; instead, the narrator emphasizes his own relationship to the diegesis, linking his narrative task to the claims of the gentleman in the white waistcoat: "As I purpose to show in the sequel whether the white-waistcoated gentleman was right or not, I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative (supposing it to possess any at all), if I ventured to hint, just yet, whether the life of Oliver Twist had this violent termination or no."

Since the full title of Dickens's novel is *Oliver Twist, Or, The Parish Boy's Progress*, there is room for doubt about his ultimate fate. How much can be expected of a child born in a workhouse and brought up on the rates at the mercy of a penny-wise middle-class bureaucracy? Poverty and squalor are more likely to produce a criminal than a law-abiding citizen among any orphans who happen to survive the conditions of the workhouse. Oliver's fate might be that of Bulwer's Paul Clifford or Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard. Nonetheless, the narrator's obvious sympathy for Oliver from the outset makes it unlikely that he will progress to the gallows. Thus the narrator's coy positioning of himself in relation to the gentleman in the white waistcoat seems to constitute an opposition, not a conundrum. At this point in the narrative, the narrator already knows the outcome of his narrative; the gentleman with the white waistcoat does not. He is simply confident that he does. Two unnamed individuals—the narrator and the man in the white waistcoat—present their forms of authority before their mutual audience, the novel's readers.

But this anonymous character has not finished his part in Oliver's drama. As chapter 3 begins, the narrator comments that, if the imprisoned Oliver had taken the gentleman with the white waistcoat's "sage advice," he would have hanged himself in his cell with his pocket handkerchief, except for the fact that, handkerchiefs being luxuries, workhouse boys have no access to them. This is an interesting proleptic moment, for a major part of the trade to which Fagin apprentices Oliver in London is the stealing of pocket handkerchiefs, potentially a hanging offense. So this apparent aside has a resonance known only to the narrator. This is a secret bit of metonymy—the luxury of handkerchiefs equals crime—that prepares for a similar metonymy involving the white waistcoat. Moreover, the connection to Fagin is not accidental, for the man in the white waistcoat acts for Oliver much in the way the Artful Dodger does—as an agent for a potential employer. He encourages Gamfield the chimney sweep, "exactly the sort of master Oliver Twist wanted," to apply for the boy and even becomes his advocate, introducing him to the board. Mr. Limbkin, the head of the board of commissioners, realizes what a dangerous and revolting occupation chimney sweeping is for the boys who must climb up the flues, and he expresses some sympathy along those lines, enough to drive a hard financial bargain with Gamfield. However, the sale of Oliver to the vile chimney sweep is prevented accidentally by a magistrate who is distracted from his doze and notices the terror in Oliver's face. He sends Oliver back to the workhouse with instructions that he be treated kindly. "That same evening," the narrator notes, "the gentleman in the white waistcoat most positively and decidedly affirmed, not only that Oliver would be hung, but that he would be drawn and quartered into the bargain."

The gentleman in the white waistcoat seems to be one of those gratuitous items that occur in Dickens's narratives, items that do not seem to have any integral function but merely extend or enhance a given situation. The man in the white waistcoat might be an intensifier, since he not only endorses the board's treatment of Oliver but seems to relish it with sadistic enjoyment. However, I suggest that the gentleman in the white waistcoat carries out a much more important function in the novel and is far from incidental because he illustrates what I take to be a conscious narrative technique that Dickens employs to distance his work from what we normally identify as realist fiction. Moreover, I believe that Dickens understood the rules for what came to be recognized as realism and that he purposely violated them for his own ends.

In *Hidden Rivalries in Victorian Fiction: Dickens, Realism, and Revaluation*, Jerome Meckier places Dickens in the realist camp and argues that the major writers he examines—Dickens, Trollope, Gaskell, Eliot, Collins—were involved in a sly "realism war"; he declares that "the novelists themselves—professed realists all—read and reread one another" and then went on to overcome the version of realism of their competitors, most notably Dickens (2). Dickens had to respond in this war by reasserting his brand of realism in a constantly new way. But what I am suggesting is that Dickens's mode of evading the challenges of these contemporary rivals was to go *beyond* realism, to incorporate in his writings subversions of realism's stylistic assumptions to which they adhered. Many able critical studies, from John Romano's *Dickens and Reality* (1977) on, have argued pointedly that Dickens's fiction draws as much from romance, fairy tale, and allegory as it does from the mimetic tradition. Richard Lettis puts the situation well:

> Above all, he thought that writing should enable the reader to see the essential affirmative "truth" of life—this was for him the best that writing could achieve. He disliked the obvious, and approved always of subtlety, but knew that judicious use of the commonplace, of carefully selected detail, could bring reality to a story—but it must always be the kind of reality he found in drama: "wonderful reality"—the world as we know it, but "polished by art" until it assumed values not felt in the dull settled world itself. For him reality was not what it was to the realists; it was neither commonplace as in Howells nor sordid as in so many others. (60–61)

In a hostile evaluation of Dickens's career David Musselwhite depicts a Dickens who begins as a truly original narrator in the role of Boz but transforms himself into a commodified author. He sees the anarchic, transparent world of Boz, along with some later passages, such as the description of Jacob's Island in *Oliver Twist* and of the Fleet Prison in *Pickwick* as preferable to the mannered prose of *Bleak House*, as in the description of New Bleak House. The earlier work is impersonal and transparent in tone, whereas the later work is involved with the play of language itself, calling attention to itself. In a way, Musselwhite claims that Boz started as a realist and Dickens turned into a nonrealist, whatever we want to call that other entity. But again, my argument here is that Dickens became increasingly aware of how the various tropes of narration operated in what we call realism and

he did not wish to be contained within those limits. Moreover, there are many moments in Boz's *Sketches* where Dickens has already grasped this notion. J. Hillis Miller showed in "*Sketches by Boz, Oliver Twist*, and Cruikshank's Illustrations" that what critics and readers had so long accepted as precise reportage in the *Sketches* must be read in a different way: "The Sketches are not mimesis of an externally existing reality, but the interpretation of that reality according to highly artificial schemas inherited from the past" (32). And again: "The metonymic associations which Boz makes are fancies rather than facts, impositions on the signs he sees of stock conventions, not mirroring but interpretations, which is to say lie" (35). Miller indicates that Dickens was at least partially conscious of his own methods in the way he organized the *Sketches* for book publication: "The movement from Scene to Character to Tale is not the metonymic process authenticating realistic representation but a movement deeper and deeper into the conventional, the concocted, the schematic" (35).

What happens as Dickens matures as a writer is that he does become more conscious of the play of language itself because he learns to use language in craftier ways. To recognize the double-edge of metonymy, for example, provides him with a powerful tool not merely for narration but for complexity of theme. To connect patterns of metonymy over whole novels is to raise his narrative from simple realism to a style that prefigures the leitmotif technique of Richard Wagner in music, or Thomas Mann's application of that technique to fiction, perhaps most self-consciously in *Doctor Faustus*. Musselwhite complains that in his description of Carker's room in *Dombey and Son* Dickens has moved away from surfaces and textures towards a concentration on inner malignity and thus heavily loads its details against Carker. But that is the point! Plain realism could describe the room and associate certain objects with malign intent, let us say, but Dickens goes beyond that to characterize the objects as metonymic of Carker's *inner* condition. It is the *reverse* of what the realist seeks to accomplish.

I cannot here go into detail about the mimetic tradition. It would be possible to discuss Dickens's departure from that tradition in his use of naming characters and places, his methods of description, and his stylistic redundancy, but,

for the purposes of this essay, I would like to focus on one aspect of realism that seems to have received general agreement among critics over the years. That is the connection of metonymy with realist technique. Because metonymy is important in defining realism, I intend to show that Dickens used this trope in a manner contrary to its customary use in realist writing. Roman Jakobson formulated this identification of metonymy with realism when he opposed it to metaphor, which he allied to poetry:

> The primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of romanticism and symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged, but it is still insufficiently realized that it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called "realistic" trend, which belongs to an intermediary stage between the decline of romanticism and the rise of symbolism and is opposed to both. Following the path of contiguous relationships, the realistic author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synechdochic details. (77–78)

Virginia Woolf in her own way had already established the linkage of metonymy and realism in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," with the purpose of showing its limitations. She divides up the writers of her day into Edwardians and Georgians, the former representing the realism of the past, the latter the modernism of the future. Bennett is one of the former, whose tools, Woolf says, no longer work for the present generation. The chief of these tools was elaborate description, so that character could be determined by what the human being was associated with among inanimate things. She concludes:

> That is what I mean by saying that the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use. They have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there. To give them their due, they have made that house much better worth living in. But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it. (332)

Recently, Harry Shaw has examined the history of this relationship in some detail. He accepts Jakobson's ordering of metonymy with realism but extends the idea along his own lines:

> To the extent, then, that we imagine ourselves back into a situation in which we can take seriously the claims of figural realism to

capture the real, we find ourselves conceiving of the connections it makes as metonymical in nature. After Dante, figural realism appears to be founded in a species of metaphor—as does much of the literature we most prize. But that is because our culture's sense of the real has itself shifted. I draw from this the following moral, which extends Jakobson's contention that metonymy is the trope characteristic of nineteenth-century prose fiction: the defining trope of all realisms is metonymy—but it is metonymy as defined in the light of the ontology to which a given realism appeals.

> If we return to our model of realism, then, I am suggesting that the mechanism that connects different levels in modern realism is a historicist metonymy. This metonymy assumes as many inflections as there are realist novelists. (103–04)

Without offering any particulars, Shaw excludes Dickens from his study, as I see it, correctly.

There are many ways in which realism does not and cannot conform to its own largely unwritten rules. Bruce Robbins has shown, for example, that British realism scarcely represents an entire part of the population. There are few significant representatives of "the people" in this literature, and, ironically, when "the people" are represented, it is servants, dependents within the households and thus extensions of their masters, who stand in for the lower classes. Robbins claims that servants are not even depicted as genuine representatives of their historical context but fulfill roles that existed in the earliest sources of Western literature, such as Greek drama. Servants thus serve an almost symbolic role in representing the rebellious, resistant, and otherwise challenging forces arrayed against the master class. For the most part, Robbins argues, realist novelists did not try to offer a genuine picture of the lower classes, but fell back upon a trusty convention. In a more recent study, Katherine Kearns argues that realism surreptitiously and unconsciously evokes those elements of experience that it seeks to repress. She has several different formulations of this idea, but here is one: "Realism's doubled intuitions for the social and the ineffable ensure both that the sublime will make itself attractive and that its attractions will be appropriately chastised; one ends up with authorial gestures that simultaneously acknowledge and repudiate the seductions of the sublime" (114). Many other studies indicate various qualifications of realism's claims to true mimesis.

In a similar fashion, critics writing specifically on Dickens have examined ways in which his narratives must be seen as standing to one side of the realist tradition. A recent example is Juliet John's *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture*, which argues that the flatness of Dickens's characters is intentional. Dickens is not aiming primarily at the examination of internal states of mind but wishes to show that his characters are part of a larger community. Interiority is thus hostile to the communal drive of his narratives and is therefore associated primarily with villains and their like, a practice inherited from the stage, especially in its melodramatic modes.

My claim here, then, is not that I am making an original observation when I say that Dickens should not be placed within the mainstream realist tradition, if such a thing really exists, but that he appropriated devices associated with realism and used them to ends that operate against the realist program. Again, I do not mean to say that he defined himself against realism but that by hindsight we can recognize that he was resisting a mode of representation that came to dominance in fiction during his lifetime, fueled largely by the popularity of Sir Walter Scott's fiction. Elsewhere, I examine different ways in which Dickens sets himself against or outside of realist practice, but here I shall concentrate on the one feature of metonymy, and that returns us to the issue of the gentleman in the white waistcoat in *Oliver Twist*.

I have chosen the gentleman in the white waistcoat as my example because he is so rudimentary and he appears so early in Dickens's career. Dickens used metonymic devices brilliantly in his earliest writings. "Reflections in Monmouth Street" is an example, where, beginning with the old clothes exhibited in a ragshop, the narrator constructs from their appearance the lives of their former owners. The clothes bear the traces of a former life. Of course, this is the reverse of how metonymy usually works, where an article of clothing might indicate a person's function. A prominent example is the scene in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* where Gabriel Oak goes to the market to find work as a farm agent only to encounter employers seeking shepherds instead. Oak identifies himself as a potential agent by wearing middle-class clothing, but changes to his shepherd's smock, hoping to find a place as a shepherd through this new identifying attire, only ironically to be passed over by an employer who is looking for an agent. Clothes mark the man.

The gentleman in the white waistcoat is interesting because he remains nameless and is identified chiefly by this one article of clothing and by his vicious sentiments. This is all the more striking since Dickens had declared in *Sketches by Boz* that viewing the exterior of a person was a surer guarantee of comprehending his character than written description can provide, thus to offer almost no description at all must be seen not as a disclaimer (as it is in the *Sketches*, where Boz amusingly goes on to provide the description he says is unnecessary) but as a conscious strategy. The gentleman in *Oliver* is thus entirely surface to us. We get no physical description of him as we do of Gamfield in detail to indicate *his* viciousness. We have just that white waistcoat as a token of his identity. Does the whiteness of the waistcoat signify anything, let us say, like the whiteness of Moby Dick, a whiteness Melville's narrator himself opens to multiple interpretations? Let us begin with the social significance of the waistcoat.

Dickens knew about waistcoats and in his early manhood favored elaborate examples. C. Willett Cunnington and Phillis Cunnington in their *Handbook of English Costume in the Nineteenth Century* note that in the 1820s and 1830s the waistcoat had become quite dramatic, with Dandies wearing all colors of the rainbow. They remark that the waistcoat "had become the most striking male garment; a gentleman's inventory of 1828 revealed 36 white waistcoats costing £54" (104). One might assume that, though this gentleman had white waistcoats, they were not necessarily plain, since many waistcoats described as white were of elegant fabrics, such as silk or satin. In the early part of the century a white satin embroidered waistcoat with gold thread was a standard article of Court dress. The Exquisites of the 1830s wore white waistcoats with elaborate costumes. Here are two examples quoted by the Cunningtons from magazines of the time:

> In a light brown coat, white waistcoat, nankin pantaloons buttoned at the ankle with two gold buttons, yellow stockings with large violet clocks, shoes with buckles of polished cut steel.

> ... with green coat, broad velvet collar, white waistcoat, pantaloons of glazed white ticking tight to the knees. (107)

Anne Buck points out that waistcoats, where "[m]ost of the colour and ornament of men's dress was concentrated," often "showed the fabrics and colours and woven and printed designs fashionable in the materials of women's dress" (188). Many of the waistcoats that survive from the nineteenth century were wedding waistcoats often "in white or cream figured silk, or white silk embroidered" (188).

It seems, then, that white waistcoats were quite a common feature of men's dress both for formal occasions, such as weddings and court appearances, and for ordinary use. Apparently a great deal depended upon the materials out of which these waistcoats were fashioned and the cut of their design. But Dickens tells us nothing more about the man in the white waistcoat's waistcoat except that it is white. The whole man thus depends upon this overwhelmingly identifying physical object and his dialogue, or nearly so. But I shall return to that in a minute. First I want to indicate that this trait in Dickens's method of characterization stayed with him throughout his career and took on interesting variations. I shall mention just a couple of instances here because my space is limited. In *Little Dorrit*, Merdle is intimidated by his butler, who is a grave and sober man, far more refined than his master. It is in Merdle's interest to demonstrate to Society all the trappings of wealth and high social status:

> The chief butler was the next magnificent institution of the day. He was the stateliest man in company. He did nothing, but he looked on as few other men could have done. He was Mr. Merdle's last gift to Society. Mr. Merdle didn't want him, and was put out of countenance when the great creature looked at him; but inappeasable Society would have him—and had got him.

To this point, what we apparently have is some sharp social satire. Merdle's inferiority to his own servant makes a mockery of his supposed power. The butler should metonymically serve as a manifestation of the household to accomplish realist ends. And he does, except that in this case he does so ironically. So it would appear that this brief passage fulfills a realist purpose, though any reader should be wary of so quickly accepting it in that way, since it occurs in a chapter where the guests at Merdle's home are named as Treasury, Bar, and Bishop and fulfill typical, not individual, functions. Later we encounter Merdle wandering through his great house with "no apparent object

but escape from the presence of the chief butler." And a few lines later we are introduced to his habit of "clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody." Soon the "chief butler" becomes the "Chief Butler" and is described as "the Avenging Spirit of this great man's life."

Something similar happens in *Great Expectations* when Pip, feeling the need to confirm his status as a gentleman, hires an unneeded servant whose name is Pepper. In what might be mistaken as the typical metonymic device of associating character and social rank with clothing, Pip begins, "I had got so fast of late, that I had even started a boy in boots"—signifying that the boy's status as a servant is indicated by his livery, which Pip goes on to describe—"and had clothed him with a blue coat, canary waistcoat, white cravat, creamy breeches, and the boots already mentioned." The boy, however, is as much a nuisance as a help, and to indicate this Pip employs a language already strongly thematic throughout the novel. He says that he is "in bondage and slavery" after he has "made this monster." Since Pip later alludes to the Frankenstein creature, it is possible to link this reference to the later motif of the creature's avenging pursuit of Victor Frankenstein. Hence, what begins with a "realist" ploy, quickly evolves into a symbolic function. Seeing Pepper as an "avenging phantom," he renames him the Avenger, and before long this function, which is a product of Pip's imagination and has nothing to do with the boy's own nature or conduct, becomes the major and metonymic way of referring to him. But he is no longer metonymically connected to the social world; he is now a part of Pip's internal realm which is peopled with images of convicts, chains of gold, punishment, revenge, and so forth. I need not catalog the well-known web of such references that make this novel such densely rich reading. The metonym in this very simple instance consciously transfers Pepper out of the range of servant-and-master social relations and into a symbolic range of references operating against the realist agenda. Metonym blends with metaphor and even suggests allegorical dimensions.

Late in his career, Dickens is able to turn this kind of trope into a brand of shorthand that blurs the difference between metaphor/simile and metonym. For convenience sake, I will use an example that almost reprises the instance of the butler above. At the Veneerings' house in *Our Mutual Friend*, we again have generic figures Boots and

Brewer and an ominous servant, this time a retainer who "goes round, like a gloomy Analytical Chemist; always seeming to say, after 'Chablis, sir?'—'You wouldn't if you knew what it's made of'." By his next appearance and thereafter the simile disappears. Moreover, the gloom identified with him is transferred to those he serves; thus we see Eugene Wrayburn "gloomily resorting to the champagne chalice whenever proffered by the Analytical Chemist." In his next appearance, he has become simply "the Analytical." And this shift emphasizes a feature of the character that proves significant and fits him into the tenor of the novel as a whole. This apparently insignificant individual is capable of analyzing the situation around him accurately. In this novel crammed with secrets and mysteries, only a few individuals have this power of penetration and yet it is precisely this penetration that the narrator offers, especially in relationship to seeing past the surface of the Veneerings. Just as he knows better than others what the constituents of the Chablis are, the Analytical is equally acute about other domestic features. When Mrs. Veneering reports that Baby was uneasy in her sleep on the night of the election that will give Mr. Veneering a seat in Parliament, "The Analytical chemist, who is gloomily looking on, has diabolical impulses to suggest 'Wind' and throw up his situation; but represses them." In his last appearance, the Analytical Chemist feels he could give Veneering an apt answer to the question of how people live beyond their means. In his brief moments on stage he has become more and more judgmental, so it is not surprising that he departs the text as "the Analytical, perusing a scrap of paper lying on the salver, with the air of a literary Censor . . . " It might be said that Dickens here discloses his affiliation with this subversive character.

What is significant for the purposes of this essay is that Dickens calls attention to his non-realist joke on metonymy. A household servant is unlikely to have a metonymic connection with the science of chemistry. By converting a servant to an Analytical Chemist, Dickens aligns the servant with "scientific" analysis, something carried out methodically elsewhere in the novel by the police and others. The servant is a tiny image of the potential disclosure of untrue conditions that mirrors the effort of the novel as a whole. At his last appearance the Analytical Chemist has returned to simile, only now it is as the Analytical Chemist, not as a household retainer, that he

is likened to a "literary Censor." This simile marks him as a literary artifact, thus marking him a product of fancy rather than fact and indicating that he has never been a participant in a "real" domain but a figure highjacked out of allegory. He becomes a sign pointing to a particular function of the narrative and thus resembles the allegorical figure on the ceiling of Tulkinghorn's room with his ominous pointing hand.

This technique can operate in the reverse direction as well, as a simple example from *A Christmas Carol* shows. Near the opening of the story, the narrator asserts that "Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail" and then boldly calls our attention to the figurative expression: "Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade." This bit of self-conscious playfulness about the narrator's own language might have ended right here, but it is actually preparation for a far more important episode. When Scrooge arrives at his house that evening, he finds on his door "not a knocker, but Marley's face." The ironmongery simile that proved Marley dead becomes now an ironmongery that shows him not entirely dead at all. From being a dead character, Marley has become a real presence to Scrooge. More ironmongery follows. The bells in the house begin to chime on their own, introducing the appearance of Marley's ghost wearing a chain made "of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel." Marley explains his bizarre ornament:

> "I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "l made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"

Marley's chosen attitude toward life has constituted this punishment in the hereafter, and Scrooge has been forging his own similar chain. By now the simple simile of ironmongery has become a forbidding symbolism. The metonymic items of Marley's business have been transmuted into a nearly allegorical object—an iron chain.

What is happening in *Oliver Twist* is simpler but depends upon the same irony that operates in the other examples I have cited. It is important that the narrator almost always refers to the man as the *gentleman* in the white waistcoat (his first

reference is the exception). There is no doubt about his status, but the repetition of this word, always linked to the white waistcoat, reinforces his social place as one that is privileged. To some degree, then, the gentleman in the white waistcoat is a counter for a whole class. It would be possible to provide a sociological analysis, indicating that only a gentleman comfortably well off could afford such a fashionable item that would require expensive laundering and so forth. White gloves similarly indicated station through the implication that they would have to be changed during the day and many of them laundered over time. Thus articles of clothing encode a certain social attitude and even ideology. But that kind of analysis is not my purpose here. I am concerned here with Dickens's style rather than his politics. The man in the white waistcoat is not most importantly a representative of his class but a peculiarly malign specimen. His prejudices completely overwhelm him. Oliver comes before the workhouse board which consists of "eight or ten fat gentlemen … sitting around a table." He is asked his name and hesitates to answer, being intimidated by so many gentlemen. The gentleman in a white waistcoat intervenes with an outburst that Oliver "was a fool. Which was a capital way of raising his spirits, and putting him quite at his ease." There is a great deal of obvious irony in this scene at the expense of the gentlemen. For example, this famous passage: "The members of this board were very sage, deep, philosophical men; and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered—the poor people liked it!". But the gentleman in the white waistcoat is not merely stupid in this manner; he has a determined animus against the poor. He does not merely assume the worst about the poor, but wishes them ill. The head of the board instructs Oliver, but the gentleman in the white waistcoat adds his own view immediately after.

> "Well! You have come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade," said the red-faced gentleman in the high chair.

> "So you'll begin to pick oakum to-morrow morning at six o'clock," added the surly one in the white waistcoat.

This unexplained, gratuitous nastiness sums up the gentleman in the white waistcoat and raises him almost to the level of symbolic representation. In some ways we *are* faced with the mystery of whiteness similar to that in Moby Dick.

Near the beginning of this essay, I noted the narrative irony of the narrator's comment on the handkerchief that Oliver could not have hanged himself with because handkerchiefs were a luxury in the workhouse, and I suggested that this reference is the narrator's proleptic joke, because handkerchiefs will play an important role in Oliver's subsequent career. One prominent connection has to do with hanging, so that the gentleman in the white waistcoat is actually the first to voice a motif that proliferates through the text in a manner that becomes typical of Dickens's style, of which I have tried to give a few brief example from other novels above. Since Dickens was writing under great pressure while composing *Oliver Twist*, it cannot be assumed that he planned out that intricate pattern of handkerchief references, but it can be assumed that his imagination instinctively worked in this way. In later writings, it is clear that he consciously employs the technique.

Earlier I quoted from Katherine Kearns's *Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism: Through the Looking-Glass*. One chapter in this book, "A Tropology of Realism in *Hard Times*," is a very intriguing and valuable reading of Dickens's novel. At one point Kearns summarizes her perception of Dickens's dilemma—how *Hard Times* presents double messages at every level of its discourses, reflecting Dickens's anxiety about and his resistance to the realistic mode:

> His apprehension of some alternative and unnameable energy brings his metonymies to challenge their own directional, propagandistic contiguities; people, their characters formed in some secret place, seem as much to create or to alter their surroundings as to be created or altered by them. (188)

Kearns is acute in noting the ways in which metonymy works in this novel. She sees that "the language that reveals character through metonymy in *Hard Times* must communicate Coketown's essential nature as a fabricated construct, its strangeness only masked by the conventional linearities of its architecture …" (190). And she demonstrates that Bounderby's character, though dependent upon metonymies, refutes itself with its past, thus resisting the realistic program of the novel, for he is not what he is; his character has nothing to do with his past and thus is not explicable in terms of his own current realism. I couldn't agree more, but Kearns seems to feel that Dickens brings about this disjunction inadvertently, that he is unconsciously subverting

his own attempt at realism. It seems to me more sensible to regard Dickens as intentionally bringing about exactly these deconstructions. After all, he is attacking the Utilitarian materiality represented by the Gradgrinds and Bounderbys, and he means to demonstrate its falseness. It is spectacularly evident that Bounderby, the enemy of fancy, is himself the most fanciful storyteller in the novel, having fabricated his entire early history. My argument is that Dickens employed metonymy in his fiction precisely to call attention to that part of experience that is not limited to materiality. He made his inclinations clear in his famous preface to *Bleak House* when he wrote: "In Bleak House, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things."

In *Hard Times*, Dickens aggressively calls attention to the difference between the metonymic and the metaphoric, the "realistic" and the "fanciful," in his style. At the very opening of the story Mr. Gradgrind is described as having a "square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall." The square wall connects Gradgrind metonymically with the business/industry, no-nonsense aspect of Coketown. But the eyes in their cave associate him metaphorically with a different pattern in the novel that has to do with redemptive danger and with the capacity to imagine beyond the factual and the material. Kearns has called attention to the way in which the square wall pattern proliferates as the narrative proceeds:

> Thus Gradgrind's "own metallurgical Louisa" is most literally a metonymic chip off the old block who lives in Stone Lodge, having been struck off the parent with a piece of the thing that names her; the implied syntagmatic progression goes nicely from the obdurate industrialism embodied in Coketown's red-brick buildings to Stone Lodge to the wall-and warehouse-like Mr. Gradgrind to his flinty offspring.

That is the metonymic development of the square wall, but the metaphoric development of the dark caves is equally complex and pervasive, though perhaps even subtler. It finds expression in the "ditch" that Bounderby claims to have been born in as well as in the "dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom" of the mighty Staircase Mrs. Sparsit imagines Louisa descending, and in the uncovered shaft into which Stephen Blackpool falls. The ditch is the product of Bounderby's

imagination, not a reality; the pit is the product of Mrs. Sparsit's imagination, and never becomes real; the shaft, though real enough, is the medium through which Stephen Blackpool, by the power of his positive imagination, conceives the central truth of the novel. While lying in the mineshaft he can see a star in the sky: "'I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour's home. I awmust think it be the very star!'" The narrator endorses Stephen's perception: "The star had shown him where to find the God of the poor; and through humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness, he had gone to his Redeemer's rest."

This tendency to take a small detail from early in the narrative and elaborate it in an increasing network of allusions and similarities is typical of Dickens's narrative method and is related to the examples I have given in the narrator's mention of a handkerchief early in *Oliver Twist*, the butler in *Little Dorrit*, and Pepper in *Great Expectations*. Dickens does not disguise his purpose and his method from any careful reader. Even as McChoakumchild (and the name gives away the narrator's moral alignment) is calling for the schoolchildren to be filled with facts, the narrator obstinately contains his efforts within the realm of fancy.

> He went to work in this preparatory lesson, not unlike Morgiana in the Forty Thieves: looking into all the vessels ranged before him, one after another, to see what they contained. Say, good McChoakumchild. When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brimfull by-and-by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within—or sometimes only maim him and distort him!

This is throwing down the gauntlet, as the shift to preacherly diction directly suggests. But if the narrator confines his Utilitarian characters within the circle of well-known fable, he does so in order to counteract a similar action perpetrated by these characters themselves. Here is what we learn of the young Gradgrinds, brought up through their father's fact-based training:

> The first object with which they had an association or of which they had a remembrance, was a large black-board with a dry Ogre chalking ghastly white figures on it.
>
> Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything about an Ogre. Fact forbid! I only use the word to express a monster in a lecturing castle, with Heaven knows how many heads manipulated into one, taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair.

This reads like a parody of the Giant Despair in *Pilgrim's Progress*—one of the all-time great fictions illustrating the positive power of fancy—who captures and confines Christian and Hopeful in a dungeon because they have strayed out of the true way. Here, however, the children are innocent captives, and the den into which they are drawn bears a family resemblance to the caves of Gradgrind's eyes and the other ditches, pits, shafts, and so forth that emerge as the narrative proceeds, culminating in Stephen's release from his chasm into the freedom of death. In the contest between metonymy and metaphor, metaphor wins, but metonymy has also been drafted to the work of symbolic architecture which subverts and transcends what we call realism. J. Hillis Miller points out the way in which metonymy in Dickens crosses the line from its realistic function: "The metonymic reciprocity between a person and his surroundings, his clothes, furniture, house, and so on, is the basis for the metaphorical substitutions so frequent in Dickens's fiction. For Dickens, metonymy is the foundation and support of metaphor" (13). In *Hard Times* the work of subversion is planned, open, and direct, whereas in *Oliver Twist,* for example, it seems largely instinctive.

In the realist tradition, metonymic connections help to identify characters with social place, occupation, and mental or emotional ability. The details might be articles of clothing, tools, and so forth, but these articles are subordinate to the purpose of making sharper the nature of the human figure. For realism, metonymy reinforces materiality. By contrast, in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens uses a repetitive metonymy to obliterate any specific human identity and makes his gentleman in the white waistcoat instead the embodiment of a malign spirit, dispersing the materiality of the individual man into a class atmospheric. Realism is not supposed to take this leap, though in fact a number of supposed realists could not resist such moves at one time or another. But Dickens makes this a regular practice in his writing and seems to be doing so in resistance to the growing impulse in the writing of his time to favor elaborate examinations of internal states partly through metonymic connections, preferring instead to represent a world with symbolic overtones, no matter how deeply he was capable of giving the impression of rooting it in a palpable reality.

**Source:** John R. Reed, "The Gentleman in the White Waistcoat: Dickens and Metonymy," in *Style*, Vol. 39, No. 4, Winter 2005, pp. 412–26.

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# Renaissance Literature

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1450

It could be argued that no other literary period in history is as rich—or paradoxical—as the Renaissance. Many historians locate the Renaissance from the mid-fifteenth until the early seventeenth century. There are, however, a few writers from other time periods whom historians and critics commonly associate with the Renaissance. The European Renaissance produced some of history's greatest writers and works of literature, yet many historians and critics disagree about *when* it actually took place. Contemporary Renaissance fairs and many movies set in Renaissance times are often set in England. In reality, however, the Renaissance started in Italy, then spread slowly east to other European countries, most notably France, Spain, and finally, England.

The Renaissance (from the French word for "rebirth") refers to the emergence and new interest in classical Greek and Roman texts and culture that took place between the Middle Ages and the modern period. With the advent of the printing press in 1440, the development of vernacular languages, and the weakening influence of the Catholic Church on daily life, among other historic events, Renaissance writers and scholars had new avenues for expressing their views. Many Renaissance works survive into the twenty-first century as some of the most celebrated in history. Early writers such as Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More staged direct attacks on the Church and society with works such as Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*
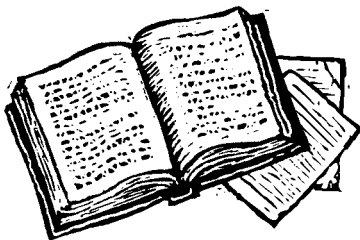
and More's *Utopia*. These writers helped open doors for later ones, including William Shakespeare, who some critics consider the greatest dramatist and poet of all time.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### *Elizabeth Carey (1585–1639)*

Elizabeth Carey (sometimes spelled as Cary) was born in Oxford, England, in 1585. She was a voracious reader from a young age and had an aptitude for languages. She married Sir Henry Carey in 1602 when she was only seventeen years old, but her husband was soon gone to fight in the war with Spain. In 1603, she moved in with her husband's family despite his absence. Her mother-in-law forbade her to read, so Carey wrote instead. *The Tragedy of Mariam* was completed soon thereafter, by 1609 at the latest. Carey also became interested in Catholicism during this time, a dangerous pursuit in post-Reformation England. She and her husband had eleven children together, and, in 1622, Henry moved them all to Ireland where he had been appointed lord deputy of that territory. Part of Henry's duties was the prosecution of Irish Catholics. Carey left her husband in 1625 because of their religious differences and returned to England.

In 1626, Carey was disowned by her husband and made a house prisoner when it was discovered that she planned to convert to Catholicism. All alone, Carey took up writing again, this time to earn money. The following year, Henry was forced to pay Carey's debts, and the couple was reconciled in 1631. Henry died in 1633; Carey died in 1639. She is remembered and celebrated as the first woman to write a play in English.

### *Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616)*

Miguel de Cervantes (Saavedra), son of Rodrigo de Cervantes Saavedra and Leonor de Cortinas, was born on or about September 29, 1547, in Alcalá de Henares, Spain. After studying under a humanist teacher in Madrid, Cervantes enlisted in the Spanish military and helped to defend southern Europe from the invasion of the Ottoman Turks. While involved in this effort, Cervantes suffered an injury that crippled his left hand. On the way back home from the front, Cervantes and other Spanish soldiers were captured by pirates and detained in northern Africa for five years, at which time they returned to Spain as heroes. However, economic times were tough, and Cervantes's status as a hero soon waned. He turned to writing plays but with little success. He finally was able to secure a civic position as a supplies manager, whereupon he was blamed for the mismanagement of food and jailed. Following these misfortunes, Cervantes wrote his masterpiece *El Ingenioso hidalgo Don Quixote de La Mancha* (translated as *The History of that Ingenious Gentleman: Don Quixote de La Mancha*), commonly referred to simply as *Don Quixote*, which details the misadventures of a madman. Cervantes died of edema on April 22, 1616, in Madrid, Spain.

### *Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536)*

Desiderius Erasmus was born October 27, 1466, most likely in Rotterdam, Netherlands. He attended cathedral school, where he was first exposed to Renaissance humanistic thought, and his desire for the intellectual life was born. He used his religious education to access as many classics as he could find. Unlike many Renaissance writers who followed him, Erasmus wrote entirely in Latin, still considered at this time to be the language of the educated. Although he made plans to obtain a degree in theology, these plans were constantly postponed because of his intellectual pursuits, including several trips to England, where he met influential English humanists such as Thomas More. Following More's lead, Erasmus eventually combined his religious and intellectual interests into a new program of reform, using his literary works to stage satirical attacks on the Church and society. Out of all of his works, Erasmus's satire *The Praise of Folly* had the greatest influence on later humanist writers, who mimicked Erasmus's style in their own satirical works. It should be noted that Erasmus, like other humanist writers, wished to reform the Catholic Church while keeping it unified. However, in his criticisms of the Church and his scholarly interpretation and translation of the Bible, Erasmus was one of many humanists who inadvertently helped to instigate the Protestant Reformation and subsequent division of the Church. Erasmus died on July 12, 1536, in Basel, Switzerland.

### *Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527)*

Niccolò Machiavelli was born on May 3, 1469, in Florence, Italy, to a middle-class family of civic workers. He studied Latin from an early age and was drawn to the classics, particularly texts about the Roman Republic. He followed family tradition and entered the Florentine political
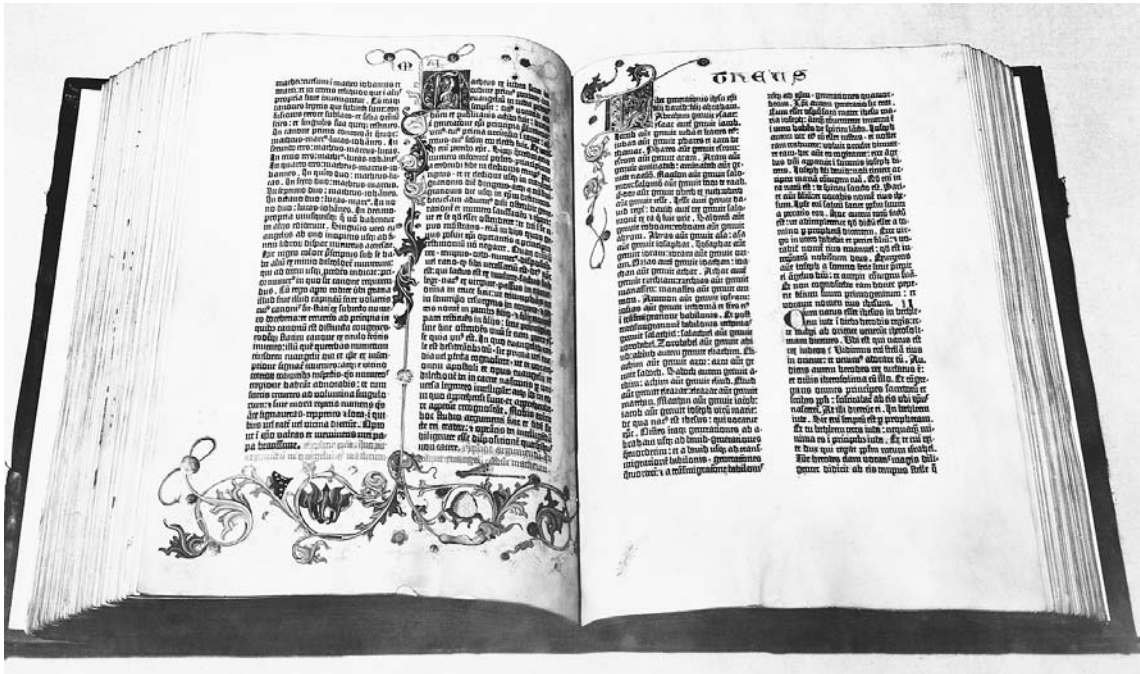
*The Gutenberg Bible* *(© Bettmann / Corbis)*

scene during Italy's politically unstable city-state period, when large cities such as Florence acted as independent republics. Within Florence, a number of factions vied for power. In 1498, Machiavelli helped one of them overthrow the dominant religious and political figure. Through a few other political posts he held over the next fourteen years, Machiavelli gained influence, while observing the harsh realities of politics. After the Medici family returned to power in 1512 and exiled Machiavelli to his country home, Machiavelli spent much of his time translating his political experiences into two treatises, or explanatory documents. The most infamous of these is *The Prince*. Machiavelli died of illness June 21, 1527, in Florence.

### Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)
Christopher Marlowe, son of John and Catherine Marlowe, was born in February 1564 in Canterbury, England. Although he embarked on a humanistic education, receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Cambridge while on scholarship, Marlowe was initially denied his Master of Arts degree due to his absences during his studies. Marlowe's activities were vouched for, however, by the court of Queen Elizabeth. Historical evidence suggests that during his educational absences, Marlowe was serving as a spy in the queen's service, helping to uncover and foil an insurrection plot by expatriate Roman Catholics. This life of intrigue and suspicion continued during Marlowe's six years in London, where he was imprisoned for a short time as an accomplice to murder. During the six years he was in London, Marlowe wrote plays, the most famous of which is *Dr. Faustus*. Marlowe died on May 30, 1593, but the circumstances surrounding his death and the evidence given in the inquest that followed it remained matters of debate into the 2000s.

### Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592)
Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, son of Pierre Eyquem, was born on February 28, 1533, in Perigueux, France. The Montaigne name was noble, purchased by the author's great-grandfather and first used by the author. At the direction of Montaigne's father, the entire Eyquem household spoke Latin in an effort to instill it into the young Montaigne. Montaigne studied and practiced law for several years and served two terms as mayor of Bordeaux. However, his major focus during his adult life was writing. Despite his background in Latin, Montaigne wrote his major work, *The*

*Essays*, in his native French. Montaigne died on September 13, 1592, in Perigueux.

### *Sir Thomas More (1478–1535)*

The records for Sir Thomas More's birth are not exact, although historians surmise he was born February 7, 1478, in London, England. More was the son of John More and Agnes Graunger More. While in his early- to mid-twenties, More lived with monks and adopted their lifestyle. Like his friend Erasmus, More combined his religious and intellectual pursuits into one humanistic ideal that he pursued for the rest of his life. The ultimate expression of this ideal came with the publication of *Utopia* (1516). In his adult life, More served Henry VIII and Parliament, and in 1521 he was knighted. When Henry declared himself head of the Church of England in 1531, however, More was forced to choose between his king and his Church. Faithful to the Church until his last days, More resigned his chancellor position and three years later refused to swear an oath endorsing the authority of Henry VIII over the Church of England and nullifying that of the pope in England. More was sent to the Tower of London and was beheaded July 6, 1535.

### *François Rabelais (1494–1553)*

Details about François Rabelais's life are incomplete, but it is believed that he was born in 1494 in Chinon, France, into a wealthy family. Rabelais embodied the spirit of the Renaissance, which encouraged the pursuit of multiple vocations and interests. In his varied career, Rabelais worked as priest, physician, scholar, and writer. He also served his brother, the governor of Italy's Piedmont region, as an intermediary in the escalating conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. This was an ironic task, since Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* was condemned by the Sorbonne—the Catholic theological faculty at the University of Paris—as sympathetic to the Lutheran cause, while the Calvinists (Protestants) thought Rabelais's books promoted atheism. Despite this animosity from religious groups, Rabelais's books enjoyed a wide circulation, thanks to his protection from the French crown. Most of Rabelais's work was written in the French vernacular, which inspired other French writers to do the same. Rabelais's writings influenced other European humanists as well, most notably Cervantes. Rabelais died in 1553 in France.

### *William Shakespeare (1564–1616)*

Tradition holds that William Shakespeare, son of John and Mary Arden Shakespeare, was born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, although the specific date of his birth has not been verified. In fact, for a man who is regarded by many critics as one of the most important writers in history, surprisingly little is known about Shakespeare. Most of the details are derived through speculation. Because his father was a man of some civic importance, it is assumed that Shakespeare received a well-rounded, humanistic education. Some scholars also take Shakespeare's references to schools in his plays as proof of his own education. Given the enormous variety of experiences Shakespeare describes in his plays, it is also assumed that he pursued or observed many vocations and activities. Not much else is known about Shakespeare until 1592, when he became popular as an actor and writer in the London theater scene. He wrote more than thirty plays, including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar*. Tradition holds that Shakespeare died in Stratford-upon-Avon, on April 23, 1616, exactly fifty-two years after his birth.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Don Quixote

The two parts of Miguel de Cervantes' *The History of That Ingenious Gentleman: Don Quixote de La Mancha*, commonly referred to as simply *Don Quixote*, were published in 1605 and 1615, respectively. Both parts generally appear in one publication. The story details the misadventures of an old man who has gone mad from reading too many chivalric romances, a form of medieval literature that was popular in Spain during Cervantes' lifetime. True to the form of chivalry, the old man idealizes everything he sees, to much humorous effect. At the end of the novel, Quixote comes to his senses and denounces chivalric ideals before he dies. The novel paints an accurate picture of life in early seventeenth-century Spain and struck a resonant chord with Cervantes' public. Although Cervantes himself thought the work nothing more than a parody, modern critics have noted the book's Renaissance view of favoring realism over idealism and have credited the book with influencing the development of the modern novel. In addition, Cervantes' novel spawned the term "quixotic"

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- *Don Quixote* was adapted as a television movie in 2000 by Hallmark Entertainment. It was directed by Peter Yates and starred John Lithgow as Don Quixote and Bob Hoskins as Sancho Panza. The movie is available through Turner Network Television (TNT).

- *Hamlet* was adapted by Pilgrim Pictures as a classic 1948 film, directed by and starring Laurence Olivier in the title role. As of 2008, it was available from Universal-International distributors. Several of Shakespeare's plays, under the following titles, have been adapted for film by Kenneth Branagh serving as screenwriter and director: *Love's Labour's Lost* (2000), *Hamlet* (1996), *In the Bleak Midwinter* (1995, also known as *A Midwinter's Tale*), *Much Ado about Nothing* (1993), and *Henry V* (1989). Branagh also stars in the first two and the last of these productions.

- Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* was adapted to an audiocassette, titled *Prince*, and was published by Blackstone Audiobooks in 1997.

- Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* was adapted to audiocassette and was published by Blackstone Audiobooks in December 1991.

(the pursuit of foolish ideals), which is still used in the twenty-first century.

## The Essays

When Michel de Montaigne wrote his collection of inquiries known as *The Essays*, first published in 1580, he created the modern literary essay form. However, the book itself—composed of three books of 107 chapters of widely varying length—is not organized into essays as recognized by modern readers. Rather, the term "essays," translated from the original French title of the book, *Les essais* (meaning "tests" or "attempts"), refers to the introspective, or self-driven, experimental methods that Montaigne used to explore the limits of his own human experience—the dominant idea of Humanism. This method is the only unifying factor in the book. The essays lack chronological order and sometimes contradict each other. In some cases, the essays are about subjects that have nothing to do with the title, and in other cases, the author switches topics within the essay. Although a few critics have attacked this lack of cohesiveness, many have looked past the structure of the book to its idea of introspection and its use of a conversational tone that creates an intimate bond between author and reader. Montaigne's in-depth, critical examination of subjects both large and small emphasized the idea of extreme skepticism popular in humanist thought, which influenced later Renaissance writers, including Shakespeare.

## Hamlet

William Shakespeare was first and foremost a humanist, and all of his plays distinctly capture this Renaissance spirit. In his first tragedy, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare gives his title character an introspective intellect that is both humanist and modern. The play, published in 1600 or 1601, details the internal struggle that Prince Hamlet faces in deciding whether to avenge his father's murder. Although his father's ghost commands Hamlet to kill the murderer (Hamlet's uncle), Hamlet is not so easily swayed and thinks through the problem for himself. In the process, Hamlet considers many ideas about philosophy and human experience, all the while experiencing a spiritual crisis. The play resonated with Shakespeare's contemporary audience and has continued to affect audiences and critics into the twenty-first century, many of whom note its psychological depth.

## The Praise of Folly

Desiderius Erasmus published his satire *The Praise of Folly* in 1511. Making use of the goddess Folly, the book features biting commentary on the injustices the author perceived in his world, most notably examples of religious foolishness such as the sale of indulgences (vouchers people could buy to absolve themselves of sin). The work immediately angered conservative Church officials. In Renaissance fashion, Erasmus incorporates classical references throughout the work and parodies the blind idealism of medieval times, a technique which influenced later humanist writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Cervantes. Erasmus's various uses
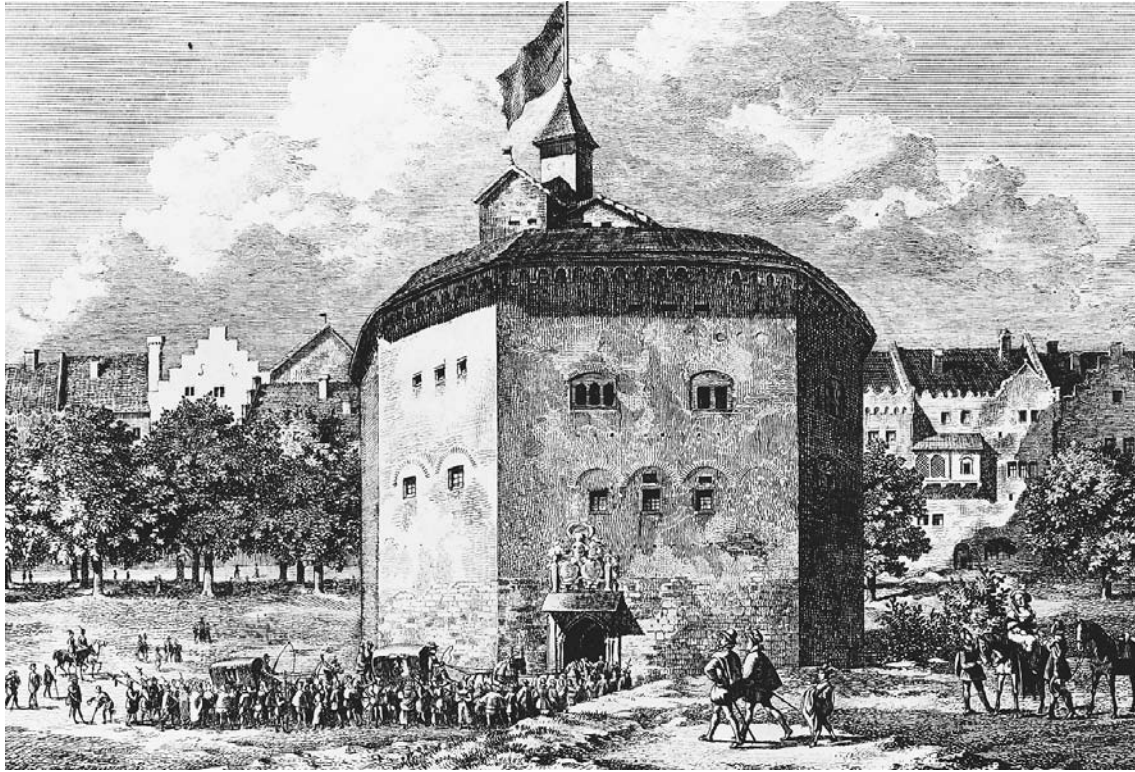
*The Globe Theatre* *(© The Folger Shakespeare Library. Reproduced by permission of The Folger Shakespeare Library)*

of the word "folly" have perplexed readers for over four centuries.

## The Prince

It can be argued that no other work in the history of literature has inspired more long-term, wide-spread distaste than Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, published in 1532, five years after the author's death. Although Machiavelli intended the work to be a handbook for political leaders, most readers in the sixteenth century were openly disgusted by the book's cold discussion and support of the unethical methods, such as murder, that successful leaders used to acquire and remain in power. At the time of its publication, the book was condemned as a manual for tyranny, and many critics since that time have had a similar response to the work. Largely due to the deliberate spread of mistranslations of *The Prince*, English Renaissance writers such as Shakespeare and Marlowe incorporated negative depictions of Machiavelli into some of their works. The book even inspired the term "Machiavellian" (meaning duplicitous), which remains in use into the twenty-first century.

Only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was *The Prince* accurately translated and reevaluated in its historical context. In this modern light, the intentions of the author have been hotly debated. Some critics have conjectured that Machiavelli was simply reporting on behaviors that he observed, while others believe that Machiavelli wrote the book as a satiric attack on tyranny. In any case, through works such as *The Prince*, Machiavelli has been referred to as the founder of empirical political science.

## The Tragedy of Mariam

Elizabeth Carey's *The Tragedy of Mariam* is celebrated as the first play written in English by a woman. Carey wrote it between 1602 and 1604 when she was a young woman, but it was not published until 1613. Her source was *Antiquities of the Jews*, by Josephus, which recounts the story of King Herod's cruelty toward his wife Mariam. In Carey's version, the events take place in a single day. Carey's Mariam is a tragic figure torn between being a good wife and despising her husband for the murder of her grandfather and brother. In the end, she speaks

her mind and stands up to her husband's ex-wife Salome, which results in Mariam being condemned to death. Carey paints Mariam as a martyr, a strong woman living with the corruption and sin of her husband's household. Carey's play is a closet drama, which means it is meant to be read aloud rather than performed on a stage.

## Utopia

Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, is one of the most influential works written during the Renaissance. The book has two parts. The first critiques the social and political problems More saw, while the second describes life in an idealistic fictional society called Utopia. Utopians employ various communist methods to prevent problems experienced in sixteenth-century England. In both parts, More himself is the narrator and, as such, acts as the Renaissance skeptic for the reader. In addition to criticizing his own society, he also criticizes as absurd the methods that the utopians use, causing critics to debate what More's true beliefs were. The author never resolves the issues, leaving the book open-ended instead of trying to provide a clear solution. Critics have noted that this ambiguity invited his readers to join in the discussion on these topics, a call heeded by other Renaissance writers.

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Do some research on Aristotle' *Poetics* and then select a Shakespearean play with which you are familiar and analyze it in light of some of the characteristics Aristotle explains, such as the unities, the nature of the hero, and the idea of catharsis. Does Shakespeare's play satisfy Aristotle's esthetic or not?

- Read about the Globe Theatre in Shakespeare's day and the recreation of that theater in modern times. Write an essay that explains how the Globe was arranged and in what ways it uses ideas first employed in Ancient Greek drama and in what aspects it departs from the ancient model.

- Although the humanists did not intend this, their writings helped to spark the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation. Research the particulars behind each of these movements, and then compare the two views of religion. What is the same? What is different?

## THEMES

### *Antiquity*

The Renaissance was sparked by a return to a classical style of learning, which had largely been ignored during the Middle Ages, when most writers glorified the Catholic Church and its teachings. As cities began to prosper, religious corruption increased and the influence of the Church waned; however, writers rediscovered the classics and began to incorporate them into their own works. "My father was neither the Chaos, nor Orcus, nor Saturn, nor Jupiter," says Erasmus's personified Folly in *The Praise of Folly*, referring to four gods, who were figures from the stories of the successions of the gods in Greek and Roman mythology. With the advent of the printing press in the 1450s, the age of mass-market print distribution began, and more writers were able to receive a classical education.

### *Individualism*

Study of the classical languages and values moved Renaissance writers to incorporate the classical style into their own works and encouraged a more worldly view than that of Middle Age religious writings, so that writers and scholars began to look beyond the Church's teachings and to take matters into their own hands, including the interpretation of the scriptures. This dramatic shift in thought, from relying totally on the wisdom of the Church to developing understanding through scholarship, led to the intense examination and appreciation for the human individual. This movement was called Humanism. The glorification of humans and human experience eventually led to the idea that humans could achieve perfection in this life as opposed to only in a divine paradise. Shakespeare's Danish prince Hamlet echoes this sentiment in a famous passage from *Hamlet*: "What a

piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties!" (Faculties in this sense means "abilities.") Othello, from Shakespeare's tragedy of the same name, was unable to rise to this perfection. Millicent Bell argues that contemporary beliefs about race dictated that he be characterized as a man who was seriously flawed. Race determined his character despite his evident honorable bearing.

### Faith in Reason

With the resurgence in classical learning and the focus on more secular, or nonreligious, human issues, scholars and writers embraced a spirit of skepticism and began to place a greater importance on reason. This belief was directly contrary to Church teachings, which encouraged people to have faith in the Church alone. However, it is important to note that the humanists were not against the Church. On the contrary, most humanists believed their faith was strengthened by reason, and when they used rational or skeptical arguments against the Church, it was in an attempt to inspire reform of the Church practices. In addition to their application of reason to Church practices, humanists also used reason to rebel against the unrealistic ideals popular in medieval literary works, most notably the chivalric romances. Cervantes's *Don Quixote* embodied this application. The old man in the story is so blinded by the idealism he has read about in medieval romances that he can no longer see the truth, thinks he is a knight, and goes seeking adventures. In one of the most famous examples from the story, Quixote attempts to fight a number of windmills, which he mistakes for giants. Says Quixote: "This is noble, righteous warfare, for it is wonderfully useful to God to have such an evil race wiped from the face of the earth."

### Education

Education was extremely important to Renaissance writers, and they pursued their own educations with diligence. As literacy increased due to the printing revolution and people other than scholars were able to read, writers also turned their focus outward. Historian Norman Davies writes in *Europe*, "The humanists knew that to create a New Man one had to start from schoolboys and students." From students, Renaissance writers turned to other specific sections of the public, toward whom they aimed a number of educational publications detailing the proper ways to do just about everything. In 1518, Baldassare Castiglione wrote *The Courtier*, a manual for courtly behavior. In 1530, Erasmus wrote *Manners for Children*. In 1532, Guillaume Budé emphasized the importance of learning itself in *The Right and Proper Institution of the Study of Learning*, while in the same year, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, his handbook for government leaders.

## STYLE

### Vernacular

The Renaissance began with resurgence in classical learning, including the study and proper use of Latin. However, Latin was the language of scholars, not the common people. As more people became literate, many authors began to write in their vernacular, or native language, to reach this wider audience. At the same time, many writers attempted to demonstrate that their native languages were just as good as Latin, as Rabelais did when he published his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in his native French. In addition, many writers produced works defending the decision to use vernacular, of which Joachim du Bellay's *Defence and Illustration of the French Language* is one of the most famous. "I do not, however, consider our vulgar tongue, as it now is, to be so vile, so abject as do these ambitious admirers of the Greek and Latin tongues," says Bellay, arguing against the prevailing belief that only the classical languages could produce literary greatness.

### Irony

Irony is used in various ways. Two of these are verbal and situational. In its most basic sense, verbal irony entails saying one thing when meaning the opposite, often for a humorous effect. Situational irony occurs in the contrast between what a given set of circumstances appear to be and what in fact they are. For example, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the title character is given false confidence from a prophecy by three witches, stating that he cannot be killed by a man born of a woman. At the end of the play, Macbeth relies on this prophecy when he fights Macduff. He is so sure of his success that he taunts him, telling Macduff about the prophecy that he cannot be killed by a man of woman born. However, as Macduff tells Macbeth:

Despair thy charm;
And let the angel whom thou still hast serv'd
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's
  womb
Untimely ripp'd.

Because Macduff was born by caesarian section rather than vaginally, he was not technically "born" of woman, and he can kill Macbeth, which he does.

## Satire

Satire is an attack or protest, created by portraying the object of the protest in an unfavorable manner and hoping to bring about change. In Renaissance times, writers such as Erasmus and his friend More responded to the social injustices they saw with satirical attacks, as an example from Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* demonstrates. When speaking about Christians, who he says are "enslaved to blindness and ignorance," Erasmus writes that priests encourage this blindness because they have wisely foreseen "that the people (like cows, which never give down their milk so well as when they are gently stroked), would part with less if they knew more." Erasmus is saying that if people were more educated about the Church and its injustices instead of just relying on the Church's comforting assurances, people would not be so willing to give their faith to the Church. By referring to the process of duping the people into faith as milking a cow, Erasmus sets up a negative image in the readers' minds and causes them to think about his argument.

## Utopia

More's *Utopia* inspired many imaginary societies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and is so famous that the word "utopia" came to signify both any idealized place and the literary form that depicts such a place. Renaissance utopian works sought to inspire social change by creating a new, imaginary, society that addressed problems in a different way. Two related examples from *Utopia* illustrate how More did this. In the first part of the book, More has his fictional character Raphael Hythloday talk to Cardinal Morton (chancellor to Henry VII) about some reforms he proposes. Hythloday brings up a current problem, the wool trade. Says Hythloday, "Your sheep . . . that commonly are so meek and eat so little; now, as I hear, they have become so greedy and fierce that they devour men themselves." This is not a literal eating of men, but a symbolic one. It points to the fact that landlords who wished to get rich from the wool trade were creating widespread poverty by stealing all of the common land people formerly used for agriculture, so that the landlords' sheep could graze on it. As a result, many of the new rural poor crowded into the cities, which led to other social ills such as disease and crime. In the second part of the book, about utopia itself, Hythloday demonstrates how the utopians do not have this problem because they conserve their resources when making and using clothes: "They use linen cloth most because it requires the least labour . . . . a Utopian is content with a single cloak, and generally wears it for two years."

# MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

## The Protorenaissance

Many historians and critics acknowledge a "protorenaissance" that preceded and laid the groundwork for the actual Renaissance. While critics are in disagreement as to when this protorenaissance began, the period lasted approximately from the twelfth century (when many universities were built) to the first half of the fifteenth century (up until the advent of the printing press). During this period, many influential writers began to create the Renaissance spirit that would influence later Renaissance writers. The most notable of these are three Italian writers—Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarch, and Giovanni Boccaccio—and English poet Geoffrey Chaucer. When Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy* in Italian in the early fourteenth century, he literally created and defined the written version of Italian, paving the way for later Renaissance writers to develop their own vernaculars. At around the same time, Petrarch not only helped to track down and reproduce many of the great classical works later writers would study, he also helped popularize the use of the sonnet, a type of lyrical poem that many European Renaissance writers used for centuries.

Giovanni Boccaccio also helped to recover and translate ancient texts and, as historian Paul Johnson notes in his book *The Renaissance: A Short History*, "he produced a number of reference works, including two massive classical encyclopedias," one on the topography of the ancient world and one categorizing all of the ancient deities. Boccaccio also wrote *The Decameron*, a collection of one hundred tales some critics think

influenced Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer's work, most notably *The Canterbury Tales*, published in 1400 after his death, helped to develop the English vernacular, inspiring later English writers as Dante's work had done in Italy. *The Canterbury Tales*, which tell the stories of several pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, are also noted for their humanistic depiction of late medieval society. Johnson says of the pilgrims: "These men and women jump out from the pages, and live on in the memory, in ways that not even Dante could contrive."

### The American Renaissance

Ralph Waldo Emerson issued a ringing challenge to the literary community of the young American nation in his 1837 Harvard address, "The American Scholar": if American writers were "free and brave," with words "loaded with life," they would usher in a "new age." Emerson looms over that age, whether as an inspiration to reformers and artists of his generation and the next or as a bugbear to those distrustful of social and institutional change or literary innovation. Never wishing to lead a party or to be imitated himself, he thought it his role (and that of the scholar) to provoke others to discover their own resources of genius and power. The rich literary production in New England during the next quarter century—in many senses a response to Emerson's provocation—constituted what came to be known as the American Renaissance.

### The Renaissance Man

The ideal human in physical, mental, and moral condition came to be known as the Renaissance man. A Renaissance man is a person who pursues and excels at many vocations and diverse interests, following the humanist notion that man's capacity to learn and improve is endless. This ideal was emphasized in the Renaissance education, which included study in several different areas. A famous example from the time is the Italian Leonardo da Vinci, who was accomplished as a painter, sculptor, and scientist, who designed inventions such as a helicopter, specialized in human anatomy, and painted masterpieces, such as the fresco *The Last Supper* and the oil portrait titled *Mona Lisa*. Davies says, Leonardo "possessed seemingly limitless talents to pursue his equally limitless curiosity." In the twenty-first century, the term Renaissance man

or woman applies to someone who is a genius in many, often highly dissimilar fields of study.

### Commedia dell'arte

*Commedia dell'arte* is an Italian term meaning "the comedy of guilds" or "the comedy of professional actors." This form of dramatic comedy was popular in Italy during the sixteenth century. Actors were assigned stock roles (such as Pulcinella, the stupid servant, or Pantalone, the old merchant) and given a basic plot to follow, but all dialogue was improvised. The roles were rigidly typed and the plots were formulaic, usually revolving around young lovers who thwarted their elders and attained wealth and happiness. A rigid convention of the *commedia dell'arte* is the periodic intrusion of Harlequin, who interrupts the play with low buffoonery. Peppino de Filippo's *Metamorphoses of a Wandering Minstrel* gave modern audiences an idea of what *commedia dell'arte* may have been like. Various scenarios for *commedia dell'arte* were compiled in Petraccone's *La commedia dell'arte, storia, technica, scenari*, published in 1927.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From the mid-fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, Europe experienced many vital changes, many of which were interconnected, and most of which were built upon technical, social, and political developments from the late Middle Ages. The most notable of these was the development of printing, which in turn influenced a number of other events. In Germany, Johann Gutenberg's invention of the moveable-type printing press in 1450, which combined a number of existing technologies, quickly caught on in other European countries. With the renewed interest in classical literature and the increasing contributions to Renaissance literature, book production rose steadily. Johnson notes, "By 1500, after forty-five years of the printed book, the total has been calculated at nine million." As vernacular languages gained in popularity, the number of printed books increased even more.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of people were flocking to universities, which had been created in the late Middle Ages to educate members of the clergy. However, as literacy increased

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **1450s:** German businessman Johann Gutenberg prints the first Bible (in Latin) from a printing press.

  **1510s:** Martin Luther's theses and other literature promoting reformation of the Catholic Church are quickly disseminated through printing presses.

  **Today:** There continues to be a market for printed books, though literature is also being published and distributed by electronic media.

- **1450s:** After decades of bitter rivalry, the Italian city-states form the "Italian League" and agree to protect each other from outside attacks.

  **1510s:** Machiavelli writes *The Prince*, an instruction manual on how monarchs gain and wield power. He addresses it to the Medici family, the unofficial rulers of the Florentine republic.

  **Today:** After many transformations in Italian government, city-states have been abandoned in favor of a democratic republic.

- **1450s:** After fifty years, Italian sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti completes his famous bronze doors for the northern and eastern portals of the baptistery of the cathedral of Florence, which depict scenes from the Bible in astonishing realism.

  **1510s:** Erasmus publishes *The Praise of Folly*, a seminal humanist work that advocates interpreting the Bible with realistic, scholarly methods to determine God's true intent instead of relying solely on church tradition.

  **Today:** Some people believe that if the original text of the Bible were fed into a computer and analyzed for certain patterns, hidden messages would be revealed.

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and people renewed their interest in classical education, universities began to offer more secular curricula like law. Many Renaissance writers were trained at these universities.

The Renaissance was also a time of mobility, both within Europe and abroad. As the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church waned in power, Italy's city-states and Europe's monarchies increased in importance. With this development, Rome was no longer the intellectual or cultural center of Europe, and Renaissance scholars began to travel elsewhere, spreading their ideals in the process. The most notable of these traveling scholars was Erasmus, whose visits to England in the late fifteenth century introduced him to several other influential humanists and helped him to develop the ideas that would make him famous. As Johnson notes, Erasmus came in 1498 to study at Oxford University in England because "it was no longer necessary to go as far as Italy."

Meanwhile, explorations outside Europe were on the rise, and a whole new world was being discovered. The successful navigation around Africa's Cape of Good Hope in the 1450s was one such voyage, while Christopher Columbus's discovery of America in 1492 was another. The resulting expansion of the world in the eyes of Europeans influenced Renaissance writers like Rabelais, whose *Gargantua and Pantagruel* incorporates fantastical islands that can be reached by ocean travel, and features very odd beings: "We got sight of a triangular island. . . . The people there . . . all of them, men, women, and children, have their noses shaped like an ace of clubs."

In England, the Renaissance spirit of criticism increasingly focused on the Catholic Church. In 1517, Martin Luther posted his famous ninety-five theses to the door of his church; these, with the aid of the printing press,

were also widely distributed. One of the theses demonstrates the main point of his argument: "Thus those preachers of indulgences are in error who say that by the indulgences of the pope a man is freed and saved from all punishment." Although Luther, like the humanists who inspired him, had hoped his theses would inspire a reformation of the Church while keeping it whole, most historians agree that his symbolic act launched the Protestant Reformation. From this point on, parishioners gathered in two factions, Catholics and Protestants. In 1529, the Catholic Church refused to acknowledge King Henry VIII's divorce from his second wife, Catherine of Aragon, who had failed to bear the king a male heir. Two years later, Henry retaliated by declaring himself the supreme head of the Church of England.

The Protestant Reformation inspired the Catholic Church's response, the Counter-Reformation, in which the Church changed its tactics and started to embrace some of the humanist aspects it had originally fought so hard against. During these two major movements, both Catholic and Protestant printers used their trade as a weapon, creating propaganda literature they distributed to people in hopes of keeping or gaining their faith.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The confusion over what constitutes the official period of the Renaissance and its role in history dates back to 1858. Samuel Johnson says, "The term 'Renaissance' was first prominently used by the French historian Jules Michelet." Two years later, Jacob Burckhardt immortalized the term in the publication of his *The Civilization of the Renaissance*, in which the period was viewed as the beginning of the modern age.

From that time until late in the twentieth century, historians and critics alike envisioned the Renaissance as a transition period between the Dark Ages—in which there was little or no technical innovation or cultivation of the arts— and the modern age. In fact, Renaissance critics themselves were under a similar impression about the importance of the time period. Critic Vernon Hall sums it up in his book *A Short History of Literary Criticism*, when speaking about the literary critics of the time: "Looking

upon the Middle Ages as a semibarbaric period, they were out to bestow form, classical form, on the literature and life of their age."

During the Renaissance, the new humanistic literature inspired both positive and negative responses from readers and critics. Because many Renaissance works criticized the Catholic Church, they were not received well by either the Church or the Church's supporters, who would often ban or burn these works. On the other hand, for those who were open to the new ideas Renaissance literature proposed, the works were received very well. So to a large extent, the reception of a work depended on the predisposition of the critic examining it. In addition, in many cases the writer and critic were the same, as in the aforementioned examples of works promoting the use of vernacular language. Hall says about the Renaissance critics, "regardless of whether their influence was good or bad they succeeded admirably in doing one thing. They established literary criticism as an independent form of literature."

As scholars in later years have looked back on the Renaissance, critics have tended to focus on one country. Says Jonathan Hart in his introduction to *Reading the Renaissance*, a collection of essays examining the Renaissance as a whole, "Most often, scholars examine the national literatures of the Renaissance in isolation."

Some of the most famous criticism has been for one particular author, as in the famous "Preface to Shakespeare" by eighteenth-century writer and critic Samuel Johnson, in which he notes, "Shakespeare is above all writers. . . . the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirrour of manners and life." Shakespeare has been, without fail, the single most studied writer of the Renaissance, in part because his works synthesize many of the humanistic themes that Renaissance writers employed, which still ring true with many critics and audiences in the twenty-first century.

## CRITICISM

### Ryan D. Poquette

*Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Doctor Faustus*

*Anatomical chart created by Leonardo da Vinci* (© *Corbis*)

*as an example of two warring ideologies in Christopher Marlowe's play of the same name.*

Christopher Marlowe's play, *Doctor Faustus*, written in 1604 at the height of the Renaissance in England, lends itself to countless interpretations. Critics have read it as an extreme humanist play, focusing on Faustus's decision to pursue knowledge at all costs, even damnation, a concept which he does not initially believe in. Others, however, have read it as a medieval Christian morality play, a type of cautionary tale that demonstrates the battle for a human soul between primal good and evil forces like "God" and "The Devil." Indeed, there is evidence in the text to support both of these assumptions. The truth is, the play is both. Faustus, a product of the transitional times in which he (and the playwright, Marlowe) lived, is a character so saturated in both medieval Christianity and Renaissance Humanism that he is incapable of committing to either. In the end, this spells his ruin.

As the play starts, Faustus has come to a decision. True to humanist fashion, he has set himself on a task of consuming all of the worldly

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
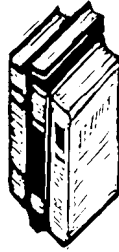
- Allan Atlas's *Renaissance Music: Music in Western Europe, 1400–1600* (1998) is a comprehensive book about music during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe.

- Craig Harbison's *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance Art in Its Historical Context* (1995) examines the origins of Renaissance art in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Netherlands, France, and Germany.

- *Architecture of the Renaissance: From Brunelleschi to Palladio* (1996), written by Bertrand Jestaz and translated by Caroline Beamish, provides a good overview of the architectural rebirth in fifteenth-century Italy, which was inspired by the columns, rounded arches, and classical architecture of Greece and Rome.

- Florence was the key city for the arts during the Italian Renaissance. *Florence and the Renaissance: The Quattrocentro* (1997), by Alain J. Lemaitre and Erich Lessing, examines the course of creative development in architecture, sculpture, and paintings during the Renaissance in Italy.

- Ingrid D. Rowland's *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (1998) employs an interdisciplinary approach to explore the cultural conditions that produced the Renaissance.

> **FAUSTUS IS AT THIS POINT A HUMANIST TO THE EXTREME, FOR IF ONE CARRIES ALONG TO A SUPERLATIVE DEGREE THE IDEA OF BELIEVING IN HUMAN POWER TO BETTER ONESELF, IT TURNS INTO THE BELIEF THAT HUMANITY CAN SUPERSEDE GOD."**

This road is deliberately chosen by Faustus. Having reached the limits of human knowledge, he turns instead to the magic arts: "A sound magician is a mighty god. / Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity." With this decision to turn to magic to try to make himself a god, Faustus turns to the dark side, and the play takes a turn from skeptical Humanism to medieval mysticism. A true humanist, schooled in all of the natural sciences, would not believe in magic. This is one of the many paradoxes in the play.

After seeking out some magician friends, Faustus acquires the skill to conjure. His first major act is to call forth the devil, Mephistopheles, which he does with the aid of some Christian implements, such as holy water. When the devil appears for the first time, he is so hideous that he scares Faustus: "I charge thee to return and change thy shape. / Thou art too ugly to attend on me." Faustus forces Mephistopheles to come back in the shape of a "Franciscan friar," which is more pleasing to him. Faustus is willing to forsake himself and his religion, but only if the items he gets in return fit a certain mold. As Roland M. Frye notes in his article "Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*: The Repudiation of Humanity," "From this point onward Faustus's hold upon reality steadily dissolves."

Faustus's delusions start with his failure to believe that Mephistopheles is actually in hell. Mephistopheles explains that any existence that does not include the grace of God is a hell, and so Mephistopheles suffers whether he is in the earthly realm or the underworld. Faustus refuses to believe the devil and forges ahead with his plan to surrender his soul to Lucifer in exchange for "four-and-twenty years" to have Mephistopheles as a servant to attend on Faustus and give him whatever power he needs.

knowledge he can, and in doing so "thou hast attained the end." Faustus here begins his practice of referring to himself as "thou" (the Renaissance version of "you") in addition to referring to himself as "I." He will continue to refer to himself as "thou" or "Doctor Faustus" off and on throughout the play. By having Faustus refer to himself as both an insider ("I") and outsider ("thou" and "Doctor. Faustus"), Marlowe underscores the division between fantasy and reality on which Faustus will tread on the road to his damnation.

Still, Faustus falters before he actually goes through with the process; pausing, he entertains the thought of God, although he quickly scolds himself for such thoughts: "What boots it then to think of God or heaven? / Away with such vain fancies and despair!" Faustus even goes to the other extreme, saying he will turn to Beelzebub and "offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes." Again, the forces of rational Humanism and medieval theology war with each other within Faustus, but this is the first time Faustus has offered to murder for his cause. It is at this point that other forces start fighting with each other, namely a good angel and bad angel, who come in to try to fight for Faustus's soul. This is much in the style of a medieval morality play. The evil angel wins the battle by tempting Faustus with the power he so desperately craves.

Faustus, enraptured with the idea of being able to have Mephistopheles for his pet and to be able to "raise up spirits" whenever he wishes, makes the pact with Mephistopheles and Lucifer. It is only at this point that Faustus, confident in his decision, decides to ask Mephistopheles again about the nature of hell. Once again the demon gives an answer similar to the first one, saying that "All places shall be hell that is not heaven." It is interesting that Faustus asks this question. He is confident he will not be damned in hell and that in his rational mind he has gotten the better end of the bargain. He thinks he will have twenty-four years of power and then get off easy, and yet the first question he asks Mephistopheles after officially pledging his soul to Lucifer is what hell is like. Yet once again, Faustus does not believe the devil's answer, saying, "Come, I think hell's a fable." If this is so, then why does Faustus ask about hell? Is he so sure in his mind that he is safe that he wishes to taunt the devil? Or is there a nagging doubt from his Christian side that has prompted him to ask the question? This is another instance where Faustus's contradictory beliefs introduce a paradox in the play.

From this point on in the play, the nagging doubts in Faustus's mind increase in frequency. He asks for a wife from Mephistopheles, and the devil brings him another devil in the guise of a woman. This is not what Faustus requested, and so he is offended. But Mephistopheles cannot give him a human wife. The devil can give him power, but it has its limits. Instead, if Faustus asks for human women, he will bring more

devils. Mephistopheles hints at this when he says he will bring women "as beautiful" as Lucifer was, before his expulsion from heaven. Faustus glosses over this and the other spells the devil demonstrates. Faustus is intent on his real wish, which is to "raise up spirits when I please." His wish to be able to raise the dead is reminiscent of Jesus' raising of Lazarus, of which Faustus is aware. Faustus is at this point a humanist to the extreme, for if one carries along to a superlative degree the idea of believing in human power to better oneself, it turns into the belief that humanity can supersede God.

However, Faustus soon takes a turn back to his theological side. After reviewing Mephistopheles' spell book, he sees the error of his ways. He asks the devil to show him the heavens: "Now would I have a book where I might see all characters and planets of the heavens, that I might know their motions and dispositions." The devil shows Faustus, who in the next scene realizes that he is damned and curses Mephistopheles, "Because thou hast deprived me of those joys."

Faustus now fights with himself more openly, first praying to God to save him, then begging Lucifer to forgive him for praying to God. He is a man unhinged, and he alternately clings to one ideology and then the other. In his more Christian moments, he believes in God and hell but thinks he is past the point of saving. In his more humanistic moments, he asks incessant questions of Mephistopheles, trying to disprove the existence of God and hell so that he will not be damned. "Tell me who made the world," Faustus asks the devil, who cannot say God's name, and so refuses. Instead Mephistopheles says: "Think thou on hell, Faustus, for thou art damned." In other words, not only should Faustus forget his salvation, he should concentrate on the fact that when his contract with Lucifer comes due, his life could be made very bad in hell.

Faustus decides to stick to his damnation and starts to enjoy his power. Or at least he tries. Most of his attempts to use magic backfire, as in his attempt to play a trick on the pope, which ends with he and Mephistopheles fleeing before they are cursed: "Forward and backward, to curse Faustus to hell." This is a hard lesson for Faustus. It is no accident that Marlowe chose to have his character try to provoke the pope, who in the medieval Catholic religion is the direct servant of God. Here, Faustus has aligned

*A scene from the television movie adaptation of* Don Quixote *by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra* (*AP Images*)

himself with evil and tries to win over good but cannot.

The rest of his attempts at magic are even worse, as they are squandered doing deeds for others, most of which do not fall in line with his original plan of playing a commanding role over all of creation. "I am content to do whatsoever your majesty shall command me," says Faustus to the emperor, who has Faustus bring forth the spirit of Alexander the Great and his paramour.

At the end of his twenty-four years, Faustus has wasted all of his time and reflects on his plight, being once again of the medieval mind: "What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?" In one last attempt to please some scholars, Faustus has Mephistopheles bring forth the spirit of Helen of Troy. "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?" Of course, it is not. None of the spirits that the devil has conjured have been human, but rather demons, just like the first demon Mephistopheles brought forth to Faustus for a "wife." However, at this point, Faustus is lost, and in his delusion, he sees Helen, not the demon, whose "lips suck forth my soul."

The play, which has taken a roller-coaster ride through competing ideologies, ends on the medieval note, as Faustus awaits his damnation, trying one last time to repent by throwing away the quest for knowledge that has damned him: "I'll burn my books. Ah Mephistopheles!" Faustus is carried off to hell, which is unfortunately more real than his humanist side would have wished.

**Source:** Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on Renaissance Literature, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## Millicent Bell

*In the following essay, Bell discusses the racial prejudices Othello tries to rise above—and is ultimately overwhelmed by—in Shakespeare's play.*

Othello's whole life seems to be shaped by a society—like Shakespeare's England—in which self-transformation as well as the transformations effected by the forces of social change, or even by mere accident, operate to alter what one is, shift one's very selfhood from one template to another. Before he became the hero who won the regard of the Venetian state and the love of Desdemona, he had been someone we can only dimly imagine. Somehow, his career had begun by exile from an origin we never see directly. We can merely suspect its vast difference from his present condition. What he might have been as a person of station in his native place we will never know.

We do not even know without doubt that he is a "blackamoor," a Negro from sub-Saharan Africa, like "raven-coloured" Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus* who is described as having a "fleece of wooly hair" and whose child is called a "thick-lipped slave." Roderigo slurringly refers to Othello as "the thick lips," and he is called "black" throughout the play and says, himself, "Haply for I am black." But, perhaps, he is a "tawny Moor" from the Mediterranean rim, like the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*, or a Berber or "erring Barbarian," as Iago puns, or the "Barbary horse" who has "covered" Desdemona, as the same racist provocateur vulgarly tells Brabantio. Shakespeare does not remove all doubt, but he seems willing to let us visualize "a veritable negro," to use Coleridge's phrase for the Othello

> AT THE LAST, OTHELLO SURRENDERS HIMSELF
>
> TO THE PRISON OF RACE HE THOUGHT HE HAD
>
> ESCAPED. HE IS NOT ABLE, IN THE END, TO CAST AWAY
>
> THE ROLE AND CHARACTER WHICH SOCIETAL
>
> CONVENTION PRESCRIBED TO HIM AT THE BEGINNING
>
> OF HIS CAREER IN THE WHITE COLONIAL WORLD."

whose love for a white woman he found "something monstrous to conceive." Elizabethans might not have reacted as Coleridge would come to do. Othello was played as a black man on the stage in Shakespeare's own day and for over a century and a half after. And so again we feel that the part must be played today, though the nineteenth and a good portion of the twentieth century were able only to tolerate a sort of light-skinned Arab sheik to represent him.

But one way or another, his exact beginnings remain obscure to us. Though he has told Desdemona as well as her father "the story of [his] life/ From year to year—the battles, sieges, fortunes/ That [he] passed . . . even from [his] boyish days"—his summary to the signory of Venice is vague, and the "travailous history" he offers of wars and wanderings, of captures and escapes, and of encounters with monsters and cannibals is mythically Odyssean. One thing we know is that he had once experienced the ultimate degradation that had come when, "taken by the insolent foe," he had been "sold to slavery." Somehow, he found his freedom, and we can presume that he was converted from his original Mohammedanism, but we are ignorant of when or how. Already, when we first meet him, he is a Christian and a "self-made man" who has made the most of opportunity and his own genius and has overcome the handicaps of being foreign and black in the white Venetian world in which he has found a place. This stranger with an exotic, almost mythical otherness has acquired a place within the order of Venice by his own efforts on behalf of a colonial empire. And yet, in the end, he cannot sustain this new personhood, this transformed social being donated by altered occasion, forged by his own will.

The curtain rises for good reason on a discussion about jobs and how one is qualified for them. Iago's declared envy of Cassio's promotion is plausible, even though he expresses this resentment only in a single remark to Roderigo. It serves to relate the play to a new seventeenth-century social climate that gave rise to uncertainty about personal identity—and gives a historical meaning to the way Iago comes before us as the man who believes that one is only what one appears to be, what role one is able to personate successfully. Iago's most significant statement of this view is the skeptical declaration he makes to Roderigo—"'tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus. Our bodies are gardens, to which our wills are gardeners"—which is almost sincerely his own philosophy, though it hardly serves the feckless Roderigo to whom it is addressed. Iago calls Cassio, just appointed lieutenant, a mere classroom soldier, "a great arithmetician . . . /That never set a squadron in the field/Nor the division of a battle knows/More than a spinster." Practical field experience is a legitimate requirement for the promotion Cassio has gained—and something different from the mere entitlement of class and even the textbook theory he has acquired. In contrast, Iago has served in battle, as he reminds Othello: "in the trade of war I have slain men." Iago professes to believe in promotion for merit and resents the arbitrary advancement of the candidate, like Cassio, who is part of an old boys' network. He also claims the earned rights of seniority rather than preferment gained by letters of recommendation from influential somebodies.

> Preferment goes by letter and affection
> And not by old gradation, where each second
> Stood heir to th' first.

But though he makes his claim by referring to a system of respect for service he calls "old gradation," he himself has tried to go up the ladder by the aid of "letter and affection" and secured the support of "[t]hree great ones of the city." He is one of the new breed of men who not only claim advancement by merit but will manipulate and scheme for advancement—and by either means expect to escape assignment to a fixed definition. That he has not received his deserved promotion and must prosper just the same is something he is prepared for as a master of Machiavellian elasticity. He deprecates title and position and even the old division into masters and followers that organizes society:

> We cannot be all masters, nor all masters
> Cannot be truly followed. You shall mark
> Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave
> That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,
> Wears out his time much like his master's ass
> For nought but provender, and when he's old,
>     cashiered.
> Whip me such honest knaves!

Others, adapting to a new social climate, know the meaninglessness of the identities society assigns. Taking instruction from Machiavelli, they make the most of opportunity, and, though observing the old boundaries of outer behavior,

> trimmed in forms, and visages of duty,
> Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves
> And, throwing but shows of service on their
>     lords,
> Do well thrive by them, and when they have
>     lined their coats,
> Do themselves homage: these fellows have
>     some soul
> And such a one do I profess myself.

But not all have Iago's confidence. In a mobile society, one is always likely to lose one's footing and become a nobody—that is, to cease to exist in a social sense. The play is full of implicit references to a milieu in which, as in today's corporate world, there is no longer a guarantee of tenure. Demotion breaks Cassio's heart. Othello remembers with grief how he had "done the state some service" before his replacement as general and administrator of Cyprus.

Unlike the aristocratic Cassio, Othello, who may once have been a prince, has been a mercenary soldier and before that even a slave in another world. But, as the play begins, he is in command of the Venetian forces in defense of Cyprus against the Turks. A Renaissance idea of fame, or of "making a name" for oneself, is invoked in the play, as is Iago's Machiavellian idea of "thriving." It is the heroic character Othello has made for himself that achieves his success in his wooing. He makes Desdemona put aside the prerequisites of class and race assumed for her appropriate suitor. She says she "loved [him] for the dangers [he] had passed," though her father, who looks for inherited credentials he understands better in the sons of Venetian aristocracy, calls Othello's recounting of his history "witchcraft." And perhaps such self-fabrication, such transformation by which one of the colonized joins the military elite of a colonial power, is a kind of magic. For Brabantio, miscegenation is, classically, a threat of redefinition not to be

made less threatening by proof of Othello's worthiness. "For if such actions may have passage free/Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be," he shouts in an outburst of class panic. Iago will remark a bit later to Cassio, "he to-night hath boarded a land carrack," implicitly comparing Othello's sexual conquest to the seizure of a Spanish or Portuguese treasure ship (a "carrack") by an English privateer—in other words, an act of social piracy.

Yet nothing can be more fragile than Othello's self-making, which has none of Iago's confidence in being whatever, for the occasion, he wills himself to be. His attempt to give rebirth to an ancient ideal of epic heroism is vulnerable to the spirit of the later time represented by Iago. As his nobility is erased by rage and despair in the middle of the third act, he mourns,

> O now for ever
> Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content!
> Farewell the plumed troops and the big wars
> That make ambition virtue! O farewell,
> Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill
>     trump,
> The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife,
> The royal banner, and all quality,
> Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
> And, O ye mortal engines, whose wide throats
> Th' immoral Jove's great clamours counterfeit,
> Farewell: Othello's occupation's gone.

The strangeness of this wonderful speech is seldom commented on. There is no real reason why Othello should say goodbye at this point to his soldier's profession, which has given him an epic selfhood. His terrible crime, for which he only escapes punishment by performing his own execution, is still ahead of him. But the collapse of personal being he is already experiencing is inseparable from the loss of occupation. Before he embraces his literal self-destruction at the last, he refers to himself in the third person, saying "Where should Othello go?" as though the man he was is no longer speaking. Afterwards, when Lodovico comes looking for him with "Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?" he replies, "That's he that was Othello? here I am." Then, he remembers his former self—the self created by his public career—as having once defended the Venetian State even as, at this ultimate moment of further transformation, he identifies himself with the "circumcised dog" he once killed. Critics are mistaken who have spoken of Othello's "recovery" in the final scene when he seems to become, again, a fearless soldier and romantic lover who dies by his own hand. It is hard to

admire Othello uncritically once having read T. S. Eliot on this hero's famous final speech ("What Othello seems to me to be doing in making this speech is cheering himself up. He is endeavoring to escape reality"). But Eliot did not observe that what happens at this last moment is tragic acceptance rather than escape, an acceptance of his original status as a racial outsider, which neither his military achievements nor his marriage have succeeded in permanently altering.

His marriage has proved to be the theater in which the issues of self-realization, the issues that beset men in society at large, are acted out for Othello on the scale of intimate relations. Marriage to a woman of a rank above one's own has been a universally practiced means of male self-advancement throughout human history, of course, but the marriage of Othello to Desdemona has provided a precarious bridge over the gaps between them. Shakespeare hints that Othello's jealous anguish and distrust of his own perceptions may be caused by the interracial character of his union with a daughter of his Venetian masters. All those reminders by Iago of the impossibility of establishing Desdemona's adultery—a privacy invisible directly—refer one back to a miscegenation over whose consummation a cloud of unknowableness also hangs. The real but equally transgressive relation of Othello and Desdemona is even less easily viewable than the adultery of Desdemona with Cassio that did not take place but was so vividly supposed. This marriage becomes, by implication, something not to be made "ocular," as though it is obscene, as though it can be fairly represented only by animalistic metaphor in Iago's description to the shuddering Brabantio at the beginning of the play: "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/Is tupping your white ewe!" Just as he will cause Othello to hallucinate the false image of Desdemona and Cassio locked in naked embrace, Iago rouses her father with his wizard evocation, setting into the mind of the old man the animal coupling that represents their racial transgression as "making the beast with two backs," and figuring Othello as a black ram as well as a Barbary horse.

It seems probable that, at this early point, Othello and Desdemona have not yet had the opportunity of establishing the union they have secretly contracted. The newly married pair could not have enjoyed their nuptial rapture for long during their first night in Venice when a midnight summons from the Duke posts the bridegroom to the defense of Cyprus. But not only circumstances or conditions keep this marriage from being consummated. The play suggests that Othello himself is engaged in a deferral of this forbidden act. Othello portrays himself convincingly at his trial before the Venetian Duke and Senators as one more used to the "flinty and steel couch of war" than to the "downy" bed of love. This war-hardened soldier hasn't had much experience of love's soft delights. He confesses: "since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,/Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used/Their dearest action in the tented field." He is no Marc Antony. Though Desdemona will accompany him to Cyprus, he is at pains to remind the Duke how largely his military preoccupation will absorb him:

> And heaven defend your good souls that you
>      think
> I will your serious and great business scant
> When she is with me. No, when light-winged
>      toys
> Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
> My speculative and officed instrument
> That my disports corrupt and taint my
>      business,
> Let housewives make a skillet of my helm.

He tells Desdemona, as he assumes his new assignment, "I have but an hour/Of love, of worldly matter and direction/To spend with thee. We must obey the time."

Desdemona may still be a virgin when they are reunited after separate crossings to Cyprus, and Othello says, "The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue./The profit's yet to come 'tween me and you." He gives orders for a wedding party while he leads his wife to bed, but the party grows wild and brings Cassio into disgrace, and Othello and Desdemona are interrupted once more—after which Othello lingers on with the wounded Montano, saying to his wife, with some equanimity, "Come Desdemona: 'tis the soldiers' life/To have their balmy slumbers waked with strife." Shakespeare may have wanted us to wonder how well their lovemaking had gone or if it had even got under way, and to sustain the doubt in Iago's earlier question, "Are you well married?"

We may connect the jealousy aroused so readily in Othello with one of those postnuptial awakenings that come to men unprepared for the active sexuality of the women they marry. Was

Desdemona too quick or he too slow? It has been evident from the start of the play that she can take the initiative. We recall that when she first heard Othello's narrative of his past exploits she told him that "she wished/That heaven had made her such a man"—a remark that either expresses her longing for masculine roles or her bold invitation to him to make himself hers. She prompted Othello by telling him that if he had a friend who loved her, he "should but teach him how to tell" such a story as his own, "and that would woo her." She herself admits to the Duke of Venice, "That I did love the Moor to live with him/My downright violence and scorn of fortunes/May trumpet to the world," and so she pleads to be allowed to accompany him to Cyprus rather than to be left behind, "a moth of peace." When Othello lands in Cyprus to find her already there waiting for him he greets her, "O my fair warrior!" Perhaps she already is what Cassio calls her, his "captain's captain." Her father may not have known the daughter he describes as "[a] maiden never bold,/Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion/Blushed at herself."

Her activeness may be sexual. She had insisted to the Duke that if she were left behind, "the rites for which I love [Othello] are bereft me." Later, convinced that she has made love to Cassio, Othello will come to say, under Iago's influence, "O curse of marriage/That we can think these delicate creatures ours/And not their appetites!" Iago will have laid the ground for such a disillusion by his suggestion that Desdemona had already been an awakened woman before her marriage, a "super-subtle Venetian": "In Venice they do let God see the pranks/They dare not show their husbands." Brabantio charged Othello before the Venetian signory with having bound Desdemona in "chains of magic"—for how, otherwise, could she, "so opposite to marriage that she shunned/The wealthy, curled darlings of our nation" and incurred "the general mock," have "run from her guardage to the sooty bosom/Of such a thing"? But Othello knows he has used no witchcraft, and to him Iago suggests "a will most rank,/Foul disproportion; thoughts unnatural" in Desdemona. And with this disbelief in her genuine love for him, along with a suspicion of her too-ready sexual forwardness, he is lost. Perhaps he suspects a racial will to dominance in her sexual "appetite," which declares that she is not his but that he is hers as a slave belongs to his owner.

This, of course, is a counterpart to the white master's fear of the slave's rebellion, which expresses itself in the racist presumption of the dangerous lustfulness of the oppressed and repressed—the cliché of a primitive savagery more powerful than the white man's, a lust threatening white womanhood. Someone like the stupid Roderigo, who has failed to get Desdemona even to glance at him, will refer to the "gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" when he attempts to arouse Brabantio against Othello. Iago works this vein when he portrays Othello as someone of mere impulse. "These Moors," he says, "are changeable in their wills." He even claims to believe that "it is thought abroad" that his General's unbridled lust has extended to Emilia, and cuckolded *him*. "I do suspect the lusty Moor/Hath leaped into my seat," he says, and though he may not really think this possible, he repeats his half-belief in this suggestion that Othello had "done [his] office 'twixt [his] sheets," while confessing that he is only looking for specious causes for his animosity: "I know not if't be true,/But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,/Will do as if for surety." Perhaps the same promptness to such presumption has infected the minds of some of the play's readers ever since, despite Shakespeare's exposure of the motives of both Iago and Roderigo in seizing so readily upon the ancient stereotype of the "lusty Moor." A refined version of it has even been discovered in Othello by so distinguished a modern Shakespeare scholar as E.A.J. Honigmann, the editor of the latest Arden Edition of the play, who speaks of Othello's "exceptional sensuoúsness, though not necessarily 'racial'" to be found in some of Othello's tributes to Desdemona's effect upon him. Honigmann cites, particularly, Othello's swooning recall of her appeal to his sense of smell—as when he exclaims, in his culminating anguish, "O thou weed/Who art so lovely fair and smellst so sweet/That the senses ache at thee."

But, in fact, Othello himself, as Shakespeare shows, is quite the reverse of the stereotypical "lusty Moor." To respond to the call of arms, Othello delays his wedding-night happiness without hesitation, almost welcoming, in a curious way, as I have noted, the deferral of his bliss. Moreover, he himself goes so far as to deny the sensuality of his feelings for his beautiful bride. He supports her plea to accompany him to Cyprus with the odd observation to the Duke:

"I . . . beg it not/To please the palate of my appetite/Nor to comply with heat, the young affects/In me defunct, and proper satisfaction,/But to be free and bounteous to her mind." This renunciation of sexual urgency almost removes his color for his grateful employers as though to refute the convention that attributes "savage" sexuality to the black man. "Your son-in-law is far more fair than black," the Duke tells Brabantio as Othello accepts his mission. It is Desdemona rather than himself who is to be suspected of illicit lust, as Iago will soon persuade him when he stresses the positive unnaturalness of *her* love for her husband instead of for a social and racial equal—knowing, rightly, how such a thought will promote that jealous insecurity he wishes to arouse. He responds to Othello's protest that Desdemona's betrayal would be an incredible case of "nature erring from itself" by suggesting that it is her marriage itself, her inclination for Othello, that is a perversity.

> Not to affect many proposed matches
> Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
> Whereto we see, in all things, nature tends
> Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,
> Foul disproportion; thoughts unnatural.

We can imagine how these suggestions affect Othello, most especially the reference to "complexion." Paradoxically, Iago actually increases Othello's self-doubt when he suggests that Desdemona has *not* freed herself from her father's racism. Is not this borne out by a love that began with her vision of her lover's "visage in his *mind*"—rather than in the black face gazing at her? To match this, Othello's disclaimer to the Duke and Senators of Venice of his physical desire for his wife may be connected to *his* fear of their physical union stated in almost the same terms when he declares that all he looks forward to is "but to be free and bounteous to *her* mind."

So, Othello seems to suffer the insecurity of someone who has crossed the racial line yet feels reproved for it when his white wife is reclaimed by her social and racial world in her supposed affair with Cassio. Iago can count on the self-hating that afflicts the victim of prejudice who cannot, himself, believe that he is loveable to someone of the other race. He has been compelled to hallucinate her intimacy with a white man, but can hardly imagine his own union with her. She may be expected to retain an inclination for such a familiar species as Cassio. Only moments before she is murdered she will remark upon the Venetian nobleman to whom she is related by blood as well as class, "This Lodovico is a proper man." To which Emilia replies, woman-to-woman, "I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip." For this is how, according to the code of Venice, a Venetian woman *should* feel; it is perfectly "natural." When Desdemona is called a "whore" by an Othello reduced to the racial enemy's language by his jealousy, Emilia exclaims, "Hath she forsook so many noble matches,/Her father, and her country, and her friends,/To be called whore?" But this is exactly what her social desertion must seem to white society, something more adulterous, indeed, than the affair with Cassio of which she is falsely accused.

Othello's collapse into murderous violence would seem to be an illustration of the way, according to the racist view, the coating of civilization must slide readily off the "savage" personality. But Shakespeare's readiness to admit the instability of personality—as though he is ready to entertain Iago's denial of intrinsic and permanent character—is apparent in all his tragedies. The Macbeth who is held by his wife to be too full of the milk of human kindness before his murder of Duncan is not the same as that "dead butcher" whose head is triumphantly carried onto the stage on the uplifted lance of Macduff at the end. Certainly, in Othello, the serene and just commander of himself and others we first meet is not the madman who shrieks, "I will chop her into messes," as he accepts the view that his wife has betrayed him. The play exhibits that mutability in the alteration of his very language from a majestic poetry that has been called the "Othello music" to a debased tone from which all music has gone. But this alteration is only temporary. The play does not justify the racist theory of the uneducable savage. Othello is always too noble even in his preposterous delusion and degradation, too superior to everyone else on the scene, for such a view. And yet, again, though many have seen in Othello's final end a full recovery of tragic greatness, Shakespeare's vision may be too pessimistic to allow that either.

There are no more romantic lovers in all of Shakespeare than the almost virginal warrior

and the high-minded virgin Lady whose love he wins by recital of his heroic past. But they also recall the May-December prototypes of farce; Othello feels his head for horns like the deluded old husband of a thousand comic tales. Despite the grimness of this tragic history, the comic fore-grounding of sex, as in farce, is both invoked and obscured in a play in which so much of the time the marriage bed is at least present to mind even if offstage, just guessed at, though unseen, like the sexual union enacted there. Othello's sexual secret discloses itself, however—rather than being merely suspected or hinted—on the deathbed that has been laid with his and Desdemona's wedding sheets—"sheets" being an evasive met-onymy for the bed and for the lovemaking that takes place upon it. When Iago claims to hate Othello because "twixt my sheets/He's done my office," or when he remarks to Cassio on Cyprus, "Well, happiness to their sheets!" the same figure of speech, along with the sniggering euphemism of "office," has been employed. Like Desdemo-na's honor, which Iago thinks of as "an essence that's not seen," her sexual union with Othello, though sanctified by marriage, has not been directly imaginable till now when it is revealed to the prurient gaze as the curtains of the mar-riage bed are drawn apart. "My mistress here lies murdered in her bed," Emilia announces, as though the bed of marriage, with its "tragic lodg-ing" of dead bodies—one black, the other white, lying side by side—is what horrified vision must take in at last. "Lodging" even implies the living together, the cohabitation of the lovers. The change of the word to "loading" in the Folio version of the text recalls Iago's plundered "land carrack." When Lodovico says, "the object poi-sons sight,/Let it be hid," the horror he feels is for a forbidden union as much as for the deaths this union has caused. To intensify that horror and to further emphasize the perversity of their sexual relation, there is a hint of necrophilia in the impli-cation that now, at last, their love is consum-mated. Othello tells his victim, "Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee/And love thee after," and then, having done so, "I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this:/ Killing myself to die upon a kiss," giving "die" its usual Elizabethan double sense as orgasm.

The play makes it seem, even if we are sure of the contrary, that only their deathbed unites their bodies in ultimate union. " Star-crossed" by racial difference, they resemble Romeo and Juliet, their prototypes in the enactment of a *Liebestod* climaxing a forbidden love, forbidden for both pairs of lovers even in marriages that constitute social adultery. We must recall that Othello's anticipations of bliss had prompted thoughts of death:

> If it were now to die,
> 'Twere now to be most happy; for I fear
> My soul hath her content so absolute
> That not another comfort like to this
> Succeeds in unknown fate.

It is one of those flights of Othello's hyper-bole that suggests too much before the fact, and Desdemona herself reins him in with, "The heav-ens forbid/But that our loves and comforts should increase/Even as our days do grow." To think that one will reach the peak of happiness—and so be ready to die—is a traditional poetic extravagance, but here more sinister, forecasting as it does the death which will actually be the consequence of their love—and Desdemona's literalism seems to express an appropriate cau-tion. And well it might, for in the calculus of their unanticipated difficulties Shakespeare has added something besides the uncertainty of the bridegroom, the too-readiness of the bride. In this play about love and jealousy, which shows how love is a moment's hazardous leap over vast distance, he has included the crippling prohibi-tion of racial difference.

At the last, Othello surrenders himself to the prison of race he thought he had escaped. He is not able, in the end, to cast away the role and character which societal convention prescribed to him at the beginning of his career in the white colonial world. He recalls an exploit of his adopted Venetian identity when he remembers how, "in Aleppo once," he had taken by the throat a "turbanned," that is, unconverted, Turk (wearer of what Shakespeare calls in *Cym-beline* an "impious turband") who "[b]eat a Venetian and traduced the state." He remembers how he "smote him—thus," as he turns his dag-ger toward himself. This has generally been taken as splendid *coup de theatre*—but it is more. Reenacting that killing of an infidel by his transformed Christian self, Othello becomes again what *he* was before his conversion and enlistment in the service of Venice. His magnifi-cent self-making has been undone and he now kills, again, the irreversibly circumcised, unassi-milable racial other that he is.

**Source:** Millicent Bell, "Shakespeare's Moor," in *Raritan*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Spring 2002, pp. 1–14.

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# *Romanticism*

Romanticism as a literary movement lasted from 1798, with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* to some time between the passage of the first Reform Bill of 1832 and the death of Wordsworth in 1850. With political revolution on the Continent and the industrial revolution underway, the period witnessed the breakdown of rigid ideas about the structure and purpose of society and the known world. During this period, emphasis shifted to the importance of the individual's experience in the world and one's subjective interpretation of that experience, rather than interpretations handed down by the church or tradition.

Romantic literature is characterized by several features. It emphasized the dream, or inner, world of the individual and visionary, fantastic, or drug-induced imagery. There was a growing suspicion of the established church and a turn toward pantheism (the belief that God is a part of the created world rather than separate from it). Romantic literature emphasized the individual self and the value of the individual's experience. The concept of "the sublime" (a thrilling emotional experience that combines awe, magnificence, and horror) was introduced. Feeling and emotion were viewed as superior to logic and analysis.

For the romantics, poetry was believed to be the highest form of literature, and novels were regarded as a lower form, often as sensationalistic

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1789
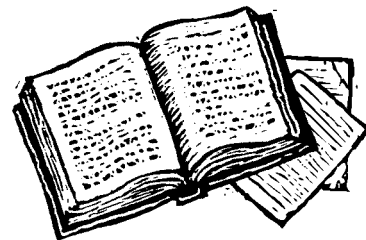
and titillating, even by those most addicted to reading them. Most novels of the time were written by women and were therefore widely regarded as a threat to serious, intellectual culture. Despite this, some of the most famous British novelists wrote during this period, including Jane Austen, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, and Sir Walter Scott. In addition, this period saw the flowering of some of the greatest poets in the English language: the first generation of William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth, followed by Byron, Shelley, and Keats.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Jane Austen (1775–1817)

Jane Austen was born December 16, 1775, in Steventon, Hampshire, England, the youngest daughter of a clergyman. Her six novels were set in the provincial world in which she lived, that of the comfortable, rural middle class, and were often based on her observations of people she knew and her assessments of human nature. The novels depict young women entering society, many of whom make mistakes or become confused but ultimately find their way to a happy marriage.

Austen began writing as a teenager and initially shared her writing only with family and friends. When she eventually published, she did so anonymously. Not well known in her own time, she soon garnered a reputation for her precision, irony, and delicate touch. Her best-known works are *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and *Emma* (1816). She influenced many later writers, including Charles Dickens, W. M. Thackeray, and Anthony Trollope, as well as George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. Austen's books have endured into the twenty-first century as some of the few classics widely read for pleasure. She died from illness on July 18, 1817, in Winchester, England.

### William Blake (1757–1827)

Artist and visionary poet William Blake, born November 28, 1757, in London, England, to a hosier, was apprenticed at age fifteen to the engraver James Basire, for whom Blake made drawings at Westminster Abbey. In 1783, Blake's *Poetical Sketches* were printed, and in 1789, he engraved *Thel* and *The Songs of Innocence*. The increasing turmoil caused by the French Revolution and the



*Lord Byron* (© Bettmann / Corbis)

war between Britain and France influenced Blake to engrave *America* (1793) and *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). In the following year, he produced the combined *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, as well as *Europe* and *The First Book of Urizen*.

In 1803, Blake was accused of sedition (inciting resistance or insurrection against lawful authority). He was tried in 1804 but acquitted of the charge. During this time, he finished *Milton* and began *Jerusalem*. However, for the next two decades he was increasingly despairing, poverty-stricken, and obscure. He was regarded as insane by some observers and eked out a living by illustrating a pottery catalog and selling his print collection. However, late in his life he found supporters and patrons, and in 1820 *Jerusalem* was finally engraved. He died August 12, 1827, in London. While he was known primarily as an artist and engraver during his lifetime, Blake came to be known as a leading romantic poet and philosopher, influencing other poets such as William Butler Yeats.

### Lord Byron (1788–1824)

George Gordon Byron was born January 22, 1788, in London, England, inheriting his title of

the sixth Lord Byron when he was ten years old. He grew up at the family estate near Nottingham, Newstead Abbey, and received an education at Harrow and Cambridge. His first publication, the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, was based on a tour of Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Turkey he took between 1809 and 1811. The work was immediately successful, and he followed it with a series of tales featuring exotic Middle Eastern settings and hero-villains.

Byron's marriage to Anne Isabella Milbanke in 1815 lasted only fifteen months, largely due to rumors spread by Byron himself about his homosexuality and incestuous relations with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. In 1816 he left England permanently, undertaking a series of trips which inspired cantos three and four of *Childe Harold* (1816, 1818). Eventually, he settled in Venice, Italy, where his immersion in the Italian language and culture had a profound influence on his work, particularly *Don Juan* (1819–1824). While in Italy, he was the lover of Countess Teresa Guiccioli and became involved with Italian independence movements. In 1823 he went to Greece to participate in the Greek movement for independence from the Turks. He died during a violent electrical storm on April 19, 1824, in Missolonghi, Greece, after suffering from fever-induced illness for almost two weeks. His body was returned to England, but burial in Westminster Abbey was refused because of his scandalous past. He was eventually buried in his family's vaults near Newstead Abbey. In his time, Byron's work was noted for its emphasis on freedom, its overtly sexual themes, its pessimism, and its use of tormented, villainous heroes.

### *Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born October 21, 1772, in Ottery St. Mary, Devon, England, the youngest child of a clergyman and his wife. At the age of ten he entered Christ's Hospital School in London, where he read a wide variety of classical and political works. In 1791, he entered Jesus College, Cambridge, and became interested in revolutionary politics and Unitarianism. He left school without earning a degree. In 1794, he met poet Robert Southey, with whom he planned a utopian community to be built on the banks of the Susquehanna River in the United States. As part of this plan Coleridge married Southey's sister-in-law Sara Fricker.

In 1794, he published his first poetry in the *Morning Chronicle*. As chronicled by Daniel Robinson, Coleridge tried his hand at sonnets but failed utterly and abandoned the form. In 1795, he began giving a series of lectures to finance the utopian scheme, but when the idea was abandoned, he returned to writing poetry. From 1797 to 1798, he lived at Nether Stowey in Somerset, and completed the poems "The Ancient Mariner," "Frost at Midnight," "Fears in Solitude," and "Kubla Khan," some of his best-known works. In 1798, with William and Dorothy Wordsworth, he traveled to Germany, where he became deeply interested in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Coleridge's addiction to opium gradually overtook him and his marriage. He traveled to Malta in 1804 in an attempt to restore his mental and physical health, as well as his marriage. He returned to England in 1806, but by then his marriage had fallen apart.

By 1813, he had returned to Christian beliefs and was being treated for his opium addiction. He began working on *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a discussion of poetry and a critique of Wordsworth, drawing on the work of German philosophers such as Kant and Fichte. He died July 25, 1834, in Highgate, England.

### *John Keats (1795–1821)*

John Keats was the youngest of the major romantic poets. He was born October 31, 1795, in London, England, to a lower-middle-class family. His father's accidental death in 1804, and his mother's death in 1809 after a long bout with tuberculosis, marked him with a sense of life's precariousness, a theme that recurs in his poetry. He was apprenticed to a surgeon and in 1816 was licensed as an apothecary and surgeon. This training in science helped to ground his poetry in the sensory details of nature and everyday life.

His first published poem was "O Solitude," which appeared in *The Examiner* in 1816, and aroused the interest of Leigh Hunt, the periodical's editor, who encouraged him to quit his medical practice and devote his life to poetry. Keats viewed this as the noblest goal one could have and was filled with a deep sense of the continuity of poetry and literature through the ages, a great love for the English language, and a desire to return poetry to its roots in Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Spenser. His first published collection entitled simply *Poems 1817* (1817)

was dedicated to Leigh Hunt. His second work, *Endymion* (1818), fell short of his own expectations, but his third collection, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820) contained "some of the greatest poems in the English language," according to Jean-Claude Sallé in the *Handbook to English Romanticism* (edited by Jean Raimond and J. R. Watson). Keats died of tuberculosis February 23, 1821, in Rome, at the age of twenty-five.

### Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837)
Alexander Pushkin is Russia's most famous and beloved poet. He was born June 6, 1799, in Moscow and began writing at an early age. His first poem was published when he was fifteen years old. By the time he finished school, he was already a recognized literary figure. As a young man, he became involved in social reform and was chased into exile by the government for his political activities for nearly a decade. He married Natalya Goncharova in 1831, and they soon were given titles and joined royal society. Pushkin challenged a man who insulted his wife to a duel. He was wounded and died soon thereafter on February 10, 1837. He was only 37 years old. He came to be considered a romantic and the father of modern Russian literature.

### Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851)
Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley is best known as the author of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). She was born August 30, 1797, in London, England. The daughter of two well-known authors, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary experienced early years full of instability. Her mother died ten days after her birth, and she was raised by her father and stepmother. In 1812 she met the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, a friend of her father, and in 1814 they ran off together, though Percy was already married. During Mary and Percy's subsequent travels in Europe, Mary began work on *Frankenstein*. Percy's wife Harriet committed suicide in 1816, and shortly afterward Percy and Mary were married. Four years after *Frankenstein* was published, Percy drowned. Mary died of a brain tumor on February 1, 1851, in London.

### Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)
Percy Bysshe Shelley was the oldest child and only son of a baronet. He was born August 4, 1792, in Horsham, Sussex, England. He attended Eton, where he was mercilessly harassed because of his acute sensitivity and distaste for physical activity. He then attended University College in Oxford, but was expelled after a few months because he published a pamphlet promoting atheism. Shortly after his expulsion, he eloped with Harriet Westbrook as part of a plan to help her escape from her boarding school.

By 1914, his marriage was failing, and when Shelley met Mary Wollstonecraft through a friendship with her father, he decided to leave with her for Europe. Harriet committed suicide in 1816, and shortly after this Shelley married Godwin. By 1818 the couple, with Mary's step-sister Claire Clairmont, decided to move to Italy, and Shelley never returned to England. He and Mary wandered throughout Italy, and between 1818 and 1822 Shelley wrote some of his most important work, including *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and his odes and lyrics. His work is noted for its reflections on a great variety of fields—including science, history, philosophy—and for his attempts to synthesize seemingly conflicting theories in these fields. Shelley was drowned in a storm while sailing on the bay of La Spezia July 8, 1822. His body was cremated on the beach a few days later.

### William Wordsworth (1770–1850)
William Wordsworth was born April 7, 1770, in Cockermouth, Cumberland, England. His father was a law agent, and after his mother's death in 1778, he was sent away to school, where he enjoyed a great deal of freedom. His father died in 1783, leaving Wordsworth and his four siblings in the care of relatives. Throughout his life, Wordsworth remained very close to his sister Dorothy.

Wordsworth began writing poetry as a young man, but his most notable works were composed after 1803 and many of them were collected in *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807). These volumes include the famous "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" and "Resolution and Independence." His long poem *The Excursion* was published in 1814 and was widely read. In 1835, a major collection of his poems was published, and in 1843 he became poet laureate of England.

Wordsworth's poetry is notable for his vision of the sublime, or the divine, in ordinary people and places. He believed wholeheartedly in the redeeming power of nature, and saw

mystery and wonder in both people and natural things. Wordsworth died after a bout of pleurisy on April 23, 1850, in Rydal, Cumbria, England.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

Byron published cantos one and two of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812, canto three in 1816, and canto four in 1818. The poem is based on Byron's European travels and describes exotic landscapes and people, along with contemporary military and political events, presenting them from the viewpoint of Childe Harold. Harold is a typical Byronic hero: Tormented by guilt over an unnamed sin, he is bitter, cynical, and melancholy, but also proud, and at times filled with remorse. Because of these feelings he is isolated from other people, cut off by the intensity of his feelings and by his intense suffering. He wanders in search of some release, but never finds it.

Byron's descriptions of current political events, such as the Spanish resistance to the French invaders and the battle of Waterloo, show the senselessness of war as well as the human drive for freedom from oppression. In his hero's unsatisfied wanderings through a great variety of places, he presents the idea that the only human permanence is found in writing and the lofty creations of the human mind.

Early reviewers praised the poem for its originality, despite Byron's scandalous reputation, and Byron secured lasting fame because of it. It was widely imitated and translated, and was the basis of a symphonic work by Berlioz. According to J. R. Watson in *A Handbook to English Romanticism*, "It is a poem about Europe, and Europe was delighted to recognize itself in this passionate, elegiac, conservative yet liberal and revolutionary masterpiece."

### Eugene Onegin

Alexander Pushkin's verse novel *Eugene Onegin* was published serially from 1825 to 1832. It is considered a classic of Russian literature. *Eugene Onegin* is the story of a young socialist who moves to a family estate in the country. He makes the acquaintance one evening with a young, romantic woman named Tatiana who quickly falls in love with Onegin. Contrary to acceptable behavior, she writes him a letter professing her love, only

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was first filmed by inventor Thomas Edison in 1910 and directed by J. Searle Dawley. This film has since been lost from public archives, but many more versions were made. These include the most famous adaptation, filmed in 1931 by Universal Pictures, which starred Boris Karloff as the monster.

- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has also spawned numerous spin-offs, including *Bride of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1932), *Son of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1939), *Ghost of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1942), and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman* (Universal, 1943).

- *Frankenstein* was made into a comedy in *Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (Universal, 1946) and Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1974). In 1994, a more serious version, which claimed to be faithful to the book, was produced by Columbia/Tristar, titled *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*.

- Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was filmed as a television miniseries in 1995 by BBC Television and the A&E Network. It was first shown on the A&E Network beginning in January 1996 and as of 2008 was available on video and DVD. The program starred Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet and Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy. It was directed by Simon Langton.

- Alexander Pushkin's verse novel *Eugene Onegin* was made into a film, *Onegin*, in 2000. Directed by Martha Fiennes, it stars her brother Ralph Fiennes as the title character and Liv Tyler at Tatiana. As of 2008 it was available on DVD from Lions Gate.

to be rejected by Onegin. Soon thereafter, Onegin insults Tatiana's sister at a party and kills her sister's future brother-in-law in the resulting duel. Three years later, in St. Petersburg, Onegin

*Illustration of the poem "The Tyger" by William Blake* ( Blake, William, illustrator. From an illustration in William Blake at the Huntington, *by Robert N. Essick. Harry N. Abrams Inc., Publishers, and The Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1994. Copyright © 1994 The Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery*)

meets Tatiana again but does not recognize her because she is now mature, refined, and married to royalty. When he realizes who she is, he tries repeatedly to win her attention even though she is married. Tatiana rejects him because she is a loyal wife, despite that fact that she still loves him.

## Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's novel, published between 1816 and 1818, is classically romantic in its emphasis on feelings over intellect and the dangers of relying exclusively on intellect; the frightening, awe-inspiring nature of the sublime; the loneliness of the sensitive hero; and the sadness inherent in the human ability to corrupt what should be naturally good. In the novel, arrogant scientist Victor Frankenstein creates a man using dead bodies, and animates him. The childlike monster wants only to be loved, but horrifies everyone who sees him.

Shelley subtitled the novel "A Modern Prometheus," linking Frankenstein to the Titan who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. Prometheus was ultimately punished by Zeus for meddling in this way. Shelley makes the point that, in taking the power to create life for himself, Frankenstein is heading for a fall. He loses touch with other people and with all human feelings. By the end of the book Frankenstein is even more alienated than the monster he created. The idea of a protagonist whose ambition defiantly knows no bounds was attractive to other romantic writers, including Shelley's husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, Coleridge, and Byron.

*Frankenstein* shocked readers of its time, who were horrified by the idea of digging up the dead and reanimating them. Many initial reviewers attacked the book. However, the book was immediately famous with the general populace, despite its shocking nature. The first stage adaptation of it occurred in 1823, the first film was made in 1910, and adaptations continued being made through the twentieth century into the twenty-first. In *Exploring Novels*, George V. Griffith wrote, "*Frankenstein* lives well beyond its young author's modest intentions to write an entertaining gothic tale to pass some time indoors on a cold Swiss summer evening."

## Pride and Prejudice

Austen's 1813 novel, which she originally published anonymously, is her second and best-known work. She wrote it for her family's amusement, but readers everywhere have enjoyed its wit, amusing dialogue, and insightful characterizations. It is a "novel of manners"; in other words, it portrays comfortable middle-class rural people and dramatizes the complex web of customs and manners holding everyone in their social places. Anyone who transgresses this code is destined for a fall. The novel, like all of Austen's books, shows a young woman learning how society and human nature operate. Throughout the book, Austen shows the results of improper behavior; some characters learn from their mistakes, while others do not. But as for a mate, each character gets the partner he or she deserves.

Although Austen was not well known during her lifetime, her books influenced later writers, including Charles Dickens, W. M. Thackeray,

and Anthony Trollope, as well as George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. In addition, she helped to raise the novel to a respected art form and paved the way for other women to write even when they did not share the extensive education that was then reserved for men. Despite her relative obscurity during her lifetime, Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* has sold more than 20 million copies since its original publication and has never been out of print.

## Prometheus Unbound

Percy Bysshe Shelley's long verse play *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) portrays the epic struggle between the Roman god Jupiter and the Titan Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. In the four-act play, Jupiter personifies the forces of tyranny and Prometheus is a symbol of revolution and liberty, making the poem a commentary on the current political situation in England, as well as a depiction of the human struggle for freedom and truth throughout history.

According to Murray G. H. Pittock in the *Reference Guide to English Literature*, writer C. S. Lewis called *Prometheus Unbound* "the best long poem written in English in the nineteenth century." Pittock himself comments, "*Prometheus Unbound* is a stupendous vision of human potential," while the play also makes clear "human beings are limited by the very desires they so long to fulfill."

## Songs of Innocence and of Experience

Blake wrote the earliest poems in his *Songs of Innocence* prior to 1784 and completed the collection by 1789. In 1793 *Songs of Experience* was published, and the two collections were combined in 1794. Blake subtitled the combination, "Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul," indicating that they were meant to complement each other. These beloved poems are both simple and remarkably complex. In some of the more transparent, such as "London" and "The Chimney Sweeper," Blake uses his poetic skill as a vehicle for social protest. He is indignant about the suffering among the urban poor and accuses both the Church and the monarchy for ignoring the situation.

In *Songs of Innocence* Blake presents childhood fears and hopes couched in the perspective of individuals who have had only a little experience. He also identifies the purity of country life with innocence and the depravity of city life with what he calls experience. Some of these poems celebrate the joyful potential of childhood, for, like Wordsworth, Blake believed children are closer to the divine than adults are.

In *Songs of Experience*, by contrast, Blake provides the street-wise cynical perspective that only children who have suffered in the world or been betrayed by adults can possibly know or understand. Like all of Blake's poetry, the gullibility and naiveté of innocence with the jaded cynicism of experience.

Blake illuminated each poem, the images of which in many cases offer another perspective or slant on the meaning of the poem. Some of Blake's art work and some of the illuminations that appeared with these poems can be seen at the Web site maintained by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

According to Francois Piquet in the *Handbook to English Romanticism* (edited by Jean Raimond and J. R. Watson), this was "the only one of Blake's books that attracted the admiration of his fellow writers during his lifetime." Piquet notes that Coleridge said of Blake, "He is a man of genius . . . certainly a mystic, emphatically."

## "To Autumn"

John Keats's ode, "To Autumn," written in September 1819, was the last ode he wrote that year. According to Douglas Brooks-Davies in the *Reference Guide to English Literature*, "There is virtually unanimous critical acclaim for the poem's supremacy among Keats's works." "To Autumn" is simply a description of the fall season and seems to serve as a conclusion to the odes Keats wrote before it. Like his other odes, "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on Melancholy," and "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the poem can be seen as a commentary on grief, most likely in response to the death of Keats's beloved brother Tom in December 1818.

"To Autumn" expresses the poet's deep love of and sensual connection with nature, and his view of nature as a place of spiritual contemplation and renewal—typical of the romantics. According to Sallé in *Handbook to English Romanticism* (edited by Jean Raimond and J. R. Watson), "With the odes, Keats invented not only a new and influential mode of symbolic poetry but also discovered the form most appropriate to his agnostic, questing genius." Klaus Hofmann, in a study of Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn," analyzes the transformed

purpose of an ode, which must claim its aesthetic value, its purpose, and its reason for being.

## THEMES

### *Dreams and Visions*

Perhaps the most notable example of the emphasis on dreams and visions in romantic literature is Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" (1816), which he claimed to have written during a dream while deeply asleep. While transcribing the lines from his dream, he was interrupted by a visitor, and later claimed that if this interruption had not occurred, the poem would have been much longer. The idea that a person could compose poetry while asleep was commonplace among romantics. Although critics at the time were not particularly enthusiastic about "Kubla Khan," people tended not to question whether it was possible for someone to dream such a long poem.

Coleridge was not the only person who claimed to dream the lines of his poetry. In the seventeenth century, John Milton also claimed to have received verses while sleeping, and Keats, like others, believed that poets were endowed with a special gift to translate dreams into words. In addition, Coleridge was known to use laudanum as a stimulant and for inspiration. Thomas De Quincey wrote *Confessions of an Opium Eater* in order to expose the addictive nature of opium and warn against its use.

### *Pantheism*

Pantheism, which is the belief that there is no difference between the creator and creation, holds that God is not separate from the world, but manifested in it. This idea was popular among romantics. For example, Wordsworth writes in his poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798":

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

This sensation of a divine "presence" in all things marked a shift in public perceptions of nature. Until this period, most people were busy struggling to eke out a living, largely through

## TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Read Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* and watch one or more of the many films that were inspired by the book. How do the book and film differ? How are they similar? In particular, how is the character of the monster portrayed in each?

- During the romantic period, opium was cheap, available, and widely used, and people did not know its use could be harmful. Read Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822). Write an essay about de Quincey and the way this drug affected him.

- Read some of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and find the accompanying artwork online or in a book. Write an essay on the poem in which you describe the art work and speculate about what interpretation of the poem can be drawn from it.

- Read about the life of Mary Shelley or Jane Austen. Write an essay explaining how they were affected by cultural attitudes and expectations of women in their time period? How did their literary works convey their response to their milieu.

farming, and viewed nature as the resource that could be used and harvested, not as a place of renewal and purity. However, with the rise of the Industrial Revolution, cities became more crowded and dirty. To the growing urban middle class, the green countryside became more attractive as a place of recreation and an escape from the ever-increasing filth and disorder that industry brought to towns. The romantics likewise viewed nature as a place of spiritual purity and peace, where people could be redeemed by contact with the divine force immanent in the natural world.

### *The Self*

During the romantic period, for the first time in history, people became aware that there were

parts of each individual's personality beyond the access of ordinary consciousness. This idea was further developed during the twentieth century as part of modern psychological theory, but at the time of the romantics it was a novelty. The romantics were fascinated with self-exploration and with the particulars of the individual's experience in the world. Previous writers had focused on politics, business, trade, and the lives of royalty or other famous people. The lives of ordinary people had been deemed unworthy of general interest. However, the romantics were influenced by the events of the American and French revolutions and their underlying political theories, and like the revolutionaries they believed the ordinary individual had the same rights and worth as any leader. This sociopolitical theory inspired writers to consider the worth of the individual in their work and to focus more on the experiences of ordinary people.

### Emotion and Feeling

In keeping with an emphasis on the individual self, the romantics valued emotion, intuition, and feeling over logic. They sought "the sublime," a state of being in which a person was simultaneously awed, frightened, and filled with a sense of majesty and wonder. A poet's response to a wild, remote, and grandiose place in nature often invoked the sublime, as did the immense night sky, gigantic geological upheavals, and rivers. They appreciated the ruins of cathedrals and ancient religious sites. Romantics also relied on their intuitive sense of things—as opposed to physical facts—to interpret the world. If a writer sensed the presence of the divine in a natural spot, for example, the reality of this presence was not questioned, but accepted as a given because the person had felt it.

## STYLE

### Rejection of Rigid Poetic Forms

In keeping with their glorification of the unlimited freedom and potential of the individual, the romantics rejected old poetic conventions—such as the heroic couplet used by Alexander Pope—and asserted the value of the language spoken by ordinary people. They believed that the form of a verse should be shaped by the subject matter, in contrast to the neoclassicists before them, who used rigid forms and shaped their material to fit them.

### Emphasis on Poetry

An interesting aspect of the romantic period was the emphasis on poetry. Most of the great romantic writers were poets instead of novelists, as novels were widely regarded as inherently inferior to poetry. Critics have offered various reasons for this prejudice. Some suggest it arose from the fact that most novelists were female, and because women were devalued during the romantic period, their work was discounted. Others note that many novels were of poor quality, giving the entire genre a bad reputation. In addition, as Bradford K. Mudge notes in his foreword in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, the poets themselves, notably Wordsworth and Coleridge, campaigned against the spread of popular fiction, claiming it would lower the tastes of the reading public and lead them away from poetry. According to Mudge, Wordsworth wrote that newspapers, novels, plays, and even some poetry, would "encourage mental lethargy" and reduce readers to "a savage, uncivilized state."

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### American Romanticism

In the *Emerson Society Quarterly*, James E. Miller Jr. writes, "America has traditionally incarnated the romantic in almost every sense," and that "The American adventure, the great democratic experiment...are the essence of Romanticism." Romanticism in the United States flourished between 1812 and the years of the Civil War. Like English Romanticism, its writers emphasized the dignity and freedom of the individual; rebellion against restrictions, whether political, cultural, or social; the importance of emotion over intellect; and the need for a personal relationship with God as provided by and in the natural world.

American Romanticism differed from the English movement in so far as it was shaped by factors unique to U.S. history, culture, and geography. Americans, unlike the English, lived in a more directly democratic society in which the ordinary individual had political power and was free from the dictates of a king, the aristocracy, and an established, landed upper class. In addition, rebellion and freedom of all kinds were encouraged, at least among white people, by the presence of an apparently limitless supply of

land; if whites felt restricted, they would simply move farther west, where there was less social restriction and seemingly more opportunity. In small, insular England, this feeling of personal freedom and the lure of "the open road" were experienced differently. The romantic poets were great walkers. Indeed, Wordsworth' long poem, *The Prelude* begins with the speaker heading out of London on foot, intent on walking north toward the Lake District.

Because the United States was a new country, it did not have a separate set of literary forms, traditions, and masters. This lack of a creative structure or ceiling encouraged writers to experiment with new forms, genres, and styles. Americans felt a certain rivalry with Britain and wanted to prove that they, like the British, could create works of lasting merit that reflected the uniqueness of the American character. Thus, American romantic writers focused on American settings and themes. In addition, the vast and largely unspoiled beauty of the American landscape provided perfect material for romantic musings on nature and spirituality.

Writers considered part of the American romantic movement include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman. According to Mark Bevir in the *English Historical Review*, these writers differed from their British counterparts in their "close relationship to both Unitarianism and frontier individualism."

Unitarians opposed the concept of a divine Trinity and believed that God had a single personality or manifestation. They rejected the concepts of damnation and eternal hell, the innate sinfulness of humanity, and the belief that Jesus had atoned for human sins. Bevir notes these beliefs "readily opened the way to a belief in a single spiritual deity existing within nature, rather than a transcendent God standing outside nature." He comments that although English romantics believed nature could inspire or renew people, American romantics typically believed God and nature were one and that God's purpose was achieved through the action of natural forces.

Many romantics in England and the United States looked to the past for inspiration. In England, Coleridge believed that a national church could provide stability and balance against the onward forces of social progress, and art critic John Ruskin was interested in reviving the medieval importance of trade guilds and craft skills. However, American romantics such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman were inspired by the democratic ideals of U.S. presidents Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. American romantics emphasized material simplicity, living close to nature, and the honest manual labor of the self-sufficient farmer and frontier dweller. Thoreau—perhaps the greatest proponent of the simple, self-sufficient life—lived alone in a cabin by Walden Pond, trying to simplify his lifestyle so he would be able to time away from work for contemplation, the study of nature, and his writings.

## Celtic Renaissance

The Celtic Renaissance is a period of Irish literary and cultural history at the end of the nineteenth century. Followers of the movement aimed to create a romantic vision of Celtic myth and legend. The most significant works of the Celtic Renaissance typically present a dreamy, unreal world, usually in reaction to the reality of contemporary problems. William Butler Yeats's *The Wanderings of Oisin* is among the most significant works of the Celtic Renaissance. It is also known as the Celtic Twilight.

## Platonism

Platonism is the philosophy attributed to Plato, popular among the poets of the Renaissance and the Romantic period. Platonism stressed the ideal over the real, asserting that a world of ideal forms exists beyond the material world perceived by humans. Platonism is expressed to varying extent in the love poetry of the Renaissance, the fourth book of Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier,* and the poetry of William Blake, William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Friedrich Holderlin, William Butler Yeats, and Wallace Stevens.

## Pre-Raphaelites

The Pre-Raphaelites were a circle of writers and artists in mid-nineteenth-century England. Valuing the pre-Renaissance artistic qualities of religious symbolism, lavish pictorialism, and natural sensuousness, the Pre-Raphaelites cultivated a sense of mystery and melancholy that influenced later writers associated with the symbolist and decadent movements. The major members of the group include Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, Algernon Swinburne, and Walter Pater.

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **Nineteenth Century:** Women are not expected or encouraged to have professions or to make a living. There are no women diplomats, lawyers, or judges, and professions such as medicine, law, engineering, architecture, and banking refuse entry to women. A woman must marry to ensure that she will be financially supported. It is considered immoral for an unmarried woman to live alone. If a woman does not marry, she is expected to earn her keep and remain "respectable" by living with and taking care of a male sibling or her parents.

  **Today:** Although there are still differences in pay scale and status between men and women in many fields, women in many countries are now working in all professions and can choose to be educated in any field. In addition, a majority of women are not required to marry and can choose the type of household or family that is most suitable to them.

- **Nineteenth Century:** The Industrial Revolution results in a greater variety of goods for consumers as well as in the growth of cities. It also leads to pollution, urban overcrowding, labor problems, and the exploitation of laborers, including children. The growing blight in the cities leads people to view nature in a new light and to value it for its own sake rather than simply as a resource to be exploited.

  **Today:** Factories are still polluting the environment, and people are still trying to find a balance between industrial growth and the preservation of natural resources. However, children in most industrialized nations are no longer permitted to work and laws require factories to provide safe workplaces. A computer/Internet revolution is occurring, leading to widespread changes in industry, communications, and consumer habits.

- **Nineteenth Century:** Novels are largely regarded as "trash," not something serious, intelligent people should spend time reading. Many novelists are women. Poetry is considered the highest form of literature.

  **Today:** Novels are written by both men and women and are widely read. They range from light reading to serious, award-winning fiction, and some novelists make millions of dollars on their books. In contrast to the romantic age, poetry has been marginalized in popular culture, and it is difficult for poets to make a living from their works.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### American and French Revolutions

The French Revolution, which drew upon some of the principles enacted in the American Revolution, resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy of France and the spread of interest in democracy, nationalism, and socialism throughout Europe. On the eve of the revolution, France was in crisis; the monarchy, which claimed to rule by divine right, had spent so much money that the country had a massive deficit. A poor harvest and bitter winter in 1788 plunged the country into famine and drastically increased prices. In addition, British textile makers were underselling their French counterparts, leading to the closure of some French manufacturers and the spread of unemployment among the workers. The increasingly restless poor found that the wealthy nobles, clergy, and upper middle class made good targets for their anger at this situation.

The revolution was not a clean victory for either the poor or democracy, as by 1799 France was a military dictatorship. However, intellectuals throughout Europe were thrilled and inspired by the notion of revolutionaries rising

up and demanding their rights. Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, and others wrote glowingly of the revolution, and Bysshe Shelley and Byron thoroughly supported its radical principles. In general, the romantics believed in the worth, potential, and freedom of the individual, and exalted this freedom over the then-traditional acceptance of social hierarchy and political repression.

### Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution was a period of social and economic change that began in the mid-1700s and lasted until the late 1800s. This change was instigated by the invention of various mechanical means of producing goods more quickly and cheaply than by hand. For example, textile mills allowed the production of vast amounts of cloth, with far less labor and cost, than if the cloth were produced by the traditional method of individual weavers working in their homes. Factory ironworks produced iron items more quickly than individual craftspeople could, and the "spinning jenny," a device for spinning thread, could make more cotton thread than many human spinners.

The Industrial Revolution was also fueled by declining mortality rates, which resulted in rapid population growth. The increasing numbers of people provided both a workforce for the factories and a market for the goods produced.

The new factories necessitated improved transportation routes for raw materials and finished goods, as well as housing and other services for the laborers. These needs caused roads and canals to be improved or constructed, and swelled the cities with cheaply built housing. The first British railway, between Stockton and Darlington, was built in 1821.

The factories hired women and children as well as men, and were often unsafe. Housing built for the workers was often substandard and unsanitary. The factories themselves polluted both air and water, belching out smoke from coal-fired furnaces and releasing dye and other wastes into rivers. The regimented hours and repetitive work in the factories were viewed as dehumanizing and numbing by the general populace.

Romantic writers were aware of these changes, which presented such a contrast between the hellish life of the city laborer and the purity and peace of nature. The industrial changes convinced many romantics the natural world was purer than the industrial one, and that nature was a place of spiritual truth, release, and renewal. In *The Excursion*, Wordsworth applauds the advances in science and technology that made the mills possible, but also criticizes the exploitation of women and children, the dehumanizing work shifts, and the all-encompassing greed of the factory owners.

### Religious Influences

The Church of England was the official religious body during the Romantic period, but it had lost touch with much of the population. Some parishes were run by parsons who never actually visited them, while other parsons pursued their own material and physical pleasures. The growing urban population of uneducated laborers often went unserved, and in the largest cities many people were disillusioned about the church. David Jasper notes in the *Handbook to English Romanticism* (edited by Jean Raimond and J. R. Watson) that on Easter Day 1800, there were only six worshipers in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Coleridge (as quoted in the *Handbook to English Romanticism*), whose father was a clergyman, was so skeptical that he wrote about his own son's baptism, "Shall I suffer the Toad of Priesthood to spurt out his foul juice in this Babe's face?" In general, the romantics believed the established church was stale and complacent, and they sought other avenues to express their spirituality.

The Unitarians, at the time a small sect that rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and believed that Christ was not divine, were highly educated and had a great deal of influence on the romantics. Coleridge, who was a Unitarian for some time, preached in their churches. Romantics were also influenced by the views of Immanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish mystic who promoted a pantheistic worldview particularly attractive to William Blake, who attended a Swedenborgian conference in 1787.

However, of all religious groups, the Methodists had the most impact on the romantics, who were moved by the Methodist portrayal of humans as sinners seeking redemption and the grace of God. In addition, the Methodist emphasis on emotional conversion rather than intellectual contemplation, as well as their joy at Christ's gift of salvation, fit the romantic worldview.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The writers who are now called "romantic" did not consider themselves to be part of a movement while they were writing. The term "romantic" was applied to them much later. At the time they were writing, their work received a mixed reception. Some works, like Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* were immediately praised, and others, such as Austen's novels and Blake's other work, did not receive recognition until long after their original publications.

As John R. Greenfield points out in his foreword in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, contemporaries of the romantic poets saw them "not as a monolithic movement all agreeing upon the basic premises of Romanticism, but as belonging to various schools with different orientations concerning taste, religion, and politics." Greenfield also notes that much literary criticism was based not on the work in question but on the writer's political stance; if the critic objected to a writer's politics, he simply gave the writer a bad review. The critics divided the poets into various schools: a "radical circle" of Blake, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley; the "Lake Poets," including Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Robert Southey; the "Cockney School," which included Keats and Leigh Hunt; and the "Satanic School" of Percy Shelley and Byron. The latter group received its name because of Byron's scandalous reputation and Shelley's atheism and radical beliefs, which shocked readers of the time.

In the early twentieth century, Romanticism was strongly criticized by writers such as T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, and Cleanth Brooks. In *Midwest Quarterly*, Asad Al-Ghalith writes, "Throughout most of his writing career, Eliot attempted to write poetry that would reflect his antiromantic taste and preferences," and that Eliot

> wanted to break away from the romantic development of poetic structure. However, despite Eliot's dislike of Wordsworth and other Romantic poets, he shared with [Wordsworth] a profound kinship in his concern for spirituality within nature, in his stress on the present in relation to past and future, and in the emphasis on the role of memory to recapture the fleeting moments of childhood.

Some critical work on the romantics has focused on resurrecting the almost-forgotten contributions of women writers, many of whom have historically been marginalized. In *Midwest*



*Nineteenth-century print of a scene from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Hulton Archive | Getty Images)

*Quarterly*, Stephen C. Behrendt points out that readers "are beginning to study a 'British Romanticism' that looks and feels very different from the one that most of their predecessors studied." Behrendt and other scholars have focused on the connections among romantic writers, instead of studying them as if they lived and wrote in isolation. Behrendt also observes Romanticism "involved women far more prominently than has traditionally been acknowledged." He maintains the traditional critical image of the romantic poet was that of "the lone male poet whose visionary experience places him beyond domesticity," a view that has persisted since the romantic period, when cultural values prevented people from seeing women's contributions as equal to those of men. Women who dared to enter the "male" territory of poetry were considered unnatural. They were allowed to write novels because novels were considered unimportant. According to Behrendt, this idea of male poets and female novelists has persisted to the present day, but, he comments, "a whole new model has to be generated, one that incorporates men and women authors alike, in all genres."

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- Christopher Hibbert's *The Days of the French Revolution* (1999) discusses the political and social ideals underlying this revolution that influenced the romantic movement.

- Claire Tomalin's *Jane Austen: A Life* provides a fascinating biography of the popular author.

- Renowned critic Harold Bloom's *The Visionary Companion: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (1971) delves into the works of many of the great English romantic poets.

- Edited by Thomas H. Johnson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1976) has all 1,775 poems arranged in the chronological order of their writing (as far as could be determined). Dickinson was a poet of the American Renaissance in the nineteenth century. Her style is distinctive and unparalleled, noted for its brevity; its beautiful, sometimes morbid, imagery; and for its occasional obscurity.

- Edited by Pamela Woof in 1991, *The Grasmere Journals* (1800–1803), by Dorothy Wordsworth, gives a picture of the domestic life of the Wordsworths and descriptions of William Wordsworth's manner of composition. Dorothy's journals also show how Wordsworth used subjects and metaphors from her private writings for the poems that made him famous. The journals show Dorothy Wordsworth's photographic eye, knowledge of botany, and fine writing style.

- French romantic novelist Victor Hugo penned his most famous book *Les Misérables* in 1862, which was a successful best-seller in its day. *Les Misérables* is the story of a poor man who is transformed by the generous kindness of another person. Jean Valjean eventually rises to success, despite the fact that his past continues to haunt him.

- Alexander Dumas was a novelist of the romantic style who became famous within his lifetime. His book, *The Three Musketeers* (1844) continues to be a favorite among young readers today as it is unabashedly filled with adventure, intrigue, and romance.

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Despite occasionally falling from critical favor when literary tastes change, the major romantic writers are still considered among the greatest poets and novelists in the English language. Their work continues to influence writers into the twenty-first century.

## CRITICISM

### Kelly Winters

*Winters is a freelance writer. In this essay, Winters considers the persistence of romantic ideas in current attitudes about nature and the environment.*

Romantic odes may be out of style, and few novels are now written in the style of Jane Austen or Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, but some romantic ideas and ideals are still deeply embedded in our own popular culture, particularly in popular attitudes about nature. Most people do not know it, but our current ideas about the environment and our relationship to it were born during the romantic era.

**THE BIRTH OF ENVIRONMENTALISM IN ROMANTICISM**
For the romantics, the vast, uncontrolled wilderness of nature was a holy place, a place where people could retreat from the increasing filth and falsity of civilization. Nature was viewed as "wiser" than humans; it had existed since before humans existed and, if left alone, would continue to flourish. Humans could not produce anything as complex, beautiful, and grand as nature, and they could certainly not improve on anything nature had created. However, by going to wild places, people could align themselves with the harmony and wisdom inherent in nature, and be renewed.

> *PREVIOUSLY MARGINALIZED ECOLOGICALLY-BASED POLITICAL MOVEMENTS, OFTEN ROOTED IN ROMANTIC IDEAS ABOUT NATURE, GREW AND GAINED SO MANY ADHERENTS THAT THEY BECAME A PART OF MAINSTREAM POLITICAL DEBATE.*"

In addition, ecological movements encourage people to think of themselves as kindred to, and part of, the natural world, rather than standing apart from it. This feeling of kinship and oneness is a hallmark of Romanticism.

These views, which persist in our own culture, were new during the romantic era. Until the eighteenth century, people had little time to spare for appreciating nature; they were busy farming, fighting wars, and simply trying to survive. However, the Industrial Revolution gave the new urban middle class time for recreation. It also resulted in pollution and overcrowding in the cities, so these people looked to natural areas, rather than the increasingly unpleasant urban ones, for their recreation. Gardening, nature walks, and appreciation of natural beauty became common pastimes for the first time in history. As Lucy Moore writes in the *Ecologist*, "For the first time, nature became an object, and this may be the moment the modern environmental movement began."

### THE INFLUENCE OF ROMANTIC WRITERS

Through the influence of romantic writers, ordinary people became interested in experiencing nature. For example, Wordsworth, who wrote poems about the beauty and spirituality of nature, was a highly successful poet in his own lifetime and was even appointed poet laureate in 1843, but his guides to the area where he lived were even more popular than his collections of poetry. He lived in the Lake District of England, and his writings about the natural beauty of the area made the Lake District a tourist attraction in the mid-1800s. Travelers visited the area hoping to partake of the same natural beauty, inspiration, and spiritual renewal the poet describes in his writings. Although it seems commonplace now to retreat to nature for renewal, at the time this was a novel idea, and walking in the Lake District and perhaps encountering the poet on his own walks became a kind of fad of the romantic era.

Coleridge, who also lived in the area and was a favorite of Lake District tourists, likewise saw nature as a redeeming and purifying force, and loved wilderness and wildness. According to Moore, Coleridge wrote, "The farther I ascend from animated Nature, from men, and cattle, and the common birds of the woods, and fields, the greater becomes in me the intensity of the feeling of Life."

For a time, Coleridge believed he could build a utopian community that would partake of the spiritually purifying aspects of nature, and he and Robert Southey planned to construct such a community on the then-wild banks of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. Although, like many such utopian dreams, the plan ultimately fell through, Coleridge retained his belief that nature could provide solace and wisdom to people.

Percy Shelley, who was not quite as active in outdoor pursuits, nevertheless wrote, "I love all waste / And solitary places, where we taste / The pleasure of believing what we see / Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be."

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley reflected the romantic view of nature as a place of peace and redemption in *Frankenstein*. In the book, unlike in the films based on it, the monster is a peaceful and gentle creature. When the monster discovers how cruel humans are, it dreams of fleeing to South America, where it will live peacefully in the forest with a mate Dr. Frankenstein will make for it. They will live simply on the fruits and nuts of the forest, sleeping among the trees: a romantic ideal, a return to the spiritual innocence and purity of the Garden of Eden. However, Dr. Frankenstein, who is afraid of the monster's potential, destroys the female, forcing the monster back to civilization—and civilization's destruction.

Keats was also keenly aware of the destructive human impact on nature, and that appreciation of nature often occurs only when people become aware that natural beauty is fragile and can be destroyed and lost forever. In short, the romantics believed that untouched nature invoked a sense of awe and grandeur within people; that experiencing this awe could allow people to experience a feeling of purification and redemption; that untouched nature was superior to humanity; and that the long-term presence of people in nature could only be detrimental to it.

These principles have long guided attitudes toward the preservation and use of wilderness areas, and continue to the present day. The U.S. Wilderness Act of 1964 provides for the protection

and preservation of areas untouched or little-touched by human intervention, where humans can merely be temporary visitors, and where permanent human settlement or construction is not allowed. This idea of nature as pristine and separate from the degrading presence of people goes back to the romantics.

In addition, most campers and hikers have heard the popular phrase "leave no trace," which urges people to minimize their impact on nature to such an extent that, after they leave the wilderness area, it would be difficult or impossible for observers to tell that they were even there. Campers are asked to carry out everything they carry in, and to "take only pictures; leave only footprints" behind. While in the wilderness, people are also asked to respect wildlife by keeping their distance from it, to be as quiet as possible so that the sounds of nature are the only ones heard, and to avoid crowding or overusing any one area. As R. Bruce Hall notes in the *Journal of Leisure Research*, this philosophy, like other currently prevalent wilderness-use principles, "encourages people to think of themselves as temporary visitors whose presence can only harm nature. . . . [and] emphasize[s] the negative consequences people have on natural areas and on recreation experience." It also emphasizes the benefits that people can gain from experiencing nature in its purest, least-disturbed state.

### GETTING AND SPENDING: THE IMPACT OF INDUSTRY

Wordsworth wrote in his poem "The World Is Too Much With Us," "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; / Little we see in nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!" What he means is that in the frenzy of economic expansion and exploitation of the environment, people have lost touch with the spiritual and creative powers that true contact with nature can provide. Thus, we are out of touch with both the environment and ourselves.

The Industrial Revolution began over two hundred years ago, but we are still experiencing it and its effects on society and nature; the problems of pollution and waste have only increased since that time as industry has grown and become ever more complex. According to James Pinkerton in *Foreign Affairs*, David Malin Rodman of the World-Watch Institute, an environmental group, noted that it is "the very nature of industrial economic systems to degrade the environment on which they depend." This idea first became prevalent during
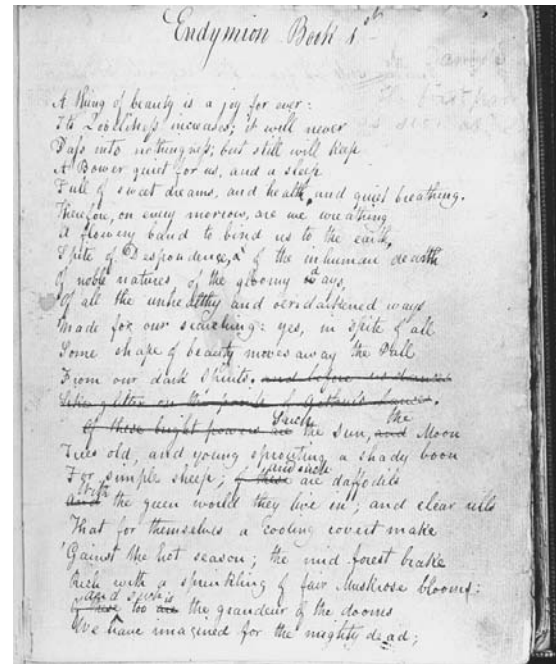


*Draft page from* Endymion *by John Keats* (William C. Shrout | Time & Life Pictures | Getty Images)

the Industrial Revolution, when coal-fired factories began spewing black smoke over England's green countryside and dumping toxic wastes into previously clean rivers.

This worry about the negative effects of industry is still widely held today. Toward the end of the twentieth century, with increasing environmental destruction, people became increasingly aware that irreplaceable natural treasures were being degraded or lost, and increasing numbers of species were becoming extinct. Pinkerton writes, "Many people have become aware that unbounded cultivation, extraction, and construction have disastrously degraded the ecosystem of the planet."

As a result of this awareness, previously marginalized ecologically-based political movements, often rooted in romantic ideas about nature, grew and gained so many adherents that they became a part of mainstream political debate. In 1997 in Europe, according to Pinkerton, the ecological political parties had a potential electorate that was almost as large as that of the Christian democratic parties. In the United States, Green Party candidate Ralph Nader came in fourth in the 1996 presidential election

and came in second in many areas that were heavily populated by college students. In 2000 Nader came in third in the national election, and some observers claimed that his presence on the ballot diverted a substantial number of voters from the Democratic Party and thus lost the election for Democratic candidate Al Gore. These victories for the environmental parties show that many people, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and other romantics, still believe that nature, as a source of renewal, transcendence, and peace, should be celebrated and protected.

**Source:** Kelly Winters, Critical Essay on Romanticism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### *Klaus Hofmann*

*In the following excerpt, Hofmann explains that Keats's poem* Ode on a Grecian Urn *is rooted in a tradition of religious hymns.*

They who misquote the title of Keats's ode may not be aware of the truth in their mistake. Indeed, Keats's poem is an ode not "on" but "to" a Grecian urn, most conspicuously so as it opens with a threefold apostrophe and thereby fulfils the requirements of the genre more faithfully than most odes. This faithfulness exposes the poem to the question whether the apostrophe addresses a being worth the effort. Is the addressee an at least potentially responsive partner in the communicative situation of the ode, which is essentially a dialogic one though the utterance may be one-sided in the manner of the dramatic monologue. From its origins in the cult hymn, the genuine partner of an odic address is a divine being, a god, goddess, or a godlike authority, capable of hearing, of understanding, of fulfilling a request. The invocation may not be received, the god may not listen, may not care, may not be willing or able to help—the precariousness of prayer—yet there must be a confidence in, and a possibility of, a gracious reception. This requirement is not withdrawn or diminished in post-religious circumstances with no established godhead to address. Then, the demand on the poem is even heavier. It is now the poem's task to create the authority to which it turns. The post-religious ode has to assume the status of poetic self-sufficiency, of, in Miltonic terms, Satanic self-creation, of being the poet's prayer to himself. Put in philosophical terms: It has to assume aesthetic autonomy. Religious belief is being replaced by the poetic

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faith of Coleridge's definition. Now the ode has to prove by its very performance that its address is a valid one, the foremost act of such performance being, in Keats's case, the poetic creation of the urn. To the degree this creation succeeds in the course of the poem, the urn will have proved eligible for the odic address.

In itself, an urn seems an unpromising addressee. An ode to a pot is bound to be ridiculous. Then, what about an urn, an earthenware, at best a marble, pot? Can it bear the burden of an odic apostrophe, its serious solemnity? Is not the danger of bathos unavoidable? Would not the title "Ode to a Grecian Urn" announce a travesty? The embarrassment is evident in some literary critics' endeavor to upgrade the urn, notably into a funeral urn, a move which finds no support in the poem, but provides the opportunity for the critic to enrich the poem with ponderous thoughts on death and transitoriness, or with a plethora of symbolic lore. Conversely, other critics have valiantly embraced the precariousness of the inappropriate object with an emphasis on the abject state of the disused utensil, the piece of debris, which through this abasement is elevated to the state of art. From this point of view Keats's Ode is regarded as ancestral to surrealist translations of discarded utensils into art objects. Mentioning Duchamp's ready-mades, K. S. Calhoon barely suppresses the punning, though etymologically correct, connection between urn and urinal. Obviously the predicament has been noticed and there is no reason to assume that Keats was not aware of it. Is this why Keats avoids the obvious title and

swerves to "Ode on a Grecian Urn," a phrase which does not immediately expose the poem to the doom of bathos? But can the poem escape this doom? Do not the first lines quickly give away what the title may have tried to hide: that the poem is an ode to a Grecian urn, boldly confident of its success in establishing the urn's dignity?

The gesture of avoidance in the poem's title which after all announces what it refrains from announcing, namely an ode, which is generally an "ode to," may on the other hand not be a sign of embarrassment by the addressee's lowness, but a symptom of awe in the face of the silent work of art, even fear of the unmediated impact of beauty. Grant Scott senses this: "The prospect of paralysis before the silent beauty of the unravished bride is never far from the speaker's mind...." This anxiety has been explained along psychological and gender lines. In the light of such explanations the sister arts turn out not to be sisters but siblings of different sex with visual art taking the female, verbal art the male part. The Medusa myth has been enlisted to contribute the motif of the petrifying female gaze "that so often charges the ekphrastic encounter between word and image." Awe and fear may turn to resentment which is nourished by the iconophobia traditional to Jewish-Christian culture. But the resentment also inherits iconophobia's ambivalence, oscillating with the desire for what it shuns. This ambivalence may motivate a dialectic which makes ekphrasis reject the image and yet aspire to a pictorial mode of existence in its own, literary ways as Murray Krieger argues in his exposition of the "ekphrastic principle." The Ode's title dares not announce what the Ode is in fact about to venture: to establish a communicative relationship with the urn which, indeed, exists beyond the range of communicative exchange. The Ode is bound to attempt the task of drawing the incommunicative phenomenon into the domain of language and thereby translate language into the urn's aesthetic mode. This amounts to an endeavor to transcend the sphere of communication to which the poem, however, is genuinely attached by its medium, language. The ekphrastic negotiation which a poem addressing a work of visual art is bound to inaugurate will ineluctably be caught in this aporia, which is constitutive of literary art. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* devotes its attention to the dialectic evolving from this aporetic foundation of poetry. Adorno's remark on language

and "Etruscan vases in the Villa Giulia" could apply to the Attic urn and Keats's Ode:

> Owing to its dual character, language is a constitutive principle of art as well as art's mortal enemy. Etruscan vases in the Villa Giulia articulate something without using communicative language. In fact, the true language of art is speechless.

Will Keats's poem attain the speechlessness of the true language of art? Or will it remain in opposition to the urn, unable to transcend "art's mortal enemy?"

One more hint, to pass over less convincing guesses, issues from the poem's title, suggesting a factual as well as conceptual attachment of urn and poem. The ode is announced like, even as, an epigram, in its Greek origins an inscription in verse usually placed on a statue, tomb, or funerary column. In this regard the most plain and simple-minded inference to be drawn from the poem's title would be to perceive the text of the ode inscribed "on a Grecian urn." This would enrich the poem's discourse on ekphrasis by a recourse to the prototypical encounter of visual and literary art, the epigrammatic fiction of a speaking stone set in relief by the silent stone on which the epigram is inscribed, an encounter devised by the antagonistic collusion of the stonemason and the epigrammatist versed in the rhetoric of *prosopopoeia*. The epigrammatist gives a fictional voice and, as it were, face, *prosopon*, to the stone; the mason silences this voice into writing chiseled into the stone, reducing language to a lapidary materiality, which the passer-by may again redeem into speech.

To follow this suggestion made by the title and to assume that Keats meant the Ode to be perceived as an inscription on the urn would, however, stretch poetic license to a degree which seriously strains the poet's credit. Putting an ode in the place of an epigram might be appreciated, even relished as a Romantic disdain of genre rules. But a Greek vase or urn with an English Romantic ode inscribed on it would be too grotesque an invention. The poem rejects this imputation line for line as its speaker inspects the urn's surface without registering, except, perhaps, for the last lines, an appearance of his own words. Nevertheless, the title's suggestion of a collusion or competition between the two genres—ode and epigram—is intriguing and has elicited wily remarks such as Martin Aske's hint at the poem being written "on" the urn, not literally, but as "a parergonal trace

which seeks to reinscribe itself on the silent, ineffable space of the absent image of the urn" or "as a parergonal inscription over an absent, or at least never completely represented object." In the final lines of the Ode the epigrammatic genre will emphatically assert its claims and the negotiations between an "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and an "Epigram on a Grecian Urn" will be resumed.

The opening of the poem does not follow the evasive strategy and the oblique suggestions of the title. It sets out with an uninhibited odic address, yet avoids both the embarrassment of addressing an unworthy object and the intimidation by an inaccessible phenomenon by avoiding the name—as does, indeed, the rest of the poem. It never, through all its five stanzas, has recourse to a plain "O, urn!" The strategy of getting away from—and with—the odic address to an urn is, in the first three lines, the rhetoric of metaphor. The poem tropes away from the risk of banality or presumptuousness, transfiguring the urn into the "still unravished bride," the "fosterchild," the "sylvan historian." The urn fades behind the images imposed upon it. In this manner the poem establishes a responsible partner. It does so in a halting manner: the ode is in search of its addressee. The first two attempts are inconsequential, suggestive as they may be. The "still unravished bride of quietness" surprises as a conceit of an incipient allegory which does not develop into one. The prospect of such a development is awkward, to say the least. What kind of marriage to the bridegroom "Quietness" may be envisaged? What consummation? What ravishment? Death? A less radical reading may avoid the allegorical personification of quietness and take the word simply as a qualifying genitive, presenting the urn as a quiet virgin. In either case the word "still," read as an adverb, sounds a premonition of doom threatening the virginity of the "yet" unravished bride. Could it be that the ode, with a coy cynicism, emphasizes what it is eager to destroy: the integrity of the urn as a silent, a non-speaking entity, existing beyond the reach of communicative intimacy, a thing of beauty? Was the urn secure in its unravished state as long as it was a bride of quietness, from which this very address tries to abduct her? Whatever the reading, this opening conceit proves a barren one and is not pursued beyond the first line. There is, however, a note struck here which will recur. The notion of stillness and silence will return as a *leitmotif* throughout the poem. It will soon be taken up and continued in the figures of the frieze on the urn—though with a difference: The stasis, which

keeps those figures "for ever" in their position and from achieving what they aspire to, is brought about by their being frozen into an image, while the urn's stillness is qualified by the ambiguity of the word "still," which, as an adverb, suggests the temporality of "not yet." The urn is, after all, subject to the ravages of time.

The second conceit, the one of the "fosterchild of silence and slow time," emphasizes the temporality of the urn's stillness. As a fosterchild of "slow time," the urn is capable of a history which, perhaps imperceptibly, may bring about change, fruition, ravishment of whatever kind. The third attempt at a valid invocation seems to take its cue from the second line's emphasis on time and history. As a "sylvan historian" the urn is supposed to know history and to be a source of historical knowledge.

The sequence of three figurative attempts to open a channel to the urn raises doubts about the aptness of the procedure. The rhetoric of metaphor is, after all, grounded in aporia. Metaphor, like its extension, allegory, is resorted to when the proper term is deemed inappropriate or unavailable and a non-proper term is inserted in its place—to the effect of a hovering validity which is held in suspense by the knowledge that the term is not the proper one. The paradox of the wrong term being the only appropriate or possible one accounts for the precariousness of metaphoric speech. The three initial apostrophes of the "Ode" are impaired by this precariousness. They are misnomers. In addition, the attempt at establishing familiarity by inventing a figurative family may block rather than open the way to the urn's identity. The erotic note which is struck by the first address—and which has occasioned numerous interpretations along gender lines—has the awkward courtesy of someone trying to be amorous to another man's bride. The fact that the first two conceits are abandoned is indicative of the speaker's insecurity. The third attempt, "Sylvan historian," seems to hit an appellation capable of carrying the poem. Or does it? Does it perhaps divert the poem into a string of futile digressions, from which it cannot desist and from which it only just reverts in its last stanza? Is the ode by these digressions deferring its end and thereby maintaining its existence—beyond the pleasure principle?

As it stands, the poem settles for the "sylvan historian," whose "flowery tale" will soon absorb the speaker's interest. The approach remains

tentative. Vagueness veils the probably female figure, sylph or not, of the "sylvan historian." Is s/he supposed to be a teller of tales, a "storian"? Or is there a historical dimension to what s/he is expected to deliver? A probing into the Greek past, as may well be expected from the fosterchild of "slow time?" And why "sylvan?" Does the epithet refer to the florid style of the teller of a "flowery tale." Does it refer to the leaf-ornament bordering the frieze? Or does it characterize the historian herself? Does it mark her/him as a natural source of intimation whose medium is the symbol, which, in Walter Benjamin's poetic phrase, contains meaning "in its hidden and, if one may say so, sylvan interior." Or is the emphasis on the "naturalness" of the history delivered by the urn, which is not the antiquarian's or the scholar's production but that of the poetic genius who has his authenticity as an instance of nature, writing "history without footnotes," as Cleanth Brooks put it. Obviously, the sylvan historian's history is set in the aesthetic mode; it is a work of art, the sculpted relief on the urn's surface.

Figured as a "sylvan historian," the urn is shifted from the position of addressee to that of the speaker's consort, colleague and competitor in the poetic function of expressing a flowery tale, which the urn, in its sculpted frieze, is said to perform "more sweetly" than the speaker can. The confrontation of the visual against the linguistic mode, of visual art against poetry, of *Malerei und Poesie*, is broached in these opening lines. Judged by the sensuous, aesthetic criterion of sweetness, visual art is given precedence over verbal art. Yet by attributing to visual art the same task to which he himself is dedicated, namely to tell a tale, the speaker moves the confrontation into the domain of language and loads the dice in favor of the literary mode. Whatever the advantage of visual art in the contest, its achievement will be the same as what the speaker aspires to. Now, to expect pictures to tell a tale is certainly not extraordinary. The narrative element in the visual arts is a prominent issue in art scholarship. It tends, however, to be converted into an issue of literary scholarship. In the context of the Ode's opening stanza the pronounced interest in tale and legend betrays a reluctance to appreciate visual art. The speaker disregards the possibility of a radical heterogeneity of visual art. He asks for tale and detail instead of aesthetically appreciating art and image. He is determined to read, not to behold. To him, the frieze presents a "legend" which he is bound to decipher. The "sylvan historian" is approached as a source of information and the epithet seems to activate the traditional meaning of *silva* as a source of material: story as store.

The pictorial medium does not readily deliver what the speaker expects. The flowery tale which the sylvan historian is said to express so sweetly is not forthcoming. The speaker's expectation may have been wrongly placed. He may have been deceived by his own metaphor: The urn may just not be a historian—sylvan or other. Indeed, it insists on its own mode of presentation: a marble relief of figures, frozen into their position, not able to move into the continuum of a tale.

The speaker is undaunted. He is determined to have a tale told him through the pictures of the frieze. With the question "What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape" he loses sight of the urn and its metaphoric disguises and enters a sphere distinct from the urn as such. The pronoun "thy" is the last reference to the sylvan historian or the urn before the latter will be invoked again in the last stanza. The leaf-fringe may be taken as the frame constituting this sphere—as the *parergon* which Derrida, taking his cue from Kant, develops into the concept and emblem of the margin delimiting the aesthetic mode. The fringe in Keats's ode, to be precise, does not circumscribe the sphere of art as a whole but severs non-representative from representative art within the aesthetic sphere, thereby breaking up the integrity of that sphere. It distinguishes the urn—the "shape"—from the zone of pictorial representation, which, beyond its material reality as part of the urn, is of a different quality: It is an apparition of reality, it "haunts about thy shape." The speaker is intrigued by the urn's display of sculpted images and neglects the possibly beautiful shape of the urn. The urn does not interest him the way the frieze does. The urn's silence may be impressive, yet it is the obvious and plain property of the thing. The silence of the piping piper, by contrast, is of a logical intricacy which will absorb the speaker's interest. The urn's—slow time's fosterchild's—lasting through the ages is venerable, yet it is a durability it has in common with any cup, horse-bit or axe preserved through the centuries. The suspension of time which exempts the youthful singer, the trees, the bold lover from temporality challenges the understanding in a different manner. It is this challenge which the speaker is about to meet—with questionable

success. Aesthetic considerations are faded out. What occupies the speaker in these stanzas is not the beauty of the frieze's images. Beauty is not a topic in the ode until it is broached in the last stanza. This decisive strategy of the poem is ignored in the ubiquitous critics' opinion that the beauty of the urn or its frieze is the poem's concern right from the beginning. The word "fair" does occur in stanza two, but it refers to a maiden's beauty, not to the work of art. What is at issue in these stanzas are the intricacies of representation and, by implication, the intricacies of ekphrasis, not beauty.

The speaker's absorption into the pictorial world of the frieze begins as inquisitiveness, manifest in a series of standard questions: What is the story? What is the site? Who are the persons? What is going on? No explicit answer acknowledges the propriety of this inquisitiveness: A lesson whose teaching may eventually be registered, when the last stanza states what is needful to know. Yet critics protest too much when they point out the urn's refusal to meet the speaker's request and expatiate on the urn's secretiveness. After all, it may not tell a tale, but in its own way it provides a wealth of detailed information, which the speaker—and the reader of the poem—can perceive without effort. Nor need the speaker's questioning be denounced as an intrusion when it may more appropriately be perceived as a wondering, even admiring acknowledgement of a sight—with an ekphrastic side-effect of divulging what is being seen. The enquiry clearly shifts towards astonishment as the pronoun proceeds from the interrogative to the affective, exclamatory "what!" "What wild ecstasy?"—*pace* the question mark—no longer asks a question but expresses amazement. Observation and inquiry give way to empathic participation, which continues through the following stanzas, as the speaker drifts further into an empathic involvement in the imaginary world of the urn's relief, from storied urn to animated bust.

The speaker's naïve participation comes to an end when he suddenly becomes aware of the representational mode, the duplicity of representation and what is represented, the difference of art and life: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter." The initial consciousness of the unreality of the haunting legend of deities or mortals has faded to some degree in the last four lines of the first stanza. Now it is regained in the puzzling insight that there is a presence of something absent—"unheard melodies." As if taking a hint from Adorno's use of the passage as the epigraph to his Schönberg essay in *Prisms*, Marshall Brown has developed the *topos* into a negative dialectic which vindicates the presence of what is materially absent as a constitutive feature in art. In tacit propinquity to Kant who, in elaborating the third moment of the judgment of taste, distinguishes "form" as the constituent of the true judgment of taste from "matter" ("Reize und Rührungen"/"charms and emotions"), Brown demonstrates the formative function of what is unheard, unseen, unread in given passages of a work of art, passages in which the artist achieves the logically impossible: produces absolute form which is not the form of anything, but "performs" by sheer absence of something formed. The argument comes close to Derrida's elaboration of the *parergon*, the forming frame which becomes manifest after any substance has been whittled away, but vanishes at the moment of its pure manifestation. Being neither within the work nor without, it disappears in the abysmal gulf of negativity from which, however, it performs the function of framing. Taking its cue from the praise of "unheard melodies" in Keats's ode Brown's vindication of form against "base materialisms and empty formalisms" (*Turning Points* 267) discovers in those lines more than the poem's speaker does. The speaker puts into a nutshell what he does not unfold. By him the unheard melodies are not considered in the context of the musical performance where they may function as "structure, skeleton, attitude, feeling" (*Turning Points* 255). They are perceived as melodies silenced by their transference into the sphere of visual art. Here the poem briefly exhibits a case of ekphrasis involving the other sister art: Music is presented by visual art, with a certain sleight of sculptor's rhetoric presenting the piper as a metonymy of his music. The sculptor's ekphrasis of music is ekphrastically presented by the ode, which in turn is a musical, at least an audible, presentation, muted into a written text. A cunning introduction to the poem's central topic! The recourse to the criterion of sweetness recalls the previous confrontation of the sylvan historian's tale and the speaker's rhyme and again sides with the greater sweetness of the mute art which—if the term applies—enchants the speaker, the singer of Keats's verse. What are we, readers and listeners, to make of his chant? Or is it cant? Is he not up to appreciating the

heard melody of the song he is singing, of which he is the source and the instrument? Does he disavow the aural quality of his own utterance, the rhymes and rhythms of his verse, its sound effects and paronomasias? Evidently, an ode, αοιδη, is not a "ditty of no tone." Would he prefer his song, a "heard melody," to be muted into the representation of a song, a melody unheard? Does he aspire to a marble image of himself chanting the ode? Is the desired upgrading indeed performed by the written text which may be read without being heard? Is the text to the speaker what the urn is to the piper—the cold pastoral transfiguring his song into a written poem? This consideration, of course, breaks open the closed entity of the poem which harbors no writer, only a speaker. The written text of the poem is not contained within the poem. The notion of the frame, the *parergon*, again asserts itself. The text of the ode is there to frame and present the speaker's or singer's performance, which itself is not a writing performance and therefore excludes the text. The poem is contained in and by the text, not by itself. Not being self-contained it foregoes the absoluteness of aesthetic autonomy. It depends. On the written text, as this text depends on its writer, the poet, perhaps on the poet's amanuensis, who received the poet's words as the poet, in Milton's conceit, received the call of the muse: as a "ditty," a dictation prospective of its mutation into a written, eventually printed, text.

The coincidence of frieze and text both transposing the audible into silence highlights a connection of what is conventionally arranged in opposition: the visual and the verbal. As a written text the word dwells like the melody unheard in the visual realm, transcending the aural sphere. To the speaker's mind and the poem's logic the negation of aural sensuousness overrules the positivity of visual sensuousness and attributes to mute visuality a non-sensuous, spiritual quality: A curious revision of the traditional affiliation of spirit, voice and hearing on the one hand and body, image and beholding on the other arranges visually mediated spirituality against aural sensuality. What elevates those inaudible melodies is that they are piped "to the spirit." In the same vein the poem, which has saved the speaker's odic utterance into the permanence of a written text, plays to the spirit. As "ditties of no tone" both may be perceived by intellectual intuition, the Romantic philosophers' stone.

The visual as the spiritual medium is played off against the aural as the sensuous medium and this resumes the reflection on the representational mode which has been the poem's concern since the speaker's attention turned to the frieze's images. Spirituality is ascribed not to the visual sense as such but to the world of semblance which is brought about by visual mimesis. Aural mimesis, though well established in onomatopoeic practices, hardly sustains a separate sphere corresponding or referring to a first world but tends to fall back into the continuum of sound and noise. It repeats rather than represents. Music—"heard melodies"—is, *pace* Aristotle, not a mimetic art and derives its claims to spirituality from other quarters. Visual representation genuinely establishes the realm of semblance in its ambiguity of illusion and deception on the one hand and apparitional spirituality on the other. Oscillating between deception and epiphany, between idol and ideal, *Schein* conditions the relation between beauty and truth in a precariousness which quivers in the word *specious*.

The speaker falls for both, the deception and the ideality of a realm far above "all breathing human passion." True, he has achieved an awareness of the peculiar mode of representational art. He ought to be conscious of the different modes of existence and not to perceive the scene in an inappropriate immediacy. There, behind the mirror, is the realm of melodies heard, here the zone of melodies unheard. But the neat distinction is immediately blurred. In an inconclusive conclusion—"therefore"—the speaker exhorts the "soft pipes" to play on, an exhortation lost on pipes whose metonymic softness has changed into hard marble. They do play on—unheard melodies have to be performed too, as we have learned—but the art of performing unheard melodies has been taken over by the art of representation behind which the live music has vanished. This is what the speaker half knows and half forgets. He gets entangled in an interpolation of the two levels or modes, resulting in the paradoxical statements which posit the coexistence of mutually exclusive qualities. The coalescence of life and art, endowing the life processes with the atemporality of the sculpted image, is an achievement reserved to verbal, denied to visual presentation. The poem is, in these passages, an exercise in and comment on the possibilities of verbal ekphrasis, which comprehends both representation and the life represented. Its lesson is confirmed by default in critics' unthinking attempt to

grasp the verbal performance again in a visual image. Helen Vendler's recourse to the well-known duck/rabbit sketch misses the point. Whilst the picture insists on an either/or perception, though this may speed up to a vertiginous flickering, language can embrace the alternatives within its regular syntax. Misled by the example in the other medium, Vendler believes that there is a "quick shuttling back and forth in the speaker's mind between immersion in the fervent matter and recognition of the immobile medium" (128). In the same vein James Heffernan argues: "Up to the very moment when the urn finally speaks, the poem seems to tell us that we cannot have both [i.e. fixed beauty of visual art and the language of narrative] at once, that we must choose between the narratable truth of a passionately mutable life and immutable beauty of graphic art" (114). Yet it is this distinction which the poem tries to obliterate. The poem, unlike the sketch, confounds the two modes of existence, though it does not fuse them into a *unio mystica* as Wasserman contends.

The speaker loses orientation in his confrontation with three tiers of existence—the live scene, its pictorial representation, the verbal ekphrasis. He is fascinated—and fascinates the reader willing to go along with him—by bizarre contaminations of the three. He is tricked into seeing breathing human passion transported beyond the realm of breathing human passion. He reimports the petrified figures into an imaginary lifeworld to the effect of a perpetual "now." The atemporality of the representation is converted into perpetuity. The speaker does not reflect on the logic of this prestidigitation. He simply falls for it, answering effect with affect. Like the naïve playgoer, who encourages and warns the *dramatis personae,* he takes part in what he half sees, half imagines—exhorting the pipes to play on, giving instruction and consolation to the youthful singer and to the lover. The next stanza parades the speaker in a state of abandon, whipping up happiness, "More happy love! more happy, happy love!" The "more" may even lose the function of the grammatical comparative and turn into a hungry cry for "more." As he attributes "happy love" to the marble figures, he wallows in it himself, getting carried away in the rhythm of "happy, happy" which pulls the poem down to a child's performance on a hobby horse, mocking the "Hoppe, hoppe Reiter" of the German nursery. Closer to home and to the text is, of course, "The Idiot Boy," the galloping rhythm of "happy, happy John," which in turn echoes that of Wilhelm's horse, the "Hurre, hurre, hopp hopp hopp," in G. A. Bürger's "Lenore."

This loss of distance and control has been remarked on, has given occasion to blame and ridicule, or to awkward excuses, though it may also be read with an ear for an interlacing of sympathy, envy and rejection. To extol the stanza, as Thomas McFarland does, as an outcome of "the white-hot moment of genius" reflects unfavorably on the concept of genius and suggests that the poet may have burnt his fingers. Indeed, the stanza may be called silly, the more so if the old meaning of "seely," preserved in the German *selig*, is recalled. Yet it has its place in the poem. James O'Rourke ascribes its poetic failure to the speaker's futile attempts at ekphrasis—by extension to the generic futility of ekphrasis—which will only be overcome when the speaker extricates himself from his subservience to visual art and moves "beyond the recycling of the imagery contained on the urn, and to offer its own antithesis. . . . So long as the poem attempts to reproduce the imagery contained on the urn, it can only repeat itself. . . . The repetition of 'happy, happy boughs' . . . demonstrates, in its monotony, what happens when the simultaneity of the visual arts is transposed directly into poetry. . . ." O'Rourke concludes that "the speaker is disabled to a degree that verges on stuttering." His very involvement alienates the speaker from the condition he tries to render verbally. The verbal medium turns the sameness of the happy still-life into repetitiveness, and the imaginary participation in the blissful state of the frieze's figures in fact throws the speaker into the condition of a "breathing human passion," which "leaves a heart high sorrowful and cloy'd," the very condition he thought he had evaded. His reaching out for those figures' happiness leaves him at best in a state of being too happy in their happiness. Eventually he abandons this futile attempt and reflects, in the stanza's last lines, on the contrast between the two conditions.

These explorations take the poem far beyond a simple deliberation about the respective advantages of life and art, a question which preoccupies the Stillinger collection of 1968, with Wasserman's book of 1953 and Cleanth Brooks' essay of 1945 in the background, and makes a recent handbook fall behind the state of current discussion. Nor does the poem offer information on Keats's personal preference of art to life or vice versa. Speculations whether Keats's predilection was with "his fair love's

ripening breast" rather than with marble ones may be appreciated in a jocular mood which made Cleanth Brooks cite e. e. cummings' funny rhyme, "A pretty girl that naked is / Is worth a million statues." The ode does not provoke, even less satisfy such curiosity, nor does it let us overhear Keats in person.

As the poem proceeds, the activities which suggested happiness are superseded by a scene which, while presenting the festiveness of a communal sacrifice, suggests desolation, victimization, down to details like the "peaceful citadel" the peace of which reverberates with the threat of war for which a citadel, after all, provides. The urn's presentations now extend beyond the state of bliss. If the image of the lowing heifer intimates to Paul Fry (256) another unheard melody then this is certainly not a sweet one. Reverting to the questioning of the first stanza, the speaker is not satisfied with what the urn's frieze presents but supplements the scene of the sacrificial procession to the green altar with the conjectural "little town by river or sea-shore, or mountain-built." The threefold option is another comment on the advantage of literary as against visual presentation. Literary art can propose three versions of the little town's site; visual presentation, short of giving three different pictures, would have to decide where to situate it. The extension of the poem's vista beyond what the urn exhibits overrules the limitations of ekphrasis as a, however fictive, description of a given work of art. In an act of "ekphrastic rivalry" a sample of verbal poesis not subservient to a preceding sculptural *poesis* is inserted. This allows a fleeting glimpse into the poet's workshop. For once the speaker practices what is otherwise the poet's privilege, which, in reverse, amounts to a Hitchcockian cameo appearance of the poet in the guise of the speaker. There is a difference, however, between the poet devising the sculpted urn and the speaker's invention. The latter is equivocal. It may suggest a little town and it may suggest the picture of a little town, an imagined addition to the urn's frieze. The town is temporarily silent as its inhabitants have left for the procession and will be back by evening or next morning. As an image, however, the deserted little town is frozen in its desolation. The silent rendering of actual silence—more so than the previous metamorphosis of heard melodies into unheard ones—invites the equivocation of two spheres and a conflation of the world of history and the world of art. In previous stanzas a confusion of

both sides of the mirror of representation brought about the perturbation of a charmed victim of art's delusive power. In stanzas two and three the speaker was intrigued, puzzled and duped by the paradoxes he himself conjured up by his mixing with the marble creatures of the Greek artist, insisting on their timeless existence and at the same time insinuating life and a temporal continuum. Now, in stanza four, the speaker has progressed from dizzying entanglement to a stance of intellectual control, even sophistication, displaying Romantic wit and irony. Intersecting the level of reality with the level of semblance he sees the town desolate because its inhabitants have moved into the sphere of art from which there is no return: an Attic Hamlin Town. The complaint that not a soul can return to tell that not a soul can return adds to the absurdity of the surrealist joke and superadds the notion of the revenant, the Gothic figure of the returnee who cannot return. The aesthetic sphere throws its spell over the historical world, the little town, and assimilates it to its timeless state.

Many critics discover in this stanza's reference to a little town, which is not actually pictured on the urn, the poem's reaching out to historical reality, a break-through to a new dimension. Here, it is alleged, the poem achieves its genuine identity which has been thwarted up to this stanza by the speaker's fixation on the urn's figures. In addition, the engagement in historical reality and its temporal dimension is said to bring about the poem's turn to narrativity. Such interpretations attempt to recruit the poem for historicist discourse. Temporality is the shibboleth which a poem has to master in order to be worth considering. A variant of the historicist approach is offered by James O'Rourke who, while critical of the McGann school, also sees the poem coming into its own in stanza four, no longer idolizing the "sentimental beauty" of illusionary art but presenting "a beauty that is real." The rhetoric of temporality is extended to that of allegory which this stanza is said to offer. The lack of evident allegory is made up by the critic's allegorizations: For O'Rourke the empty town "becomes an image for the final destiny of these figures who vanish into the abyss of time," a conceit in the wake of Wasserman's earlier invention of a pilgrim's progress, a "passage of souls from the world-town to a heaven-altar, from which there is no return" (43)—a construct which provoked

mocking remarks from Leo Spitzer (80, n. 12). Helen Vendler's remark that the procession is invested "with the weight of life's mysteries of whence and whither" (125) is another instance of the allegorizing approach.

Both ways of inculcating a historical dimension, a straightforward one or an allegorized one, disregard the fact that the inspection of the frieze continues in this stanza and that the poem continues exploring the effects and perplexities of representation, notably the interplay of temporal event and still image. By missing the joke about the exodus of the little town's community through the looking-glass of art and seeing the poem open a door out to historical reality critics are in fact victims of the joke. Temporality has been on the poem's agenda all along, in the mythological and pastoral scene of previous stanzas as well as in the scene from communal life in the fourth. Rather than invent a sudden shift in the poems—or its speaker—from being under the spell of images to being aware of historical reality one might pay attention to the poem's persistent negotiation of the representational relation, which juxtaposes the temporal and atemporal modes of existence. This attention may bring about an awareness not only of the poem's historical sensibility but also of the Romantic poem as a historical phenomenon. The poem's reflecting on art's vampiric power of draining life and assimilating the victim to its own mode of existence, oscillating between ideality and an uncanny "apparitioning," may be a valid contribution towards a definition of the Romantic moment in history.

The fifth stanza—perhaps following the cue given by the last syllable of the fourth stanza's last word, the only appearance of the sequence "urn" in the poem—resumes the invocatory pose, incidentally the rhyme pattern, too, of the first stanza and, in one respect, confers symmetry on the poem, in another respect breaks the poem up by practically restarting it. The restart is remarkable for the poem's or the speaker's change of attitude. At last he faces the urn again. He is still aware of the sculpted frieze, but its pastoral scenes now stand in metonymically for the urn, the "Cold Pastoral." He has extricated himself from his absorption in the world of the urn's relief and resumes the odic invocations of the first stanza, even venturing the odic "O." But now he is on different terms with the urn. Gone are the metaphoric transfigurations. With "Attic

shape" the poem comes closest to calling the urn an urn. The mocking sound of the paronomasia "fair attitude" somewhat dilutes the factuality of the new approach, but sticks to the facts, the Attic provenance and character of the urn, risking a pun rather than resorting to an awkward "fair Atticness." The new approach is firmly established in the—at last and for the first time—factual description of the artefact. The urn's figures are now recognized as "marble men and maidens." Silence, formerly turned by a troping fancy into a foster-parent, is now simply attributed to "form," a term which recalls scholarly rather than poetic diction. "Cold Pastoral" acknowledges the quality of the artefact which has previously been ignored. "Pastoral" is the technical term for the genre in question. All in all, the fifth stanza brings a thorough revision of the previous performance, even an invalidation of the four previous stanzas. Invalid and inappropriate, so the final stanza's verdict, was the previous approach to the urn, the absorption into the world of representation and the neglect of truly aesthetic judgment. Involved in logical puzzles and equivocations, first as victim, then as master, at times indulging in an affective consumption, even consummation, of the picture-frieze, the speaker had lost sight of the urn. Now, he shows a new regard for the urn, contemplating instead of inquiring. Above all, he introduces the concept of beauty—with the word "fair" in the stanza's first line, eventually in the urn's message. The revision of the last stanza is a new vision, an aesthetic vision. At last the urn figures as a thing of beauty. It is the speaker's new insight that the encounter with the work of art was foiled as long as the aesthetic judgment of its beauty was displaced by usage—intellectual or emotional. However, he does not remain in an attitude of adoration and aesthetic appreciation. Eventually his newly won attitude is cast into knowledge presented as the urn's teaching, articulated by the speaker: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." By this dictum and the confirmatory comment on it the poem stands corrected and redeemed. After a process of erring and mistaking it has eventually worked out its aesthetic salvation. Or, has it?

The message itself is by no means as vapid as detractors would have us believe, nor is it in need of a silly scatological joke in order to reveal its meaning. The point it makes may have been blunted by ubiquitous use, yet it governs the idealistic aesthetics of the Romantic era, most

explicitly in F. W. J. Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism,* which, through the mediation of S. T. Coleridge, was brought into the English discourse on art, aesthetics and the imagination. Schelling appoints, in an ontologizing development of the function of the power of judgment in Kant's *Critique*, the production of the beautiful work of art as the anticipation of what philosophy aspires to establish: truth. In the final section of *System* Schelling states that

> it is self evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy. . . . Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart. . . .

> Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge, and with it all those sciences it has guided to perfection; we may thus expect them, on completion, to flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source. . . .

Hegel affirms the truth of beauty when, in the introduction to his *Aesthetics,* he states that "art's vocation is to unveil the truth in the form of sensuous artistic configuration." The urn's dictum can be seen in close propinquity to Hegel's central definition of the concept of beauty as "das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee," the "sensuous appearance of the idea":

> Now we said that beauty is Idea, so beauty and truth are in one way the same. Beauty, namely must be true in itself. But looked at more closely, the true is nevertheless distinct from the beautiful. That is to say, what is true is the Idea, the Idea as it is in accordance with its inherent character and universal principle, and as it is grasped as such in thought . . . Now, when truth in this its external existence is present to consciousness immediately, and when the Concept remains immediately in unity with its external appearance, the Idea is not only true but beautiful. Therefore the beautiful is characterized as the pure appearance of the Idea to sense.

Hegel's careful distinction states the identity of beauty and truth "in one way" (*einer Seits*) yet does not admit reciprocity, truth not exhausting itself in beauty but coming into its own as thought. The urn's chiastic assertion of the identity of beauty and truth, truth and beauty, seems to override such reservation and therefore expose itself to questions as to its tenability, though the slight disturbance of the chiasm—the sylleptic omission of the second "is"—has been read as indicating a non-reciprocity. The commentary, in any case, shifts the issue of truth in a Hegelian fashion from the confines of beauty to its epistemic homeland. With this move the assertion of identity pronounced in the maxim is again subject to the criterion of truth in the commentary's emphasis on knowing. Taken as knowledge, the definition of truth as beauty may not be true after all, or, in a historical dimension, it may have passed its moment of truth, the epoch of classical *Kunstreligion*.

The qualification of the urn's dictum as sufficient knowledge relegates both the urn's dictum and the urn's commentary on it to the status of a possibly superannuated and self-serving wisdom, from which the poem may very well distance itself. And what authenticates the dictum as the urn's wisdom in the first place? The imputation of the dictum as the urn's direct utterance is proposed by interpretations, which, supported by the officious editorial act of hedging the two lines in quotation marks, attempt to isolate the urn's message from the poem in order to keep the latter free from "aestheticist teaching" or to keep it at an ironic distance. Such interpretations establish the very sphere of aestheticist irresponsibility which these critics denounce. Meaning to demonstrate a no-nonsense realism they indeed fall for the delusion of a speaking urn—in Spitzer's words "a Grecian miracle"—whilst the poem realistically counts on the mediation of a speaker. This, of course, complicates the issue. If the speaker lends his voice to the urn, why not his words, in a ventriloquist fashion? Then, who is talking?

One way of attributing the final pronouncement to the silent urn is to assume it being written on the urn's body, with the speaker acting as the reader of the inscription. What the title of the Ode suggested may at last have come true—in a modest, yet credible, version. A Romantic ode written on a Grecian urn would have been a preposterous proposition. An epigram written on a Grecian urn, however, may be acceptable even to the fastidious reader. The "leaf-fringed legend" of the first stanza may in this case be read as a first reference to the inscription, although this would raise the question why the speaker could not read it right away—granting the poetic licence of an English text on an Attic urn. . . .

And yet—Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" has charmed and will charm readers into the persuasion of having read a beautiful poem. The last stanza's acclamation of the urn's beauty throws the impression of beauty like a veil over the poem which, not least by this same stanza's manoeuvers, keeps its generic as well as historic distance from the manifestation of beauty. The poem's claim to beauty is thoroughly exploded by its performance, and yet, like the condensation of a previously evaporated substance, a secondary beauty settles on the poem's surface, spreading a bloom which suffices to win over the aesthetic judgment. This bloom may be taken to be a reflection of the poem's desire which is denied fulfilment for generic and historic reasons. In this manner Keats's ode exerts the power of a nostalgic reminder of a vanished condition which lends it an aura of beauty.

**Source:** Klaus Hofmann, "Keats's *Ode to a Grecian Urn*," in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 45, No. 2, Summer 2006, pp. 251–84.

### Susan J. Wolfson

*In the following essay, Wolfson examines four poetic works of the Romantic period, including* The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, *to show why interpreting an "uncertain" poem "must become an active seeking and generating of meaning."*

**I**

In 1799 William Blake reminded the Reverend Dr. Trusler, "The wisest of the Ancients considerd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouzes the faculties to act." This comment may be applied to the rhetorical activity of much Romantic poetry as well, especially in poems in which logical structures—the plots of an argument, a tale, or an informing legend—are the expected means of instruction. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *The Thorn*, "La Belle Dame sans Merci," and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" all unfold mysteries against potential sources of interpretation: moral lessons, arguments, glosses, village testimony, portentous encounters, spectral legends. Yet however much such sources may "rouze" the mind to render intelligible "what is not too Explicit," in these poems, the materials invoked for that purpose themselves become invaded by what Keats calls "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts." If these poems arouse expectation that there is a secure logic to be discovered for their perplexing

> THE EFFORT OF WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE IN THESE 'LYRICAL BALLADS' TO DRAMATIZE THE UNCERTAINTIES OF INTERPRETATION OPENS A FIELD OF RHETORICAL ACTIVITY IN ENGLISH ROMANTICISM IN WHICH THE PLAY OF INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES EMERGES AS A PRIMARY SUBJECT—A 'PRINCIPLE OF ACTION' IN ITSELF."

circumstances, they tend to dramatize the difficulties of such discovery more than its success.

These are poems, in other words, about problems in interpretation, involving questions that go to the heart of the Romantic concern with language itself: What is the status of explication or logical argument in poems that appear to frustrate such modes of discourse even as they put them forth? What kind of poem, or poetry, does this activity produce? One effect, certainly, is to cast into doubt the principles of coherence (the causal sequences) on which plots and arguments alike rely and to foreground the less certain, uneasy motions of mind attempting to describe such principles in the circumstances that have compelled its attention. Such stress yields a poetic syntax more psychological than logical in organization, more affective than narrative in its procedures. These poems all show the degree to which interpretation cannot consist simply of deciphering hidden patterns of meaning or discovering causal sequences, but must become an active seeking and generating of meaning.

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Thorn* dramatizes the efforts of their speakers to elucidate mystery through recourse to the logic of moral argument and the logic of narrative, respectively. The Mariner's "Rime" itself involves several kinds of interpretation, but the most blatant sense-making scheme in Coleridge's text—the Marginal Gloss—is amassed against the Mariner's "Rime" as a parallel commentary, making the poem as a whole bear the signature of two distinct intelligences: that of the riming Mariner and that of the Marginal Editor. In *The Thorn*, Wordsworth entertains dilemmas of interpretation in the body of the poem itself;

moreover, he diminishes the locutional differences between the narrator of the tale and the voice of his logic-seeking questioner—as if to suggest a unity of enterprise. In both these lyrical ballads, the sources of interpretive authority and the logical patterns they promote or delineate never quite emerge as "points and resting places in reasoning" independent of "the fluxes and refluxes of the mind" trying to interpret.

So psychological an emphasis (and the poetic texture it effects) must have impressed Wordsworth and Coleridge alike as a revolutionary enough experiment in the language of poetry. Yet Coleridge's belief that "the best part of human language . . . is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself" was not to be given its most radical poetic treatment until a generation later. Keats explicitly features the questions of interpretation that haunt *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Thorn* in his own lyrical ballad "La Belle Dame sans Merci"—a poem that bears a structural resemblance to *The Thorn*. Not long after, he was at work on a series of odes (of which "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is the most striking example) in which he not only makes a premise of the problems of interpretation all these lyrical ballads trace with increasing intensity, but extends that negotiation with uncertainty to the reader's engagement with the play of his rhyme.

## II

Today, most readers of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* are probably not as bothered as was Coleridge's acquaintance, the poet and essayist Mrs. Barbauld, about the "improbable" nature of his story. The second "fault" of which she complained to the author, however, remains something of a notorious vexation for many modern readers—namely, that the poem "had no moral." Coleridge is willing to cede the point on "probability"; but "as to the want of a moral," he counters, the poem's "chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of pure imagination." Yet in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* Coleridge not only seems to deplore "moral sentiment"; in this work of pure imagination, he seems to want to baffle the effort to discover any principle of action. Indeed, he continues his remarks by declaring that his poem "ought to have no more moral than the *Arabian Nights'* tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates

by the side of a well and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant *because* one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son." Coleridge emphasizes the causal vocabulary with knowing irony, for to the mind of the date-eater, the genie has produced moral necessity from a chance event and consequence.

But before considering what kind of moral paradigm that tale offers to the reader of Coleridge's poem, we need to turn to the Mariner himself, who finds moral uncertainties in the central circumstance of his "Rime." The world he describes, as readers from Wordsworth to the present have noted, is one informed by inscrutable forces; nature is unpredictably solicitous or persecutory, benevolent or tyrannous. As in "Dejection," the language that can be read from nature's appearances often seems barely more than the fiction of a desperate imagination. Indeed, the foggy atmosphere from which the Albatross emerges, and which always surrounds its presence, suggests both inner and outer weather:

> At length did cross an Albatross,
> Thorough the fog it came;
> As if it had been a Christian soul,
> We hailed it God's name.

Despite the appealing rhyme of "Albatross" with "cross" (here and subsequently), the Mariner's "As if" has the effect of raising a question about what "principle or cause of action" (if any) is actually involved. For the conjecture, uttered in fogbound misery, seems to describe primarily the hopes of an anxious crew, rather than anything positive about the bird itself. The Mariner and crew attempt repeatedly to convert conjecture into a syntax of event and consequence that can join the Albatross to the fate of their ship: when the splitting of the ice and the rising of a good south wind follow the advent of the bird, they hail it as the agent of their release; when the fog disperses (along with the ice and snow) after the Mariner kills the bird, the crewmen reinterpret the Albatross as the cause of the fog, and their release into sunshine and fair breezes as a consequence of its death; and when the same breezes fail and the "glorious" sun becomes "bloody," the crewmen imagine themselves plagued by the Mariner's killing of the Albatross and rue that act. What are we to make of this continual shuffling of logic? Even Wordsworth, usually not averse to making the reader "struggle," sides with Coleridge's perplexed readers

and against his "Friend" in the "Note to the Ancient Mariner" he wrote for the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads.* He cites, among other difficulties, the "defect" "that the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other." The arbitrary interpretations that gather around the Albatross are a case in point. Each new scheme of causality does not clarify any "necessary connection" between the bird and the state of the weather, as much as all together expose the fiction of interpretive acts: ascertainment of the bird's value emerges after the fact, as a logic of cause and effect is imposed on a mere sequence of events. As in the tale of the genie and the date-eater, cause and effect are matters of convenient collation rather than of inevitable connection. We begin to sense that if the Albatross signifies anything, it is the very ambiguity of signs—that is, the ambiguity with which the external world vexes a desire for interpretive certainty.

The language of cause and consequence not only surrounds the Albatross but is the very principle upon which a narrative must proceed, and so the problem of collation and connection extends to the listener of the Mariner's tale. How is one supposed to coordinate the two key events upon which his story depends: the killing of the Albatross and the blessing of the snakes? The way the Mariner himself represents these acts makes more of their irrationality than of their moral dimensions: "I shot the ALBATROSS" merely joins subject and predicate, rather than explains the act; and even when that act is apparently redeemed by the blessing of the water-snakes, this, too, is given without reference to a conscious motivation: "I blessed them unaware." The parallel syntax of "I shot" and "I blessed" does make a neat pattern for the sampler homily with which the Mariner caps his tale: "He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small: / For the dear God who loveth us, / He made and loveth all." Nonetheless, a listener cannot escape awareness that this moral is for its bearer embedded in a self-denying context: the Mariner is doomed to eternal exclusion from the love and prayer he preaches. Ironically, he isolates and terrifies his auditors more than he consoles them with any sense of God's inclusive love. The would-be Wedding-Guest's "wiser" state notwithstanding, that listener at least is also left "sadder" for having heard the "Rime"—perhaps more "stunned" than instructed by the Mariner's will over him. Denied the "goodly company" of the marriage feast, the Wedding-Guest's very name is rendered meaningless. Left "of sense forlorn," this student of the Mariner's lesson finds himself, instead, a participant in the Mariner's alienation: listener and tale-teller alike seem at the end of their encounter "forlorn" of common "sense"—the comfort of living in a world of rational cause and consequence. As Coleridge remarks in the "Conclusion" of his own biography, "there is always a consolatory feeling that accompanies the sense of a proportion between antecedents and consequents . . . giv[ing], as it were, a substratum of permanence, of identity, and therefore of reality, to the shadowy flux of Time."

What denies the Mariner and all his listeners this sense of proportion is that the question that is the efficient cause of his narration—"What manner of man art thou?"—eludes certain answering. What is his "substratum" of identity? Is he a killer of an Albatross, a blesser of water-snakes, a preacher of God's love, or an agent of contamination? The question is voiced originally by the Mariner's first auditor, the Hermit, and as we learn, it wrenches the Mariner "With a woful agony" that requires nothing less than a retelling of all the events of his ordeal. Yet as tortured and elaborate as the Mariner's response is, it remains indeterminate: the question generates his "Rime," and his "Rime" regenerates the question. Its conclusion, in fact, gestures toward its perpetual rehearsal in the shadowy flux of time:

> Since then, at all uncertain hour,
> That agony returns:
> And till my ghastly tale is told,
> This heart within me burns.

Endlessly navigating about a core of mysterious events, the Mariner can never capture their informing logic: his text circles about this absent center but always begins and concludes in agonizing uncertainty. Nor does Coleridge's ballad itself secure the tidy closure of "moral sentiment," ending instead with a register of the aftereffect of the Mariner's tale in the mind of his stunned, forlorn auditor. If the Mariner himself "Is gone," he leaves the trace of his mystery in that interior realm, making the truest issue of his "ghastly tale" the way it haunts a listener's imagination. "I was never so affected with any human Tale," Charles Lamb wrote to Wordsworth; "After first reading it, I was totally possessed with it for many days. . . the feelings of the man under the operation of such scenery dragged me along like Tom Piper's magic

Whistle.—" Another listener confessed to feeling "insulated" in the wake of hearing the poem recited by its author: "a sea of wonder and mystery flows round [me] as round the spell-stricken ship itself."

The effect of the Mariner's "Rime" in leaving its readers thus "possessed," despite the patent moral at its close, is amplified by the interpretive apparatus with which Coleridge surrounds the text of the "Rime." The "Argument" at the head of the 1798 poem is primarily descriptive, concerned mainly with the course of the Mariner's ship and alluding only briefly to "the strange things that befell" as if by chance, accident, or inscrutable agency. With the "Argument" of 1800, however, Coleridge introduces terms of moral logic and potential instruction: "the Ancient Mariner cruelly and in contempt of the laws of hospitality killed a Sea-bird and . . . was followed by many and strange Judgements." Yet in the 1802 and 1805 editions of *Lyrical Ballads* Coleridge dropped the "Argument" altogether, as if he had decided not to prejudice his reader with authorial signals, but to let his poem work its own effect. The next publication of the poem in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) strikes a compromise, supplying a marginal gloss instead of an argument. Like the "Argument" of 1800, the Gloss often brings a moral interpretation to bear on the Mariner's story. Unlike the "Argument," however, the Gloss is a parallel text, in effect competing with the "Rime" for the reader's attention, rather than supervising it. It presumes to order the Mariner's ordeal with a logic that his own "Rime" does not disclose—if supplying the "necessary connection[s]" whose absence Wordsworth, among others, regretted. "And lo! the Albatross proveth a bird of good omen," it declares with the authority of biblical exegesis. "The ancient Mariner inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen," it avers, judgment in its every other word. Or taking as a cue the Mariner's fervent hope that "Sure my kind saint took pity on me," the Gloss confidently interprets a necessary connection: "By grace of the holy Mother, the ancient Mariner is refreshed with rain." The voice of the Gloss confronts the reader as the genie does the date-eater, starting up to declare moral necessity at every turn. Yet far from clarifying whatever connections between events the "Rime" may have left obscure, the very presence of a Gloss emphasizes their absence and points to the need for explicit terms of instruction in a circumstance where all is interrogative ("Why look'st thou so?" "wherefore stopp'st thou me?" "What manner of man art thou?"). Indeed the final marginal comment, "an agony constraineth . . . [the Mariner] to teach, by his own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth," gives the rehearsal of that lesson a psychological urgency ("agony") even as it declares a moral principle. Despite the faith readers such as Robert Penn Warren have placed in the authority of the Gloss, it persists as another fiction—a parallel account of the ordeal recounted by the Mariner's "Rime," or an account of another ordeal: the attempt to make sense of the Mariner's language.

There is one frame, however, that Coleridge retains in every edition, namely, the voice of the anonymous balladeer with which the poem begins and ends. Readers tend, as Lionel Stevenson does, to treat this frame voice as no more than a "perfunctory" device. Yet in a poem so fundamentally involved with issues of tale-telling and tale-listening, this view deserves reconsideration. The relative situation of the Mariner's "Rime" is what lyricizes the ballad, making it as much about the feelings the "Rime" develops in its tellers and listeners as about the supernatural character of its events or the moral wisdom of its instruction. Its concluding focus on the Wedding-Guest suggests, furthermore, the frame narrator's muted but overall interest in the relation between "forced" tale-telling and "forced" tale-listening. The Wedding-Guest, now possessed with the "Rime," may have found a motive for narrative similar in power to that which possesses the Mariner with his ordeal. The poem leaves open to question whether this newly haunted listener might himself become a haunted purveyor of the Rime's repetitive life: Will the Wedding-Guest rise the morrow morn, compelled to reach toward an audience of his own, to say in the manner of the ballad's frame narrator, "It is an ancient Mariner, / And he stoppeth one of three"? The ballad's opening word, "It," hears the same sense of perplexed indeterminacy with which the Mariner has left the Wedding-Guest, while the present tense of narration, both here and in the ballad's penultimate stanza ("The Mariner, whose eye is bright, / Whose beard with age is hoar, / Is gone"), suggests the perpetual presence of that figure in the mind that contains his "Rime." The affinity the balladeer's language bears to the psychology of the Mariner's haunted listener is further enhanced by the copresence of their voices in the poem's inaugural stanza, before the actual character of the Wedding-Guest is introduced. The opening two lines flow immediately into a question—"By

thy long grey beard and glittering eye, / Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?"—in which the pattern of meter and rhyme and the as-yet-unspecified identity of the questioner momentarily create the sense of a single mind moving from observation to speech.

The self-circling energies of this narrative frame and the would-be containment offered by the poem's interpretive frame (the early Argument or later Gloss) suggest an extended rhetorical figure for the motions of a mind left stunned by the Mariner's "Rime" and attempting to sort out its mystery. Could the interpretive apparatus surrounding what Coleridge thought of as "A Poet's Reverie" be the textual signatures of a previously sense-forlorn auditor trying to make sense by obtruding (for himself and for his own audience) a "principle of action" on the intolerably inconclusive tale that has possessed his imagination? The Latin epigraph that in 1817 takes the place of earlier Arguments and subtitles indeed brings a problematic perspective to bear on the Mariner's mysterious experience. An excerpt from *Archaelogiae Philosophicae* by the Anglican divine, Thomas Burnet, it offers scholarly speculation on the existence of the invisible and the supernatural in the things of the universe. Yet Burnet cautions that in circling about but never attaining knowledge of the unknown, the mind must be vigilant for truth, careful to distinguish the certain from the uncertain. The action of circling about a center that defies final understanding describes the relation of the Mariner's "Rime" to its enigmatic core of events; it also figures the relation of the Gloss to that "Rime": each text surrounds a mystery, attempting to negotiate moral certainty in the face of what haunts and rouses the imagination. And the comprehensive text of Coleridge's 1817 ballad, equivocating between Marginal Gloss and Mariner's "Rime," now poses that problem to the reader. For the *apparatus criticus* and the "Rime" together shape a fuller text that, while denying unambiguous principles of instruction, offers an explicit figure for the ultimate uncertainty of interpretation.

### III

In leaving its reader so "struggl[ing] with feelings of strangeness and aukwardness," *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* achieves one of the revolutionary goals of *Lyrical Ballads*. Deriding the "mere artifices of connection" that characterize the "falsity in the poetic style" of the day, Coleridge points to Wordsworth's contributions to their volume and praises the way such poems reveal compelling "resemblances between that state into which the reader's mind is thrown" by the "confusion of thought front an unaccustomed train of words and images" and "that state which is induced by the ... language of empassioned feeling." The reader's "confusion" in the presence of such language is the note on which *The Thorn* begins, and Wordsworth even supplies an interlocutor to give voice to the inevitable protests. The ballad opens plainly enough, with an unspecified speaker reporting a simple fact: "There is a thorn." But as in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the world of positive fact ("It is . . .") dissolves rather quickly into the shadows of imagination: this is no mere bush, we find out, but one of a mysteriously charged constellation of objects that has taken possession of the speaker's imagination. He hopes a village tale will supply terms by which he can explain "why" this "spot" should produce such impressive effects out of its simple elements. His initial gesture in this direction is to claim that he "saw" a "woman" at this spot, beside that thorn, crying to herself, "Oh misery! oh misery! / "Oh woe is me! oh misery!"—namely Martha Ray: betrothed, seduced, abandoned in pregnancy on her wedding day, bereaved of her child, and perhaps guilty of infanticide at "the spot." The interpretive appeal of this rural legend for the speaker is that it plots an objective chain of events that culminate in the affective power of "the spot," allowing him to displace his obsession with "the spot" to Martha Ray; he is merely an accidental witness.

But as with the Gloss attached to the Mariner's "Rime," here too the very pressures that introduce the cause-and-effect logic of the tale call into question the validity of the proposed explanation. The speaker's insistence that it was Martha Ray whom he "found," "saw," and "heard" "Ere [he] had heard of Martha's name" may indicate no more than a desperate effort to release his imagination from the grip of a mist-bound panic on a lonely, stormy mountain ridge. Stephen Parrish argues persuasively that the credulous and superstitious speaker may have traced into his account of "the spot" the details of Martha Ray's history after the event of his own witnessing, converting mere objects into intelligible signs of her ordeal. A psychological urgency shades the explanation promised by the tale into language that expresses the reach for explanation by a mind invaded by mystery. The questioner in the speaker's audience may plead,

"But what's the thorn? and what's the pond? / "And what's the hill of moss to her?" But that plea, despite its relentless repetition, fails to make the speaker clarify an account suspended uneasily between what he professes to know, or swears is true, and what he "do[es] not know," "cannot think" or "tell."

That the poem dramatizes the motions of interpretation as much as it displays the materials of interpretation constitutes what Geoffrey Hartman has, termed the "double plot" of *The Thorn*, in which "the action narrated and that of the narrator's mind run parallel." The question for the speaker is "why?": what is the connection between the "tale" and "the spot"? But for the reader, that question is compounded with another, about the agent of that second psychological order of action: "What manner of *mind* is this?" we may ask. Wordsworth himself takes up this last question in his own version of the Coleridgean Argument and Gloss: the long Note he appends to the poem in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Addressed to "Readers who are not accustomed to sympathize with men feeling in that manner or using such language," the Note supplies a sort of second text—that "Introductory Poem" Wordsworth felt he "ought" to have adducced to *The Thorn* "to give this Poem its full effect." But unlike Coleridge's Gloss, Wordsworth's Note is not concerned with clarifying a principle for the "action narrated"; he means instead to clarify his intent to exhibit what happens to the language of discourse in the absence of such a principle—particularly in the case of a "credulous and talkative" discourser with an imagination "prone to superstition." Wordsworth argues that the speaker's particular "manner," especially his "repetition of words" (a chief complaint among the poem's first readers), is meant to dramatize an effort "to communicate impassioned feelings"—an effort spurred by "something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of [his] powers, or the deficiencies of language" to do so.

The speaker's frustration of plot and his larger struggle with the language of cause and effect thus become a general struggle with all modes of articulation—except the repetition of verbal fragments "which appear successfully to communicate" a feeling, and "the interest" thereby "which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion." "During such efforts," Wordsworth explains, "there will be a craving in the mind" which, to the extent that it remains "unsatisfied," will cause the speaker to "cling to the same words." Though Coleridge deplored this effect, the circumstances of his own Mariner's narrative suggest a certain amount of sympathy for its motivation. For the implicit repetition of the Mariner's "Rime," and the actual repetitions in *The Thorn* that play in the voices of both Martha Ray and the ballad's speaker, all describe motions of mind engaged with what is not too explicit: repetition becomes re-petition, re-asking. As such an interrogative attempt, repetition emerges as another version of the questions that provoke the telling of each tale, that "craving in the mind" for a certainty it cannot locate. Indeed, the voice that actually utters questions in *The Thorn* is itself a repetitive one. This voice never quarrels with the narrator but merely echoes his tentative discourse in interrogative tones. Both the echoing locution of this voice, as well as its indeterminate origin, suggest that Wordsworth may even be shading the poetics of dialogue into monologue, as if to represent a colloquy within one intelligence, between a voice seeking fact and reason ("But why. . .?"), and a write helplessly burdened with mystery ("I do not know"). The play of these voices, like that between Coleridge's "Rime" and his framing apparatus, becomes an extended figure for the mind's engagement with uncertainty. There is a difference, however, for in Wordsworth's poem the two writes we hear are scarcely distinguishable, and neither presumes interpretive authority.

## IV

The effort of Wordsworth and Coleridge in these "lyrical ballads" to dramatize the uncertainties of interpretation opens a field of rhetorical activity in English Romanticism in which the play of interpretive strategies emerges as a primary subject—a "principle of action" in itself. Shelley writes an ode the whole point of which seems to be to question whether "the human mind's imaginings" work against a "vacancy" of information in the external world (*Mont Blanc*); Byron chants playfully: "Apologue, Fable, Poesy, and Parable, / Are false, but may be rendered also true, / By those who sow them in a land that's arable: / 'T is wonderful what Fable will not do! / 'T is said it makes Reality more bearable" (*Don Juan* XV:89). Keats's Odes

are perhaps the consummate Romantic instance of a poetic design in which the primary principle of action is a psychological event—a mind exploring and testing its own fictions of interpretation. But narrative, too, becomes arable land for such testing in a poem such its "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," Keats's version of a lyrical ballad. As in *The Thorn* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the central event (the perhaps fatal entanglement of a knight with an enigmatic woman of the meads) emerges only as a troubled memory, the primary action becoming instead the exchange between a perplexed questioner and a would-be tale-teller. The poem opens on an explicitly interrogative note, as a voice arrested by a strange impression queries its cause: "O what can ail thee, knight at arms, / Alone and palely loitering?"

Like the questioners of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Keats's balladeer seeks a reason for a peculiar phenomenon: what explains this unexpected sight on the meads, a knight absent from his wonted world of quest and romance? What sort of tale awaits the telling? The tone of the question reflects its speaker's uncertainty, for it suggests at once a moment of puzzled concern for an ailing countryman and a slightly chiding "what-ails-you?" reproach for the appearance of negligence. The description of the landscape that completes the stanza—"The sedge has wither'd from the lake, / And no birds sing"—extends the mood of inquiry by stressing the incongruity of figure and place. Yet there is a gap between the stanza's questions and its voice of description that raises a question for the reader: are the comments on the landscape a cryptic but potentially meaningful reply *to* the questioner or a further effort *by* the questioner to provoke a reply from the knight? That ambiguity, and its mysterious circumstance, persist in the second stanza:

> O what can ail thee, knight at arms,
> So haggard and so woe-begone?
> The squirrel's granary is full,
> And the harvest's done.

This stanza compounds rather than clarifies the indefinite relation between question and statement, an ambiguity to which I shall return. For now it is enough to note that both the landscape that frames the knight and the statements that frame the questions announce a world of depleted vitality, no longer productive of any harvest, even, apparently, the harvest of inquiry: the field is unyielding for all. The principle of *in*action seems the profoundest absence

of all; indeed, the questioning voice is the singular movement in this otherwise barren circumstance.

The adjectives "haggard" and "woe-begone" (as well as the previous stanza's "Alone" and "loitering") begin to play against this vacancy of information, however, by hinting at anterior events: "woe-begone" and "Alone" suggest diagnoses of an ailment for which "loitering" may be a symptom, while the etymology of "haggard," along with what Keats might describe as "its original and modern meaning combined and woven together, with all its shades of signification," suggests an intuition of cause. The modern meaning of "drawn, gaunt, exhausted" is enhanced by the status of "haggard" as an adjective derived from "hag," implying prior bewitchment. The word points even more specifically to the effects of commerce with a "haggard": "a wild or intractable female," and—with special relevance to Keats's La Belle Dame—with a "'wild' expression of the eyes." May the knight's present "haggard" appearance be the effect of a contagious encounter with some haggard's "wild wild eyes"? The latent efforts at interpretation stirring in these adjectives emerge in the overtly symbolic imagery that follows:

> I see a lily on thy brow
> With anguish moist and fever dew,
> And on thy cheeks a fading rose
> Fast withereth too.

As Earl Wasserman remarks, this stanza invites a "symbolic reading": the lily is the harbinger of death (Keats in fact wrote "death's lilly" in an earlier draft); the "fading rose" (also originally "death's fading rose") cannily surmises the fatal fading of romance, while the repetition of the verb "wither" in reference to the knight's appearance can now suggest an affinity between him and a heretofore incongruous circumstance. The elaboration of detail has begun to resonate with an obscure significance which promises a logical connection: the imagery of the whole reports a hollow center whose very vacancy has become significant. Everything speaks of absences, withdrawals, depletions, and abandonments.

The questioner has in effect entered the realm of latent narrative, for with the cue of this "symbolic reading," the knight produces a tale whose information confirms all these intuitions and imaginative surmises. Nonetheless, its sequence of events—far from elucidating the original mystery—only deepens its range, for

here too details elude definite organization. Wasserman's study of the poem is particularly alert to "the dim sense of mystery and incompleteness" Keats's artistry arouses in us, along with the way certain "overtones" in the "affective and image-making energies of the poem" "drive the mind to ask questions of conceptual intent. What, one wonders, is the larger meaning couched in the absence of song? why a knight-at-arms and an elfin grot? and what are the significances of the cold hill side and the pale warriors?" Like the Marginal Editor of the Mariner's "Rime," Wasserman means to "penetrate [this] mystery", and he thinks he has the answer: La Belle Dame "is the ideal" that entices mortal man "towards heaven's bourne," but which must elude permanent possession in this world. Other readers surmise different causes and propose "Circe" as a more accurate key to interpretation.

Yet the knight's tale yields no certain logic either way, for like his questioner, he too is in struggle with indeterminate appearances. "She look'd at me as she did love," he reports, with a syntax that hovers between a confidently durational sense of "as" as "while" and that of less confident conjecture, "as if." His subsequent assertion, "And sure in language strange she said—/ I love thee true," bears no more certainty than the Mariner's hopefully proffered "Sure my kind saint took pity on me." In both cases the claim only accentuates the gap between the strangeness of signs and their proposed translations. La Belle Dame escapes logical explication even in retrospect—as the syntax of the knight's tale everywhere demonstrates: his narration merely accretes from "and" to "and"—a word sounded in fact in every stanza of the ballad, more than two dozen times throughout. As in *The Thorn*, the final stanza comes to rest on the original mystery, its terms now intensified by the intervening narrative:

> And this is why I sojourn here,
> Alone and palely loitering,
> Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
> And no birds sing.

Despite the withering of lush romance into a death-pale aftermath, the cause remains unknown. The knight's summation simply echoes on a syntactic level the absences noted by the questioner. Though he frames an answer in the syntax of explanation ("And this is why. . ."), it is an answer that doesn't produce much, beyond halting present tenses left wandering between two

worlds, one dead and one powerless to be *re* born. Lacking a clear antecedent, its "this" belies the stress by voice and meter: there is, finally, no "why" to solve the mystery of La Belle Dame or to dispel its lingering effects. Indeed, the knight's final, haunting repetition of his questioner's voice only magnifies the interrogative mood of the whole, whose irresolution now involves the reader too.

We should not ascribe that questioning voice simply to ballad convention, however, even if it does perform the conventional service of prompting a tale. For the very presence of this questioner on the meads is itself questionable. As in *The Thorn*, the status of the poem's conversation remains ambiguous enough to suggest two voices playing in one intelligence, instead of two dramatically distinct speakers. We note, for instance, a curiously shared attraction to the landscape of barren meads, as well as a shared song—the knight reports being spellbound by "La Belle Dame sans Merci," and the balladeer repeats the spell of that language strange in the title of his own song. Keats enhances these provocative affinities by keeping the identity of the questioner anonymous (more a voice than a character) and by withholding any punctuation that might distinguish two separate speakers. There is a quality to the place and play of these voices, in other words, that implies the self-questioning motions of a divided consciousness examining its forlorn state. Even the knight's summary statement, "And I awoke and found me here," points to self-division and the need to heal it, with the location of "here" suspended between a situation in the landscape and a situation in the mind. Like *The Thorn*, Keats's lyrical ballad allows a reading of its voices as a dialogue of the mind with itself; by the end of the poem, the question that drew our attention to the knight has been utterly absorbed into his own voice. The status of the ballad's dialogue must of course remain part of its mystery—neither clearly an internal colloquy nor a conversation between distinct *dramatis personae*. But the ambiguity is suggestive, for it points toward the rhetorical play of the odes, which, as many readers remark, is one of internal dialogue and debate.

## V

If "La Belle Dame sans Merci" foregrounds a probing question and a perplexed reply against a set of events that haunt about the shape of present speech, "Ode on a Grecian Urn"

heightens that drama of interpretation. Instead of a narrative organization of tale, tale-teller, and listener (or reader), Keats concentrates the action of the poem on the motions of a single lyric intelligence engaged with an image: a tableau on an urn, which like "the spot" in *The Thorn* or the appearance of the knight on the meads seems to signify something beyond itself, but for which there is no "legend" forthcoming, problematic or not. Keats's field of action is that of a poet's mind beckoned to interpretation, and the drama he presents concerns the increasingly self-conscious attempts of that mind to describe the significance of the object before it.

Like "La Belle Dame," the Ode begins with a greeting that suggests there is a story to be told, a meaning to be expressed:

> Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
> Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
> Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
> A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme.

All the vocatives—an "unravish'd bride," a "foster-child," a silent tale-teller—suggest an unfinished circumstance—or from a rhetorical point of view, information on the verge of expression. Keats brilliantly exploits that implication by following these invocations with a series of questions, the syntactic equivalent of these figures of provocative incompletion:

> What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy
>   shape
> Of deities or mortals, or of both,
> In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
> What men or gods are these? What maidens
>   loth?
> What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
> What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

If the speaker surmises the urn as a silent Grecian "historian," the questioning of his "rhyme" provides a particularly cooperative voice, for *historia* is the Grecian method of learning by inquiry. Yet the attempt to double the historians on this occasion produces an ironic counterplay in the language of poetic inquiry. Far from recovering the mysterious legend presumably harbored by this "Sylvan historian," the speaker's rhyme doubles back on itself to mirror his own perplexities: he barely launches his greeting before it branches into multiple "or"s, a kind of "wild ecstasy" of syntax that diagrams his "mad pursuit" of his own "maiden loth"—the unravished "what" that might supply the absent meaning of the images he riddles. As Keats's speaker pursues the significance of his object, Keats's rhyme mirrors the course of that pursuit.

Keats's Ode continues to elaborate this double plot, presenting a speaker in pursuit of interpretation in rhyme that expresses, primarily, the ardor of the pursuer. If, however, Keats's readers are inclined to exempt themselves from this mirror-play, they have unwittingly played into an even more subtle irony. For over the course of the Ode, Keats turns the behavior of his rhyme into a dilemma for the reader, fully analogous to the speaker's dilemma of interpretation before the urn. By the conclusion of the Ode, in fact, the reader may have the uneasy feeling that not only have these dilemmas converged, they may even have reversed, for Keats's speaker abandons us with an ambiguously toned "that is all" just before becoming as silent as the urn itself.

The dovetailing of the two dilemmas of interpretation—the speaker's of the urn and the reader's of the rhyme—begins as soon as the speaker stops questioning to muse on the freedom of the urn from any finite significance. If no "legend" can be read into the silent tableau, it may be because "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter." With this new premise, the absent "legend" finds a productive counterpart in "unheard" melodies, those "ditties of no tone" played "Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd . . . to the spirit." The language of Keats's poetry intensifies that paradox with a play of visual repetitions and half-heard echoes. The word "ear," for instance, reemerges enfolded in "end*ear*'d," as if that repetition were both a visual and auditory figure for the inner audience to which it refers. Furthermore, the sound (as well as the spelling) of "endear'd" resonates as "end ear'd," as if to signify audience beyond the bourn of "the sensual ear"— "just below the threshold of normal sound," as Cleanth Brooks puts it. The slant and sight rhyme of "endear'd" with "unheard" adds a further elaboration to the visual and auditory design of rhyme. As readers, we begin to attend to information that haunts about the shape of rhyme, as well as the information it expresses through the logic of paradox. Language itself becomes a provocative figure of interpretation.

Yet that very elaboration of linguistic surface further perplexes these "ditties of no tone," for the speaker has a tone, or rather tones, that correspond ambivalently to the absences he notes:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not
    leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not
    grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy
    bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Any effort to evaluate the syntax of these judgments is thoroughly involved with the speaker's own perplexity before the arrested figures he contemplates. On the one hand, "Fair youth" and "Bold lover" present ideal images of mortals whose special stasis insulates them from the normal attritions of human passion and the vagaries of human inspiration; "the negation of these verbs," Earl Wasserman insists, "creates an infinity of mutable or chronological time." But the dependency of surmise on such negatives may be decreative as well, for the tone of the whole is poised between emphatic celebration and rueful irony: "do not grieve; / She cannot fade." The initially bold assurance of "therefore, ye soft pipes, play on" succumbs to the wavering balance of "Though . . . yet . . . though," while the expansive potential of figures seemingly poised on the verge of action yields figures trapped in an eternity of postponements.

The third stanza heightens these tensions of interpretation, both for the speaker and for us, not with syntactic equivocation this time, but with a univocal insistence on gradations of happiness, where the very repetition of positive value exposes the urgency with which it is being declared:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd . . .

Like the repetitions of Wordsworth's Sea Captain in *The Thorn*, here too "words" verge on becoming mere "things" of passionate speech, rather than "symbols:" They render a linguistic event that like the branching syntax of stanza 1 or the seesawing sentences of stanza 2 aligns the reader of Keats's "rhyme" ever more sharply with the interpretive dilemma of the beholder before the urn.

This third stanza concludes with a particularly intense convergence of situation and syntax that invariably trips Keats's readers:

For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

On a first reading, "All breathing human passion far above" seems to be a summary phrase for the state of "More happy love! . . . For ever panting, and for ever young": the semicolon after "young" perhaps marks a pause analogous to a comma, like the semicolons after "adieu" and "new" in the same stanza, while, conversely, the comma after "above" temporarily halts our reading in this field of happy surmise. Moreover, the stanza's syntax encourages us to feel that there is no problem in reading "breathing" as a continuation of those activities that the speaker has also described in present participles, "piping" and "panting"—activities that in fact involve kinds of "breathing." Wasserman puts the case this way: the line "is the syntactical analogue" of a visionary ideal where "breathing human passion" exists in a state "far above," fusing "mortal and immortal, the temporal and the atemporal." We may even be inclined to read "All" as an inclusive noun for the melodist and the lovers, and "breathing" as a verb whose direct object is "human passion."

The comma keeps us reading, however, and as we do, we reject this last syntactic possibility. More important, we find that "far above" is not a place but a value judgment that separates "All breathing human passion" from the conditions of the "happy love" we have been imagining. The value of "breathing" does perplex that judgment with information that will emerge more fully in stanza 5's "Cold Pastoral!"—an obverse evaluation of the same condition. But at this point, "breathing" is realigned only with the "sorrowful" conditions of the immediately ensuing participles, "burning" and "parching," its situation distilled utterly from the possibility of mystical convergence with "for ever panting and for ever young."

What is striking about this line, and the stanza as a whole, is the "phenomenology of reading" it produces. The teetering syntax of "All breathing human passion far above"—first promoting, then subverting, a coordination between the "happy love" on the urn and the highest promise of "human passion"—becomes significant not only for what it would describe, but for the way it behaves. Just as the urn's art resists decisive interpretation, so that one line entangles nearly every reader who has studied

Keats's Ode. The question of narrative legend ("What men or gods are these?") moves, in this stanza, into a question of grammar and syntax: "What nouns or verbs are these?" Ambiguity is now the common property of urn and rhyme, and the dilemma of interpretation, the common situation of Keats's speaker and Keats's reader.

The return of questions in stanza 4 can be only an ironic event after these doublings of dubious surmise. They seem deliberately calculated to demonstrate the futility of certain interpretation:

> Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
> To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
> Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
> And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?

This object of address is not the potentially intelligent "Sylvan historian" of stanza 1 but a "mysterious priest," whose knowledge (like his identity) is beyond possible knowing. Nor is there any possibility of discerning a historical context for this "sacrifice": origin and termination can be a matter of surmise only:

> What little town by river or sea shore,
> Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
> Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?

The question of "what little town" echoes the earlier inquiry for "what leaf-fring'd legend," but here the configuration of "or"s concerns one of those "Nothings" that have existence only in the "ardent pursuit" of imagination. The circumstance is without a representation and, significantly, without a voice:

> And, little town, thy streets for evermore
> Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
> Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

The connective "And" hardly breaks the flow of the question, for it produces a response that extends interrogative motion into an undoing of its very premises. In stanza 1, the urn as a "bride of quietness" or a "foster-child of silence" suggested a haunting indeterminacy, while the paradox of "unheard melodies" made that "silence" an elusive spiritual extension of sound. Stanza 4 reduces that potential to mere emptiness. Like the landscape in "La Belle Dame" where "no birds sing," here, too, is a tableau of absence: there is finally no "historian," "not a soul to tell/Why," and the voice of bold inquiry, eager to ravish the urn for its "what" and "why," finds itself ironically partnered to her silence. The final stanza completes this movement: all questions are absorbed by the object that had excited them,

and the urn relapses to a mere "Attic shape"—the "attitude" of "silent form" that signals the silencing of inquiry.

Yet even as Keats's speaker appears to concede this consequence, Keats's rhyme redeems language by exploiting its multiplicity of interpretive signals. For the profusion of puns and shades of signification that play through the ode's final stanza at once speak of and enact the indeterminacy the ode has dramatized throughout. If the urn's art withholds its spectral legend, flattening illusory possibility to a merely opaque "Fair attitude! with brede / Of marble men and maidens overwrought," Keats takes advantage of the "heard melodies" of poetry to multiply the dimensions of its activity. "Brede," for instance, describes the quality of the urn's figured design, but its punning against "breed" and ironic half-echoes of "bride" and "breathe" subtly reject the "human passion" the speaker had projected onto the urn's fair attitudes. Indeed, "Fair attitude" refers both to the loveliness of the urn's art and to the fairness, or justice, of its silent seeming. "Overwrought" involves similar shadings, for while it refers to the lapidary quality of the urn's design, it also criticizes an eternity where one may never, never kiss. And as a pun on over-"raught" (an archaic or Spenserian version of "reached"), it gently mocks the speaker's previous overreaching to idealize the urn's tableau, as well as implicates his view of the overwrought figures before him with his own overwrought postures of interpretation—that voice given to chanting, "Ah, happy, happy boughs!... More happy love! more happy, happy love!" "I found my Brain so overwrought that I had neither Rhyme nor reason in it—so was obliged to give up," Keats reports of one mood of composition in the midst of *Endymion*.

The transition from the "overwrought" brain to "giving up" is in fact the consequence Keats's final stanza enacts. The resistance of both urn and rhyme to any single pattern of significance is again underscored with the utterance, "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!" "Cold Pastoral!" is, of course, the speaker's decisive revision of his previous surmise, "For ever warm": the epithet coolly extinguishes the ardor of that pursuit. More important, however, is the way this phrase not only juxtaposes the beholder's conflicting responses ("Cold" marble,

"Pastoral" illusion), but translates that perplexity of signification into a compelling linguistic figure. "Cold Pastoral!" is no reconciliation but rather a tensed collation of opposites: a dynamic, because, unresolvable, oxymoron. The disjunctive effect of reading Coleridge's Marginal Gloss against his Mariner's "Rime" is something Keats's "Cold Pastoral" concentrates into a single phrase. It is Coleridge in fact who provides the most cogent Romantic argument for the imaginative value of oxymorons. To defend Shakespeare's attraction to the figure, he urges allowance for the way oxymoron reveals and perpetuates that

> effort of the mind, when it would describe what it cannot satisfy itself with the description of, to reconcile opposites and qualify contradictions, leaving a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other, when it is, as it were, hovering between images. As soon as it is fixed on one image, it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination. . . a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected.

Not only is this a provocative countertext to Coleridge's favored poetics of reconciliation, but it is the best reading of "Cold Pastoral" ever not written about the phrase, for it speaks to the way the voice of judgment Keats produces in stanza 5 keeps the mind of the reader working hard in a dialectic of constructions and deconstructions. However teasingly silent this "Sylvan historian" remains about its informing "legend," it becomes, through the very provocation of its silence, the historian of urn-readers and urn-reading, a historian of the speaker's activity and our own. The urn befriends its beholders the way Keats's rhyme does—by encouraging their imaginative activity. We come to value its artistry not so much by what it yields to thought as by what it does to thought—provoking questions and refusing to confirm any sure points and resting places for our reasonings.

The voice of the urn, were one to imagine it, is a perfect contrast to the voice that declares "Cold Pastoral!": "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" is such a piece of self-enclosed harmony that it merits separation by quotation marks from the rest of the rhyme. Its status is another matter, however. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" emerges in part as the final, desperate surmise of a beholder not happy with an absent legend, nor with being so teased out of thought, and determined to tease the

silent form into oracular utterance. And oracular utterance it seems—a rich, cryptic piece of *sententiae antiquae*. Yet despite the grace of its neatly balanced syntax, its language proves for some a cold comfort; for the ambiguous situation of this voice compromises its high philosophical tone, bringing a special kind of "woe" to "generations" of readers expecting something more accessible to interpretation. The phrase all but requires another "legend" to help us know what it means. Indeed, the words "Beauty" and "truth" seem so inscrutable as an abstract and brief chronicle of the urn's art that they sound its "ditties of no tone" with a vengeance. As with the marble brede of figures on the urn's surface, one may project whatever significance onto the aphorism one wishes: but as with those figures, this phrase contracts to mere opacity if its mystery is too irritably teased.

The statement "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" is a lofty answer that in effect plays ironically against the rhetoric of answering, for it simultaneously invites and repels the possibility of understanding, shaping a piece of "charactered language" that is partly like the "hieroglyphics" Keats celebrates in Kean's "music of elocution" and partly like the "{hie}*rague*glyphics in Moor's almanack." The two poles of meaning, "Beauty" and "truth," slide across their marker of equivalence, "is," reverse positions at the comma, and so elude syntactic priority that, despite the elegant symmetry of statement, its logic can only be wondered at, like the urn itself. Urn and aphorism together go round and round, each serenely self-enclosed, endlessly circular, resonating with mysterious promise, but "still unravish'd" at last.

The only consequence is a further mockery of the questioner: "—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." This statement, too, has the sound of stable wisdom, but the more one teases it, the more one discovers a tone that unsettles its terms of resolution. That "all" hints at sufficiency, even at mysterious plenitude, and yet it has a ring of dismissal, as if parodying anyone's effort to "know" "all." The irony against interpretation is as wry as Robert Frost's couplet: "We dance round in a ring and suppose, / But the Secret sits in the middle and knows." For Keats, however, there may be no "Secret"—only the effect of those dancing round and supposing. Whether the speaker imagines "that is all" as the urn's comment on its aphorism, or himself tells us this, the opacity of the pronoun "that" and the uncertain tone of the whole still leave us wanting

to know "*what* is all?" Keats takes us only this far, then to relinquish us to an utterance that, like the contemplation of eternity, absorbs inquiry into silent thought. Here, a negotiation with "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" is not merely an act of mind we observe in another (be it Mariner, Marginal Editor, Sea Captain, knight, or poet), but one that the play of Keats's language has produced and sustained in the reader's own experience.

**Source:** Susan J. Wolfson, "The Language of Interpretation in Romantic Poetry: 'A Strong Working of the Mind,'" in *Romanticism and Language*, edited by Arden Reed, Cornell University Press, 1984, pp. 22–49.

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# Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1818

Aliens, time travel, sorcerers, and dragons! The domains of Science Fiction and Fantasy literature are recognizable to many people, and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the messages and social commentary behind these icons captivated readers, and more recently critics. Science Fiction and Fantasy appear from the outside to be two distinct forms of literature, and yet the two genres share some similar characteristics and roots. This paradox has inspired much debate over the twentieth century, while the movement itself has grown into a booming publishing industry that shows no signs of slowing.

Critics and historians have widely different viewpoints about the origins of Science Fiction. Still, many have conceded that Mary Shelley's 1818 British novel *Frankenstein* was the first novel to explore the hypothetical implications of modern science. Most agree that Jules Verne's novels from his *Extraordinary Journeys* series, including *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, helped to define the genre. Although most of the early works were published in Europe, in the first half of the twentieth century, Science Fiction and Fantasy literature exploded in the United States, due in large part to inexpensive, genre pulp magazines such as *Amazing Stories*, which reprinted novels such as H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*, and to more expensive magazines such as *Astounding Stories*, which helped introduce influential new writers such as Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein.
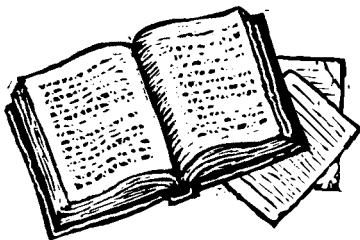
Science Fiction and Fantasy literature inspired many related movements in film, television, and art, and profoundly influenced the development of science and culture in the twentieth century. In the early 2000s, the field remains dominated by American authors, many of whom continue to use their speculative creations to comment on current realities.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Isaac Asimov (1920–1992)

Isaac Asimov was born January 2, 1920, in Petrovichi, U.S.S.R. (the former Soviet Union), and moved to the United States with his parents in 1923, becoming a U.S. citizen in 1928. Asimov was a voracious reader. His love of science led to a doctorate in chemistry from Columbia University and a subsequent post as a professor of biochemistry at Boston University's School of Medicine—a position he held for much of his writing career. Although he published more than 450 fiction and nonfiction books, making him one of the most prolific writers in history, Asimov is most remembered for his Science Fiction works, which influenced many writers in the United States during Science Fiction's golden age. Asimov has been credited with coining the term robotics and with creating "The Three Laws of Robotics," which made their first appearance in his early robot short stories, collected in *I, Robot*. Asimov died of heart and kidney failure on April 6, 1992, in New York City.

### Ray Bradbury (1920–)

Ray Douglas Bradbury was born August 22, 1920, in Waukegan, Illinois. During the depression, Bradbury's family moved to Los Angeles to find work. Bradbury began, like many other Science Fiction authors of the golden age, publishing his fiction in the fanzine he edited. In 1941, Bradbury published his first short story, and six years later, published his first story collection. With the publication of *The Martian Chronicles*, a series of interconnected short stories about the human colonization of Mars, Bradbury achieved enough critical success to break out of Science Fiction genre magazines into the more reputed mainstream magazines, which were off limits to most Science Fiction writers. In 2004, he was awarded the National Medal of the Arts by President George W. Bush

*Jules Verne* (Public Domain)

and First Lady Laura Bush. He was given a special citation by the Pulitzer board in 2007 in recognition of his literary contributions. As of 2008, Bradbury lived and worked in Los Angeles, California.

### Robert Heinlein (1907–1988)

Robert Anson Heinlein was born July 7, 1907, in Butler, Missouri. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who started writing Science Fiction in their youth, Heinlein did not enter the field until he had already worked as a naval officer and studied physics and mathematics at the University of California, Los Angeles. As one of the Science Fiction writers for genre magazines during Science Fiction's golden age, Heinlein had a sophisticated writing style and raised the bar on Science Fiction literature and influenced many other writers. After working as an engineer in World War II alongside fellow Science Fiction writer Isaac Asimov, Heinlein published several Science Fiction juveniles, or young adult novels, then he began a series of controversial novels, including *Stranger in a Strange Land*, his best-known work. Heinlein, considered by many to be the most influential figure in American Science Fiction, died of heart failure on May 8, 1988, in Carmel, California.

### *Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)*

The grandson of T. H. Huxley, a noted biologist and proponent of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, Aldous Leonard Huxley was born July 26, 1894, in Godalming, Surrey, England. Huxley originally intended to pursue a career in medicine, but an eye disease that led to temporary blindness prevented his doing so. Although Huxley wrote in several different fiction and nonfiction genres, his most famous work is *Brave New World*, a Science Fiction novel that draws on evolutionary theory to create a nightmarish vision of the future. Five years after the novel's publication, Huxley moved to Los Angeles, California, where he wrote more mystical works until his death on November 22, 1963, in Hollywood. Huxley died on the same day as his British contemporary C. S. Lewis and on the same day that U.S. president John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

### *C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)*

Clive Staples Lewis, known to readers as C. S. Lewis, was born November 29, 1898, in Belfast, Ireland. An atheist as a teenager, Lewis slowly came to renew his faith in Christianity then incorporated his beliefs into his writing. After attending Oxford University, Lewis taught English literature at Oxford for almost thirty years. During his tenure as a professor, Lewis, along with fellow Christian Fantasy writer J. R. R. Tolkien and others, founded the Inklings, a casual club that met to discuss the writers' works in progress. Although Lewis wrote nonfiction also, it is his fantastical writings that made him most popular. His seven-volume children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia,* a Christian allegorical Fantasy, has delighted generations of popular audiences, particularly children. Lewis died of heart failure in Oxford, England, on November 22, 1963, the same day as Huxley and U.S. president Kennedy died in the United States.

### *Mary Shelley (1797–1851)*

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was born Mary Wollstonecraft August 30, 1797, in London, England. The daughter of two well-known authors, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary faced instability in her early years. Her mother died shortly after her birth, her father remarried, and she grew up in a chaotic environment with siblings from her father's two marriages, her stepmother's previous marriage, and her mother's previous affair. When she was fifteen, Mary met and fell in love with a friend of her father, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Mary had an affair with Percy, who was already married, and the two of them fled to Europe when she was seventeen, where Mary wrote *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, which many critics consider the first true Science Fiction work. Following the suicide of Percy's wife, Percy and Mary were married. Four years after *Frankenstein* was published, Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned. Mary Shelley lived for almost thirty years as a widow then died in London of a brain tumor on February 1, 1851, at the age of fifty-three.

### *J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973)*

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, known to readers as J. R. R. Tolkien, was born January 3, 1892, in Bloemfontein, South Africa. When he was four years old, Tolkien's family moved to England. After attending Oxford University, Tolkien taught English language and literature first at Leeds, then at Oxford. During this time, Tolkien, along with fellow Christian Fantasy writer C. S. Lewis and others, founded the Inklings, a casual club that met to discuss the writers' works in progress. Tolkien's passion for language and literary history culminated in his creation of Middle-Earth, a mythical world, modeled on northern and ancient literatures. Middle-Earth made its debut in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, the prelude to his trilogy "The Lord of the Rings." Because of these works, Tolkien is considered by many to be the father of modern Fantasy stories. Tolkien died of complications from an ulcer and chest infection on September 2, 1973, in Bournemouth, England.

### *Jules Verne (1828–1905)*

Jules Verne was born February 8, 1828, in Nantes, France. At age twenty, he left for Paris, where he studied law, intending to join his father's law firm. After passing his law exam, he struggled in Paris for several years, attempting to make a living off his writing. Although one of his plays was produced in 1850, it was not until 1863, after working as both a secretary for a theater and a stockbroker, that Verne's writing attracted the attention of Jules Hetzel, the magazine publisher who printed the majority of Verne's novels in serial form. The most famous novels are those that Verne called Extraordinary Journeys, including *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, which

helped to establish Verne's reputation as one of the two founding fathers of modern Science Fiction (along with H. G. Wells). Verne wrote until his death on March 24, 1905, in Amiens, France.

### Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922–2007)

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was born November 11, 1922, in Indianapolis, Indiana. While serving in the United States Army in Germany during World War II, Vonnegut was captured by the Germans and kept as a prisoner of war in Dresden, Germany. There he witnessed the Allied firebombing of the city on February 13, 1945, and was one of few survivors of the firestorm that killed an estimated 120,000 people. This experience earned Vonnegut a Purple Heart and, more importantly, gave him the basis for much of his fiction. Vonnegut dealt with war themes in many of his early novels, but it was not until the publication of *Slaughterhouse Five: or, the Children's Crusade* that Vonnegut told the full story of his Dresden experience through his characters. He died on April 11, 2007, in New York City.

### H. G. Wells (1866–1946)

Herbert George Wells, known to readers as H. G. Wells, was born September 21, 1866, in Bromley, England. He won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science in London, where he studied under T. H. Huxley, the famous proponent of Darwin's theory of evolution and grandfather of noted Science Fiction writer Aldous Huxley. Although infatuated with his first-year studies with Huxley, Wells spent most of his remaining school years performing extracurricular activities such as founding and editing a college magazine. It was in this magazine that he first published "The Chronic Argonauts," which was later published as *The Time Machine: An Invention*, and which details a possible outcome of human evolution. This short novel, along with many of his other early novels, helped to define what he called the scientific romance and established Wells as one of the two founding fathers of modern Science Fiction (along with Verne). Wells died August 13, 1946, in London.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Brave New World

Huxley's internationally acclaimed work, *Brave New World*, first published in 1932, is a nightmarish vision of what could happen in the future if politics and technology supersedes humanity. Huxley's novel depicts a futuristic, supposedly ideal world in which there is no sickness, disease, or war. However, to achieve this ideal, people are mass-produced in test tubes; social classes are created through genetic manipulations that predetermine a person's intelligence and body type; and unwanted emotions are suppressed with soma, a hallucinogenic drug. In this inhuman system, an outsider born of natural means is considered a savage. Critics have noted Huxley's cynicism in the work and have examined it in context of life during the post-World War I era, when governments sought scientific and technological progress at all costs. The novel ranks with George Orwell's equally disturbing *1984* as one of the great dystopian works of Science Fiction literature.

### The Chronicles of Narnia

*The Chronicles of Narnia,* Lewis's seven-volume Fantasy series, was originally published between 1950 and 1956. The series (which followed a different order than current editions) started with *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, a story about four English schoolchildren who find a portal to Narnia—a parallel Fantasy world—through a wardrobe. In Narnia, they learn they are there to fulfill a prophecy. In the process, they meet fantastical creatures, battle a witch, and witness the Christ-like death and resurrection of a lion named Aslan. Christian themes permeate the series. Since their publication, *The Chronicles of Narnia* have found a wide acceptance, especially among young readers. Some critics, however, do not care for the violence in the series, in which might sometimes makes right. Like the works of his contemporary and friend Tolkien, Lewis's books created a new world that inspired later writers.

### Frankenstein

Shelley wrote her novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* when she was in her late teens. The story was her entry in a writing contest with her lover, poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, the infamous poet Lord Byron, and John Polidori, who was Byron's doctor. Shelley's work, commonly referred to simply as *Frankenstein*, was published in 1818, and is widely regarded as the first true Science Fiction work for its reliance on scientific, rather than supernatural, action. The original novel differs greatly from the screen adaptations, which focus on the horrific aspects

# MEDIA ADAPTATIONS
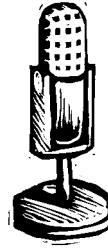
- *Brave New World* was released as an audio book in 1998. It was published by Audio Partners and read by Michael York.

- Four of the books from Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* series were made into award-winning television shows by BBC Television. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1988) was directed by Marilyn Fox. *Prince Caspian* (1989), *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* (1989), and *The Silver Chair* (1990) were all directed by Alex Kirby. As of 2008, the series was also available as a boxed set.

- Director James Whale's classic, *Frankenstein*, was released as a film in 1931 by Universal Studios and starred Colin Clive as Dr. Frankenstein and Boris Karloff as his monster. As of 2008 the movie was available on VHS or DVD from Universal Studios Home Video. The DVD contains many special features, including the original theatrical trailer, commentary by film historian Rudy Behlmer, production notes, a documentary (*The Frankenstein Files: How Hollywood Made a Monster*), and archival photos.

- *Frankenstein* has seen many permutations on film, including Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, released in 1994 and starring Branagh and Robert De Niro. Humorous adaptations of the Frankenstein story include Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (1974) with Gene Wilder, Peter Boyle, and Marty Feldman.

- *The Hobbit*, read by Rob Inglis, was released as an audio book from Recorded Books in 2001.

- *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, was made into a blockbuster hit movie and released in December 2001. It was directed by Peter Jackson and stars Elijah Wood as Frodo the hobbit. *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* was released in 2002 and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* in 2003. Together the trilogy won seventeen Academy Awards. As of 2008, these movies were available—individually or as a set—on DVD from New Line Home Video.

- *The Martian Chronicles*, adapted as a television miniseries in 1980, was directed by Michael Anderson, and featured Roddy McDowell as Father Stone, Darren McGavin as Sam Parkhill, and Bernie Casey as Major Jeff Spender. As of 2008, it was available on video from USA Video.

- *Slaughterhouse-Five* was released as a film in 1972 by Universal Pictures. Directed by George Roy Hill, it featured Michael Sacks as Billy Pilgrim. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from Image Entertainment.

- *The Time Machine*, which was released as a film in 1960 by Galaxy Films and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), was directed by George Pal and featured Rod Taylor as the time traveler. As of 2008, it was available on DVD from Warner Home Video. The DVD contains a behind-the-scenes documentary, *The Time Machine: The Journey Back*, hosted by Taylor, along with co-stars Alan Young and Whit Bissell.

- *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* was released as a silent film in 1916. It was directed by Stuart Paton and featured Allen Holubar as Captain Nemo. As of 2008 it was available on DVD from Image Entertainment. Walt Disney Pictures produced a movie version in 1954, starring Kirk Douglas as Ned Land and James Mason as Captain Nemo.

- Director Andrew Adamson embarked on a series of films that capture C. S. Lewis's magical series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The first film, titled *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, was released in 2005. The second film, *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, was released in 2008.
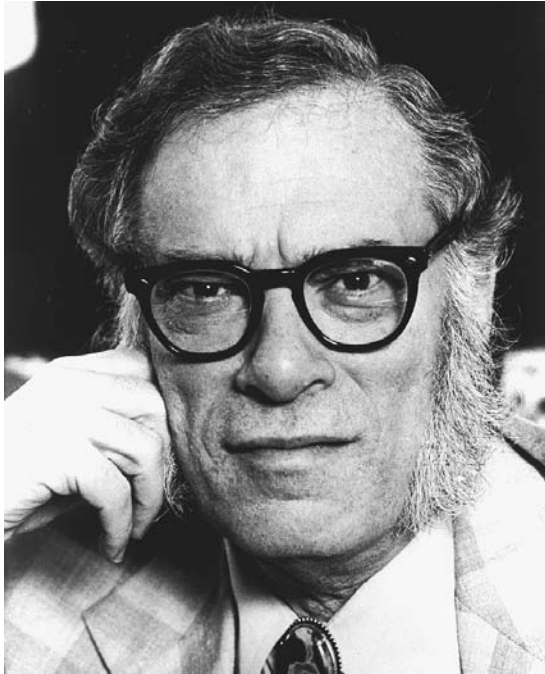
*Isaac Asimov* (AP Images)

of the tale. The story details Dr. Frankenstein's scientific experiments intended to galvanize a corpse consisting of assembled body parts. The unnamed monster, lacking a soul, becomes an outcast of society and goes on a killing spree, finally fleeing to the Arctic North. When Shelley first published the novel in 1818, critics treated it as just another Gothic novel and failed to recognize the depth of the work. Since then, the work has enjoyed a serious critical and popular reception.

### The Hobbit

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* was first published in 1937. The story details the adventures of Bilbo, a hobbit (an imaginary creature that exists in Middle-Earth, Tolkien's mythical past world), who has a number of adventures involving other fantastical beings, including dragons, goblins, wizards, elves, and talking animals. The story also introduces a magical ring, which Bilbo finds and which features prominently in Tolkien's sequel trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. Since the publication of the four-volume series, critics and popular readers alike have been fascinated by Tolkien's imaginative tales and literary artistry. The four-volume epic influenced many later

Science Fiction and Fantasy writers and also inspired a cult following.

### I, Robot

Although Asimov was not the first to write about robots, he revolutionized the way of writing about them. In his early robot short stories, originally published in Science Fiction magazines in the 1940s, Asimov defined and demonstrated the "Three Laws of Robotics":

> One, a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. ... Two ... a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.... Three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

Asimov's robot stories were collected in 1950 in one volume, *I, Robot*, which brought him widespread critical acclaim, mainly for the "Three Laws," which were accepted and used by many other Science Fiction writers. Critics praised the ethical example that Asimov set with the laws, which were so influential that many assumed they would be used as a basis for future robotics design and production.

### The Martian Chronicles

*The Martian Chronicles*, a short story collection first published in 1950, made Bradbury famous, and was one of the first Science Fiction works to garner positive critical attention. Although many critics regard Bradbury as one of the best living Science Fiction writers, Science Fiction purists note that much of his Science Fiction work, including *The Martian Chronicles*, which features a Mars blatantly different than what science has revealed—is really Fantasy. The stories detail repeated efforts made by humans to colonize Mars and feature space travel, robots, and other scientific scenarios. However, it is the emotional depth, not the scientific setting or plot, that distinguishes the work. The chilling blend of future reality and Fantasy in the story collection earned Bradbury respect from critics and popular readers alike. Unlike many of his pro-science contemporaries, Bradbury is against too much scientific and technological development at the expense of humanity, a fear that he expresses in *The Martian Chronicles*.

## Slaughterhouse Five

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* draws on his experiences as a witness to the 1945 Allied firebombing of the German city of Dresden. Vonnegut's main character, Billy Pilgrim, escapes the horror of these memories by traveling through time and space to visit the planet Tralfamadore. It is here that he relives the good moments in his life. Whenever he is faced with the horrors of war, Pilgrim remarks, "so it goes," a seemingly impartial phrase that resounds in the reader's mind, creating a feeling that death is inevitable. Originally published in 1969, the book was a hit with its Vietnam-era audience, who identified with the war issues the novel raised. The novel was well-received by critics, which was rare for a Science Fiction novel at the time. Although Vonnegut does not like to be called a Science Fiction writer, novels like *Slaughterhouse Five* have helped bring positive critical attention to the Science Fiction field.

## Stranger in a Strange Land

Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, first published in 1961, was Science Fiction's first bestseller. With its controversial exploration of human philosophy, religion, and sociology—as opposed to technology—it was a striking departure from his previous novels and from other Science Fiction novels. In the book, Valentine Michael Smith, a human raised by Martians, returns to Earth and experiences human culture as an outsider. With demonstrations of his paranormal powers given to him by the Martians, he becomes a messiah-like figure and inspires the establishment of a religious movement. The novel embraces the supernatural and so is perhaps Fantasy, but it caused a major upheaval in the Science Fiction world, and greatly influenced future Science Fiction writers. It was received with enthusiasm by members of the 1960s counterculture, who recognized and emulated its message of free love. It was not loved by early critics, many of whom labeled Heinlein a fascist for his radical ideas.

## The Time Machine: An Invention

The first of many Science Fiction novels that would make him famous, Wells's *The Time Machine: An Invention*, commonly referred to simply as *The Time Machine*, was published in 1895. Wells drew on the evolutionary theory he had studied to tell of a future, more than 800,000 years hence, in which humans have evolved into two separate species.

The attractive and ignorant Eloi, descended from humanity's upper class, become food for the working-class, ape-like Morlocks, who live underground. The time traveler who witnesses this then travels thirty million years into the future, witnessing the death of the Sun and the subsequent death of life on Earth. Critics in Wells's time regarded *The Time Machine* as a brilliant work, and later critics and popular audiences agree. Although both Wells and Jules Verne are considered fathers of modern Science Fiction, Wells and his unique literary inventions like time travel have generally been considered more influential.

## Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea

Verne's novels in his *Extraordinary Journeys* series, particularly *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, have delighted international audiences for more than a century. First published in 1870 in serial form in a French magazine, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* details the adventures of Captain Nemo on the submarine *Nautilus*. Although many regard Verne as a predictor of scientific inventions, most of his futuristic ideas—like the submarine in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*—were extrapolated either from history or from reading current scientific research. Many of Jules Verne's books, including *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, were inaccurately translated into English from Verne's native French. Consequently many outside the Science Fiction field regarded Verne as just a children's writer until subsequent translations revealed the literary depth of his works.

# THEMES

## *Science and the Supernatural*

Science Fiction often reflects the time in which it is written. So it is that in the early twentieth century, when society was still heavily focused on technological innovation through science and industry, stories were often exploratory in nature. These stories were usually dominated by natural sciences like physics and astronomy, which often manifested themselves plot devices like spaceships or evolution. These plot devices were often incorporated into tales about humanity's future or alien races on other worlds. In the more metaphysical 1960s, however, books like Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* experimented with pseudosciences (theories or practices

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- There is no commonly accepted definition for what determines a hard science from a soft science, although many use these terms. Research some of the many sciences that Science Fiction authors have written about. Write a short report that divides your research into what you think are hard and soft sciences.

- One of the common beliefs about Science Fiction authors is that they intend to predict the future, and some works have been criticized when they have not accurately done so. Find three technologies that were correctly predicted by Science Fiction authors. Compare the fictional accounts with the real technologies, and write a paper explaining how and why each technology has had either a positive or negative impact on society.

- Many Fantasy authors begin their tales by creating a map of the imaginary world they are creating. Draw a map detailing an imaginary world of your own creation and label all of the major geographic features—mountains, forests, bodies of water, and towns. Write a three-page description of your world, describing its inhabitants, history, politics, and economics.

considered to be without scientific foundation). A good example is when Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* protagonist, a human given paranormal abilities by the Martians, is first asked to demonstrate his telekinetic powers: "'Mike, will you please, without touching it, lift that ash tray a foot above the desk?' … The ash tray raised, floated above the desk."

Many Science Fiction purists prefer stories that employ "hard" sciences, and some maintain that pseudoscientific elements like telekinesis marks a work as Fantasy. The same is generally true of magic, which is often incorporated into Fantasy works such as Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

When Gandalf, the wizard, is surprised by goblins, he uses his magical powers to defend himself: "there was a terrible flash like lightning in the cave, a smell like gunpowder, and several of them fell dead." In the imaginary realm of Fantasy, however, wizards are not the only ones with magical powers. Sometimes objects contain special powers as Bilbo discovers when he finds a mysterious ring: "It seemed that the ring he had was a magic ring: it made you invisible!" Bilbo's supernatural power to turn invisible is not only interesting, it also serves as an important plot device in the novel.

## Time

Of all of the themes in Science Fiction and Fantasy, the manipulation of time has been one of the most frequently used. Most Science Fiction or Fantasy stories take place in another time, either the past or the future. In some cases, as in Wells's influential novel *The Time Machine*, the protagonist travels in a machine, which physically takes him either backward or forward through time, the fourth dimension. Says the time traveler, "I am afraid I cannot convey the peculiar sensations of time travelling. They are excessively unpleasant."

Other forms of traveling through time, such as near-light-speed space travel, are more physically pleasant for the traveler. Following Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, Science Fiction writers have created a host of spaceships capable of traveling near the speed of light. Theoretically, as a ship like this approaches the speed of light, time will slow down for the ship's passengers, so that they will age less quickly than those who remain at the point where the ship started. Joe Haldeman demonstrated the potential emotional and psychological ramifications of this technology in his book *The Forever War*, in which elite soldiers retain their youth by traveling at near-light-speeds throughout the universe, chasing an elusive enemy.

In the book's conclusion, the soldier protagonist, Mandella, finally returns to his planet of origin, where he finds out that "the war ended 221 years ago." An even bigger surprise is that Mandella's lover, a fellow soldier who was separated from him by space and time during the war, left a note for him 250 years ago. However, the note includes detailed instructions on how his lover is manipulating space and time to try to meet him while they are both still alive and young.

So I'm on a relativistic shuttle, waiting for you. All it does is go out five light years and come back … very fast. Every ten years I age about a month. So if you're on schedule and still alive, I'll only be twenty-eight when you get here. Hurry!

However, some Science Fiction and Fantasy writers avoid the issue of time travel altogether and choose to simply begin their stories in the future or past.

### Salvation and Destruction

From the very beginning of Science Fiction, many writers have expressed one of two diametrically opposed ideas concerning the development of science and technology: It will save humanity or it will destroy it. Many of the works that have received favorable criticism or which reign as "classics" fall into the latter group. Perhaps it is because of their darker qualities that these works stand out from the others; Science Fiction has always been strongest when it issues warnings. Readers need look no further than Verne and Wells. Verne's *Extraordinary Journeys* novels tell predominantly positive tales about man's use of the machine to explore and conquer the unknown. However, it is Wells and his dark tales of scientific progress gone bad that most later Science Fiction writers claim is the stronger influence. This focus on dark, sometimes apocalyptic visions had its heyday in the years after World War II, following the advent of the atomic bomb, when the end of civilization was a distinct possibility.

One of the most chilling expressions of the global destruction idea takes place in Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*. Throughout the novel, a genius child trains, using military war simulation games in space. At the end of the story, after he has successfully completed a simulated mission in which he obliterates the alien enemy's home planet, both Ender and the reader learn the last battle was real. Without his knowledge, Ender has coordinated an interstellar attack on the aliens' home planet. The sense of despair in Ender, as he comes to realize how the military tricked him into launching a weapon with a destructive power exponentially greater than nuclear weapons, is almost palpable: "they were real ships that he had fought with and real ships he had destroyed. And a real world that he had blasted into oblivion." This is the dark stuff of which some of the best Science Fiction is made.

## STYLE

### Utopia and Dystopia

A utopia is a literary form that features an idealistic imaginary society. In most cases, these ideals are unattainable. The author writes about this imaginary place not because he or she hopes to achieve this ideal but because the author hopes to inspire debate about the issues expressed in the work and so bring about social change. In Science Fiction, writers have in turn commented on the unattainable quality of utopias by writing dystopias— visions of a future society that, in striving to achieve an ideal, instead becomes a nightmare. The two most famous Science Fiction examples of dystopias are Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*. Susan Storing Benfield examines elements of utopian society, such as property, gender roles, and governance, present in Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed*.

In Huxley's bleak future, the dystopian society has achieved its goal of eliminating sickness, disease, and war, but in the process it has sacrificed much of what makes humanity human. People are genetically engineered to fit into a certain social class and follow a uniform way of life, and any abnormal or creative behavior is suppressed through drugs. In one of the final scenes, after a human born of natural means attempts to stage a revolt against the system, he meets with one of the world government leaders, who explains why they have sacrificed many human interests, including religion, for technological progress: "Call it the fault of civilization. God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make your choice."

At least in Huxley's vision, the brainwashed citizens themselves are happy. Not so in *1984*. In this society, fear and paranoia are what motivate the citizens to conform to the government's demands. Politics rule, and people are wise to remember, as many posters in the society state, "Big Brother Is Watching You." The book's protagonist, Winston Smith, is unfortunate enough to attempt a revolt against Big Brother, which results in Smith's being mentally and physically destroyed by the totalitarian regime.

### Description

Science Fiction by its very nature incorporates some form of scientific description in its tales. In some works, such as Asimov's *I, Robot* stories

that examine the use of robots in human society, the science is meticulously explained as an integral part of the plot. Asimov writes, "Inside the thin platinum-plated 'skin' of the globe was a positronic brain, in whose delicately unstable structure were enforced calculated neuronic paths." This robot brain, like a human's, fits "snugly into the cavity in the skull of the robot." Throughout the stories, the robots' "thinking" processes feature prominently in the plot.

Other Science Fiction stories, however, incorporate minor descriptions of technologies that are not central to the story's plot. For example, in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the human ambassador sent to the planet Gethen, which is light years away from his planet, demonstrates how he can communicate across the distance nearly instantaneously with his ansible communicator. "The principle it works on ... is analogous in some ways to gravity. ... What it does ... is produce a message at any two points simultaneously." The king to whom the ambassador shows the device is not impressed and does not pay much attention to this technology. Nor do Le Guin's readers. Although the communicator is an interesting device, the real story in the book is the lack of gender bias due to unique biology that Le Guin creates for her alien society.

### Setting

One of the most important choices Science Fiction and Fantasy authors make when creating stories is the setting. Because most Science Fiction and Fantasy works involve "rules" established through generations of other writers—such as Asimov's famous "Three Laws of Robotics"—the choice of a setting can introduce potential constraints. While writers sometimes bend or break those rules, deviating from them requires the formulation of a convincing and compelling alternative.

The choice of a setting is also one of the indicators of the type of tale the story is intended to be—Science Fiction or Fantasy. Although there is much debate over what distinguishes the two genres, Card, in his book *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy*, offers one possible definition based on his own experiences as a Science Fiction and Fantasy writer: "A rustic setting always suggests fantasy; to suggest Science Fiction, you need sheet metal and plastic.

You need *rivets*." Especially since the New Wave of Science Fiction and Fantasy, which appeared in the 1960's with seminal authors such Heinlein and Harlan Ellison, a definition of Science Fiction and Fantasy by their settings is no longer so easily applied.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

Science fiction had a profound effect on the development of motion pictures. From almost the very beginnings of film, Science Fiction movies have developed special effects, starting with the first real Science Fiction film, George Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon* in 1902.

Since then, Science Fiction films have had a hit-or-miss history, and many literary classics have been made into highly inaccurate adaptations that sacrificed plot for special effects. In 1926, Fritz Lang released his monumental *Metropolis*, a nightmarish vision of a potential future in which the city is large and impersonal and the working-class is intended to be replaced by a new race of robots.

In 1963, the British Science Fiction television series *Dr. Who* began its unprecedented, 26-season, 695-episode run. In 1966, Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* debuted in the United States to little fanfare. Eventually, Roddenberry's characters and ideas inspired several related television series, a host of movies, countless book tie-ins, and a widespread cultural movement of sorts. The terms Trekkie and Trekker continue to be used to refer to ardent *Star Trek* fans. The 1999 film *Galaxy Quest* is a good-natured parody of *Star Trek* fandom.

With Stanley Kubrick's 1968 critically acclaimed adaptation of Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Science Fiction films gained new respect. The release of George Lucas's original *Star Wars* trilogy in the 1970s and early 1980s helped to further revitalize the Science Fiction film and inspired widespread devotion reminiscent of the *Star Trek* phenomenon. Lucas went on in the early-twenty-first century to create several a popular trilogy prequel to the original *Star Wars* films.

In the 1980s and 1990s, several influential films were released. *Blade Runner*, a film loosely based on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, is one of few literary

adaptations to film at that time. Both the film and author acquired a cult following as a result of the film. Original Science Fiction films of note during the last two decades of the twentieth century include Steven Spielberg's blockbuster *E. T.* (re-released in an updated version in 2002), James Cameron's *Terminator* movies, and the Science Fiction comedy film series *Back to the Future*. In the early years of the twenty-first century, Science Fiction films and television shows—many of which continue to create groundbreaking new special effects—are alive and well.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Science Fiction has its roots in the nineteenth century, a time when the world experienced an explosion in new inventions and an appreciation of science and scientific methods as a means of progress. With the advent of the daguerreotype (the precursor to photography) in the first half of the century, humans harnessed the power to record images quickly and accurately. This technology was further explored with the advent of motion pictures at the end of the nineteenth century.

As science and technology grew in popularity, its practitioners challenged established thought. With the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* in 1859, the idea of man as a being of singular importance in the universe is shattered. With the help of geologists who date the Earth as much older than suggested by the Bible, Darwin's theories propose that humans and apes share an ancestry.

The early years of the twentieth century introduced new transportation technologies both on land in the form of gasoline-powered automobiles and in the sky in the form of airplanes. World War I introduced new weapons technologies, including tanks that are first used on battlefields in 1917. These new technologies helped fuel the ideas behind Science Fiction and Fantasy literature, which exploded in the 1920s with Hugo Gernsback's publication of several Science Fiction and Fantasy pulp magazines— named for the cheap paper on which they were printed, although some used the term to indicate a lack of quality.

In 1926, American scientist Robert H. Goddard tested the world's first liquid-fuel rocket, the advent of which eventually triggered a race in the 1950s and 1960s between the United States and the Soviet Union to develop rockets for propelling weapons and space shuttles. On October 31, 1938, Orson Welles made media and literary history by dramatizing H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* on the radio. Because it was told in the style of a newscast, the broadcast convinced hundreds of thousands of listeners that the story of a Martian invasion was real, and widespread panic ensued as Americans jumped to the conclusion that they were under attack.

Also in 1938, John W. Campbell, an American editor, took the reins of the Science Fiction magazine *Astounding Stories*, which he later renamed *Astounding Science Fiction*. The magazine, which placed more emphasis on quality than other pulps, quickly distinguished itself and helped to nurture the careers of many talented, new Science Fiction writers. It effectively launched the golden age of Science Fiction, a period that lasted until a few years after the end of World War II.

When World War II began in 1939, the world experienced paper shortages that affected the publication of Science Fiction and Fantasy magazines. Publishers cut magazines that did not have strong circulations. *Astounding Stories* was one of the few that survived, and its issues, which contained stories from such successful authors as Heinlein and Asimov, helped to define modern Science Fiction. In 1945, the United States dropped the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two Japanese cities, effectively ending World War II.

In the 1960s and 1970s, amidst the New Wave of Science Fiction and Fantasy, a period marked by experimental writing in the field, more female Science Fiction writers began to publish under their own names. The predominantly male readership of Science Fiction works had not previously allowed for many works by women writers. Those women who were published often wrote under male pseudonyms or used intentionally gender-ambiguous pen names, such as C. J. Cherryh or Leigh Brackett. The publication of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1969 was a direct response to the bias of the genre. In the story, a human ambassador visits a far world that has ideologically and biologically

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **1900s:** The Wright Brothers make their historic flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, proving to the world that humans can fly.

  **1940s:** German-born scientist Wernher von Braun develops the V-2 rocket for Adolph Hitler, envisioning it as a means for space travel. Hitler, however, uses the rocket as a weapon during World War II, so von Braun defects to America, where he shares his knowledge with American scientists—who follow von Braun's lead and begin to apply it to space exploration.

  **Today:** Having experienced both extraordinary success and tragic failure, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) continues to plan and send exploratory missions into space.

- **1900s:** Einstein proves the existence of atoms.

  **1940s:** The United States is the first to harness the power of the atom and demonstrates the awesome, destructive power of nuclear warfare when it drops atomic bombs on two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively ending World War II.

  **Today:** After the breakup of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many of the nuclear weapons from the world's former superpower fall into the hands of independent terrorist groups. In 2001, after an attack on the World Trade Center in New York City that launched a war on terrorism, the American public's fear shifts to biological weapons and suicide bombings.

- **1900s:** In 1901, Italian physicist and inventor Guglielmo Marconi receives the first long-distance wireless message in Morse Code, which traveled from England to Newfoundland almost instantaneously.

  **1940s:** Bell Labs makes the first demonstration of its transistor, which amplifies electric current in an efficient and cheap manner. The first transistors are used in telephones.

  **Today:** With the advent of modern wireless technology, digital data from telephones and computers can be transmitted instantly to and from anywhere in the world by increasingly smaller devices that rely on microprocessors—computer chips that contain millions of microscopic transistors.

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evolved to the point where gender issues are nonexistent.

The advent of the first computer, ENIAC, in 1946, had the greatest effect on modern society. Although Science Fiction writers had predicted that robots would become the most important technology in future societies, it was the computer that won out in the end. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, as new technologies—most of them based on computer technology—are introduced, Science Fiction and Fantasy writers continue to react to them in their works, reworking themes that have been used in Science Fiction since the nineteenth century.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Science Fiction has always faced three problems from a critical standpoint: definition, history, and literary reputation. First, there is the two-part question of what is Science Fiction and how does it differ from Fantasy. As Frederick Andrew Lerner observes in his *Modern Science Fiction and the American Literary Community*, "the Science Fiction professionals themselves—writers, historians, and critics whose careers are closely associated with Science Fiction—have reached no consensus." Perhaps the only definition that everyone can agree on is that given by Harry Harrison in his article "The Term
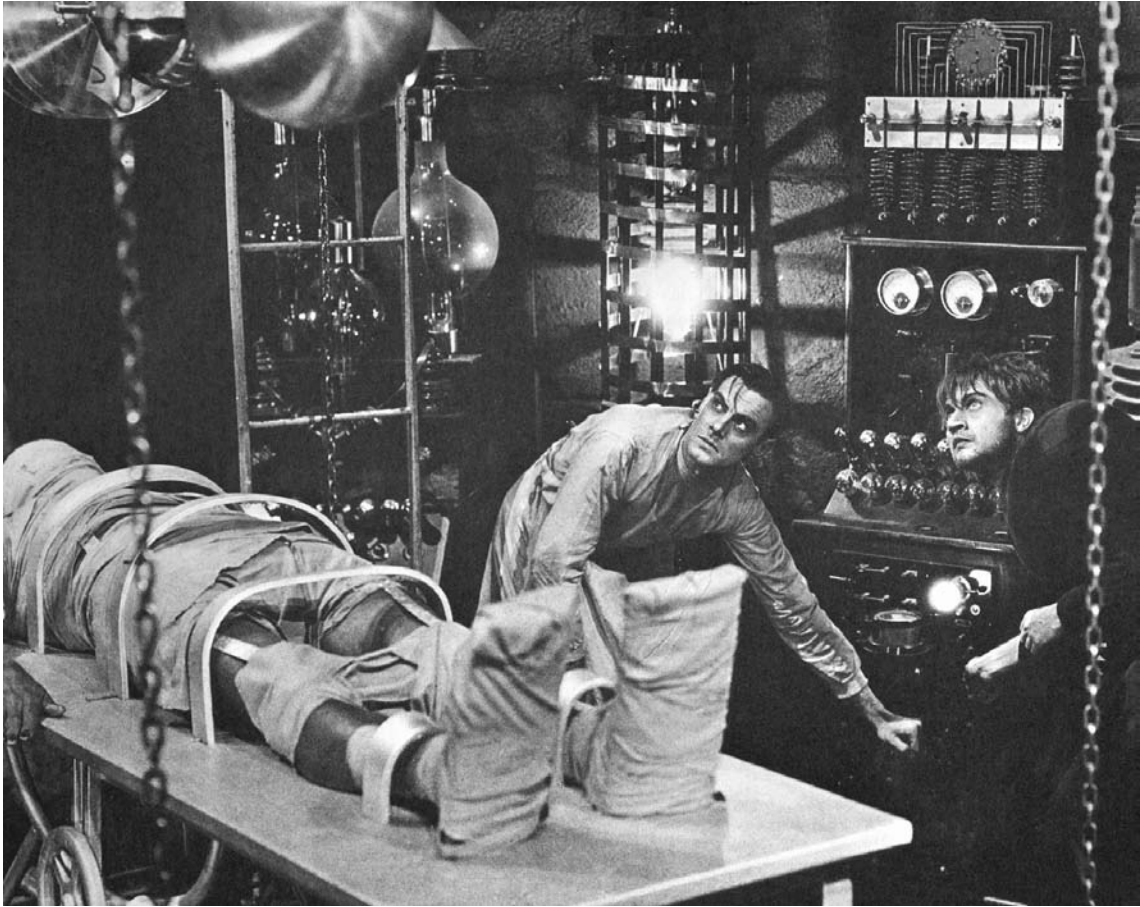
*The Monster (Boris Karloff) is brought to life by Dr. Frankenstein (Colin Clive) and his assistant Fritz (Dwight Frye) in the 1931 film adaptation of* Frankenstein *by Mary Shelley* (© *Corbis-Bettmann*)

Defined": "The definition of science fiction is: Science fiction is."

Science Fiction is often referred to as a form of Fantasy. Critic Julius Kagarlitski maintains in his essay "Realism and Fantasy" that "all fantasy is 'scientific' in the sense that it is engendered by that type of thinking whose mission it was to determine the real natural laws of the world and to transform it." Kagarlitski also notes that "the history of fantasy is a very long one," unlike Science Fiction, which most critics agree has only been around for the last couple of centuries.

The problem of defining Science Fiction's history is steeped in controversy. Although some critics and historians claim that writings several hundreds of years old are Science Fiction, the leading argument—and the one that has seen the most acceptance—was offered by British Science Fiction author Brian Aldiss. In his

book on the history of Science Fiction, *Trillion Year Spree*, Aldiss maintains that Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the first true Science Fiction work due to its reliance on scientific methods. "Frankenstein's ambitions bear fruit only when he throws away his old reference books from a pre-scientific age and gets down to some research in the laboratory," says Aldiss.

The arguments of definition and history are often laid aside, however, when it comes to discussing the literary merits of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Although some very notable authors like Wells and Verne wrote critically acclaimed Science Fiction works, it has taken a while for Science Fiction and Fantasy works to gain acceptance in the mainstream. This is due in large part to Gernsback and his publication of Science Fiction and Fantasy pulp magazines. The same magazines that helped increase

popular readership in the field, also served to distance critics.

With the works of specific writers such as Bradbury and Vonnegut the genre was able to transcend its pulp image and garner the positive attention of critics. Works such as *The Martian Chronicles* and particularly *Slaughterhouse Five* have also found favor with academia and are often taught in the classroom. Jack Williamson noted this trend in his 1974 article "SF in the Classroom": "From a standing start only a dozen years ago, Science Fiction has now become a popular and reasonably respectable academic subject."

This trend continues into the early 2000s. As for the mainstream critics, they tend to favor the types of stories they always have: the ones that transcend the genre of Science Fiction and illustrate more universal themes of humanity.

## CRITICISM

### *Ryan D. Poquette*

*Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette explores the similarities and differences among Science Fiction and Fantasy works, by examining three aspects of Wells's* The Time Machine *and Tolkien's* The Hobbit.

With the introduction of pulp genre magazines like *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories* in the 1920s, modern Science Fiction and Fantasy stories were lumped together, with no attempt to define or separate each genre. Although many critics have since tried to define each genre, no consensus has been reached, and Science Fiction and Fantasy are often referred to as one field. This is true in the popular sphere as well. Orson Scott Card (who is a Science Fiction and Fantasy writer himself) notes in his book *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy*, "in most bookstores, fantasy and science fiction are lumped together in the same group of shelves, alphabetized by author with no attempt to separate one from the other." However, one can make a possible distinction by examining the *specific* ways that Science Fiction and Fantasy writers use *general* ideas and techniques shared by both genres. By exploring the general similarities between Wells's *The Time Machine* and Tolkien's *The Hobbit*—two works that helped to define the modern Science Fiction and

Fantasy genres, respectively—these specific differences can be identified.

The first general similarity between the two genres is in their views of science and technology. Both genres tend to take a negative view toward science and technology. In fact, much of Fantasy literature is, by its very nature, anti-technology. Fantasy authors like Tolkien often stage their tales in a rustic environment that hearkens back to a pre-industrialized past and is generally derived from a nostalgic blend of human history and mythology. In some Fantasy, however, the feelings against industrial progress are more pronounced. Take this passage from *The Hobbit*, in which Tolkien is discussing the goblins, one of many evil races in the book: "It is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once." By associating this evil race with troublesome machines—a clear sign of industry—Tolkien is implying that technological progress itself is evil. It is particularly telling that Tolkien wrote this story as humanity was gearing up for World War II, during which a number of killing machines were invented. As Michael Wood notes about Tolkien's works in *New Society*:

> The enemy is science, or rather the complacency of science, the self-satisfaction of people who think they can explain everything, who have no time for myths, for forms of truth which will not fit within a narrow rationalism.

Unlike *The Hobbit*, the anti-technology view in *The Time Machine* is not apparent at first. In the beginning of the novel, the time traveler is hopeful about science and technology as he displays the model of his time machine to his assembled guests—who use scientific arguments to discuss the prospect of time travel. Says the medical man, one of the time traveler's guests, "if Time is really only a fourth dimension of Space, why is it, and why has it always been regarded as something different? And why cannot we move in Time as we move about in the other dimensions of Space?" Later, when the time traveler has returned from his journey into the future, he explains to his guests what he had hoped to find there. "I had always anticipated that the people of the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand odd would be incredibly in front of us in knowledge, art, everything." But as the time traveler soon sees, human society has evolved from upper and lower classes into two separate

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- *Fantastic Voyages: Learning Science through Science Fiction Films* (1993), by Leroy Dubeck, Suzanne Moshier, and Judith E. Boss, uses scenes from classic and recent Science Fiction films to illustrate scientific principles of physics, astronomy, and biology, and details how the films either adhere to or violate these principles.

- Dick Jude's *Fantasy Art Masters: The Best Fantasy and SF Art Worldwide* (1999) features samples from some of the world's most acclaimed Fantasy and Science Fiction artists. The book also includes interviews with the artists, who reveal how they created some of their favorite creations and relate what it is like working in the industry.

- *Blast Off! Rockets, Robots, Ray Guns, and More from the Golden Age of Space*, by S. Mark Young, Steve Duin, and Mike Richardson, is a detailed exploration of the toys created during the 1930s through the 1950s. Published in 2001, the book examines the history of these unique collector's items, which include such memorable Science Fiction characters as Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon. It includes reprints of original advertisements, comic-strip and pulp-magazine art, and even original packaging and instructions from toys produced all over the world.

- Joseph Campbell's study of myth, titled *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), identifies one basic story that recurs throughout world's mythologies. Campbell's ideas inspired many later Science Fiction and Fantasy writers, most notably George Lucas, the creator of the *Star Wars* films.

- Richard Rickitt's *Special Effects* (2000) gives a thorough history of special effects, which are used mainly in Science Fiction, Fantasy, and horror films. Rickitt examines everything from trick photography to computer-generated effects, using examples from early films, such as George Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), to more recent Science Fiction films, such as *The Matrix* (1999).

- Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* explores the history, philosophy, and mechanics of comics, which have been around for more than three thousand years and which have included notable characters from Science Fiction. Writing and drawing entirely in the form of a comic strip, McCloud illustrates the ideas that he discusses, using scientific concepts like space, time, and motion in the process.

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species, both of which have regressed physically and mentally to the point where they have lost their humanity. The time traveler, a man from the nineteenth century, possesses more knowledge than these distant descendants, a fact that taints his view of the inevitable future.

In his history of Science Fiction, *Trillion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss discusses the sense of despair inherent in *The Time Machine*: "Its sceptical view of the present, and its pessimistic view of the future of mankind—and of life on Earth—challenged most of the cozy ideas of progress, as well as the new imperialism, then current." Wells set the pace for many other Science Fiction writers, who imparted this dual idea of initial hope and crushing despair into their own works.

Another area in which general parallels between Fantasy and Science Fiction can be drawn is in the setting. Both Science Fiction and Fantasy works usually involve a setting that is something contrary to the writer's current reality, an "other" reality. The majority of Science Fiction works, like *The Time Machine*, take place in a future reality, which is often drastically different in either a distinctly positive or negative sense. As Aldiss notes, "Utopianism or its opposite is present

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in every vision of the future. There is little point in inventing a future state unless it contrasts in some way with our present one." In Wells's case, the future world his time traveler encounters is a nightmarish future Earth, where the ape-like Morlocks, the descendants of the working class who dwell underground, tend the pretty but naïve Eloi like crops. The reader, like the time traveler, is drawn to detest the Morlocks, who feed on the Eloi.

While many Science Fiction "other" realities take place in the future, Fantasy works like Tolkien's Middle-Earth are constructed as part of the mythical past. Here, Tolkien also portrays a nightmarish vision of Earth, although his is much richer than Wells's portrayal. While Morlocks served as the detested race in Wells's novel, Tolkien offers trolls, goblins, and the imaginary beast that is found in much mythology and Fantasy—the dragon. The dragon is especially nasty in *The Hobbit*. After Bilbo narrowly escapes being burned from the fire that the dragon spews from its mouth, Bilbo hides where the dragon cannot get to him or his dwarf companions. The dragon, Smaug, in a fit of rage, instead takes out his fiery anger on the nearby Lake-Town, the inhabitants of which have done nothing to the dragon. Tolkien describes Smaug's many destructive passes over the town, then gives Smaug's next thought: "Soon he would set all the shoreland woods ablaze and wither every field and pasture. Just now he was enjoying the sport of town-baiting." Fortunately for the town members, a bird carries Bilbo's news of the dragon's weakness to the town, and the dragon is slain.

A third area in which general similarities can be found between Science Fiction and Fantasy is the use of the quest, or journey, as a narrative structure. In journey stories, a protagonist travels to somewhere else, has an adventure, and is transformed. In Science Fiction, many of these stories have followed the trend set by works like Wells's *The Time Machine*, in which the traveler is a willing participant. In fact, in the time traveler's case, he travels on his journey through an invention of his own making. At the end of his first adventure through time, the time traveler has indeed changed. He has seen the bleak, far future, which saddens him, but he refuses to give up. In the end, he makes another journey, to an age not quite so far in the future, where he can try to warn people before they make the same mistakes that lead to the future he has seen. However, at the end of the book, after three years, the time traveler has still not returned, and Wells ends the book on an ambiguous note. The reader never finds out the conclusion of the time traveler's journey, or how it ultimately transforms him.

In fantastic journeys—many of which follow the ages-old storytelling form of the heroic quest—the journey's beginning, end, and outcome are clearly defined. The protagonists in Fantasy stories do not always choose to begin their journeys. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo does not ask for his quest to rescue the treasure hoard from the dragon. At the beginning of the tale, Bilbo is happy with his quiet life in the Shire, and does not want anyone to change that. It is only with the intervention of the wizard Gandalf that Bilbo is called to go on the quest. Gandalf asks Bilbo outright to do it, but Bilbo refuses: "We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner!" Gandalf leaves but, unbeknownst to Bilbo, the wizard marks Bilbo's front door to indicate that he is available as a burglar-for-hire for a group of dwarves.

After the dwarves start to arrive and Bilbo's world begins to tumble, Gandalf reveals his stunt. At this point something happens that makes Bilbo change his mind about going on the journey. His "Took" side, the adventurous line of his ancestors, gets offended when the dwarves say he could not handle the adventure. As Tolkien writes about Bilbo, "He suddenly felt he would go without bed and breakfast to be thought fierce." For a hobbit, who is constantly thinking about food, this is a brave admission

*Ian McKellen plays Gandalf in the 2001 film adaptation of* The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring *by J. R. R. Tolkien (The Kobal Collection / The Picture Desk, Inc.)*

and is one of the first signs that Bilbo has "more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself," as Gandalf puts it to the dwarves.

Throughout the quest, Bilbo slowly begins to trust his instincts and risks his life to save the dwarves from being eaten by giant spiders, imprisoned by elves, and finally, consumed by their own greed while trying to hoard the dragon's treasure. Bilbo does indeed undergo a transformation, proving himself worthy of Gandalf's prophetic praise. Unlike Wells's time traveler, the transformation is a distinctly positive one, and the book ends on a clear upbeat note.

The debate about what constitutes Science Fiction as opposed to Fantasy has been going on for more than a century. Although no consensus has been reached, many publishers label certain books as belonging to either the Science Fiction or Fantasy field, and fans generally know when they are reading one as opposed to the other.

**Source:** Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### Susan Storing Benfield

*In the following essay, Benfield analyzes Le Guin's novel* The Dispossessed *for its commentary on utopias, dystopias, and the role of government.*

Ursula Le Guin's brilliant science fiction novel, *The Dispossessed*, follows in the tradition of utopian and dystopian fictions dating back to Thomas More's *Utopia* and Plato's *Republic*, in which authors explore their hopes and fears for human society by creating imaginary polities. Le Guin's novel raises questions about the role of government and property in human society by presenting two contrasting worlds. At first, Anarres and Urras appear as ideal, versus defective, human societies. Over the course of the novel, Le Guin presents a more nuanced portrayal of the two: Urras, a planet with a range of governments similar to those of present-day earth, if more repressive, sexist, and class bound; and Anarres, an anarchistic breakaway society located on the Urras's moon.

Le Guin begins from the premise that the most important goal of governments and societies is to enable human beings to be as free as possible. This is clearly the standard by which she wants Anarres, her ambiguous utopia, to be judged. Although it is desirable for societies to

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eliminate unnecessary suffering, Le Guin stresses that suffering is an essential part of human life and that the elimination of suffering is neither a possible nor a desirable goal. Likewise, Le Guin demonstrates that equality is a problematic goal. Anarres's attempt to create a fair and egalitarian society is presented as a good thing, but Le Guin shows us how easily the pursuit of equality can turn into the suppression of difference. Le Guin has said that her goal in writing *The Dispossessed* was to examine what she regards as the most idealistic and interesting theory of government, that of anarchism.

Within the framework of her novel, Le Guin provides a painstaking account of what a society based on the anarchosyndicalist ideas of such thinkers as Paul Goodman might look like. She goes beyond the usual categories of utopian and dystopian fictions. Through her depiction of her Anarresti hero Shevek's reactions to Urras, she points out how narrow and incomplete our usual views of human motivation may be. For example, Shevek, who has grown up believing that people's primary motivations are internal, is amazed to see how hard Urrasti work for mere external rewards such as money. Le Guin examines what people would have to sacrifice to reach these anarchistic ideals. Her ambiguous utopia is, in the words of Marianne Moore, "an imaginary garden with real toads in it." Le Guin provides a vivid picture of those aspects of human nature that create hierarchies and bureaucracies even in the absence of formal government.

The novel is told from the point of view of Shevek, a physicist, the first person from Anarres to visit Urras in generations. Le Guin structures her novel by alternating chapters concerning Shevek's experiences on Urras with chapters providing an account of his growing up on Anarres. Through Shevek's observations of Urras, Le Guin paints a vivid picture of the abuses and inequities to which centralized government that is based on the protection of property is prone, as well as a somewhat Rousseauian portrayal of the suffering caused by the accumulation of power and property, even for their most successful accumulators.

At the same time, her account of Shevek's life on Anarres shows both the virtues and defects of this anarchistic society. Le Guin provides a convincing account of a society largely without formal government in which education and social sanctions regulate behavior. As Shevek observes the obvious limitations on the freedom of individuals on Urras, he begins to reflect on the more subtle, frequently internalized, limits on individual freedom in his world. He relives his own experiences and those of other creative individuals who are held back in their areas of endeavor by petty bureaucratic individuals who have accumulated power despite the lack of a formal power structure. One of his new acquaintances on Urras argues that she would prefer to cope with external tyranny rather than carry around a little tyrant in her head.

**THE WALL**

The novel opens with the image of a wall, which will prove to be a recurring motif. Here it is the low, unimpressive, but extremely important wall surrounding the Port of Anarres, which Shevek must cross to enter the freighter that will take him from Anarres to Urras. Le Guin describes it as a dichotomy: from one point of view, "It enclosed the rest of the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free. Looked at from the other side, the wall enclosed Anarres: the whole planet was inside it, a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine." This wall, like other man-made barriers in the novel, signifies the obstacles that human beings create that limit freedom.

Shevek has a number of significant dreams about walls throughout the novel. As a young child, distressed by his mother's absence and rejection by his age-mates, who perceive him as different and egotistic, he is comforted when his father explains mathematical principles to him and shows him logarithmic tables. Soon afterward, he dreams of a wall, high and impassable, that prevents him from continuing a journey he must make if he is ever to come home. His father shows him "the primal number, that was both unity and plurality." The wall disappears, Shevek is suffused

with joy, and he knows that he has come home. He remembers the joy, but later in his life, he frequently has painful, unresolved dreams about the wall. When, as a man, Shevek commits himself to changing his society and takes the first step that will lead to his journey to Urras, he says this: "Those who build walls are their own prisoners. I'm going to go fulfill my proper function in the social organism. I'm going to go unbuild walls." Takver, his more practical partner, who sometimes speaks for the author, supports his decision but adds that "It may get pretty drafty."

Shevek is the first Anarresti to travel to Urras since the settlement and closure of Anarres more than a century and a half ago. Shevek is not breaking any law by going to Urras, because Anarres has no laws. However, he is violating a basic social custom and exposing himself to considerable danger. He narrowly escapes stones thrown by Anarresti who believe him to be a traitor. When Shevek leaves for Urras, he is on the verge of completing his general temporal theory, which will attempt to overcome the intellectual wall between two apparently contradictory ways of looking at time studied by physicists on Urras and Anarres, the sequency theory, and the simultaneity theory. His work has tremendous implications for travel and communication over interstellar distances. Thus, the complexity of time is an important subject of this book, making the organization of the novel's discussion of the events challenging. The events on Anarres precede those on Urras in a simple "sequentialist" chronology of Shevek's life. However, through her use of alternating chapters, Le Guin chooses to emphasize the complex interconnections of events. I first discuss Le Guin's treatment of Urras and then her treatment of Anarres, because dialectically and, in the larger scheme of Le Guin's universe, chronologically, Urras precedes Anarres. Le Guin provides a complex picture of Urras and shows that it has good aspects as well as bad. Nevertheless, she primarily uses her account of Urras to point beyond itself. On Urras we are shown the reasons that people would want something better, and these are the possibilities that Anarres represents: a society that would offer more human connection, more equality, and, above all, more freedom.

### URRAS

Although Shevek has had some success in unbuilding walls on Anarres and has passed through the wall between Anarres and Urras, once on Urras he finds himself surrounded by new walls, both literal and metaphorical. He is outraged when he finds the door to his cabin on the ship to Urras locked, as locked doors are virtually unknown on Anarres. Once on the planet, he perceives its luxurious vehicles and rooms as boxes. Shevek is nevertheless touched by the humanity of the people he meets. They are not the cold, selfish "propertarians" his education on Anarres has led him to expect. He is delighted by the opportunity to discuss physics with those who can really understand him. He reflects on the irony that only here "in the realm of inequity" has he met his equals. He is seduced by the natural beauty and complexity of Urras, which contrasts dramatically with the bleakness of Anarres, and he cannot help sometimes feeling at home there.

However, Shevek soon feels the claustrophobia of the walls closing in on him. He begins to suspect that he is surrounded not only by the walls of the beautiful, monastic university where he lives, but also by the more flexible walls that the government of A Io, the wealthy capitalist country that hosts him, keeps in place, even when he travels. He tries to learn about the other countries, such as communist Thu and underdeveloped Benbili, and about the lower classes of A Io, but he remains isolated. Shevek initially does not see that he is being controlled, because he is allowed to address groups of people and proselytize for anarchism. However, he eventually realizes that just as he cannot pierce his colleagues' wall of distant courtesy, his polite audiences do not really hear him. He feels that his hope of bringing Anarres and Urras together was foolish; he feels he is doubly isolated, unable to be a part of either world. After Shevek has been on Urras for some time, teaching at the university and working (without much success) on his general theory of time, he finds a note from Urrasti revolutionaries accusing him of betraying them and the hope that his world represents. At this point, he recognizes the walls that have been built around him, but he can find no way to break them down. He tries to talk to his servant Efor, the only member of the "unpropertied classes" with whom he has contact, without success.

Another wall that Shevek recognizes is Urras's inequality between the sexes. The position of women on Urras immediately makes Shevek uncomfortable. Urras is not the kind of violent, misogynous society common in feminist

dystopian fiction; rather it is presented as a somewhat Victorian society in which both women and men are straightjacketed by rigid gender roles and sexual mores. Within the one household Shevek visits on intimate terms, that of his colleague Oiie, he is surprised to see Oiie, who speaks publicly of women in belittling terms, treat his wife with courtesy and respect, very much as an Anarresti man would treat his partner. In his own home, the stiff and secretive Oiie appears to Shevek as "a simple, brotherly kind of man, a free man." Although he is touched by Oiie's family life, it still seems to offer "a very small range of freedom."

When Shevek asks his colleagues about the absence of women in the academic and scientific world, they think he is requesting sexual services and offer without embarrassment to provide whatever he might like. When he explains that he was asking about female scientists, they are embarrassed; now he has mentioned something dirty. They assure him that women are naturally incapable of mathematics and abstract thought. When they ask him if they "let women study science" on Anarres, he is puzzled by the concept of "letting" people study something. When he tells them that his teacher Gvarab, whose work they have admired, was a woman, they are shocked, but they do not question their own presuppositions. Shevek pities these men because of their distorted view of women, which he sees as being caused by their need to possess others. He draws the connection, suggested by the title and echoing throughout the novel, between possessing and being possessed: "They knew no relation but possession. They were possessed." One of Shevek's colleagues attempts to counter what he perceives as Shevek's criticism of his attitude toward women with a platitude that ironically emphasizes his view of women as property: "a beautiful, virtuous woman [is] the most precious thing on earth."

On his next visit to Oiie's family, Shevek meets a beautiful, if not by Urrasti standards, virtuous woman, Oiie's sister Vea. His conversations with Vea are the most explicit discussions he has with anyone on Urras concerning life on the two planets. They discuss relations between men and women in the two societies, as well as the opportunities for freedom and the obstacles to it that each presents. Wealthy and glamorous, with a successful husband who is not around

much, Vea appears to have the best that Ioti society offers women. Shevek pities but is intrigued by her. When he asks her whether Urrasti women are content with their inferior position, she becomes defensive and argues that women on Urras are not inferior because they run the men and control things without having to get their hands dirty.

Later, when they discuss freedom and sexual mores on Urras and Anarres, we see that Shevek's characterization of Vea as "restless, unsatisfied, and dangerous" hits the mark. She is attracted to Shevek and his society because they represent the freedom she desperately desires. She is excited by the thought that Anarres has rejected confining sexual mores, but she is deeply disappointed when Shevek explains that Anarresti society is an attempt to reach morality, not to throw it out. Vea objects, "I think you Odonians missed the whole point. You threw out the priests and the judges and divorce laws and all that, but you kept the trouble behind them. You just stuck it inside, in your consciences . . . You're just as much slaves as ever! You aren't really free." Vea's definition of freedom as a complete absence of inner or outer constraint is, as Shevek says, extremely dangerous. Distorted by the hypocrisy of her society, she sees concern for others as a pretense and civilization as an attempt to cover with pretty words the reality that life is a bloody fight in which the strongest prevail.

Despite her extreme position, Vea raises the important issue of internal versus external restraints on freedom. Vea refers to an Urrasti tyrant whose artifacts she and Shevek saw in a museum when she tells him that he and his countrymen have a Queen Teaea inside their heads who orders them around like the queen ordered her serfs. Shevek suggests that she belongs inside our heads, but Vea argues passionately that it is better to have her in a palace because then one can rebel against her.

When Shevek begins teaching on Urras, the circumstances of his Urrasti students and colleagues compared with those of their counterparts on Anarres cause him to contrast the types of freedom made possible by these two societies:

> They were superbly trained, these students. Their minds were fine, keen, ready. When they weren't working, they rested. They were not blunted and distracted by a dozen other obligations. They never fell asleep in class because they were tired from having worked

on rotational duty the day before. Their society maintained them in complete freedom from want, distractions, and cares. What they were free to do, however, was another question. It appeared to Shevek that their freedom from obligation was in exact proportion to their lack of freedom of initiative.

Shevek compares the privileged situation of academics on Urras with the complex web of cares and responsibilities he dealt with on Anarres. However, the lack of initiative and ability of his Urrasti students to think for themselves leads him to conclude that he was more free on Anarres: "He had not been free from anything: only free to do anything."

At a party given by Vea, Shevek makes an eloquent, if drunken, defense of Anarresti superiority, calling on the motifs of wall and prison: "[O]ur men and women are free—possessing nothing, they are free. And you the possessors are possessed. You are all in jail. Each alone, solitary, with a heap of what he owns. You live in prison, die in prison. It is all I can see in your eyes, the wall." Frustrated by the incomprehension of his listeners, Shevek gets increasingly drunk, vomits, and passes out. The following morning, he recognizes his role in his own imprisonment. Just as he had tried to vomit up his guilt and self-disgust over his involvement in an imprisonment game as a child, Shevek believes that, the night before, he was trying to vomit up not only the alcohol he had drunk but "all the bread he had eaten on Urras." He tries to become a free man in the same way that he did when he decided to go to Abbenay and start the Syndicate of Initiative. Pushed into a similar corner on Anarres, he found that the way for him to act as a free man was to pursue the work he was individually called on to do, despite the expectations of society.

Likewise, at this point on Urras, Shevek decides that he won't do physics for the politicians; he will do physics on his own terms. He will complete the general temporal theory he came to Urras to complete. He will "assert by his talent, the rights of any citizen in any society: the right to work, to be maintained while working, and to share the product with all who wanted it." For eight days, Shevek works almost nonstop, completing his theory. Afterward, he falls into a feverish illness. Like his earlier illness in Abbenay, this illness and recovery signal the beginning of a new connection with the people around him. His servant Efor, who previously rebuffed his attempts to make personal contact, protects and takes care of him. Once Shevek is on the way to recovery, Efor talks to him openly, at last allowing Shevek some insight into his life and the lives of the unpropertied class, supporting Shevek's belief that brotherhood begins in suffering. Efor helps Shevek leave the university secretly and get in touch with Urrasti revolutionary leaders.

He learns what important symbols Anarres and he personally are for those who seek change on Urras. He speaks at a meeting of the masses in Capital Square that begins a general strike. He says many of the same things he said earlier, to the guests at Vea's party, to the handpicked audiences the Ioti government permitted him, but at last he is heard. Speaking "out of his own isolation, out of the center of his own being," he speaks the pain and inmost experiences of his listeners.

Brutally, he learns how limited freedom on Urras really is, how violent repression may lie beneath the surface of a society that claims, like A Io, to permit freedom of speech while actually being based on gross injustices. The Ioti police open fire on the crowd; Shevek barely escapes with his life. After three nights of hiding in a basement with a dying man, he is smuggled into the Terran embassy. He asks the Terrans to broadcast the equations of his theory of time, so that he can share the results of his work with all who wish to benefit from it, rather than allowing it to be used by the Urrasti to win wars or make money.

Shevek tells Keng, the Terran ambassador, that the Ioti government brought him to Urras, despite the danger that he would prove to be the spark to their political tinder box, because the government officials believe that the possession of his completed general theory of time would allow them to threaten Terra and Hain and the other star-faring powers with "the annihilation of space." They believe that Shevek's theory will allow their engineers to attain the instantaneous transferal of matter across space. Shevek tells Keng that although his equations will not accomplish that, they will make possible the development of the ansible, a device that will permit instantaneous communication between any two points in space. Keng, who has personal experience of the temporal implications of interstellar distances, immediately grasps the tremendous implications of such a device: "I could talk

to diplomats on Chiffewar, you could talk to physicists on Hain, it wouldn't take ideas a generation to get from world to world."

This invention will do on a larger scale what Shevek sought to do on a small scale by coming to Urras. The Anarresti had cut themselves off; they refused to talk with the rest of humanity. Shevek sought to open up communication by coming to Urras. Keng expands on the degree to which the ansible will break down the barriers: "It would make a league of worlds possible . . . We have been held apart by the years, the decades between leaving and arriving, between question and response. It's as if you had invented human speech! We can talk, at last we can talk together."

At this point, his experiences have rendered Shevek deeply pessimistic. He believes that Urras has nothing to offer Anarres and that his journey has been wasted. Keng's broader perspective balances Shevek's hopelessness. She realizes that the defeat of the forces for change Shevek has witnessed is not necessarily permanent. She tells Shevek that Urras is not Hell: "I know it's full of evils, full of human injustice, greed, folly, waste. But it is also full of good, beauty, vitality, achievement. . . . It is *alive*, tremendously alive—despite all its evils, with hope." She has seen, on Terra, the worst consequences of human folly and greed, but she still has hope for the future. She believes that communication between the various human societies can lead to progress.

### ANARRES

As we have seen, Le Guin uses the chapters detailing Shevek's experiences on Urras to point to the need for an alternative society, such as Anarres. In the chapters that take place on Anarres, she shows us many positive things about its society, but she also uses her account of Shevek's experiences from his childhood up to his decision to go to Urras to develop a critique of the shortcomings of Odonian society on Anarres. Shevek, a passionate Odonian, is reluctant to accept the criticisms of his free-thinking friends such as Bedap. However, Le Guin shows how problems within Anarresti society affect Shevek, beginning in childhood.

To begin with, the teachers in the nurseries and learning centers where Shevek spends most of his childhood are portrayed as mediocre individuals who strive to indoctrinate their charges rather than help them think for themselves. For example, they reject Shevek's early thinking about space and time as mere egotism. Shevek, at eight, tries to share his realization of Zeno's paradox, that a thrown rock can never reach the tree: "It doesn't matter how far it's gone, there's always a place, only it's a time really, that's halfway between the last place it was and the tree." The group leader's only reaction to Shevek's precocity and genuine interest in such questions is to eject him from the group for showing off.

Like the image of the wall itself, the expansion into the concept of imprisonment also becomes significant in Shevek's childhood. One of the critical incidents in his childhood concerns an experiment he and his friends conduct with the idea, so far outside of their personal experience, of prison. As eleven-year-olds, they read a biography of Odo, the woman revolutionary who developed the anarchistic philosophy on which the society of Anarres is based. When they have difficulty understanding Odo's long imprisonment, a traveling history teacher explains prisons to them "with the reluctance of a decent adult forced to explain an obscenity to children." They struggle to understand the notion of this kind of coercion. Why didn't the prisoners just leave? What does "locked" mean? How could they be "sentenced" to do work? What if they didn't want to? Why didn't the others stop the guards from beating a prisoner?

Tirin, the most creative of Shevek's friends, finds an enclosed space they can use as a prison. For him, imagining being immured is sufficient, but some of the other boys want to try it. The domineering Kadagv demands to be imprisoned first. He insists that they choose how long he is to stay there. When Kad emerges after four hours, cocky as ever, declaring it no big deal, the boys decide to provide him with food and leave him for two nights. They release him after thirty hours. Kad, disoriented and having suffered massive diarrhea, exits frightened and humiliated. Shevek vomits repeatedly after Kad's release and is deeply shaken. This episode gives Shevek insight into the experience of both prisoner and jailor and leaves him with a lasting horror of imprisonment that plays an important role in his subsequent critiques of both Anarresti and Urrasti societies.

Although Shevek is slow to criticize Anarresti society, he continues to feel painfully isolated by his differences from others as he grows into

manhood. As a teenager, Shevek argues against Bedap and Tirin when they question Anarresti platitudes. They point out what will become a theme of these chapters—that although all Anarresti are supposedly free because no laws make them do things or prevent them from doing them, their society has some powerful methods of controlling the behavior and even the thoughts of its members.

When Shevek goes to study temporal physics with Sabul at the Institute of the Sciences in Abbenay, "the mind and center of Anarres," he finds that the only place he can do his chosen work and the colleagues with whom he must work are at the heart of what is wrong with Anarresti society. Although the original settlers were aware that "unavoidable centralization was a lasting threat, to be countered by lasting vigilance," this vigilance appears to have faded. Even in the absence of formal government and hierarchies, informal but often rigid power structures have grown up. Sabul turns out to be a type only too familiar to anyone who has spent time in academia, a petty, jealous mediocrity who has built his reputation by appropriating the work of others, with little ability except for bureaucratic manipulation and a knack for standing in the way of those more talented.

Shevek learns Iotic, the language of A Io, the dominant country on Urras, although he is troubled by Sabul's insistence that he keep this knowledge secret. He reads the work of Urrasti physicists and is excited to learn that he can send letters to them on the freighters that travel between the worlds. However, he soon discovers that Sabul has put his own name as well as Shevek's on one of his most important essays. Shevek is only able to continue the work he wants to do by entering into a mutually exploitative relationship with Sabul, which violates his most basic beliefs about morality and human relationships. Doing this literally sickens Shevek. He becomes ill for the first time in his life and has to be hospitalized.

When he gets out of the hospital, Shevek makes a conscious effort to form connections with people. He finds to his surprise that, despite his sense of unacceptable difference, they welcome him. He reconnects with his boyhood friend Bedap. Although he is still reluctant to accept many of Bedap's ideas, Bedap helps him see the source of his problems more clearly. Bedap tells Shevek that he has come up against

"the wall." He forces him to recognize that his difficulties with Sabul are part of a larger problem. Anarres has an entrenched power structure that resists change and sets arbitrary standards for creative intellectual work. For example, Bedap, a frustrated educational reformer, says that a month in Abbenay has shown him that he has no chance of accomplishing his goal of improving science instruction in the learning centers. He explains that Sabul and others like him get their power from "the innate cowardice of the average human mind. Public opinion! That's the power structure he's part of, and knows how to use. The unadmitted, inadmissible government that rules the Odonian society by stifling the individual mind."

Bedap argues that although the need for stability and expertise inevitably leads to the development of bureaucracy and hierarchy, Anarresti society has failed to use education to counter this authoritarian tendency: "We don't educate for freedom. Education, the most important activity of the social organism, has become rigid, moralistic, authoritarian. Kids learn to parrot Odo's word's as if they were *laws*—the ultimate blasphemy."

Bedap introduces Shevek to other creative individuals who have run up against this wall. Shevek continues to disapprove of them even as he admires their independence of mind. The most tragic example of this society's destruction of an exceptional individual concerns Tirin, Shevek and Bedap's brilliant but fragile childhood friend. Bedap tells Shevek that after he left, Tirin wrote a satirical play that was viewed as anti-Odonian. He was subjected to a brutal public reprimand from which he never recovered. Although he qualified as a teacher, he was assigned to a road-repair crew and eventually sent to an asylum. When Shevek finally meets Tirin again, he is a destroyed person, caught in a mental loop in which he compulsively rewrites the play that began his troubles.

Bedap also reintroduces Shevek to Takver, an acquaintance from their days at the regional institute, with whom he makes a commitment to lasting partnership. Through Shevek and Takver's relationship, Le Guin examines the issue of the compatibility of monogamy and family with freedom and the role of family in a society dedicated to the elimination of property.

In designing the social structure of Anarres, Le Guin takes a middle road between those

utopian visions that embrace marriage and the family and those that reject them. She acknowledges that human desires are complex and that both sexual experimentation and monogamy may fulfill human needs. Anarres does not have any formal institution of marriage and does have nurseries in which children can be cared for full time or part time. Young Anarresti enjoy complete sexual freedom, yet a place exists for adults who choose to form permanent or semipermanent partnerships, and parents may choose to keep their children with them.

Although the anarchist philosopher, Odo, herself embraced the idea of fidelity, many Anarresti believe that the concept of such a commitment goes against the Odonian belief in nonownership and freedom. However, Odo argued that freedom is only made meaningful by choice and self-limitation: "if no direction is taken, if one goes nowhere, no change will occur. One's freedom to choose and to change will be unused, exactly as if one were in jail, a jail of one's own building, a maze in which no one way is any better than any other." Thus Odo saw the possibility of promise "as an essential element of freedom." Through Shevek's relationship with Takver, Le Guin shows the degree to which a committed, loving, long-term partnership made possible by monogamy offers something that some, if not all, human beings desire deeply, rather than being merely an inappropriate wish to possess another person, which could be socially engineered out of existence.

Unlike those utopian writers who suggest that social arrangements can solve the problems in human relationships that cause suffering, Le Guin suggests that the things human beings want are difficult to attain, and that even the best social arrangements can offer, at most, a greater likelihood of more satisfactory relationships. Le Guin suggests that Shevek and Takver share a relationship rate in any society, a profound and joyful commitment based on reality rather than romance. Le Guin indicates the degree to which others desire what they have by describing how, despite Shevek's and Takver's relative social self-sufficiency, others are drawn to them, "as thirsty people come to a fountain."

From his relationship with Takver, Shevek gets the strength and clarity he needs to defy society and pursue his own vision. Most of his conversations about the problems of Anarresti society take place with Bedap or other friends, but the crucial discussions in which Shevek realizes the actions he must take are with Takver. To Takver he articulates the significance of the reality that although people talk about refusing a posting as if it were an option, almost nobody ever does it: "[W]e're ashamed to say we refused a posting … the social conscience completely dominates the individual conscience, instead of striking a balance with it. We don't cooperate—we *obey*. We fear being outcast, being called lazy, dysfunctional, egoizing. We fear our neighbor's opinion more than we respect our freedom of choice." To her, he articulates the answer—they must return to Abbenay together and start the Syndicate of Initiative. Likewise, when Shevek and the others in the syndicate are at a loss as to their next move, Takver tells him what, on some level, he already knows: that he must go to Urras. Their relationship is strong enough that he can leave without abandoning his family, even though there is a real possibility that he may be unable to return. His relationship with Takver provides a center from which he can journey while retaining the possibility of coming home.

### DEPARTURE

The penultimate chapter of *The Dispossessed* deals with the events that lead up to Shevek's departure to Urras. In it we see the extent of the conflict that Shevek's new Syndicate of Initiative has brought Anarres. To the dismay of their opponents, who believe that this threatens the existence of Anarres, those in the syndicate have built their own transmitter and have initiated radio contact with the Urrasti. A proposal by Bedap to reconsider the terms of the Closure of Anarres and to allow some Urrasti claiming to be Odonians from the underdeveloped country of Benbili to come to Anarres is met with horrified predictions of the destruction of Odonian society on Anarres. Shevek argues that the aim of their society is freedom, not safety; they must therefore be willing to take risks for the ideals of their society to survive. The less dangerous possibility of sending an Anarresti to Urras is also raised, but this meets with an equally hostile response.

After this inconclusive meeting, Shevek finds out that the power structure has methods besides direct opposition to combat his syndicate. He receives an offer, brought to him by Sabul, of a permanent autonomous posting at the Physics Institute, with complete access to regular channels of publication for his work. At first, Shevek's friends interpret the offer as a sign of victory, but Shevek grasps that it is an

underhanded attempt to separate him, its best known member, from the Syndicate of Initiative.

As Shevek's family gathers that evening, they finally share how much hatred and rejection they have all suffered, demonstrating that the fear of breaking social norms on Anarres is well founded. Shevek has experienced name-calling and physical violence. Takver is being forced out of a job she loves. Most heartbreakingly, their brave, vulnerable, eight-year-old daughter Sadik has been abandoned by her friends, excluded from games and subjected to increasingly spiteful vituperation from which the older children and adults in her learning center no longer try to protect her. This situation is untenable for Shevek, but he refuses to go back. With Takver's encouragement, he moves forward. Shevek accepts an invitation to visit Urras, in the hope that by doing so he can open a door that will let a little more of the fresh air of freedom into both worlds.

**RETURN**

*The Dispossessed* ends with Shevek on his way back to Anarres. Le Guin leaves his arrival to our imagination. He travels not on an Urrasti freighter, but on The Davenant, a Hainish interstellar ship, run by people from the distant worlds of Hain and Terra. This delicate, beautiful ship reminds us of the existence of possibilities other than the antithesis between the austerity of Anarres and the opulence of Urras. Despite disappointed hopes, Shevek is happy. He senses that an important promise has been fulfilled. He is pleased with the news from Anarres, although there will be conflict and the outcome is uncertain. He will be met by large contingents of friends and enemies, but he has many more supporters now than he had before his journey.

Shevek takes another bold step and decides to allow Ketho, a Hainish crewmember, to disembark with him on Anarres. He claims the right to interpret the Terms of the Closure of Anarres for himself and decides that the exclusion applies only to Urrasti, not to all foreigners, as is commonly held on Anarres. He explains to Ketho that he can enter Anarres only as an individual, only on his own personal initiative, not as any kind of representative of a foreign government and that he takes his chances when he does so: "once you walk through the wall with me, then as I see it you are one of us … you become an Anarresti, with the same options as all the others. But they are not safe options. Freedom is never very safe."

Nonetheless, Shevek is optimistic about his own future and that of Anarres. The novel ends with the image of sunrise over Anarres. However, Le Guin gives us reasons for doubt as well as hope. There will be violence when Shevek lands. Presumably, given the statement about the numbers of friends and enemies, it will be premeditated and on a larger scale than the impulsive individual outbreaks hitherto experienced on Anarres. We remember the devastating violence after Shevek spoke to the crowd on Urras. Even if Shevek survives to lie down with Takver that night, will the dream of Anarres survive? Shevek and the syndicate have succeeded in their aim of stirring things up. Shevek's journey and his return have obviously caught the imagination of many people. Ketho's presence on Anarres suggests the possibility of further change and more contact with other societies. However, it seems probable that the opposition of the enemies of change would have hardened and organized. Once the course of events is determined by violence, even if favorably to the forces of change, where will it end? The trust on which a society based on mutual aid and cooperation rests might be irreparably damaged. Perhaps the best possible outcome would involve the kind of complex compromises that would require governmental structures to work out.

Thus, *The Dispossessed* ends with a question rather than an answer. Anarres has flaws too serious for it to be considered a utopia. However, it contains enough that is good and enough hope for a better future that it cannot fairly be described as a dystopia. The doctrine of permanent revolution, which Shevek articulates to both his Urrasti and Anarresti audiences, turns out to be in its own way anti-utopian. Shevek's words to the hopeful crowd on Urras, "You cannot buy the Revolution. You cannot make the Revolution. You can only be the Revolution," are met with machine-gun fire. When he expresses similar views on Anarres, the context is more hopeful but also renders his statement more radical. Shevek articulates what he sees as the basis of Odonian society: "The duty of the individual is to accept *no* rule, to be the initiator of his own acts, to be responsible… Revolution is our obligation: our hope of evolution. The revolution is in the individual spirit, or it is nowhere… If it is seen as having any end, it will never truly begin." Shevek embodies this spirit. He sees what is good about his society. He understands the risks, for himself and his world, of continuing to pursue change. Yet he persists and is able to do so within the framework

of Anarresti society. He sees his actions as fulfilling the fundamental values of his society. He is able to use Odonian methods; for example, he starts a new syndicate, the customary Anarresti way of doing things. He reinterprets the Terms of Closure rather than simply rejecting them.

Thus, Le Guin suggests that, although there are no utopian endpoints, the attempt to create social structures that allow for greater human freedom and fulfillment is difficult and dangerous but worthwhile. Any society, however well conceived, that perceives itself as that perfect endpoint will become destructive of freedom, a dystopia instead of a utopia. Le Guin makes clear throughout her novel that the goal must remain the cultivation of individual freedom. Any society that sets out to perfect human beings or to do away with pain and sorrow will also endanger people's capacity for joy, freedom, and humanity. Le Guin agrees with one of her more cynical characters that human beings are not infinitely malleable: "Human nature is human nature." As Shevek learns by experience, people on Urras and Anarres are not fundamentally different.

However, Le Guin suggests that we may tend to take too limited a view of human nature. She argues that the impulse to mutual aid and cooperation is as deeply rooted as the tendency toward competition and dominance. She does a remarkable, sometimes dizzying, job of forcing us to see from perspectives distant from our own. She turns the questions we ask about how a society based on voluntary cooperation could work on their head, by showing us the similar uncomprehending questions Shevek and other Anarresti ask about how a society based on competition and coercion could possibly succeed.

**Source:** Susan Storing Benfield, "The Interplanetary Dialect: Freedom and Equality in Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*," in *Perspectives on Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Summer 2006, pp. 128–34.

## Patrick Parrinder

*In the following essay, Parrinder examines scientific theories and metaphors used by authors of Science Fiction.*

### I

A provisional and, I hope, uncontroversial definition of science fiction might run as follows: sf is a distinct kind of popular literature telling stories that arise from actual or, more usually,

> THE RESULT IS PROPHETIC SCIENCE FICTION, NOT IN THE SENSE OF AN ACCURATE FORECAST, BUT OF THE STORY'S POWER TO CONVINCE US OF ASPECTS OF THE FUTURE BEYOND OR BEHIND THE OSTENSIBLE FICTIONAL VEHICLE: IT IS, IN EFFECT, A KIND OF ORACLE."

hypothetical new discoveries in science and technology. The science and technology must be convincing enough to invite a certain suspension of the reader's disbelief: this is how sf, as a creation of the later nineteenth century, differs from earlier fiction in which themes such as space travel and encounters with extraterrestrials were presented in a merely fantastic or satirical light. The present essay will propose a broad evolutionary model for the development of science fiction, comprising a prehistorical and at least three historical stages. The points of transition are those at which the genre can be seen to shift from one kind of discourse to another. In all science-fiction stories, scientific and technological innovation has consequential effects, causing changes at the level of the social structure, of individual experience, and in the perceived nature of reality itself. As sf has developed not only has its stock of imagined alternatives continued to multiply, but their status has changed from what I shall call the prophetic to the mythic and to the metaphorical. At present there are signs that the 'metaphorical' phase of science-fictional discourse may be breaking down, just as its predecessors did.

It is true that a periodisation of science fiction along these lines will strike some readers as being offensively schematic and dogmatic: my only excuse is that it may be a stimulus to further thought. Earlier critics to whom I am indebted, notably Darko Suvin and Mark Rose, have given their own versions of the 'philosophical history' of the genre—a philosophical history being a deliberately simplified model, or a hypothesis to be borne in mind when constructing a detailed empirical history. My model tries to foreground the relationship of sf to the

physical sciences, while in the background there is a developing argument about scientific epistemology, and especially about the relationship of science to narrative discourse or, as we say, fictions.

Most early or 'proto' science fiction was the product of writers who stood at some distance from the science of their time and set out to mock, satirise, discredit, or at best to play with it. I am thinking here of Lucian, Godwin, Cyrano de Bergerac, Swift, Voltaire, Mary Shelley, and Poe. Poe comes the nearest to generic science fiction, though his imitations of scientific discourse can never be taken at face value. His cosmological essay 'Eureka' can claim to be a remarkable example of prophetic insight, since its alternately expanding and contracting universe is taken very seriously by some modern cosmologists. But 'Eureka' is also a vast legpull, an exercise in teasing absurdity comparable to the same author's 'Philosophy of Composition' with its satire on literary theory. In each case, Poe sets out to debunk Romantic irrationalism by showing that the mysteries of creation (whether human or divine) are susceptible of a blindingly simple, logical explanation; but the explanation collapses under its own weight, leaving both the mystical and the mechanical outlooks in ruins.

To move from proto-science fiction to the first stage of the genre itself is to move from sophisticated irony and satire to something which at first sounds very much cruder—the mode of literary prophecy. Poe gave one of his most obviously parodic stories the title 'Mellonta Tauta', Greek for 'these things are in the future', but the writers of prophetic science fiction speak of future things and mean what they say. Or rather, since it is a question of literary prophecy—that is, prophecy openly making use of fictional devices—they appear to mean it. There is, as it turns out, an intricate relationship between literary prophecy and parody or irony, which perhaps accounts for Poe's crucial influence on Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. The use of future dates in fiction will illustrate what I have in mind, since every future date is a virtual not an actual date, even though some should be taken much more seriously than others. At one extreme, Poe's character Pundita in 'Mellonta Tauta' writes her long, gossipy letter from the balloon 'Skylark' on 1 April 2848; at the other, Arthur C. Clarke sets the opening chapter of

*Childhood's End* in 1975, but once that date has passed he writes a new opening chapter for the revised edition of the novel. Both editions carry Clarke's well-known prefatory statement to the effect that 'The opinions expressed in this book are not those of the author.' George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was made all the more ominous by its naming of a future year which rapidly became part of the political discourse of the Cold War period, even though '1984' was arrived at by reversing the last two figures of 1948 in which the novel was written; in any case, the book begins with the clocks striking 13, a manifestly satirical touch. What are we to say, then, of a date such as Wells's 802 701 AD in *The Time Machine*? Wells's story is, as he himself said in one of his letters, 'no joke', and the narrative logic just about manages to account for a date so unthinkably far in the future (provided that we do not inquire too closely). The result is prophetic science fiction, not in the sense of an accurate forecast, but of the story's power to convince us of aspects of the future beyond or behind the ostensible fictional vehicle: it is, in effect, a kind of oracle.

From Verne and Wells to Gernsback, Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein and Pohl we have a genre shaped by writers who are almost missionaries for science, and whose fiction proclaims that it has something to divulge about the future. The writers of prophetic sf are futurologists who nevertheless recognise that, in what Frederik Pohl has offered as 'Pohl's Law', 'The more complete and reliable a prediction of the future is, the less it is worth.' Characteristically, prophetic sf writers not only claim scientific authenticity for their visions but seek to promote what Wells called the 'discovery of the future' by means of essays, journalism and popular science writing as well as fiction. They celebrate and warn their readers about things to come. Taken literally and in detail, their prophecies are undoubtedly false, but then every true terrestrial prophet is also a false one. What prophetic sf writers do know about the future is that (to adapt George Orwell's comment on Wells) it is not going to be what respectable people imagine. And this implies that prophetic science fiction will be in trouble once its predictions of scientific and technological advance have started to become respectable and commonplace.

While many of Jules Verne's best-known titles speak of travel in spatial dimensions, Wells's

titles often refer to travel in time, or rather to space-time. Verne's archetypal hero is Captain Nemo of the submarine *Nautilus*; Wells's is the Time Traveller. The Wellsian model of prophetic science fiction presupposes a Positivistic space-time continuum in which natural diversity is accounted for and brought under the rule of universal laws such as those of evolution and thermodynamics. Though living matter is extraordinarily plastic, the universe is a closed system of matter and energy without supernatural interference or any possibility of regeneration from outside. Space and time were bound together from the late nineteenth century onwards by the measurement of the speed of light and by the concept of the light-year. The future, like outer space, was waiting to be discovered, even though the future would be partly moulded by human choices. Within the 'classical' space-time universe which Wells called the 'Universe Rigid', the scope for human freedom of action faces severe constraints. According to Sir James Jeans, the sun is 'melting away like an ice-berg in the Gulf Stream', and humanity 'is probably destined to die of cold, while the greater part of the substance of the universe still remains too hot for life to obtain a footing. . . . [T]he end of the journey cannot be other than universal death'. Prophetic science fiction explores both the mysteries and the certainties of this scientific, material universe.

To do so it relies, above all, on the spaceship, an ethereal version of Jules Verne's submarine enabling the science fiction hero to travel across the space-time universe at just below (or, in many cases, far above) the speed of light. The spaceship as dream-vehicle gave way, in the mid-twentieth century, to the technological realities of NASA and Cape Canaveral (though sf writers have felt constrained to keep several jumps ahead of NASA's transport technology). At much the same time, a fundamental change in cosmology led to the general adoption of the expanding-universe theory according to which, far from inhabiting an entropic steady-state system, everything is perpetually getting farther away. Where Sir James Jeans in his best-selling account of *The Mysterious Universe* had been preoccupied with an apocalyptic future event, the 'Heat-Death of the Universe', physical speculation now came to centre upon a founding moment in the past, the Big Bang which initiated universal expansion. Science fiction has been deeply affected by this switch of attention from the end of everything to its beginning.

In the 1920s and the 1930s, the reaction against prophetic science fiction began in the work of 'space fantasists' like David Lindsay and C. S. Lewis. Lewis wrote that the best sf stories were not 'satiric or prophetic' but belonged to what he called 'fantastic or mythopoetic literature in general.' In the post-war decades, Lewis's view of sf gradually took precedence over Heinlein's much narrower conception of it as 'Realistic Future-Scene Fiction.' Soon science fiction began to repeat its 'prophetic' material and also to borrow quite consciously from modern fantasy (it had always had fantastic elements, of course), leading to a general shift from the prophetic to the mythopoetic mode. (At the same time, earlier science fiction had to be reinterpreted in accordance with the new paradigm, so that Bernard Bergonzi, for example, would describe Wells's science fictions as 'ironic myths.') I would count Ray Bradbury, Alfred Bester, James Blish and Walter M. Miller among the mythopoetic writers, but the earliest major sf novelist in this mode was probably Olaf Stapledon. Admittedly, his position is ambiguous. *Last and First Men* is in many ways a standard work of prophetic sf, with its chronological tables and its narrator addressing us from the far future. Stapledon's preface to *Last and First Men*, however, states that his 'attempt to see the human race in its cosmic setting' is an 'essay in myth creation', not a prophecy. His later book *Star Maker*, where the hero's journey through the space-time cosmos leads to a vision of creation imbued with post-Christian mysticism, is straightforwardly mythical. From the Sixties onwards, it became commonplace to speak of science fiction as a 'contemporary mythology', a phrase which hints at the hostility to science which is (it seems to me) latent in Stapledon's writings, as well as being explicit in Lewis. The sf critic Patricia Warrick defines myth as a 'complex of stories which a culture regards as demonstrating the inner meaning of the universe and of human life'; here the body of scientific knowledge and speculation is reduced to the level of scriptures and stories, so that 'scientism' as it is now known takes its place alongside other competing belief-systems, just as some Americans want to give creationism the same weight as evolutionism in the teaching of biology.

Where Warrick claims that the scientific model of the universe itself functions like a myth, Ursula Le Guin sees mythmaking as the special province of writers and artists. Le Guin argues on Jungian grounds that storytelling connects scientific methods and values to our collective dreams and archetypes; it is science fiction, not science itself, that deserves the title of a 'modern mythology.' In practice, once science fiction became consciously mythopoetic it began to indulge in generic self-repetition and a growing carelessness towards scientific facts. The imaginary Space Age universe crossed by magical faster-than-light spaceships and full of lifelike robots and contactable intelligent aliens has remained a staple of sf (and of the popular consciousness of science) long after it ceased to resemble a plausible scientific future. From a collection of increasingly commonplace prophecies SF had become a nostalgic theme-park of futures past.

But then in the 1960s, as Brian Aldiss claimed, 'SF discovered the Present', and the future was increasingly regarded as a metaphor for the present. Aldiss and Le Guin, among others, have frequently asserted that the genre's portrayal of the future of space travel, alternative societies and alternative life-forms is at bottom metaphorical. Much of New Wave and feminist science fiction is apparently metaphorical rather than prophetic or mythopoetic in intent. By 1970 the academic study of sf had begun, so that we can track the redefinition of science fiction as metaphor through academic theory as well as through the pronouncements of practising novelists. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer had argued that myth and metaphor were radically linked, and in a writer such as Le Guin, and in an early theorist such as Robert M. Philmus, there is a kind of slippage from myth to metaphor. On the other hand, Darko Suvin rejects talk of the artist as mythmaker and offers a fully worked-out theory of sf as a metaphorical mode: its stories, he says, are not prophecies but analogies or parables. The redefinition of science fiction as metaphor coincided with the politicisation of sf and its criticism in the Sixties and Seventies, though in my view it has served a primarily contemplative rather than an activist politics. The envisioned alternatives of metaphorical sf are fantastic and utopian possibilities, parallel worlds serving what Sarah Lefanu has called 'interrogative' rather than predictive functions. An interrogative or dialogical function is precisely what has traditionally been claimed for the literary genre of utopia. Metaphorical theory views science fiction not as an alternative to utopia (which is how the prophetic writers from Wells to Heinlein had seen it), but as one of the contemporary forms of utopian writing. This understanding of science fiction as a metaphorical mode is still dominant today, but its limitations have become increasingly evident. The metaphorical theory of the genre redefines sf as 'speculative fiction' or 'speculative fantasy', but it cannot in the long run explain why these speculations should be based on science.

**II**

Each of the three phases of science fiction I have outlined can be roughly correlated with a set of contemporary philosophical or metaphysical assumptions. Each set of contemporary assumptions constitutes an ideology or *Weltanschauung* exerting a gravitational pull on the fiction that comes under its influence. In this sense, prophetic science fiction belongs with Positivism and scientific materialism; science fiction as myth implies either neoChristianity or a pragmatic cultural relativism drawing on psychoanalytical and anthropological insights; while science fiction as metaphor tends to imply a post-structuralist 'conventionalism' or 'anti-foundationalism' denying or downgrading the referential aspects of fiction. In this view, statements no longer have a truth content, so that it would be absurd to judge imagined futures by their potential correspondence with any 'real' future. Prophetic sf is a propaganda device which is meaningful only in relation to the discursive present in which it arises.

Admittedly, it is tendentious to assert that theoretical defences of sf as a metaphorical mode imply a conventionalist view of reality. To do so they must argue not merely, in Le Guin's words, that 'all fiction is metaphor' but that all knowledge and description is so too. Darko Suvin's influential theory of science fiction is critical at this point, since Suvin in his best known work insists on a rigorous distinction between cognitive sf and supposedly non-cognitive fantasy. According to Suvin, not only is sf a mode of metaphor, but 'true' metaphor is by definition cognitive—so that sf's cognitive status is established with all the force of a syllogism. The theoretical defence of this assertion is to be found in Suvin's *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction*, where he elaborates on the more

programmatic and manifesto-like statements to be found in his earlier *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*.

In *Positions and Presuppositions* Suvin quotes Paul Ricoeur's aphorism that 'Metaphor is to poetic language as model is to scientific language.' The equivalence is already suspiciously neat, and if poetic language and scientific language are both regarded as cognitive, then metaphor approximates to model. This is plausible to the extent that scientific theorising involves elements of metaphorisation and analogy or model-building; but Suvin describes not only scientific models but metaphors in general as 'heuristic fictions' which have a cognitive function. His intention, undoubtedly, is to turn post-structuralist scepticism inside out by arguing for the cognitive potential of all human creativity whether poetic or scientific, rational or emotional, or conceptual or non-conceptual. But in his discussion of sf as 'Metaphor, Parable and Chronotope' it is no longer clear to what extent so-called knowledge, or cognition, relies on a truth content.

Like other theorists of metaphor, Suvin relies on an apparently commonsense distinction between the properties of the 'true' or 'full-fledged' metaphor (equivalent to Cassirer's 'genuine "radical metaphor"') and low-grade or dead metaphors. This is crucial for the cognitive theory of metaphor, since all modern linguistic theorists agree on the ubiquity of metaphor. Nietzsche's assertion that in language itself there are no literal terms, only metaphors in various states of decay, has been echoed not merely by Derrida and de Man, but by a Positivist theorist such as I. A. Richards, who has described metaphor as the 'omnipresent principle of language.' If we say that all language also has a cognitive function we have, no doubt, stumbled upon a truth of sorts, but it is a truth that undermines any claim for a special cognitive status for scientific language, let alone for science fiction. Suvin's well-known view of science fiction as a literature of 'cognitive estrangement' implies a neat pyramid of discourse with ordinary language at the bottom and cognitive (scientific) thought at the apex; but the linguistic theory of metaphor leads us to view language as a seamless fabric with a repeated pattern in which theories, models, analogies, and 'ordinary' language are constantly changing places relative to one another. To say that sf, or any kind of fiction, is metaphorical is then to say nothing worth saying at all. Suvin, though well aware of this danger, has difficulty in extricating himself from it.

Fully-fledged metaphors or heuristic fictions, he argues, must fulfil the criteria of coherence, richness and novelty. Consciously or unconsciously, these three conditions seem to echo the scholastic triad of *integritas*, *consonantia* and *claritas*, proposed by St Thomas Aquinas and familiar to modern readers from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. For Aquinas and for Stephen Dedalus, however, these were the requirements for beauty, not for truth or cognitive value. Suvin considers and rather perfunctorily rejects a fourth criterion, that of reference to reality, on the grounds that it is already implicit in the requirements for richness and novelty. Just so did Dedalus argue that *claritas* was the same as *quidditas*, the 'whatness' of a thing. This is an economy too far, since it amounts to saying, like Keats's Grecian Urn, that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'. Suvin then distinguishes between metaphor as such, and narrative fictions which he regards as extended metaphors; the latter, he says, should be capable of verification or falsification, though the point is left undeveloped. Given the 'difference between brief and long writings', the criteria for distinguishing 'run-of-the-mill from optimal SF' are analogous to those for low-grade versus true metaphor. It is evident from this that Suvin no longer sees sf as a special kind of narrative exhibiting cognitive estrangement; rather, all worthwhile and, as he puts it, liberating human thought and creativity is (a) cognitive and (b) estranged. The purpose of such creativity is, to quote from a more recent essay, to 'redescribe the known world and open up new possibilities of intervening into it.' Perhaps, however, a verified or validated narrative (or metaphor, or scientific model) is no longer usefully analysed simply as an instance of metaphor. We should regard it, instead, as containing an actual or potential truth statement.

## III

If sf's only distinguishing feature is that it serves 'interrogative functions' by means of its portrayal of analogical models or parallel worlds, then it is destined to disappear as a separate form, becoming in effect a subdivision of the novel of ideas. It is quite possible that the century of science fiction is over and that this form of

expression born of late nineteenth-century scientific materialism has now run its course. (On the other hand, cultural history is littered with the premature obituaries of artistic forms.) The immediate cause of the genre's disappearance would be that science fiction understood as a metaphorical mode no longer has any necessary connection or concern with contemporary scientific developments.

If science fiction as metaphor is more or less played out, then it may be time to examine whether and under what conditions a return to science fiction as prophecy is possible. The genre's popular media image is still one of lurid anticipation and comic-book futurology, even though the sf community finds this embarrassingly naive and politically distasteful. Nothing is more guaranteed to excite the derision of the sf critic than the fact that Wells is still admired for predicting the tank and the atomic bomb, Clarke for the communications satellite, and Capek and Asimov for their robots. Some of the most plausibly prophetic recent science fiction is to be found in J. G. Ballard's scenarios of the end of the Space Age—but Ballard is famous, or deserves to be famous, as the one writer of his time who dared to contradict the commonplaces of respectable technocratic prophecy.

There is a trivial sense in which all scientific theories are predictive, since they assert that the regularities observed in the past will hold good in the future. But much of the most interesting scientific speculation focuses on unique (or apparently unique) events like the Big Bang, the Heat-Death of the Universe, or the course of evolution on Earth. For these events to appeal to the prophetic imagination they must have consequences in the future, and to appeal to the fictional imagination as we know it they must in principle be observable by human beings. The great advantage of the 'classical' space-time universe was the possibility of travelling around it and seeing things that had not yet happened, but even there what was directly observed would usually be a symbol or portent rather than the reality—like Wells's solar eclipse at the end of *The Time Machine*, or Clarke's Rama.

The modern counterpart to Wells's use of an eclipse to symbolise the heat-death of the sun would be a symbolic vision of the Big Bang, which is something that several writers have attempted. But where the end of the world naturally fits the prophetic mode, the beginning can

perhaps best be represented as parody, as we see in Italo Calvino's marvellous short story 'All at one point' (from *Cosmicomics*). 'Naturally, we were all there', Calvino's narrator begins, 'Where else could we have been?'. What follows is an all-too-human nostalgia exercise, the loss of a primal utopia of primitive communism (written, as it happens, by an ex-Communist). Other aspects of contemporary cosmological speculation apart from the Big Bang pose an enormous challenge to direct fictional observation, even of the symbolic kind. According to string theory, for example, the universe not only contains antimatter and black holes but has ten dimensions, six of which cannot be observed. Its fundamental building-blocks are quanta which may be conceived as either matter or energy. Meanwhile, it seems that the best chance of finding traces of extraterrestrial life is not in outer space, but in tiny fragments of meteorite on the earth's surface. Although men have been to the moon and landed a camera on Mars, and although some physicists now reckon that a time machine is theoretically possible, today's universe apparently offers no more opportunity for physical exploration than the universe of 100 years ago. We can detect more of it, but we know far more about the difficulties of actually reaching it.

Scott Bukatman in his book *Terminal Identity* argues that the Space Age has given way to an Information Age in which technology has become largely invisible, and space has been interiorised. We think of the atomic nucleus as a kind of miniature solar system, while the invention of the microchip and the spread of personal computing have led to the notions of cyberspace and of microcosmic, invisible and virtual spaces. Nevertheless, we continue to model the informational universe on the physical universe. Not only was it an sf writer who invented the term cyberspace, but science fiction and computer journalism have invested very heavily in space-time metaphors, conferring on virtual space some of the sense of challenge and adventure formerly associated with outer space (just as outer space in its time was invested with the language of geographical exploration). Hence the ubiquitous ideas of the 'net' and the 'super-highway', and Bukatman's pun on the word 'terminal', as in 'terminal identity fictions'.

John Clute has written that 'We no longer feel that we penetrate the future; futures penetrate us.' Bukatman speaks of 'our presence in the

future'. The presence of the future has become a central paradox of postmodernist theory, as in Baudrillard's essay entitled 'The Year 2000 has already happened.' It is not very enlightening to describe such pronouncements as metaphorical—more significant, perhaps, is that they seem to pivot unstably between the modes of prophecy and parody. The same might be said of the literary applications of chaos theory, which is described by its proponents as a new cosmology overturning the rigid assumptions of the thermodynamic and evolutionary spacetime continuum. Scientists see chaos as driving the universe towards a more complex kind of order, but at any particular time the world of nature is theorised as being like the British weather, 'predictable in its very unpredictability.' Speculative scientific developments such as chaos theory and string theory are described by John Horgan as 'ironic science'—science which does not converge on the truth but which 'resembles literary criticism or philosophy or theology in that it offers points of view, opinions, which are, at best, "interesting", which provoke further comment.' Ironic science must necessarily find its counterpart in ironic science fiction.

If sf must respond to the aspects of contemporary knowledge that I have all too superficially touched upon, it is also affected by its now entrenched status as an established, not a new, genre with a ready-made audience and an organised body of academic interpreters. If the more successful popular sf (and above all sf cinema) now inclines to irony rather than prophecy, it also apparently has no need to prophesy, being readily available as raw material for the production of a kind of criticism and theory which itself has prophetic pretensions. If the old sf writers were also futurologists, there is little need for today's writers to double as cultural theorists, since literary critics will do the job for them. (Not only was cyberpunk instantly canonised, but if it had not existed cultural theory would surely have had to invent it, and some people have argued that cultural theory did invent it.) Popular sf no longer claims to be prophetic, but it feeds into the 'SF of theory' which does claim to speak prophetically or at least, with a parody of prophecy.

**IV**

In *The War of the Worlds*, H. G. Wells reminds us that 'No one would have believed' in the last years of the nineteenth century we were being watched by extraterrestrial intelligences: 'And early in the twentieth century came the great disillusionment.' Since then we have had a century full of fictions of galactic imperialism, of colonies in space, and of meetings with (and massacres of) intelligent and interestingly-gendered extraterrestrials; but no one (I suggest) can take these fictions seriously any more. If science fiction is conceived as metaphor or as myth it does not matter too much if the same old stuff goes on pouring out, but for the fact of *our* great disillusionment. And early in the twenty-first century … ? Not, I hope, a new war of the worlds, but perhaps a new science fiction, prophetic or parodic, keeping one step ahead of the cultural theorists, exploring both mysteries and certainties?

**Source:** Patrick Parrinder, "Science Fiction: Metaphor, Myth or Prophecy?" in *Science Fiction, Critical Frontiers*, edited by Karen Sayer and John Moore, St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 23–34.

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# *Surrealism*

The strength of the surrealist movement can be attributed in large part to one man, French poet André Breton, who helped found the movement after World War I in France. Surrealism was a reaction to Dadaism, which was itself a reaction to the so-called logic that dadaists believed had caused the war. Surrealism, however, sought a more constructive way to rebel against rational thought than the more negative Dadaism. Drawing on the psychoanalytic studies of Sigmund Freud, the surrealists tried to expand the mind's potential by reconciling the apparently contradictory states of dream and reality. In a series of sometimes dangerous experiments, Breton and others attempted to put themselves in a hallucinatory state, in which they believed they could tap their subconscious minds directly and extract pure thoughts, untainted by the conscious mind and its rational constraints. Dadaists and surrealists were also fascinated with suicide and idealized this act, argues critic Leonid Livak—some in theory, some in fact. Since the surrealists prized individual revelation over conscious forms, themes varied among the poets, although many wrote about some form of love or nature.

While Breton and Philippe Soupault wrote *The Magnetic Fields*, considered by many to be the first truly surrealist text, in 1919, it was not until 1924, when Breton published his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, that the movement was officially founded. Breton ruled the group like a dictator, and his strict adherence to surrealist principles

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1919
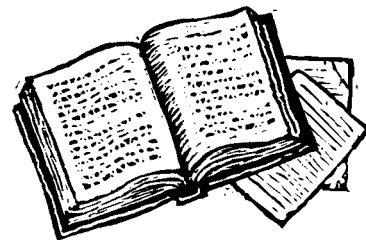
led to many expulsions and defections from the group. Nevertheless, the surrealists, who also included Paul Éluard and Robert Desnos, flourished for the next two decades, until the outbreak of World War II. Although the majority of the group's members were poets, some tried their hand at prose as well. Breton's novel *Nadja* was one of the most successful attempts. Surrealism inspired related movements in painting, sculpture, drama, and film, and has had a lasting influence on the creative arts as a whole.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### *Louis Aragon (1897–1982)*
Louis Aragon was born October 3, 1897, in Paris, France. As one of the leading proponents of Dadaism and Surrealism, Aragon helped Breton and others to inspire creative freedom in the arts. Like that of many other surrealists, Aragon's poetry was initially published in the journal *Litterature*, which Aragon helped found and edit with Breton and Soupault. However, Aragon's most famous works are his novels, including *Paris Peasant*. Aragon and the other surrealists joined the French Communist Party in 1930. Although the surrealists left the party five years later after witnessing Stalin's atrocities, Aragon rejoined the party, renounced Surrealism, and produced mainly political works for several years. He attempted to write other works later in his career, but at that point, most critics only knew him for his politically oriented fictions. Aragon died December 24, 1982, in Paris.

### *André Breton (1896–1966)*
Although he had help founding the Surrealism movement, in many ways André Breton acted alone. Born February 19, 1896, in Tinchebray, France, Breton was a medical student when he was drafted into World War I. There he served in the psychiatric wards, where he began his studies in neurology and psychology. Disillusioned by the horrors of war, Breton joined the dadaists at the war's end but left to start the surrealist movement, which he saw as a more constructive response to the war than Dadaism. He experimented avidly with automatic writing and other self-induced hypnotic and hallucinatory states attempting to reach the subconscious mind. Although he had founded and edited the journal *Litterature* with Aragon and Soupault in 1919, it
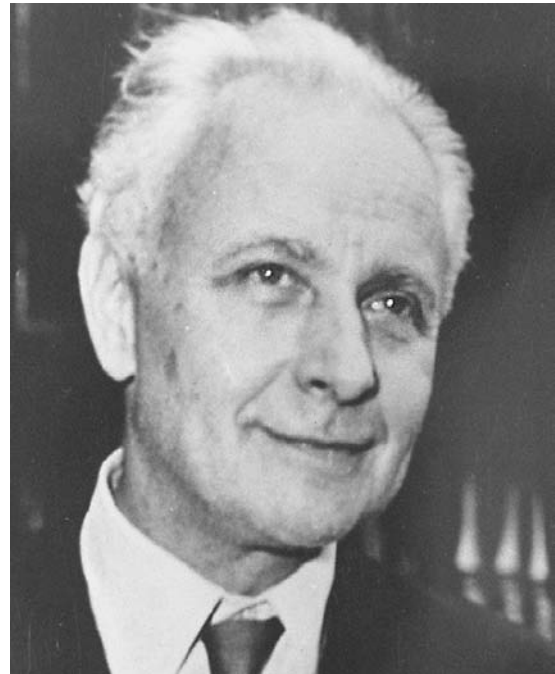


*Louis Aragon* (The Library of Congress)

was not until 1924 that he published his first of three manifestos of Surrealism. In the first manifesto, he laid out the rules that would-be surrealists should follow to tap into their subconscious. Breton was the movement's main promoter and he ran the group with a dictator-like control, expelling anyone who did not play by his rules. With his influence, surrealist painters such as Dalí achieved greater recognition through exhibitions. In 1930, Breton led the surrealists in joining the French Communist Party, although they did not stay long once they saw the atrocities Stalin was committing in the name of communism. When World War II broke out, Breton was interrogated by the Nazis about his activities, at which point he moved first to the French colony of Martinique, then to the United States, where he spent most of the war years. Breton died of a heart attack on September 28, 1966, in France.

### *René Crevel (1900–1935)*
René Crevel was born August 10, 1900, in Paris. Crevel's childhood was not an easy one; his father committed suicide when Crevel was only fourteen years old. In 1921 Crevel joined the surrealist movement but was kicked out by Breton in 1923 for being homosexual. In 1926, Crevel was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He rejoined

the surrealist movement in 1929 in an effort to bring communists and surrealists closer. Crevel committed suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning on June 18, 1935. He was driven to despair following a conference at which he failed to unite communists and surrealists, and, in fact, some members of both groups came to blows. He was also in ill health. Throughout his life, Crevel struggled with his sexual identity, a topic he explored in his novels.

### Robert Desnos (1900–1945)

Robert Desnos was born July 4, 1900, in Paris, France. He was published as a poet in his teens, but as an adult, he originally worked as a journalist before joining the surrealists in the 1920s. Of the entire group, Desnos was recognized as having the best ability to put himself in the trance required for automatic writing, a fact that Breton noted with pride in his first *Manifesto*. Desnos, like some other surrealists, pursued a flamboyant lifestyle that included sexual promiscuity and experimentation with drugs. He was also in love with a well-known singer, Yvonne George, and he wrote about her in various romantic poems. However, he is most remembered for his novel *Liberty or Love!*. Following the publication of this novel, Desnos pursued a more stable life. He got married, reduced his involvement with the surrealists, and even wrote his own manifesto in an attempt to win control of the surrealist movement from Breton, attempting to break Breton's formal structure. The coup failed, Desnos was expelled from the group, and he went back to his former job as a journalist. He turned to writing essays, radio scripts, film critiques, and even more traditional forms of poetry, which were looked upon with disapproval by the surrealists. Desnos worked with the French Resistance against the Nazis, was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. He died of typhoid on June 8, 1945, in the camp at Terezin, Czechoslovakia a few weeks after it was liberated.

### Paul Éluard (1895–1952)

Paul Éluard, the pen name of Eugène Grindel, was born December 14, 1895, in Saint-Denis, France. Éluard contracted tuberculosis as a child and spent two years in a sanatorium, where he started writing poetry. When World War I began, Éluard joined the French military, first serving as a hospital orderly, then fighting in the trenches. After the war, Éluard met Breton and others in the dadaist movement and helped to develop Surrealism. Éluard was extremely prolific, publishing more than seventy books in his lifetime. However, it was his early volumes of poetry, including *Capital of Sorrow*, published in 1926, that helped to establish his reputation as a poet. After the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, Éluard's writings became more political, and by World War II, he had adopted a pro-socialist attitude. After the war, Éluard followed the lead of Aragon, denouncing Surrealism in favor of communism. His devotion to Stalin was so strong he wrote a poetic tribute to him. Because of his political affiliations, Éluard was denied a U.S. visa. He died of a heart attack on November 18, 1952, in Charenton-le-Pont, France.

### Pierre Reverdy (1889–1960)

Pierre Reverdy was born September 11, 1889, in Narbonne in southern France to a family of sculptors. He moved to Paris in 1910 where he became involved with Dadaism, Cubism, and Surrealism. His friends included Guillaume Apollinaire, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse. He published his first book of poetry, *Poèmes en Prose*, in 1915. Reverdy wrote short prose poems. He was prolific and recognized in his lifetime as a talented poet by his fellow surrealists. He was also a very private person. Despite this, argues critic Jennifer Pap, Reverdy maintained a poignant, pained awareness of the world around him. In 1917, Reverdy, Apollinaire, and Max Jacobs founded *Nord-Sud*, an important surrealist monthly journal. In 1926, Reverdy sought seclusion and left Paris to live near a monastery in Solesmes. He converted to Catholicism and continued to write poetry until his death on June 17, 1960. Two English translations of Reverdy's poetry appeared in 2007: *Prose Poems*, translated by Ron Padgett and *Haunted House*, translated by John Ashbery.

### Philippe Soupault (1897–1990)

Philippe Soupault was born August 2, 1897, in Chaville, France. After serving in World War I, Soupault joined forces with Breton. Although the surrealist movement was not officially founded until 1924, in 1919, Soupault coauthored *The Magnetic Fields* with Breton, a work considered by many to be the first surrealist text. It is unfortunate that many people remember him for this achievement alone, since Soupault was one of the most active members of

the group. Soupault was one of the coeditors on the journal *Litterature*. Also, while he still embraced the ideas behind Surrealism and incorporated juxtapositions of bizarre images into his work like the other surrealists, Soupault's poetry was noticeably more structured. Soupault left the group in the mid-1920s and traveled and wrote until 1938, when he moved to Tunisia. In the capital city of Tunis, he worked in radio and was outspoken against Hitler and the Nazis, which got him fired. Four years later, he was arrested in France for disseminating antifascist propaganda and was sentenced to six months in prison, where he wrote a psychological study of his fellow prisoners. Soupault died March 11, 1990, in Paris, France.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Babylon
René Crevel's surrealist novel *Babylon* was published in French in 1957; an English translation (by Kay Boyle) did not appear until 1985, fifty years after Crevel's death by suicide. This novel, far from ambiguous, tells the story of a broken family: the husband abandons his wife and daughter. The wife's father, Grandpa, is a positivist, someone who believes everything can be explained rationally; he determines that his daughter should remarry. The new fiancé is very handsome—but Grandma runs off with him instead, puzzling Grandpa even further. Crevel's purpose was to affect a critique of positivism, which he does in a very funny, readable book.

### Capital of Pain
Like Aragon, Paul Éluard's greatest works were written before his writings became more political in nature. *Capital of Pain*, originally published in 1926, is a case in point. Although Éluard had published volumes of poetry, this was one of his first volumes of surrealist poetry, and it helped to establish his reputation as a poet and bring attention to the surrealist movement. In *Capital of Pain*, Éluard focuses on two, diametrically opposed ideas—love and loneliness—and expounds on each with a passion and intensity for which he became famous. Invoking images of the individual and the universal, *Capital of Pain* was a key formative work in the poet's career. Of all of the French surrealists, Éluard was praised by critics

as the most talented, and works like *Capital of Pain* have continued to receive favorable attention over the years.

### Liberty or Love!
*Liberty or Love!*, Desnos's surrealist novel, was censured by a French court because of its graphic nature and the eroticism in some passages. The novel, first published in 1927, is like other surrealist novels in that it has a loose structure. The story relates a hazy series of events in which lovers Corsair Sanglot and Louise Lame drift in and out of each other's lives. Characters pop in and out of the narrative as if in a dream. The novel, which was much descriptive detail, was noted by critics for its dreamlike qualities. It was first translated into English in 1994, at which time it received favorable reviews.

### The Magnetic Fields
The story behind the genesis of *The Magnetic Fields* (1920) is one of intense, and one could say, fanatical commitment to a cause. In 1919, Breton and Soupault were performing a number of experiments, attempting to tap into their unconscious minds through techniques such as automatic writing. At one point, they induced themselves into a hypnotic trance and began a writing session that lasted eight days. The output, a series of prose poems, was published initially in 1919 in their journal *Litterature*. *The Magnetic Fields*, considered by many to be the first surrealist text, was important to the movement's development.

### Manifesto of Surrealism
Breton's first *Manifesto of Surrealism,* published in 1924, met with opposition. The manifesto began by criticizing current forms of writing such as the novel in very abrasive and unflattering ways, so it is no wonder that it was not liked. Although the term Surrealism was coined by his deceased friend Guillaume Apollinaire, Breton claimed (in *Manifesto of Surrealism*) the title for his movement and offered an official definition:

> Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

*Andre Breton, Paul Éluard, Tristan Tzara, and Benjamin Peret (© Corbis)*

The manifesto featured various other items, including a list of names of the people Breton considered surrealists, an in-depth description for how to perform the method of automatic writing, and several examples illustrating what Surrealism is. Breton followed this work with two other manifestos and several other works that further defined the goals and ideals of the surrealists.

### Paris Peasant

Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* was originally published in 1926. The surrealist novel employs two of the surrealists's favorite inspirational locations: a passageway at the Paris Opera and the Buttes-Chaumont Park. *Paris Peasant* was well received, especially by critics, who praised the novel's ability to mix realistic elements of the Paris locations with the surrealist elements of Aragon's created world. Much of the critics' favorable attention stemmed from the fact that they were used to surrealists who did not base their prose or novels on real places—which were harder to produce through automatic writing—and so Aragon's novel was a welcomed change. The novel also contained Aragon's own definition of Surrealism, which differed from Breton's definition in his *Manifesto of Surrealism*. Aragon

emphasized (in *Manifesto of Surrealism*) the use of the image in a random and passionate way and believed that each image forced him "to revise the Universe."

### THEMES

### *Love*

One of the favorite themes of the French surrealists was love, particularly the ability of love to overcome reason. One of the most striking examples of this is in a scene from Desnos's prose work *Deuil pour Deuil*. Desnos places the narrator in a desert city of uninhabited ruins along a river. "Despite our anxiousness, no one, no one at all, came to us," the narrator says. The "us" implies that somebody is with him, although later in the poem he admits that he "was always alone in reality." The narrator blindly searches for love. "Strange sicknesses, curious customs, bell-tolling love, where have you led me? In these stones I find no trace of what I seek." He cannot find the love for which he is looking and is trapped by the "curious customs" of love, which overcome his reason.

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- The surrealists's core philosophy involved the use of automatic writing and other methods to attempt to bypass the conscious mind and tap into the subconscious. Close your eyes and try to clear your mind of all thought, then open your eyes and write a poem, writing down the first thoughts that come into your mind. Write a report on whether you think you tapped into your subconscious mind.

- Communism has a complex history, involving many countries. Research three important events in the history of communism and write a short paper about these events, explaining how the events came about and what effect they had on communism and the world at large.

- The casualties of World War I were due in a large part to trench warfare the Western Front. Research the origins of trench warfare, including how and when each side created their trenches, and what effect fighting in the trenches had on soldiers. Using this information, write a few sample journal pages from the perspective of a soldier in the trenches.

- André Breton was one of many writers and artists captured by the Germans in World War II and interrogated. Eventually he was let go and fled to the United States. Find another writer or artist who was interrogated by German forces during the war and write a one-page biography about him or her.

- Surrealism has influenced many other arts since it was founded in the 1920s, including commercial arts including advertising. Find an advertisement from the last decade you feel has a surrealist quality and write a short report explaining why.

The narrator has mirage-like visions of caravans of beautiful women, whom he "waits for ... tormented," but they turn out to be "old dust covered women," if they even exist at all. One suspects not, especially when he later sees "planes without pilots encircled with rounds of smoke." The planes land and three women get out, but at the end of the scene the women are gone, and the narrator repeats a variation of the opening lines of the scene, implying that he is in fact imprisoned in this dream world, where love is driving him mad.

## The Human Body

Surrealists were noted for their descriptions of the human body, particularly the female body. Although these depictions are sometimes done graphically in a sexual manner, at other times, the surrealists describe parts of the body with a neutral attitude. A good example of the latter is Breton's poem "My Wife with Her Wood-Fire Hair." In the poem, Breton starts at his wife's hair and slowly works his way down her body, through her "thoughts of heatsparks" and "eyebrows like the edge of a swallow's nest," to her "champagne shoulders" and "fingers of cut hay." Each example is a vivid picture of a particular part of his wife's anatomy, and with rare exception, each image is a unique creation that sets up a picture in the reader's mind. One can envision his wife's thoughts, for example, as literal "heatsparks" that flare with electricity around her brain.

## Nature

The surrealists also incorporate nature-related images in their poetry. These generally take one of two forms: isolated images representing various aspects of nature, or larger images of nature's elements. Both types can be seen in Éluard's poem "You Rise Up." An example of the first type appears halfway through the poem when the poet writes, "You sing night hymns on the strings of the rainbow." A rainbow is a positive symbol of nature, which is consistent with the overall tone of the poem, in which Éluard sings the praises of women.

As for the second type of nature, Éluard includes three of the four elements—water, earth, and fire—elsewhere in the poem. He starts off with the two lines: "You rise up the water unfolds / You lie down the water opens." The elemental image of water often implies life, and in this case, the poet is remarking about how women are part of the process of creating life and so are one with the life-giving water, which closes and opens to accommodate the woman in the poem. This idea is reinforced in the rest of the poem first through the use

of earth: "You are the earth taking root / And on which everything is built," then through fire:

> You sacrifice time
> To the eternal youth of the exact flame
> Which veils nature in reproducing it.

In the earth image, the woman takes root, providing a solid foundation from which to build humanity. In the fire image, the woman sacrifices the majority of her life to the bearing and raising of children, a cycle that repeats itself eternally. It should be noted, however, that even though this poem seems to make use of traditional contexts for images, in many cases, the word a surrealist uses does not always match its traditional meaning.

## STYLE

### Automatic Writing

In his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton laid out the methods of the would-be surrealist, including a technique called automatic writing, which the surrealists used to try to obtain the most pure information, free from the bindings of rational thought. "Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can," says Breton. He advises people to "write quickly" about whatever comes into their minds, and "fast enough so that you will not remember what you're writing and be tempted to reread what you have written." Breton also notes that of all of the surrealists, Desnos was the group's best practitioner, and that "Desnos *speaks surrealist* at will."

### Imagery

Poets use language in their works to create different kinds of images, in a literal or figurative manner. An image can represent physical objects, emotions, metaphysical ideas, and virtually anything else that can be experienced in the real world through one or more of the five senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing, or taste. A literal image is conveyed in straight language that does not imply a hidden meaning. For example, in Paul Éluard's poem "What the Laborer Says Is Always Beside the Point," the second line reads, "A man on a bench in a street who avoids the crowd." There is nothing ambiguous about this image. As each separate part of the line is read, the image in the reader's mind becomes more concrete.

Much of surrealist poetry relies on figurative images—images conveyed by metaphors, similes, or other forms of figurative language—all of which employ ordinary words in a manner that imparts a new meaning. For example, from the same poem by Éluard:

> There are demolitions sadder than a penny
> Indescribable and yet the sun moves away from
>     them singing
> While the sky dances and makes its honey.

Éluard's language has specific meanings when looked at in context. The "demolitions" caused by war are more depressing than a penny, which represents the lowest monetary value in currency, and so is almost worthless, as are these demolished buildings. While the buildings are so destroyed that they are "indescribable," their darkness does not effect the sun. The sun, a bright object that is usually given positive connotations—in this case it sings—continues to move away, or rise and set, as it always has, taking no notice of the demolished buildings. Likewise for the dancing sky (also a positive feeling), which continues to make its honey, or rain, as it always has. Éluard uses figurative language to personify—or attribute human feelings to—inanimate objects like buildings and natural objects like the sun and sky, conveying a sense of the inevitable nature of war and its ineffectiveness in the grand scheme of things.

### Juxtaposition

In addition to imagery, the surrealists relied heavily on the positioning of their words to create the effects that they sought. In many cases, poets would place unrelated, often contradictory words next to each other in an attempt to achieve an image that reconciled dreams with reality. This device led to some very bizarre images. For example, in Robert Desnos's poem "Meeting," he writes:

> A very learned doctor sews the hands of the
>     praying woman
> assuring her she will sleep.
> A very skilful cook mixes poisons in my plate
> and assures me I will laugh.

These words are obviously juxtaposed so that they contradict each other. Doctors normally heal, so if they sew somebody's hands together, that person will likely cry out in pain, not go to sleep. Likewise, if somebody is poisoned, they are not likely to laugh, they are likely to die. However, even though the lines do not make sense, they create images in the reader's mind and convey a sense of betrayal. The speaker of these lines is being ill-treated, although he or she is assured by the respected professionals that everything is

going to be all right. One possible interpretation is that the speaker, like those who were asked to support World War I, is being duped by the government—the learned doctors who rely on logic—and being fed poisonous lies that the war will be over quickly and that citizens will rejoice when that happens.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Futurism

Futurism was a flamboyant literary and artistic movement that developed in France, Italy, and Russia from 1908 through the 1920s and is an immediate precursor to Surrealism. Futurist theater and poetry abandoned traditional literary forms. In their place, followers of the movement attempted to achieve total freedom of expression through bizarre imagery and deformed or newly invented words. The Futurists were self-consciously modern artists who attempted to incorporate the appearances and sounds of modern life into their work. Futurist writers include Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Wyndham Lewis, Guillaume Apollinaire, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Vladimir Mayakovsky.

### Surrealist Art

Surrealist painters and writers shared a number of influences, including Dadaism. However, one of the most important art influences was the early work of Giorgio de Chirico—an Italian painter who helped found a style of metaphysical painting with his famous series of unique, barren city landscapes, which he started painting in 1910. Through his use of contrasting light and shadow and his juxtaposition of objects, Chirico's paintings suggested a dark, unknown evil.

Breton supported surrealist art as well as literature. In issues of his magazine *La Révolution Surréealiste*, Breton routinely published illustrations from such artists as Max Ernst and André Masson. The biggest promotion of the surrealist artists, however, came through exhibitions. In 1925, the surrealists staged their first collective exhibition in Paris, which included work from Ernst, Masson, Joan Miró, and Man Ray, founding members of the surrealist art group. Chirico's early metaphysical work was also included. It was characteristic of surrealist art that each artist had a unique style, as each painter chose to explore the ideas of Surrealism in different, personal ways, leading to many different and exciting works. The exhibition was a success, and more soon followed.

The Surrealist Gallery, a joint venture that opened in 1926, gave many Surrealist artists a permanent exhibition space. In addition to French artists like Max Ernst, André Masson, and Joan Miró, the gallery also attracted the attention of international artists. Like the French surrealist poets, Dalí was influenced by Freud's writings. To tap into his subconscious, he induced hallucinations in himself before he began to paint. From 1929 to 1937, he created a series of dreamlike, fantastical landscapes featuring realistic objects in bizarre configurations. One of his most famous works is "The Persistence of Memory," which depicts clocks melting on tree branches in an otherwise desolate landscape. His bleak landscapes are his best-known works. After Dalí began creating more traditional paintings in the 1930s, Breton—who expected strict adherence to surrealist ideas—expelled Dalí from his surrealist group.

Surrealist painting flourished until the outbreak of World War II. Periodic exhibitions were later seen in the 1960s and 1970s, as many of the original surrealist artists died and their work was shown in retrospectives. Surrealist art is still exhibited in the twenty-first century, and its influence continues to be seen.

### Surrealist Film

The surrealist movement first expressed itself in film in the 1920s. Surrealist films embodied the concepts of its literary counterpart and featured oddly juxtaposed and often contradictory images, which were sometimes disturbing. The most famous film from this time period is *Un Chien andalou* (An Andalusian dog), released in 1928 from first-time director Luis Buñuel and painter Dalí. One of the more graphic images in the film is that of a woman slitting her eye with a razor. As English surrealist poet David Gascoyne notes in his *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, the film "caused much scandal and sensation at its first showings." The first of several surrealist films that eventually achieved widespread critical acclaim, *Un Chien andalou* continues in the early 2000s to be viewed as a classic of surrealist film.

For the next five decades, Buñuel continued making films depicting surrealist images and worlds, culminating in the 1977 film *That Obscure*

*Object of Desire*. The surrealist influence of Buñuel and others has survived into the twenty-first century. For example, the ideas of Surrealism were modernized in *Vanilla Sky*—director Cameron Crowe's 2001 film starring Tom Cruise as a magazine publisher who slowly loses his hold on reality and experiences a number of surrealist visions. At the end, he realizes he has been living in a self-induced, virtual reality dream.

### Surrealist Drama

Although some surrealists wrote plays, their greatest influence was not through their individual works but in the movement's influence on the theatre of the absurd, a dramatic movement in the post-World-War-II 1950s and early 1960s. The theatre of the absurd, a school informally founded through the works of a number of foreign playwrights living in Paris, was a reaction against the horrors of World War II. Like the surrealists, the absurdists valued dreamlike images over logical, rational thought. Unlike the surrealists, however, who attempted to create a positive and constructive reaction to the horror, the absurdists believed that human life was meaningless and that humans were helpless creatures, having fallen into a state of absurdity. Absurdist plays mimicked this feeling, introducing unpredictable situations or contradictory images that did not seem to make sense. Some of these plays, such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, first produced in 1953 in France, are considered classics of western literature. Other celebrated absurdist playwrights are Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, and Edward Albee.

### England

Just as Breton did much to promote the surrealist movement in France, English poet and novelist David Gascoyne advanced the movement in the 1930s in England. In addition to translating some of the surrealist poetry from French to English, he also wrote *A Short Survey of Surrealism* in 1935. In this book, Gascoyne analyzes the development of Surrealism, offers commentary on Breton's first and second manifestos of Surrealism, and discusses the work of other major surrealist poets.

Along with publicizing the movement through his works of history, criticism, and translations, Gascoyne's own poetry reflects the influence of the surrealists. His book of poetry titled *Man's Life Is This Meat*, published in 1936, was one of the most important surrealist works in England.

However, Gascoyne was not as interested in the subconscious as Breton and others, instead focusing on more mystical elements. His poems in the late 1930s and early 1940s show his increasing interest in religion, which dominated his later poetry.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### World War I

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, made a fateful trip to Sarajevo, capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he and his wife were assassinated. The occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary led to growing unrest among people in the region who wanted to become part of Serbia once again. The assassination was staged with the help of Serbia, which also wished to reclaim Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Norman Davies notes, in *Europe: A History*, the quick consequences of the assassination, and the revelation that Serbia was involved. "Within four weeks, the gunshots of Sarajevo brought Europe's diplomatic and military restraints crashing to the ground," Davies writes. On July 28, exactly one month after the assassination, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. An extensive system of preexisting alliances swiftly pulled most other European countries into the war, escalating the conflict. Eventually, Europe, parts of Asia, and the United States joined the war, aligning themselves either with the pro-Serbian Allies or with the Central powers, which supported Austria-Hungary.

When World War I began in August 1914, both sides believed that with their modern weapon technologies such as hand grenades, tanks, long-range artillery, and poison gas, the war would be over quickly and with minimal casualties. Davies notes the prevailing logic that dominated people's thinking: "It was going to be over by Christmas. Conventional wisdom held that modern warfare would be more intense than in the past, but more decisive." In reality, however, the war raged for four years, leading to an estimated eight million dead and even more wounded.

One of the two main lines of fighting, the Western Front, ran through France, which experienced some of the bloodiest battles in the war. The front was defined by the extensive trench that ran along its entire length on both

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **1910s:** Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, known to his supporters by the name Lenin, leads the Russian revolution, overthrowing the czar and instituting a dictatorship of the proletariat—or common people—led by himself. Over the next several years Lenin works to build the Communist Party into an organization that can effect worldwide revolution, and tries to get all separate communist parties to commit to the Soviet cause.

  **Today:** Many formerly communist countries, including the former Soviet Union, employ democratic systems of government in the early 2000s.

- **1910s:** During World War I, in an effort to rally support at home, various countries on both sides rely on printed propaganda and other methods of psychological warfare that demonize their enemy.

  **Today:** After an attack on the World Trade Center in New York City and on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., that leads to war in Afghanistan, Hollywood capitalizes on American citizens' patriotism by releasing a number of war-themed films.

- **1910s:** American poet John Masefield accompanies the U.S. volunteer ambulance service in France, sending many letters to his wife that convey his graphic observations of the effects of war. His writings are published in *The Old Front Line* (1917) and other books.

  **Today:** As the United States wages war in Afghanistan, people receive up-to-the-minute updates from on-site reporters, whose video footage and commentary is transmitted to the public through radio, satellite television, and the Internet.

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sides. Allied and Central soldiers occupied their respective trenches—which were often close to each other—and with a series of battles, each side attempted to drive their opponent out of his trench and force the line back, with a flurry of grenades and machine-gun fire. The results were horrific. Davies observes of the three most bloody battles: "the loss of life could be counted in tens of thousands per hour or hundreds per square yard."

For years the battle in the trenches was a virtual stalemate, and as the body count rose, both sides added reinforcements to maintain the trenches. "Here was a mindless tragedy which no one had foreseen, and which no one knew how to stop," says Davies.

### Dadaism and Sigmund Freud

After World War I, the dadaists tried to expose the perverse thinking. They believed that logic and other organized systems of thinking had created the horrors of war and responded to the war's meaningless slaughter with literature and art that was equally meaningless and created intentionally without logic. The dadaist movement, which had been founded in Switzerland in 1916 by a group of European artists and writers, spread to other areas in Europe, including France, where Breton became one of the willing converts.

As a medical student drafted to work in the psychiatric wards during the war, Breton had seen firsthand the effects of war on the human mind and wished to rebel against the logic that had caused the war. However, Breton soon became tired of the negative, meaninglessness of Dadaism, and sought a more positive and constructive means to stage his rebellion. Breton had studied the work of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, and was particularly interested in Freud's theories of the unconscious mind. Drawing on Freud's studies, Breton and others formed the surrealist movement. In 1924, Breton defined the group's guiding principles in his *Manifesto of Surrealism*.

## *Communism and World War II*

Although the surrealist movement initially began as a form of literary expression, political unrest in Europe forced many sociopolitical and cultural groups to align themselves with other groups. In 1930, Breton announced the surrealists's decision to join the French Communist Party in his second *Manifesto of Surrealism*. It was his hope that the greater Communist Party, which had its headquarters in Moscow in the Soviet Union, would adopt the surrealist way of thinking and apply it to politics, creating a totally liberated society. However, five years later, most of the surrealists left the Communist Party after witnessing the bloody acts Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin perpetrated in the name of communism.

Davies claims many of these acts were part of Stalin's political strategy: "Innocent victims were rounded up in their homes and villages; others were charged with imaginary offences of 'sabotage,' 'treason,' or 'espionage,' and tortured into confession." As part of Stalin's scare tactics, many of these victims were put on trial to discourage others from rebelling against him. Breton and others were some of the first to publicly denounce these trials.

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, another dictator, Germany's Adolf Hitler, invaded and conquered much of Europe. When Hitler's Nazis invaded France, the surrealists broke up, and many of them fled to other European countries or overseas.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Surrealism was a movement that sought to abandon all organized systems that normal literature followed, so it is tough to criticize the works as literature. Critic Mary Ann Caws notes this in the introduction to her book, *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism*: "Dada and surrealism, which consider themselves literature's opposite, cannot be (or should not be) theorized about, exemplified, and handled at an efficient arm's length." In addition, Caws observes that Breton himself was against criticism from outsiders: "Breton firmly believed in the principle of internal criticism, and on several occasions he brilliantly demonstrated it."

To make matters more difficult, Surrealism was intended to be a movement of individual revelation for each writer. As a result, the writings were widely different in theme, style, and form, making it hard to criticize the movement as a whole. Because of this, critics have tended to follow one of two paths. Either they have commented on the ideas behind the movement itself, or they have commented on the individual surrealist writer.

The ideas behind the movement were expressed formally in Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism*. As David Gascoyne reports in his *A Short Survey of Surrealism* in 1935, it was not well received: "It is not in the least surprising that Breton's manifesto should have aroused a considerable sensation. A great deal of animosity and blind opposition, also."

David Gascoyne discusses how Breton's absolute adherence to the rigid ideals of Surrealism further alienated him personally, not just from critics, but also from members of the surrealist group, who were "unable to maintain the standards of disinterestedness and non-conformity that surrealism demands."

As for Breton's writings themselves, Balakian notes in her entry for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* that even though he was an able poet, most people "associate him chiefly with his work, *Nadja*." Breton's intent with this work was to undermine novels which, as he states in his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, "are nothing but so many superimposed images taken from some stock catalogue, which the author utilizes more and more whenever he chooses." Still, as Balakian observes, "instead of destroying the novel as Breton had hoped, he contributed strongly to the shaping of the antinovel as a form."

Breton's contemporaries have received a mixed bag of criticism about their works. In the case of Philippe Soupault, one of the original and most famous surrealists—even though he was not with the group as long as others—the criticism has been very one-sided. J. H. Matthews, one of the foremost surrealist critics, notes the peculiar situation surrounding Soupault, who in 1919 was the cowriter of *The Magnetic Fields*, considered by many to be the first truly surrealist text: "[Soupault] is remembered as having written, with Breton, a book cited by many but read by few. Meanwhile, his other surrealist publications have not been subjected to scrutiny."

The most critically acclaimed of the surrealists, at least in poetry, was Paul Éluard. Georges

*Haze Holes in White, surrealistic painting by Herbert Bayer, 1936* (© *Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY*)

Lemaitre writes in his book *From Cubism to Surrealism in French Literature* that Éluard was "certainly the most richly gifted poet of the whole surrealist group." Lemaitre points out that the themes in Éluard's poetry focus on two contradictory ideas, loneliness and love: "Love is viewed by him as a mystic center of blazing forces, a fiery nucleus of passionate vibrations, diffusing energy throughout the whole world in ardent and pulsating waves."

Lemaitre is not so praising of Desnos, in whose works, "One would search vainly...for the abstract metaphysical quality which characterizes most of Éluard's productions." Lemaitre goes even further, criticizing the poet's use of particularly perverse forms, which "aroused from their heavy slumber, twist and turn ignominiously, releasing in their convulsive spasms an acrid and suffocating stench."

The poetry of Aragon has also commonly been viewed as negative, due to its use of particularly violent words and its spirit of protest. These elements became especially strong when Aragon committed himself to the causes of the Communist Party.

## CRITICISM

### Ryan D. Poquette

*Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette explores Paul Éluard's use of imagery in his poem "First in the World" as an illustration of Surrealism's primary goal.*

In his definitive work *Manifesto of Surrealism*, published in 1924, André Breton set the guidelines that future members of the surrealist movement would follow. Breton maintained tight control over these guidelines and promptly expelled any writer who did not observe them. Although the list of expelled members would eventually include Paul Éluard, who abandoned Surrealism for communism, Éluard was originally one of Breton's favorite writers, and one whom Breton thought exemplified the principles of Surrealism. In addition, of all the original surrealists, Éluard is the one poet praised most often by critics. For these reasons, Éluard's poetry serves as a good example of Breton's concepts. In one case in particular, the poem "First in the World," Éluard's imagery illustrates

## WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?
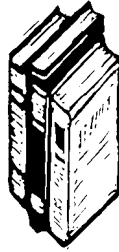
- Linda Bolton's *Art Revolutions: Surrealism* (2000) features brief text overviews of the surrealist art movement, including reproductions of famous works. The book also contains a time line and museum information.
- *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1901), Sigmund Freud's landmark book, was one of the main influences on French Surrealism. The book outlines his theory of the unconscious forces in dreams.
- *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (1998), edited by Penelope Rosemont and belonging to the Surrealist Revolution series, features nearly three hundred surrealist texts by ninety-six women from twenty-eight countries. The anthology, the first of its kind, also discusses the significance of women's contributions to Surrealism and gives a basic primer on the ideas behind the movement.
- *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (2001), by Miryam Sas, explores how the ideas and practices of Surrealism and other avant-garde styles of writing were transferred to Japan in the early twentieth century.

the central goal in Surrealism—the attempt to reconcile the dream world with reality.

"I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak." With these words in his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton introduced a concept built upon both the dream research of Sigmund Freud and Breton's own self-induced, hallucinatory experiments. Over the course of his manifesto, Breton defines the various tools the surrealists used to achieve this new "absolute reality," the most important of which is the surrealist image. Although Breton admits that there are "countless kinds" of

> **THE DREAMER STILL HAS NOT MASTERED THE PECULIAR REASON AND LOGIC OF THIS IMAGINARY WORLD, WHICH ALLOWS FOR THE SEIZING OF THE STARS THEMSELVES."**

these images, he places a repeated emphasis on the words themselves: "Words, groups of words *which follow one another*, manifest among themselves the greatest solidarity." In other words, the words in a surrealist poem are connected, and follow a pattern. However, the greater meaning derived from this pattern does not always resemble reality. As Frederick Brown notes in "Breton and the Surrealist Movement," these poems create "a locked, reflexive universe where language exists, to suppose the impossible, *on its own terms . . .* conveying no feeling, no experience, no image felt, experienced, or imagined outside itself."

Inside the microcosm of the poem, the images themselves define the characteristics and boundaries of the poem's world. Like a dream, these rules often differ from the natural laws of our own world. Éluard's poem "First in the World," originally published in his collection *Capital of Sorrow*, draws conspicuous attention to the surrealists' plan of merging the dream world with reality, a transformation that takes place over the course of the poem itself. In the first stanza, or group of lines, the poem describes the real, human world:

> Prisoner of the field, frenzied in agony,
> The light hides on you, see the sky:
> It closed its eyes to attack your dream,
> It closed your dress to break your chains.

The "prisoner" is the reader, the person to whom the poem is addressed. By addressing the poem directly to the reader, Éluard grabs the reader's attention and lets him or her know what he is about to discuss is of vital importance. In this case, the poet is informing his readers that they are enslaved in the real world, and he does so in a sermon-like way. Through his words, Éluard invokes images of slavery and freedom. The prisoner is "of the field," which is a common area where slaves have toiled in the past, and is

"in agony," a common condition for slaves. The hiding "light" that used to be in "the sky" would in many traditional poems mean daylight or the sun, a traditional sign of goodness. However, in this surrealist poem, the meaning is skewed, and the light becomes a symbol for reality, in which the prisoner is enslaved. When viewed in this context, the slavery imagery throughout the rest of the first stanza makes sense.

In the third line the poet discusses the "dream" of his readers, which is that the ideal life can be found in the real world. When reality retreats, however, it attacks this notion. Although this is a violent change for the prisoner, it is nevertheless for his or her own good, because the absence of reality redeems prisoners, by breaking the "chains."

In the absence of reality, or light, the poem and reader descend into the dream world, reality's opposite. As the second stanza shows, the characteristics of this world are strange to the prisoner:

> Before the tied wheels
> A fan laughs out loud.
> In the treacherous nets of the grass
> The roads lose their reflexion.

In this dream reality, all of the familiar hallmarks of civilization are gone. The "tied wheels" referred to in the first line of this stanza invoke the image of a car that cannot move. In the next line, the poet informs the reader that somebody or something—the word fan can mean either the device used for cooling or a person who is fond of something—is laughing, presumably at the car that is stuck. In the third line, the stuck car is revealed to be located in the "nets of the grass" that inhabit this world. This "treacherous" grass also swallows up the roads, which are now buried and so cannot reflect images or ideas.

The composite, surrealist image created by these four lines is one of nature replacing technology. In this dream world there is no place for modern technology like cars and roads—which Éluard's readers would find a comforting part of their reality. Instead the prisoner, now a dreamer, must adapt to a new set of rules and must throw out the familiarities that he or she is used to if the prisoner wants to make the most of this new world. Éluard's depiction of a disoriented dreamer who has just arrived in an imaginary world follows closely with Breton's observations about most of society, which he expressed in his *Manifesto*. Says Breton, "I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams." In Éluard's hands, the uncomfortable dreamer, like society, is yanked out of the reality of everyday life, and forced to accept the strange reality of the dream world.

After the dreamer arrives in this imaginary reality on earth, one of the four elements, the poet next summons images of another element, water:

> Can't you take the waves
> Whose barges are almonds
> In your warm coaxing palm
> Or in the ringlets of your head?

In this stanza, the poet begins to challenge his readers, taunting them with the powers they could have but currently do not possess. Unlike the poet, his readers cannot harness the sea—in which another symbol of technology, the barge, or ship, has been replaced by almonds—and coax it into their hands or their hair. Without letting go of technology and the familiar reality of the logical waking world, Éluard's readers will not be able to attain the godlike powers that the poet seems to possess. These prisoners, trapped by their familiarity with the established systems of logic and reason of the waking world, fail to see that worlds where almonds float on the sea like ships and oceans can be contained in the palm of one's hand are nevertheless valid and can be dominated. In her book *Twentieth-Century French Avant-Garde Poetry, 1907–1990*, Virginia A. La Charité observes that in Éluard's poetry, "while the image may defy reason and logic in its absurdity, it is not incomprehensible and so becomes both reasonable and logical." In other words, the images that Éluard describes create a picture in readers' minds that is definable, and so is imbued with its own sense of reason and logic.

In the next stanza, Éluard continues to taunt the reader, moving to the next largest, natural arena to demonstrate his powers, the heavens themselves:

> Can't you seize the stars?
> Stretched on the rack you resemble them,
> In their nest of fire you dwell
> And your light multiplies from them.

The dreamer still has not mastered the peculiar reason and logic of this imaginary world, which allows for the seizing of the stars themselves. Because of this, the dreamer is still a prisoner. In this stanza, Éluard says that the

prisoner is being tortured on "the rack," a situation that once again implies captivity and domination. Like the stars in this world, which form a "nest of fire," the prisoner is immobile and therefore can be dominated by people like the poet, who have accepted and embraced the possibilities of this dream reality. In fact, lacking the ability to cope with this world, the reader becomes one of the stars, and the reader's reality, "the light," begins to be defined by them. In other words, over the course of four stanzas, the reader has traded a prison in the real world for one in the dream world, failing to recognize the possibilities that the latter has to offer.

With this stanza, Éluard completes the pattern he set up in the dream world. He starts out small on land, then goes to the ocean, which can be contained in the palm of his hand, then expands to include the universe itself. He does this in a dreamlike fashion, without any transition other than the spaces between the stanzas. While the imagery is rather bizarre, it still follows a general pattern, an idea that demonstrates another of Breton's observations about dreams, from his *Manifesto*: "Within the limits where they operate . . . dreams give every evidence of being continuous and show signs of organization."

In the first part of the last stanza of the poem, Éluard brings the reader back out of the dream world into reality, although it is a struggle:

> From the gagged dawn only one cry wants to
>     rush out,
> A turning sun streams under the bark,
> It will be imprinted on your closed eyelids.

The waking reality, which is beginning to return, is "gagged," although it wants to "cry" out to the dreamer, and begins to slowly exert its influence, marking the dreamer's "closed eyelids." However, as Éluard notes in the final line, "Sweet one, when you sleep, night mingles with day." With this pronouncement, the poet announces to the reader that the two realities—dreams and real life—are intertwined. The "night" of the dream land will mix with the "day" of reality into one surreality. In this way, Éluard states that the ultimate goal of surrealists—to reconcile dreams and reality—has been achieved, and that by fighting it, one will only end up imprisoned, either in the real world or the dream world.

**Source:** Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on Surrealism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.



*Surrealist painter Salvador Dali* (*Charles Hewitt | Getty Images*)

### Leonid Livak

*In the following essay, Livak discusses the pervasive motif of suicide among the discourse of Surrealists and Dadaists in post-World War I France.*

The cult of artistic and existential evasion in Dada and surrealism made suicide a leitmotif of literary life in inter-war France. Dadaists and surrealists exploited suicide as a figure of evasion from reality, from social and moral conventions, and from the "bourgeois" concepts of talent, ambition, and remuneration associated with literature. Galvanized by the "intolerable malaise" of the war experience (Soupault, *Mémoires 1914–1923*), André Breton, Philippe Soupault, and Louis Aragon questioned the very validity of literary activity. In the first issue of their ironically entitled review, *Littérature* (1919), the upcoming poets asked French literati: "Why are you writing?" In 1924, the young critic and novelist Marcel Arland suggested that the whole spiritual atmosphere shared by his peers was

**THE PRESENT ARTICLE WILL EXPLORE THE PLACE OF SUICIDE IN THE MYTHOLOGY AND ARTISTIC PRAXIS OF THE FRENCH AVANT-GARDE BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS."**

similar to the Romantic "malady of the century" ("Nouveau Mal du siècle"). Since Dada and surrealism were seen as the products of a "new malady of the century," their suicidal tendencies recalled those in the Romantic "malady."

Thus, in his essays "Le Suicide en littérature" (1930) and "L'Art de mourir" (1932), Paul Morand argued that the deaths of many contemporary avant-garde artists were as esthetically motivated as the suicides of Werther's admirers. Victor Crastre also thought that the 1929 suicide of the former dadaist Jacques Rigaut "echoed Werther's gunshot" because "Dada and surrealism clearly affirmed the value of suicide" ("Jacques Rigaut"). In the 1979 preface to his novel *En Joue!* (1925), which had anticipated a number of suicides in the milieu of the French avant-garde, Philippe Soupault, a veteran of both artistic movements, wrote that he chronicled an époque in which "the sons of the bourgeoisie failed to overcome the insecurity, anxiety, and chaos of the post-war years." The present article will explore the place of suicide in the mythology and artistic praxis of the French avant-garde between the two world wars. I contend that many French literati involved in the activities of Dada and/or surrealism viewed suicide as an ideal means of evasion from reality conceived by the positivist theory and as an ultimate artistic statement, a "lived poem" far superior to a "written poem" by virtue of its "realism" and "sincerity."

## SUICIDE AS A FOUNDING MYTH OF DADA AND SURREALISM

Choosing their "ancestors" from among those artists who seemed to have realized literally the ideal of evasion, dadaists and surrealists were profoundly influenced by the personal mythology of Arthur Rimbaud, the Count of Lautréamont, Jacques Vaché, and Arthur Cravan. According to these models, one could

escape the vanity of art through complete "silence," realize one's anti-social stance by leaving society, and flee positivist reality in dreams, the unconscious, drugs, and death. In the cultural mythology of the French avant-garde, Rimbaud and Lautréamont incarnated the ideal of artistic, social, and existential evasion. Their personal myths provided a paradigm for life-in-poetry. André Breton, who saw no value in literature if it was not supported by the writer's attitude to life, wrote that "Rimbaud was a surrealist by virtue of his lifestyle" ("Manifeste"). According to their myths, Rimbaud rejected art (he "fell silent") and society (he left for Africa), while Lautréamont was the author of a sole text, died young and left no biographical trace.

Soupault modeled his frequent trips abroad along the lines of the Rimbaud-Lautréamont paradigm. "J'étais toujours, plus ou moins consciemment, influencé par la destinée de Rimbaud," recalled the poet, "lui qui avait décidé, à n'importe quel prix, de fuir les milieux littéraires. L' 'exemple' de Rimbaud, et le besoin de m'évader [...] m'obligèrent, le mot n'est pas trop fort, à partir" (*Mémoires 1923–1926*). Soupault was not the only young Parisian avant-gardist who drew on the revered "example" to show his contempt for "literature." His Russian colleague and peer, Boris Poplavsky, who arrived in France in 1921 and promptly contracted the spirit of Dada, described his own ideal model of a poet, characteristically mixing the myths of Rimbaud and Lautréamont to express his "most profound disgust for literature." Wrote Poplavsky:

> All I want is to express myself. To write one "naked" mystical book, like Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, then "assommer" several critics by leaving, becoming a soldier or a worker, doing away with the revolting dualism of real and described life. [I want] to concentrate on pain, to protect myself by contempt and silence.

Building surrealism's genealogical tree, Breton paid special homage to Jacques Vaché and Arthur Cravan. Both men had already enjoyed the reputation of "precursors" among dadaists who admired their anti-artistic and anti-social attitudes. According to Breton, Vaché's virtue was "to have produced nothing" ("Pour Dada"). Cravan, Oscar Wilde's nephew, had conveyed a similar disgust for literature in his review *Maintenant*, published on wrap paper from a

butcher's store and distributed from a vegetable cart. Using suicide to express his anti-artistic attitude, Cravan announced that he would kill himself in public. After reading a presuicidal note, he disrobed and chased the audience with kicks and insults (Conover 23). This spectacle anticipated Dada's demonstrations in Paris. Future suicides René Crevel, Boris Poplavsky, Drieu La Rochelle, Jacques Rigaut, and Julien Torma participated in these shows haunted by Cravan's spirit.

In 1919, Jacques Vaché and his two friends were found dead, officially from an accidental opium overdose. But according to his myth, Vaché committed suicide, taking his unwitting friends along. In 1920, Arthur Cravan disappeared on a boat promenade, and it was never clear whether it was a suicide or an accident. The interpretation of their deaths constituted one of the founding myths of Dada and surrealism—suicide as the ultimate act of esthetic self-assertion and social and metaphysical transcendence. "Sa mort eut ceci d'admirable qu'elle pût passer pour accidentelle," wrote Breton about Vaché ("Confession"). While the ambiguity of their disappearance provided a model "death-style" for Breton's peers, Vaché's and Cravan's artistic and existential self-effacement linked them to Rimbaud and Lautréamont. Dadaists and surrealists projected the would-be suicides of Vaché and Cravan upon the myths of Rimbaud and Lautréamont which furnished different models of evasion, not associated with self-destruction. Thus, when Jacques Rigaut ended his days by finally committing his well advertised and long expected suicide, Victor Crastre wrote:

> L'historien littéraire "tirera parti" de cette mort qui nous rappelle celle d'un autre initiateur de Dada: Jacques Vaché [...] Rimbaud et Lautréamont, [...] n'ont pas tenté cette forme d'évasion. Rimbaud au moment où il "renonce", ne se tue pas: il part [...]. Pour moi le désespoir de Rimbaud ne se trouve en rien diminué du fait que celui-ci ne s'est pas tué.
>
> *("Jacques Rigaut")*

The dadaist-surrealist split of 1922–23 had at its core the tension between the ethically valuable posture of "complete silence" and the more artistically fulfilling "literary temptation." Surrealism proposed a mild version of dadaist self-effacement. It permitted creative activity that produced "psychological documents," implicitly abolishing all distinction between the literary and non-literary. Life-in-poetry meant living otherwise than in everyday mediocrity. For Breton,

> La poésie écrite perd de jour en jour sa raison d'être. Si des œuvres comme celles de Ducasse, de Rimbaud [...] jouissent de ce prestige sur les jeunes, pour commencer c'est que ces auteurs n'ont pas fait profession d'écrire [...] C'est que leur attitude en tant qu'hommes laisse loin leurs mérites d'écrivains.
>
> *("Réponse")*

Dadaists, and later surrealists, elaborated a myth of suicide that served as an interpretive paradigm informing acts of self-destruction with special meaning. In light of this paradigm, suicide became an artistic text that could be "read" just like a written text, provided one was versed in the avant-garde cultural mythology. The active construction of this myth is evident throughout the 1920s in the theoretical and artistic writings of dadaists and surrealists. By the end of the decade, the suicide myth acquired a practical application as a meaning-generating mechanism, triggered by a series of suicides among avant-garde artists.

### SUICIDE IN THEORY

As a "fashionable" theoretical problem, suicide was omnipresent in surrealist thought (Blanche 5). The first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* endowed dream and suicide with the same transcendental function. The review interrogated its readers in the questionnaire devoted to the problem of suicide:

> On vit, on meurt. Quelle est la part de la volonté en tout cela? Il semble qu'on se tue comme on rêve. Ce n'est pas une question morale que nous posons: le suicide est-il une solution?
>
> *("Enquête")*

Characteristically, responses to this questionnaire were accompanied by the drawing "Jacques Vaché par lui-même."

Among the first respondents was the poet and writer Jacques Rigaut. Seeing suicide as a more efficient means of transcendence than automatic writing or hypnotic dreams ("Jacques Rigaut"), he developed both aspects of Vaché's death style. He wanted his future suicide to resemble both an accident and a "black joke" in which the suicide would die with company. Summing up his verdict on positivist reality, Rigaut wrote:

Nous savons trop de quoi ces choses sont faites pour y prendre garde; justes bonnes à propager quelques négligeables suicides-accidents [...] Un regret subsiste: on ne voudrait pas partir avant de s'être compromis; on voudrait, en sortant, entraîner avec soi Notre-Dame, l'amour ou la République.

*("Jacques Rigaut")*

A comparison of Rigaut's suicidal program with the program of surrealism reveals affinities both with regard to Rigaut's view of everyday reality and of the means to transcend it. Extolling suicide as an artistically and existentially liberating act, Rigaut wrote:

Le désespoir, l'indifférence, les trahisons, la fidélité, la solitude, la famille, la liberté, la pesanteur, l'argent, la pauvreté, l'amour, l'absence d'amour, la syphilis, la santé, le sommeil, l'insomnie, le désir, l'impuissance, la platitude, l'art [...] il n'y a pas là de quoi fouetter un chat [...] Le suicide doit être une vocation.

*("Jacques Rigaut")*

By virtue of its enumerative form and its logic, this declaration of universal contempt for reality hearkens to Breton's *Manifeste du surréalisme* and provides an alternative to the means of evasion proposed by the "pope of surrealism." "Ce monde moderne," wrote Breton in his programmatic text,

enfin, diable! que voulez-vous que j'y fasse? [...] Les sans-fils? Bien. La syphilis? Si vous voulez. La photographie? Je n'y vois pas d'inconvénient. Le cinéma? Bravo pour les salles obscures. La guerre? Nous riions bien. Le téléphone? Allô, oui. La jeunesse? Charmants cheveux blancs. Essayez de me faire dire merci [...] C'est vivre et cesser de vivre qui sont des solutions imaginaires. L'existence est ailleurs.

"To stop living" is a metaphor; Breton speaks about eluding positivist reality for another, "superreal" existence that can be found in the unconscious. But the "deadly" ambiguity of the dadaist-surrealist escape is certainly there. The "imaginary solutions" proposed in the *Manifeste* included automatic writing and hypnotic dreams. However, the expression itself could not but recall the "solution" discussed in *La Révolution surréaliste*. Breton himself viewed suicide as a "legitimate solution" ("Confession"). Since, following his own argument, one's attitude in life was more important than one's attitude in art, *Littérature*'s question "Why are you writing?" found its logical continuation in *La Révolution surréaliste* whose questionnaire about suicide could be paraphrased: "Why are you living?"

Many responses to this questionnaire confirmed the theoretical equivalency of automatic writing, dream, and suicide in surrealist thought. According to René Crevel, who killed himself in 1935, the "sensation of truth" forced courageous souls to overcome the mediocrity of daily life and to accept "the most just and definitive solution—suicide" ("Enquête"). Crevel undoubtedly meant the same "sensation" which forced one to flee reality in quest of "superreality" in dreams and hypnotic states. Antonin Artaud (who made several suicide attempts) expressed a similar opinion in his response to the questionnaire. For him, suicide was a means of transcending everyday life. And as such, the act of self-destruction became a metaphorical figure akin to other figures of evasion. Wrote Artaud:

Le suicide n'est que la conquête fabuleuse et lointaine des hommes qui pensent bien [...] Je suis mort depuis longtemps, je suis déjà suicidé. On m'a suicidé, c'est-à-dire. Mais que penseriez-vous d'un suicide antérieur, d'un suicide qui nous ferait rebrousser chemin, mais de l'autre côté de l'existence, et non pas du côté de la mort. Celui-là seul aurait pour moi une valeur. Je ne sens pas l'appétit de la mort, je sens l'appétit du ne pas être.

*("Enquête")*

Similarly to Artaud, most surrealists treated suicide with the same degree of ambiguity as other figures of existential evasion. Aragon's justification of hypnotic dreams, for instance, used the same logic as Rigaut's justification of suicide. In *Une Vague de rêves* (1924), Aragon refuted the suspicion that his associates simulated the hypnotic dreams which, as they claimed, allowed them to produce "records" of their unconscious: "Simuler une chose, est-ce autre chose que la penser? Et ce qui est pensé, est" (19). Echoing this logic, Jacques Rigaut wrote about his first aborted suicide attempt: "Ce qui importait, c'était d'avoir pris la décision de mourir, et non que je mourusse" ("Jacques Rigaut" 57). Aragon himself turned to this logic when expressing his theoretical approbation of suicide:

Je regarde passer le cortège des suicides [...] Combien je m'étonne de voir se poursuivre la vie, que les suicidés sont les seuls morts par moi, mais véritablement respectés [...] Je ne me suis pas tué, non faute d'y avoir pensé [...] Pensons sans passion au suicide. Il est vrai qu'il semble un peu mieux qu'aucune de ces *solutions*.

*("Traité du style")*

Aragon indeed attempted suicide in the late 1920s but the drug dose turned out to be too weak. As a trained physician he must have known this. Consequently, one wonders if the poet's ultimate goal was not the fashionable renown of a suicidal dandy, like that of Rigaut.

The first issue of another avant-garde review, *Le Disque vert*, was almost entirely devoted to suicide. Here Crevel elaborated his theory of "provisional suicides" ("Mort" 29–31) evocative of Rigaut's suicidal "vocation" and Artaud's "suicide in progress." In Crevel's "provisional suicide," the cult of self-destruction as the ultimate act of artistic and existential transcendence was as important as the actual realization of one's decision to die. In the same issue of *Le Disque vert*, Marcel Arland hailed suicide as part and logical consequence of the post-war "malady" which made young writers contemplate death without any "existential protection" ("Signe").

Rigaut's suicidal "vocation" reveals close association between suicide and the concept of a "gratuitous act" in dadaist and surrealist discourses. Insisting, like Artaud and Crevel, that one's decision to die was more important than its realization, Rigaut supported his argument by a general contempt of life that "was not worth the trouble of leaving it" (55), just as literature was not worth the trouble of writing it. The ambiguous circumstances of Cravan's and Vaché's deaths recalled the "gratuitous act" as exemplified by the character of Lafcadio from André Gide's novel *Les Caves du Vatican* (1916). Lafcadio kills a man "for no reason," committing a purely gratuitous crime. According to Jean Cocteau, Cravan had served as Lafcadio's prototype (Conover 252). Vaché had paid tribute to Gide's Lafcadio for his proto-dadaist spirit (Crastre, "Trois héros" 6–7). For this reason, while debunking Gide's œuvre in general, Breton and Soupault made an exception for *Les Caves du Vatican* (Soupault, *Mémoires* 1914–1923).

The experience of automatic writing made Soupault aware of the limitations imposed upon creative spontaneity by written expression. As a result, he and Breton tried to "convert poetry into action," substituting "lived poetry" for "written poetry." Later Soupault described their experiments in "lived poetry":

> Puisque j'avais admis qu'on pouvait écrire "tout ce qui ce passe par la tête", je voulais savoir comment les autres, les passants, les "gens" allaient s'exprimer [...] Je demandais à acheter des oranges chez une concierge et un saucisson chez un fleuriste [...] C'étaient des "actes gratuits" mais qui provoquaient de vives et intéressantes réactions [...] C'étaient des poèmes vécus.

> (*Mémoires 1914–1923*)

Two conditions were paramount to these life-in-poetry experiments. Firstly, the author viewed the active participation of his audience as an essential part of his "text." A "lived poem" could not exist without an exchange between the "poet" and the "reader." Secondly, at least one party had to act spontaneously. This orientation toward spontaneity, analogous to that in automatic writing, seemed to protect one's "text" from all suspicion of esthetic calculation and, ultimately, from the artistic vanity characteristic of "bourgeois" literature.

Breton's texts of 1919–1924 testify that he placed Jacques Vaché's life and death under the sign of a "gratuitous act." In light of Vaché's personal mythology—which included the rumor that, as a "last joke," killing himself, he took along two unwitting friends—Vaché's suicide could be linked to the notion of gratuitous crime. In their first "automatic" text, *Les Champs magnétiques* (1920), dedicated to Vaché's memory, Breton and Soupault spoke about a mysterious young man who, having acquired a revolver, wanted to try it out on his neighbors. The story ended with an observation that could signify either the young man's suicide or the realization of his project: "Quelle surprise, dites-moi, quand nous trouvâmes son portrait dans les journaux!." In another text, Breton described Vaché as a young man who "kicked away art" and "disappeared rather mysteriously" ("Pour Dada"). The two young men merged in "La Confession dédaigneuse," where Breton recounted how Vaché, entering a concert hall in the Conservatoire Maubel with a revolver, wanted to shoot at the public because the show was too "artistic" for his taste.

Vaché contributed to the suicide myth of the French avant-garde the requirement of gratuity, which served as an alibi in an act of self-destruction. Gratuity protected the artist from the charge of esthetic ambition. In Jacques Rigaut's program, suicide was a good means of self-effacement, provided it was completely gratuitous ("Jacques Rigaut"). This meant that one could not die "for a reason." An act of self-destruction must be or must appear as spontaneous and unmotivated as Soupault's attempt to buy oranges from a

concierge. Thus, according to his myth, Rigaut at all times disposed of a means of self-destruction in case of a spontaneous desire to kill himself. Following the same logic of gratuitous action, Breton found quite natural Vladimir Maiakovsky's suicide, which shocked most contemporaries as unexpected. In Breton's view, Maiakovsky killed himself because he was an avant-garde artist: as such, he had lived in the state of theoretical suicide, whereby the decision to die was more important than its realization. Wrote Breton:

> Le courage n'est pas, d'ailleurs, de continuer à vivre ou de mourir: il n'est que d'envisager de sang-froid la violence respective des deux courants contradictoires qui entraînent. Un homme qui pense, c'est-à-dire un honnête homme, est appelé à en juger en dernier ressort à chaque seconde et, au figuré ou non, il me paraît sain que sa main ne lâche pas le revolver.
>
> (*"Liubovnaia lodka"*)

## SUICIDE AS A LITERARY FACT

As early as 1923, Jacques Rigaut's suicidal "vocation" became a "literary fact." The hero of Jean Cocteau's novel *Le Grand Ecart* follows the recipe for "accidental suicide": he tries to die by simulating a drug overdose (84–85) and contemplates the gratuitous nature of his act. In the same year, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle made fun of Rigaut in his story "La Valise vide." The story's protagonist Gonzague uses suicide to cover up his artistic inadequacy. But Rigaut's death forced Drieu (who killed himself in 1945) to reconsider the avant-garde death-style. In 1931, Drieu published the novel *Le Feu follet* and wanted to accompany it with a short text entitled "Adieu à Gonzague." The novel deals with the life of a writer who prefers the "sincerity" of suicide to the "lie" of literature. "Adieu à Gonzague" was Drieu's apology for "La Valise vide"; it confirmed the righteousness of Rigaut's act. "Je suis bien heureux que tu te sois tué," wrote Drieu,

> Littérature, rêve d'enfance quite revenait toujours et qui était devenu un fruit sec et dérisoire que tu cachais [. . .] (177) Tu ne trichais pas comme la plupart de nos contemporains [. . .] (180–81) Mourir, c'est ce que tu pouvais faire de plus beau.

Drieu was not alone in his attitude vis-à-vis Rigaut's death. Paul Éluard eulogized the correspondence between Rigaut's attitudes in art and life, hailing his suicide as an act of righteousness: "L'arme braquée par le suicide contre la vie en a

toujours raison [. . .] Jacques Rigaut a vécu avec le souci de cette ressemblance parfaite" ("Lord Patchogue" 16). But even more importantly, one of the most influential literary critics of the time, Édmond Jaloux, attested to the widespread perception of this suicide as a model manifestation of the post-war "malady" and a proof of Rigaut's artistic "sincerity." Commenting on Rigaut's posthumously published manuscripts, Jaloux wrote:

> Quand on fera l'histoire de cette époque, je signale aux critiques futurs qu'il leur faudra en tenir compte même si beaucoup leur paraissent négligeables. L'histoire de Jacques Rigaut est celle de bien des jeunes hommes de son temps; son abdication fut le signe de sa pureté.
>
> (*"Papiers posthumes"*)

The dadaist-surrealist suicide myth has left its most comprehensive record in Philippe Soupault's novel *En Joue!* (1925). This novel confirms the place and function of suicide in the esthetics and philosophy of the French avant-garde. The fact that Soupault treated the question of suicide in the milieu of avant-garde artists ironically, as Drieu had done two years before him, indicates that by 1923 this topic had become a commonplace in dadaist and surrealist discourses and had acquired a set of rhetorical and situational clichés that could be ridiculed. Soupault described in his memoirs the conception of his novel and its protagonist, the young avant-garde writer Julien:

> J'écrivais un roman qui était à la fois comique et désespérant dont le titre m'avait été suggéré par mon ami Jacques Rigaut: *En Joue!* Certains aspects du personnage, sa désinvolture notamment, m'avaient été imposés par la façon de vivre de cet ami. Fort injustement d'ailleurs. J'ignorais alors qu'il mettrait quelques années plus tard ses menaces à exécution et qu'il prononcerait le mot: Feu! en se tirant un coup de revolver dans la bouche.
>
> (Mémoires 1923–1926)

According to his creator, Julien is a "hero of his time" and a "face of his époque" (*En Joue!* 204). Although there is no explicit statement of this hero's association with Breton's group, the novel repeatedly alludes to the impact of the surrealist movement on the young writer. Arriving at the Café du Globe (the gathering place of Breton's associates), he asks the waiter for writing implements—"de quoi écrire." This is an

allusion to the *Manifeste du surréalisme* in which Breton instructs those practicing "automatic writing" to find a table in a café and to ask for writing implements ("Faites-vous apporter de quoi écrire" 41). Julien likes to be questioned as to why he writes literature ("pourquoi il écrit")—a reference to the famous question in *Littérature*: "Pourquoi écrivez-vous?" But he does not give a direct response, preferring to answer in images ("par une image" 16). Since the poetic image was a pillar of surrealist esthetics, while the term "image" was omnipresent in the group's theoretical discourse, Julien's answer conformed to surrealist artistic doctrine.

Thinking about his own artistic merits, Julien observes: "Je suis d'une incroyable légèreté [ . . . ] Je suis la légèreté même." Symptomatically, in the works of Breton's associates, the terms "légèreté" and "facilité" most often refer to the quality of verbal expression acquired by means of "automatic writing" that, supposedly, liberates the artist from the fetters of reason and social conventions. Soupault himself had already mentioned this ideal quality in his novel *Voyage d'Horace Pirouelle* (1924), whose epigraph, taken from Paul Éluard's poem, reads: "J'ai la beauté *facile* est c'est heureux" (23; emphasis added). Finally, like many surrealists, Julien is in search of the "objective chance" ("le hasard objectif") that would suddenly reveal to him the existence of "superreality" through an uncanny manifestation. He seeks "objective chance" on his long Parisian walks reminiscent of the promenades of Breton's and Aragon's protagonists in *Nadja* and *Le Paysan de Paris*.

Like those surrealists who went through the school of Dada, Julien reconciles "literary temptation" with the dadaist contempt for "literature" and "literati." According to him, literature is a "futile" and "completely idiotic" occupation. He writes poetry "without any ambition"—merely "not to lose the habit." But unlike most surrealists, he finally stops writing. This literal implementation of the dadaist ideal of artistic self-effacement is Julien's first step on the road to the ultimate existential evasion exemplified by Vaché and Cravan. Indeed, the writer considers suicide, projecting the "idiocy" and "futility" of literature upon life. He starts thinking about a "solution," which, in the context of this novel, evokes the suicidal solution discussed in *La Révolution surréaliste*. Soupault writes:

> Le suicide. Oui. Il y songeait sérieusement. C'était un alibi. "Qu'est-ce que vous ferez, Julien?" "Je me suiciderai". Réponse universelle qu'il donnait non seulement à ses amis inquiets, mais à lui-même. Sa vie se jouait sur sa mort.

These words recall Artaud's "suicide-in-progress" and Rigaut's suicidal "vocation." Furthermore, Julien requires from suicide the same quality he expects to find in a perfect crime—gratuity.

Once he thinks about suicide, Julien cannot help thinking about gratuitous crime: "Il faut mourir comme l'on a vécu." He has long placed his life under the sign of the gratuitous crime—a murder he believes he has committed following Lafcadio's example. But he is afraid that this murder was but an accident. This possibility terrifies Julien because his supposed crime is a perfect alibi for his contempt of art. In an effort to live poetry, rather than to write poetry, he does not want to be a "poet" but a "murderer":

> "Le malheur est peut-être que je n'ai tué réellement personne? Ni Lui, ni moi-même. Peut-être a-t-il voulu se suicider?" Il déplore déjà de n'être plus à ses yeux un assassin, mais uniquement le poète Julien [ . . . ] Il a besoin de son crime pour se donner une raison de vivre, une raison de mourir.

Ultimately, however, the reputation of a Lafcadio or a Vaché could promote Julien's written poetry. Julien is full of artistic vanity, even through he claims complete indifference toward literary expression. Having lost his alibi in a gratuitous crime, he sees suicide as his second chance not to be remembered as "the poet Julien" only. Paradoxically, his written poetry will be more appreciated by his peers if his personal mythology denies the significance of his own literary production. Therefore, Julien gradually becomes obsessed with the idea of suicide, espousing the necrophiliac esthetics peculiar to many surrealist authors. It suffices to compare the description of Julien's state of mind to Crevel's and Aragon's writings to see that the latter are both the source and object of mockery in Soupault's novel.

"Sans qu'il pût résister, une idée s'empara de lui avec férocité: La Mort" (47), says Soupault, writing the word "Mort" with a capital letter. "Aucun effort ne s'opposera jamais victorieusement à cette poussée profonde, à cet élan mystérieux [ . . . ] l'élan mortel," writes Crevel in *La Révolution surréaliste* ("Enquête"). "O Mort

[...] ne me taquine pas: je viendrai," muses Aragon's narrator in "Le Passage de l'Opéra" (*Paysan*), where the word "Mort" is capitalized. Incidentally, in 1925 Soupault invited Aragon to publish "Le Passage de l'Opéra" in *La Revue européenne*, which he edited. Following this publication, Aragon publicly ridiculed Soupault as an aspiring "homme de lettres" who had failed to see that the piece was a "joke." In the same year Soupault was forced to leave Breton's group: he was accused of paying too much attention to "literature." Soupault's mockery of the necrophiliac side of surrealism and of the indifference to literature professed by its apostles may have come from his desire to respond to his "excommunication" from the group.

The intentional ambiguity of Julien's suicide follows the rules of the dadaist-surrealist deathstyle. It is not clear if, pulling the trigger of his revolver, Julien aims at himself or at an "egg vacillating on top of a fountain." This egg, which he at first sees as a jumping white spot, may be the trembling tip of a gun barrel that Julien sees when he opens his eyes and realizes that his revolver is much closer to his face than he expected. Although the novel's ending remains ambiguous, those of Soupault's readers privy to the avant-garde suicide myth hardly doubted Julien's violent demise.

This was the case of André Gide, who confronted the suicide myth in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925). We can only speculate whether Gide took on dadaist-surrealist suicidal esthetics as part of the general discussion of the "new children of the century" in his novel or because he felt responsible for contributing one of its major traits (gratuity) and models (Lafcadio). Describing the formation of a radical anti-esthetic movement among his teenage heroes, Gide depicted them as disgusted by literature and intent on seeing writing as an obstacle to living. The conflict between art and life, whereby living becomes a kind of artistic expression, is experienced by the pupils of the Azaïs pension and by the more mature Armand Vedel and Bernard Profitendieu. In a conversation with Olivier Molinier, the first editor of the review *Avant-Garde*, Bernard cites Rimbaud as his model of self-realization in life and muses about suicide as the act by which he could fully express himself. Combining the cult of suicide with eccentric behavior in everyday life, the teenagers of the Azaïs pension take as their motto, "L'Homme fort ne tient pas à la vie", making the cult of self-destruction their life credo. Albert Thibaudet saw suicide as a central value in the axiological system of Gide's characters (21–22).

Olivier attempts to kill himself after making love to his uncle Édouard, for as Bernard tells him, one can commit suicide "out of enthusiasm," in a spontaneous drive due to mere excess of life, whereby suicide is a creative act crowning an existential explosion. Boris de La Pérouse also tries a suicidal recipe handed down by friends along with a revolver. But the "strong men" who set up his death as spontaneous and accidental do not follow his example. The fact that wrong people try to kill themselves—not the preachers of suicide but their victims—shows that suicide has negative value in Gide's novel. Olivier and Boris are pushed to self-destruction by spiritual counterfeiters. Incidentally, the pupils of the Azaïs pension distribute fake coins under the supervision of avant-garde artists. Even Rimbaud's renunciation is travestied by Vincent Molinier, who, having killed his lover, goes mad in a remote corner of Africa. Gide presents the dadaist-surrealist suicide myth, which became a literary fact by 1925, as false rhetoric. His protagonist Édouard is so anguished by Olivier's suicidal attempt and Boris' death, that he refuses to estheticize these events as novelistic material.

### FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

As with any "lived poem," Jacques Rigaut's suicide required the participation of an audience that would "read" his act of self-destruction as the gesture of an avant-garde artist. The dadaist-surrealist suicide myth could inform any such act, notwithstanding the actor's original motives and the circumstances of his death. But to use it as an interpretive paradigm, "readers" had to be versed in the myth, whose presence in contemporary literary texts testifies to the cultural institutionalization of the avant-garde deathstyle in inter-war French artistic circles.

Since Rigaut had long cultivated the reputation of a dandy awaiting the inspiration for an "accidental suicide," his death was found surprising in that it left no doubts as to its nature. "Je m'étonne que celui-ci ne soit pas mort exactement de la même manière que Vaché, c'est-à-dire de telle façon qu'il soit interdit d'affirmer qu'il s'est suicidé," wrote Victor Crastre, "Sans doute a-t-il compris que ces sortes d'accidents ne trompent plus personne" ("Jacques Rigaut"). Indeed,

the formation of a model avant-garde deathstyle contradicted the spontaneity and gratuity expected from a "lived poem." This may have made Rigaut alter his suicidal script: like Soupault's Julien and Gide's Boris, he shot himself.

The "cortège des suicides" (Aragon, *Traité du style* 88) went on after Rigaut's death. In 1933, Julien Torma disappeared during a mountain promenade (Conover 10). Like Rigaut, Torma took part in the dadaist movement and shared the self-effacing attitude that marked the myths of its "precursors." Torma's mysterious disappearance, construed as an "accidental suicide," was followed by René Crevel's and Boris Poplavsky's suicides in 1935. If Crevel's death left no doubts about its self-inflicted nature, Poplavsky arranged his demise as a group "accidental suicide" à la Jacques Vaché. Notwithstanding the differences in circumstances, the deaths of Rigaut, Torma, Crevel, and Poplavsky were interpreted similarly. Informed by the paradigm of the Vaché-Cravan suicidal model, these events were "read" as the artists' attempts to live up to the ideal of self-effacement in art and life and as ultimate proofs of artistic "sincerity."

All four men were linked to the ancestors of Dada and surrealism not only through their common fate but thanks to their lifestyles and anti-artistic attitudes. The split between the surrealist stance admitting artistic creation and the dadaist ideal of complete silence was the reason for which Rigaut and Torma did not fully integrate themselves into Breton's group, which seemed too "literary": "Vous êtes tous des poètes et moi je suis du côté de la mort," wrote Rigaut to surrealists (*Écrits*). Suicide provided a concrete mode of action for those who strove to implement literally the ideal of artistic and existential renunciation.

Rigaut continued writing until his death, but stopped publishing after 1923. He argued that he had no literary ambition and was more interested in boxing. Expressing contempt for traditional art, the combination of poetry and boxing drew on the myth of Arthur Cravan, an amateur boxer whose leaflet *Maintenant* (March–April 1915) contained the text "Arthur Cravan. Poète et Boxeur." Thus, the surrealist Jacques Baron, "a poet better known as a boxer," went by the nickname "Baron le boxeur" (Aragon, *Paysan*); Soupault's protagonists, Julien (*En Joue!*) and Jean X. (*Le Bon Apôtre*), claimed to be more interested in boxing than in literature. Torma also insisted that literature was of no interest to him and that the publication of his only book of poetry happened "by accident" (Conover 92, 133). After 1926 he "fell silent" and led a nomadic life. His trajectory is unknown except for one place, where he took pains to be noticed,—Charleville, Arthur Rimbaud's birthplace. Although Crevel and Poplavsky rallied for surrealism and continued publishing, Crevel modeled his suicide in the novel *La Mort difficile*, blurring the lines between experiments in surrealist transcendence and physical self-destruction. Poplavsky, when he did not claim indifference to literature, presented himself as a "poet and boxer" (Livak 130). In his theoretical writings, the émigré poet argued that "art was unnecessary" and that full self-expression was possible only by way of "perishing, dying, disappearing" (*Neizdannoe* 96; "O misticheskoi atmosfere" 309, 311).

Philippe Soupault extended his apology to Rigaut and other avant-garde suicides much later than did Drieu La Rochelle in his "Adieu à Gonzague." In the 1979 preface to *En Joue!* Soupault wrote: "Ils ont vécu, tour à tour, les aventures dont j'avais peut-être tort de me moquer et de sourire, même d'en rire parfois." In this belated apology, the writer grouped together his friends René Crevel, Drieu La Rochelle, and Jacques Rigaut, even though the motives and circumstances of their suicides differed considerably. From Soupault's point of view, informed by the avant-garde suicide myth, they all succumbed to the post-war artistic and existential "malady" which he himself had contracted but survived:

> Relisant bien des années après l'avoir écrit, ce "roman", j'ai reconnu les fantômes de mes amis [...] Et tous ces amis sont mort, et je les reconnais, je les nomme: Jacques, Pierre, René, tous qui sont Julien, le "héros" de ce livre prémonitoire puisque tous les Juliens que je mettais en joue ont fait feu [...] Le seul survivant des personnages que j'ai baptisés Julien est celui qui a écrit ce témoignage.

The series of suicides among the Paris-based artists associated with the interbellum French avant-garde—Arthur Cravan, René Crevel, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Boris Poplavsky, Jacques Rigaut, Julien Torma, Jacque Vaché,—constitutes a body of "texts" that runs parallel to and supplements the corpus of dadaist and surrealist writings. One wonders if a Breton or an Aragon looked back at the time when they "lived poetry" and considered the path of their dead peers truer to

the ideal they had professed themselves. We know that Soupault started having such thoughts very early in his career. That is why he describes his transition from Dada to surrealism as a compromise. While Jean X., the protagonist of Soupault's *Le Bon Apôtre* (1923), stops writing literature and "leaves," his double, "Philippe Soupault," says: "J'aimais mieux m'appeler Philippe Dada que Philippe Soupault [...] Tout est fini maintenant. J'écris des romans, je publie des livres."

This statement reflects the central contradiction of avant-garde esthetics, a contradiction that forms the backbone of the dadaist-surrealist suicide myth. The advertised anti-artistic attitude of the avant-gardist is irreconcilable with artistic self-expression. Choosing art, one is bound to lose, sooner or later, his claim to avant-gardism; rejecting art, he will eventually stop being an artist. The dadaist-surrealist suicide myth, as it developed in interbellum France, offered to a number of artists a key to this problem. It provided them with a life-in-poetry script that combined both existential and esthetic self-affirmation, while allowing to renounce "bourgeois" art and society. As avant-garde artists turned their own lives into artistic texts and their own bodies into artistic material, the illusion of artistic "sincerity" seemed closer then ever. Following the logic of "lived poetry," survivors bestowed this much-coveted illusion upon the dead.

**Source:** Leonid Livak, "The Place of Suicide in the French Avant-Garde of the Inter-War Period," in *Romanic Review*, Vol. 91, No. 3, May 2000, pp. 245–62.

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> This book offers a large selection of reprinted texts from surrealist painters and poets, including some rare letters and essays that are hard to find elsewhere.

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> Levitt places Surrealism at the center of modernism and explores the philosophical stance of

Surrealism, the creative rebellion that was more than a new way of looking at things.

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In this updated edition with a new preface, Perloff studies the futurist movement in Europe, explaining how it arose and then influenced European culture from the late nineteenth century into the new millennium. Perloff's book is the only one as of 2008 that deals seriously with the poetry, art, and prose of futurist creators.

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Walz focuses on the little-known influences of French Surrealism, which include fantastic popular fiction, and sensationalistic journalism—part of the darker, more rebellious, side of mass culture.

# Symbolism

**MOVEMENT ORIGIN**

**c. 1850**

The symbolist movement in literature originated during the 1850s in France and lasted until about 1900. Symbolism exerted a profound influence on twentieth-century literature, bridging the transition from Realism to Modernism. Symbolism also exerted a strong influence on the arts, including theater, painting, and music. The symbolists sought to convey very personal, irrational, and dream-like states of consciousness, relying heavily on metaphorical language to approximate, or symbolize, an eternal essence of being that, they believed, was abstracted from the scope of the five senses. These literary ideals developed as a reaction against the dominance of positivism, which emphasized rational thought, objectivity, and scientific method. Symbolism also represented a reaction against Realism and Naturalism in literature, which sought to accurately represent the external world of nature and human society through descriptions of objective reality. Stylistically, the symbolists emphasized the inherent musicality of language, developed the use of *vers libre* (free verse), and modernized the existing form of the prose poem. The symbolists were greatly influenced by the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, whose *Les fleurs du mal* (1857; *Flowers of Evil*) embodied many of their literary ideals. In addition to Baudelaire, the central figures of French Symbolism are the poets Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. French Symbolism affected international literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in particular, inspiring the Russian
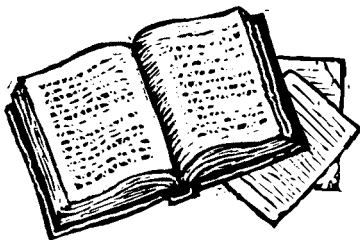
symbolist movement, which developed in the 1880s. The literature of Germany, Great Britain, Japan, the United States, and Turkey was also influenced by Symbolism. Though poetry dominated the symbolist movement, great works of fiction and drama were also written by adherents of Symbolism.

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867)

The poetry of Charles Baudelaire was the chief inspiration for the development of Symbolism. His masterpiece, *Les fleurs du mal*(*Flowers of Evil*), and his important collection of prose poetry *Petits poèmes en prose* (1868; *Little Prose Poems*), embody the central ideals of the symbolist movement. Baudelaire was born on April 9, 1821, in Paris, France. As a young man he established himself as a popular critic of art and literature. When he first encountered the short fiction of American writer Edgar Allen Poe in 1847, Baudelaire immediately felt that Poe's literary sensibilities resonated strongly with his own. Thenceforth, he devoted much of his life to translating the works of Poe into French. Through these translations, Poe became an important influence on the later French symbolist poets. In 1848, Baudelaire participated in two major political events in France, the Revolution of 1848 and the June Days rebellion. In 1855, eighteen of his poems were published in a literary journal as a collection titled *Flowers of Evil*. *Flowers of Evil* was eventually expanded to include over one hundred poems and published as a single volume. In the 1860s, Baudelaire began to compose the prose poems that were posthumously collected in the volume *Little Prose Poems* (later republished as *Le spleen de Paris*, or *Paris Spleen*). Baudelaire died of complications resulting from syphilis on August 31, 1867, in Paris, in financial ruin and with many of his poems still unpublished. However, the young generation of writers who developed the symbolist movement regarded him as their literary father, and Baudelaire soon came to be widely viewed as one of the greatest French poets of the nineteenth century.

### Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921)

Aleksandr (Aleksandrovich) Blok is considered the greatest poet of the Russian symbolist movement. Blok's symbolist masterpiece is the epic poem,
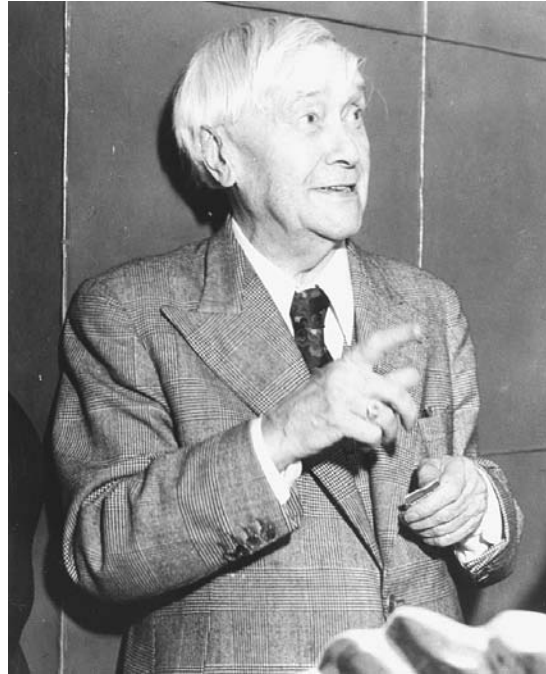


*Maurice Maeterlinck* (*AP Images*)

*Dvenadtsat* (1918; *The Twelve*). His literary ideals developed from a synthesis of the influences of Russian poets Aleksandr Pushkin and Vladimir Solovyov. Blok was born on November 16, 1880, in St. Petersburg, Russia, and died on August 7, 1921, in Petrograd (the post-revolutionary name given to St. Petersburg).

### Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848–1907)

Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours* (1884; *Against the Grain*) is considered the greatest novel to emerge from the symbolist movement. Huysmans was born Charles Marie Georges Huysmans, February 5, 1848, in Paris, France. Huysmans took up a lifelong career as a civil servant for the French government. He became associated with the naturalist school of fiction headed by the great French novelist Emile Zola. The publication of *Against the Grain*, however, signaled his break with Naturalism, as the novel embodies the ideals of the symbolist poets. His novel *Là-bas* (1891; *Down There*) is based on a real-life person who was executed in 1440 for murdering children. Huysmans died of cancer May 12, 1907, in Paris.

### Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949)

Maurice Maeterlinck was the foremost playwright of the symbolist movement and the greatest

Belgian playwright of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Maeterlinck was born on August 29, 1862, in Ghent, Belgium. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1886. Maeterlinck worked as a lawyer until 1889, when he decided to devote himself to writing. In 1897, Maeterlinck went to Paris, where he met many of the leading symbolist writers of the day. He sent his first play, *La Princesse Maleine* (1890; *The Princess Maleine*), to Mallarmé, who sent it on to an important French dramatist and critic of the day. *The Princess Maleine* was an immediate success, and many plays followed, including *L'Intruse* (1890; *The Intruder*) and *Les aveugles* (1890; *The Blind*). Maeterlinck's masterpiece and the greatest work of symbolist theater, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (*Pelleas and Melisande*), was produced at the Théatre de l'Oeuvre in 1892. His book *La vie des abeilles* (*The Life of the Bee*), published in 1901, compares his observations of the behavior of bees to human society. His play *L'Oiseau bleu* (1909; *The Blue Bird*) was an international success and has been adapted several times as a children's book and a major motion picture. The phrase "the bluebird of happiness" derives from this enormously popular and enduring story. Maeterlinck won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1911. He died of a heart attack on May 6, 1949, in Nice, France.

### *Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898)*

Stéphane Mallarmé was one of the founders of the symbolist movement and a major influence on nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry. Mallarmé was profoundly influenced by the poetry of Baudelaire, from which he developed the literary ideals of Symbolism. Mallarmé was born on March 18, 1842, in Paris, France. His mother died when he was only five years old. By the time he was twenty-one, his sister and father had also died. These early experiences with death may have contributed to the deep sense of loss expressed in his later work. Mallarmé made his living as a teacher, editor, and translator while working on his poetry. His *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1876; *The Afternoon of a Faun*) is a major work of symbolist poetry. Mallarmé also held a weekly, Tuesday-evening literary, artistic, and musical salon in his apartment in Paris. He thus was an important intellectual influence on the symbolist movement in that he devoted himself to developing and communicating the theoretical basis for Symbolism. In his poetry, Mallarmé was interested in exploring the relationship between everyday reality and an ideal world of perfection and beauty that transcends reality, what he described as the ideal flower that is absent from all bouquets. Mallarmé died September 9, 1898, in the French village of Valvins. His major works of poetry are collected in the volumes *Vers et prose* (1893) and *Poésies* (1899). His essays on literature are collected in the volume *Divagations* (1897; Wanderings).

### *Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891)*

Arthur Rimbaud was one of the founding poets of the symbolist movement and a major influence on modern poetry. Rimbaud was born on October 20, 1854, in Charleville, France. As a teenager he ran away from home to go to Paris on three separate occasions. During one of these ventures, he participated in the 1871 rebellion of the Paris Commune. However, disillusioned by the violent suppression of the Paris Commune, Rimbaud chose to devote his life to poetry rather than political action. Rimbaud, like Mallarmé and Verlaine, was influenced by the poetry of Baudelaire. In 1871, Rimbaud sent some of his poems to Verlaine, who was so impressed that he paid for Rimbaud to come to Paris and stay several months in his home. In Paris, Rimbaud met many important literary figures but alienated most of them with his vulgar behavior. However, Rimbaud and Verlaine (who was married at the time) developed an openly acknowledged homosexual relationship. The two men engaged in a tumultuous, passionate, intermittent love affair for several years. Rimbaud traveled with Verlaine to London and Brussels in the early 1870s, during which time Rimbaud composed the prose poetry later collected in *Les illuminations* (*Illuminations*). In 1873, the volatile nature of their relationship reached a peak when Verlaine shot Rimbaud in the wrist. Soon after this incident, Rimbaud returned to his family home in France, where he completed his volume of prose poetry, *Une saison en enfer* (1873; *A Season in Hell*). In 1875, Rimbaud saw Verlaine for the last time. He left Verlaine with the manuscript of the volume *Illuminations*, which Verlaine saw to publication in 1886. Rimbaud spent most of the remainder of his life traveling the world, largely cut off from the literary world of Paris. His period of poetry writing lasted from about age sixteen to twenty-one. In February 1891, Rimbaud returned to France for cancer treatments. He died on November 10, at the age of thirty-seven.

### *Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941)*

Marina Tsvetaeva was born October 8, 1892, in Moscow. Tsvetaeva attended the Sorbonne in Paris where she studied literary history. There she was exposed to Symbolism, which had a big impression on the young poet. Her first volume of poetry, *Evening Album*, was published in 1910. In 1912, she married Serfei Efron, a soldier by trade; they had two daughters together. Tsvetaeva loved her husband but, throughout her life, also had a number of affairs with both men and women. Civil war broke out in the Soviet Union in 1917, and Efron was often gone fighting. Tsvetaeva was obliged to remain in Moscow for five years during which time there was a famine and her youngest daughter consequently died of starvation. The family was reunited in 1922 in Berlin and moved to Prague, where they had a son. In 1925, they moved to Paris where Tsvetaeva found herself an outcast among the Russian expatriate community for not being sufficiently anti-Soviet. She consoled herself with correspondence with friends, among which one of her dearest was the poet Boris Pasternak. In the late 1920s, homesick, Efron became a Soviet spy and soon had to return to Russia to escape the French police. Marred by this pro-Soviet association, Tsvetaeva found herself further ostracized and followed him a year later, in 1939. Life in Stalin's Soviet Union was no better for Tsvetaeva, who had trouble finding work and was considered suspect by the government. On August 31, 1941, Tsvetaeva hanged herself at her home in Yelabuga, in the western Soviet Union.

### *Paul Verlaine (1844–1896)*

Paul Verlaine was one of the principal founders of the symbolist movement. Verlaine was born on March 30, 1844, in Metz, France. In 1862, he began his association with many of the literary figures of the day, including Mallarmé, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, and Anatole France. He married in 1870, but his marriage was disrupted by the arrival of Rimbaud in 1871, with whom Verlaine carried on a passionate and tumultuous love affair over a period of years. In 1872, Verlaine abandoned his wife to travel with Rimbaud to London and Brussels and to work on his poetry. In 1873, in Brussels, Verlaine shot Rimbaud in the wrist during a quarrel and was sentenced to two years in prison. His masterpiece, the poetry volume *Romances sans parole* (*Songs without Words*), was published in 1874, while Verlaine was still in prison. His volume *Sagesse* (1880; *Wisdom*), published in 1880, has come to be regarded as one of his major works. In the early 1880s, Verlaine was recognized as a leading symbolist poet, particularly with his poem "Art poétique." His volume *Les poètes maudits* (1884; *The Accursed Poets*), includes short biographical essays on six poets, including Mallarmé and Rimbaud. In 1886, Verlaine oversaw the publication of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*. When Verlaine died of pulmonary congestion on January 8, 1896, in Paris, he was widely recognized as a major French poet of the nineteenth century and one of the founders of the symbolist movement.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### Against the Grain

The novel *Against the Grain*, by Huysmans, was published in 1884 and is considered the greatest work of symbolist fiction. The story concerns a wealthy, privileged, and hypersensitive man who leaves Paris to isolate himself from human society. He does so by shutting himself in a luxurious country home where he sees no one. Even his servants are made to stay out of his sight. Huysmans is less concerned with plot than with the state of mind of his protagonist. Like the symbolist poets, Huysmans wished to explore the inner spiritual and psychological state of the individual through his writing. He employs prose that borders on the poetic, using language in experimental ways that embody symbolist ideals. With *Against the Grain*, Huysmans made a daring break from the Realism and Naturalism of his literary mentor, the famous French novelist Emile Zola. Huysmans's admiration of the symbolist poets is expressed within the story when the protagonist reads the poetry of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine.

### The Twelve

The verse ballad *The Twelve*, by Blok, was published in 1918 and is a masterpiece of Russian symbolist poetry. It concerns twelve brutal Red Guards on a rampage during the St. Petersburg uprising of 1917 and 1918. Stylistically, *The Twelve* is celebrated for Blok's use of language that is both vernacular and musical, expressing harsh vulgarities as well as delicate moods.

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande* was adapted as an opera by Claude Debussy, with a libretto by Maeterlinck, in 1902.
- In 2007, Kultur Video released a film biography of Russian symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok, titled *Great Russian Writers: Alexander Blok*. It tells Blok's story in its historical context.



The Apparition*, by Gustave Moreau, an important symbolist painter* (Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris. The Art Archive / Dagli Orti / The Picture Desk, Inc.)

### Illuminations

Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations* is considered a masterwork of symbolist prose poetry. It consists of forty-two prose poems first composed in 1873. The collection was not published until 1886, at a time when Rimbaud was traveling the world. Paul Verlaine, to whom Rimbaud had given the manuscript, was unable to contact Rimbaud and published the volume without Rimbaud's knowledge. Rimbaud himself may never have seen this publication. In *Illuminations*, Rimbaud developed the prose poem in accordance with the symbolist aesthetic. His unique use of language, punctuation, and informal structure is extremely experimental, leaving many readers baffled about the poems' meanings and many critics at odds over how to interpret the work. Rimbaud's themes include the importance of childhood perceptions, the journey as metaphor, the spirit of rebellion, and the mysteries of nature. He frequently ends his poems with a single, powerful line that is both striking and enigmatic.

### The Afternoon of a Faun

*The Afternoon of a Faun*, published by Mallarmé in 1876, is one of the greatest works of symbolist verse. It explores the relationship between the real world and an idealized spiritual world of perfection and beauty. It also deals with sensuality, passion, and physical sensation and how they attain significance through meditation and introspection.

### Flowers of Evil

*Flowers of Evil*, by Baudelaire, was the primary literary inspiration for the symbolist poets, and remains one of the most celebrated works of nineteenth-century French verse. The poems embody the central ideals of Symbolism. Critic William Franke divides Baudelaire's Symbolism into four complex, elements: symbol, language, reality, and meaning. Although Baudelaire himself was a precursor to the symbolist movement, *Flowers of Evil* is considered a major work of symbolist poetry. The first edition of 100 poems was published in 1857. A second edition in 1861 was expanded to include 126 poems. This 1861 edition is divided into six sections: "Spleen et Ideal" ("Spleen and the Ideal"), "Tableaux Parisians" ("Parisian Tableaus"), "Le Vin" ("Wine"), "Fleurs du mal" ("Flowers of Evil"), "Révolte" ("Revolt"), and "La Mort" ("Death"). In *Flowers of Evil*, Baudelaire maintains traditional formal elements of verse in poems that are highly innovative in theme and imagery. The poems address themes of original sin, beauty, love,

death, and the tension between sensuality and spirituality. The subjects of the poems include the spiritual and sensual love of women, the powers of Satan, and the spiritual struggles inherent to the human condition. The section "Parisian Tableaus" was added to the 1861 edition and contains poems about the city of Paris, noted as the first modern urban poetry. *Flowers of Evil* includes Baudelaire's most famous poem, "Le Cygne" ("The Swan"), in which the memory of a swan, escaped from the zoo and stranded near the Louvre in Paris symbolizes the human plight of alienation and loss that are commonly addressed in modern literature. Other major poems in this volume include "La Chevelure" ("The Head of Hair") and "Correspondences."

## Pelleas and Melisande

*Pelleas and Melisande*, by Maeterlinck, is considered the greatest work of symbolist drama. This five-act play was first produced in 1893. It uses a fairytale setting and revolves around the Princess Melisande, whose passionate love for her husband's brother leads to doom and destruction. While the plot and characterization are relatively simple, the play expresses a powerful mood of longing in language notable for its musical qualities.

## Songs without Words

Verlaine's *Songs without Words*, published in 1874, is a collection of poems that captures the musicality of the French language. The volume includes twenty-one poems and is divided into four sections: "Ariettes oubliées" ("Forgotten Ariettas"), "Paysages belges" ("Belgian Landscapes"), "Birds in the Night" (titled in English in the original version), and "Arquarelles" ("Watercolors"). The tone of the poems is highly personal, expressing feelings of passion, guilt, regret, and nostalgia. These poems were written during Verlaine's travels with Rimbaud to Belgium and England and express his mixed feelings about the wife he abandoned as well as his feelings for Rimbaud. The first edition of *Songs without Words* was published while Verlaine was imprisoned after having shot Rimbaud in the wrist during a lover's quarrel. Verlaine originally dedicated the volume to Rimbaud, but the dedication was removed from the published edition because of the scandalous nature of Verlaine's relationship to Rimbaud.

# THEMES

## *The Inner Life of the Individual*

The symbolist writers were concerned with expressing various elements of the internal life of the individual. They focused on subjective mental impressions, internal moods, delicate emotional states, and spiritual sentiments in reaction against the nineteenth-century focus on objective, external, concrete realities as perceived through rational scientific methods. Their use of imagery often exemplifies states of mind, the imagination, the human psyche, and dreams. Huysmans's symbolist novel *Against the Grain*, for example, concerns a man who isolates himself in a country house, avoiding contact with other people; the focus of the novel is thus on the detailed subjective perceptions of the hypersensitive protagonist within an isolated environment. Many symbolist poems, particularly those of Rimbaud, evoke the inner world of the child, capturing childhood impressions, perceptions, and flights of imagination.

## *The Journey*

Many symbolist writers describe various journeys, voyages, or quests as metaphors for internal explorations into the inner consciousness of the individual. Baudelaire's poem "Le Voyage" ("The Voyage") describes a journey as a symbol of the quest for meaning and satisfaction in life. Rimbaud, who wrote many of his major poems while traveling with Verlaine, often focuses on symbolic journeys in his poetry, frequently describing travel as a metaphor for a quest into the imagination. For example, "Le Bateau ivre" ("The Drunken Boat"), one of Rimbaud's most famous poems, narrates a voyage by boat as a metaphor for an internal voyage into the mind of the individual. Verlaine also wrote a number of poems based on his travels with Rimbaud.

## *Sensual and Spiritual Love*

The major symbolist poets were men, and many of their poems explore the tension in their lives between the sensual love of women and the spiritual idealization of women. These themes are addressed in the first section of Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*, wherein three cycles of love poetry are associated with three different women with whom Baudelaire was involved during his life. Baudelaire's poem "The Head of Hair" focuses on the sensuality of a woman's hair. The symbolist poets also strove for the realization of spiritual ideals through their love poetry. They considered beauty

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- The symbolist movement in literature was an important influence on modern painting. The major symbolist painters were Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, and Puvis de Chavannes. Find art books with reproductions of symbolist paintings by these or other artists. Choose one symbolist painter and provide a brief biography of him or her, focusing on the period during which he produced the majority of his symbolist works. Discuss one painting by the artist, describing the painting in your own words. In what ways does this painting express the ideals of the symbolist movement?

- Read Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun* then find and listen to a recording of Debussy's musical adaptation *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. Compare and contrast the poem to the prelude. In what ways are the ideals of the symbolist movement expressed through Debussy's musical composition? How are the ideals of Symbolism expressed differently in the different mediums of poetry and music?

- Maeterlinck was the foremost author of symbolist drama. Read his play *Pelleas and Melisande*. With a group of students, perform one scene from the play then discuss as a group the scene you have performed. Describe the symbolist elements and themes of the scene. In what ways does your performance of the scene enhance your understanding of the play?

- Although the symbolist writers did not invent the prose poetry form, a number of them did develop the prose poem as a modern form of expression. For this assignment, choose *one* of the following options: a) Choose three prose poems from either Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen* or Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, and write an essay describing the major theme or themes, the poet's use of language, and the symbolist elements of the poem; or, b) Look through published volumes of prose poetry to get a sense of the form, then write five to ten of your own original prose poems.

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to be an abstract spiritual ideal that can only be hinted at through the presence of physical beauty. Mallarmé described this concept as the ideal flower that does not exist in any real bouquet. Not all symbolist poetry was inspired by heterosexual relationships. The love poetry of both Verlaine and Rimbaud was often inspired by their own homosexual relationship.

### *Religion and Spirituality*

Symbolist literature is often preoccupied with spiritual exploration and religious questions. Symbolist writers developed religious themes in a variety of ways. Much of Baudelaire's poetry explores the Catholic concept of sin and the figure of Satan. The section of *Flowers of Evil* entitled "Revolt" focuses on Baudelaire's struggles with the allure

of Satanism. Rimbaud, on the other hand, offers harsh criticism of traditional religious beliefs throughout his writing, while striving to express spiritual ideals. Verlaine, who experienced a religious awakening while in prison, wrote poetry expressing the Catholic faith in his volume *Wisdom*. Blok is noted for his verse ballad *The Twelve*, in which the exploits of a band of revolutionary rebels are described as a Christian parable.

### *Urban Life*

Modern urban life is an important element and central theme of symbolist poetry that inaugurated the transition to modern literature in the twentieth century. Baudelaire, in his "Parisian Tableaus," a section of *Flowers of Evil*, wrote some of the first poetry to

depict nineteenth-century urban landscapes and urban squalor. His famous poem "The Swan" expresses feelings of alienation evoked by life in the modern city.

## STYLE

### *Free Verse*

Free verse or *Vers libre* was developed by the symbolist poets as a form of verse liberated from the traditional formal requirements of French poetry, such as meter and rhyme. The symbolists felt the formal qualities of a poem should emerge from its content, rather than being imposed upon it by conventional rules. Free verse poetry thus tends to be structured according to the rhythms of everyday speech. French symbolist poets Jules Laforgue (1860–1887) and Gustave Kahn (1859–1936) were the first to develop free verse, which they began to use in the 1880s. Due to the influence of symbolist poetry, free verse came to characterize modern poetry in the twentieth century. Early English-language poets who used free verse include T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

### *Musicality of Language*

Symbolist writers were particularly interested in bringing out the musical qualities of language. They developed works of lyrical beauty in which language was orchestrated with image to create a symphony of mood and suggestion. Verlaine and Mallarmé are particularly revered for the musical qualities of their poetry. Blok brought musicality to Russian verse in his ballad *The Twelve*. In drama, the plays of Maeterlinck are notable for the musical qualities of the dialogue.

### *Mood*

The symbolists focused on evoking a strong sense of mood through the use of language. Moods such as longing, regret, a sense of loss, and reverie are often expressed in symbolist literature. The poets strove to evoke specific moods through the expression of subtle internal states of mind. In symbolist fiction and drama, plot is less important than the overall mood or atmosphere that is created.

### *The Fairy Tale*

A number of symbolist writers drew from traditional folktales and fairytales in their works of poetry, fiction, and drama. Maeterlinck, for example, in his plays *The Princess Maleine* and *Pelleas and Melisande*, drew from a variety of popular folktales to create dramas set in traditional fairytale settings and featuring characters from folk literature. Rimbaud drew extensively on the fairytale in experimental narrative poems that transform this traditional genre.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### *International Influence*

The symbolist movement, though begun in France, had a profound influence on international literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Inspired by the reading of French symbolist poetry in translation, the poets of the Russian symbolist movement emerged during the 1890s. Russian Symbolism is one of the early literary movements that characterized the "Silver Age" in Russia, a period of great intellectual and literary achievement. The development of Russian symbolist literature was inspired by the writings of the Russian philosopher and poet Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), in conjunction with French symbolist literature. The Russian symbolist movement is dated from the 1893 publication of the essay "On the Reasons for the Decline and on the New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature," written by Dmitry Merezhkovsky.

Russian symbolist literature developed in two waves. The first wave included the poet Valery Bryusov (1873–1924), who translated French symbolist poetry into Russian and was regarded as the leader of Russian Symbolism; the poet Zinaida Gippius (1869–1945); and the poet and novelist Fyodor Sologub. The second wave of Russian Symbolism is associated with three major literary figures: Aleksandr Blok, Vyacheslav Ivanov, and Andrey Bely. Blok, considered one of the greatest Russian poets of the twentieth century, is celebrated for his symbolist verse ballad *The Twelve*, a religious parable that takes place during the Russian Revolution. Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949) is known as a symbolist poet and a major theoretical influence on Russian Symbolism. Andrey Bely (1880–1934) is best known for his symbolist novel *Petersburg*.

While other national cultures did not necessarily develop their own unique symbolist movements, the modernist literature of many nations did develop out of symbolist influence. English

literature in particular was influenced by Symbolism, including the works of poet T. S. Eliot and poet and playwright W. B. Yeats, as well as novelists James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The imagist movement in American and English poetry, developed by Ezra Pound and others, was also inspired by Symbolism. German writers, particularly poet Rainer Maria Rilke and novelist Thomas Mann, were affected by Symbolism, which also exerted influence on Japanese and Turkish literature.

### Aestheticism

Aestheticism was a literary and artistic movement of the nineteenth century. Followers of the movement believed that art should not be mixed with social, political, or moral teaching. The statement "art for art's sake" expresses a central tenet of aestheticism. The movement had its roots in France, but it gained widespread importance in England in the last half of the nineteenth century, where it helped change the Victorian practice of including moral lessons in literature. Oscar Wilde is one of the best-known aesthetes of the late nineteenth century.

### Decadent Literature

The decadents were followers of a nineteenth-century literary movement that had its beginnings in French aestheticism. Decadent literature displays a fascination with perverse and morbid states; a search for novelty and sensation—the "new thrill"; a preoccupation with mysticism; and a belief in the senselessness of human existence. The movement is closely associated with the doctrine summed up in the words, "Art for art's sake." The term "decadence" is sometimes used to denote a decline in the quality of art or literature following a period of greatness. Major French decadents are Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud. English decadents include Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, and Frank Harris.

### Theater

Symbolist theater developed in France in conjunction with the works of symbolist playwrights. In 1890, Paul Fort founded the Theatre d'Art in Paris, which produced works of symbolist drama. In 1892, upon the death of Fort, Aurelien Lugne-Poe founded the Theatre de l'Oeuvre from the Theatre d'Art. Symbolist theater was particularly influenced by the literary ideals of Mallarmé. The theatrical productions were a reaction against realist drama in staging, costumes, and performance style. The influence of symbolist painting affected the use of backdrops and stage sets to embody the symbolist ideals of recreating specific moods and internal states of mind, rather than reproducing realistic settings or scenarios. Maeterlinck is the most celebrated symbolist playwright. Other major symbolist playwrights include the French writers Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (1838–1889) and Paul Claudel (1868–1955).

### Painting

Symbolist painting was as important to the development of modern art as symbolist poetry was to the development of modern literature. Symbolist painting was inspired by symbolist poetry and was a reaction against Realism and Impressionism. Symbolist painters focused on depicting the world of dream, myth, fantasy, and the imagination, and on creating visual expressions of internal moods and subjective states of mind. The most important symbolist painters were Odilon Redon (1840–1916), who was a close friend of Mallarmé; Gustave Moreau (1826–1898); and Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898).

### Music

Symbolism exerted a significant influence on musical composition of the twentieth century. Most notably, French composers Claude Debussy (1862–1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) applied symbolist ideals to their music. Like Baudelaire and other symbolist poets, Debussy was strongly influenced by the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Debussy's famous composition *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (1894) is based on Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun*. Debussy also adapted Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande* as an operatic composition with a libretto by Maeterlinck himself, first performed in 1902. Ravel adapted the poetry of Mallarmé to music in his 1913 vocal composition *Trois poèmes de Stephane Mallarmé* (*Three Poems by Stephane Mallarmé*).

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although the subject matter of symbolist poetry was focused on the individual and was generally apolitical, several of the symbolist poets themselves were involved in major political events that took place in France during the second half of the nineteenth century. These events included the Revolution of 1848, the Second

# COMPARE
# &
# CONTRAST

- **1850–1900:** France experiences several internal rebellions and major changes of government. The Second Republic, a constitutional democracy ruled by a president, lasts from the Revolution of 1848 until 1852. The Second Empire, under the rule of Emperor Napoleon III, remains relatively stable from 1852 until 1870. The Third Republic, a constitutional democracy with a president, remains relatively stable from 1871 until the German occupation of France in 1940.

  **Today:** The current French government, known as the Fifth Republic, is a constitutional democracy ruled by a president. The Fifth Republic was formulated in 1959 and has remained relatively stable into the early 2000s.

- **1850–1900:** France engages in warfare as well as alliances with several European nations. In the Crimean War of 1853 to 1856, France, in alliance with England and Turkey, is at war with Russia. In the Franco-German War of 1870 to 1871, France is invaded and defeated by Germany. In 1894 France enters a pact with Russia known as the dual alliance. According to the dual alliance, the two nations would aid one another in case of aggression by the triple alliance (1882) of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

  **Today:** France—along with Germany, England, Austria, and Italy, among others—is a member of the European Union, an organization of some 27 independent European nations united by various social, political, economic, and legal interests to maintain peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with one another.

- **1850–1900:** After the Revolution of 1848, universal manhood suffrage is established in France, giving all adult males the right to vote in political elections and referenda.

  **Today:** Since 1945, women in France, as well as men, have been granted the right to vote .

- **1850–1900:** One of the few European nations that did *not* experience a revolution in 1848, Russia remains a vast empire ruled by an autocratic czar until the revolution of 1917. A major social reform is enacted in 1861, when the serfs in Russia, essentially peasant slaves, are emancipated and granted the right to own land.

  **Today:** After some seventy years of communist rule (since 1917), the U.S.S.R. was dismantled in 1991 and divided into some twelve independent nation-states, of which Russia is the largest and most powerful. The nations of the former Soviet Union remain strongly associated with one another through the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991.

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Empire, the Franco-German War, and the Paris Commune.

The Revolution of 1848 in France was an uprising of citizens that resulted in the overthrow of the existing constitutional monarchy under King Luis-Philippe. The revolution consisted of three days of rioting during the month of February, in which the army engaged in a violent clash with a crowd of demonstrators. As a result of this public unrest, the king chose to abdicate the throne and named his nine-year-old grandson as his successor. Thus began the period of French government known as the Second Republic, which included a new constitution providing for a variety of social reforms. Four months after the formation of the Second Republic, civil unrest again erupted in Paris in a four-day-long civil war known as the June Days. The June Days were sparked when workers, supported by students and artisans, protested against government budget cuts that denied welfare to

thousands of unemployed people. This rebellion ended after the army shot and killed about 1,500 demonstrators and arrested 12,000 of them. The symbolist poet Baudelaire, at that time still unpublished, is known to have participated in both the February and the June uprisings of 1848.

In the first presidential election of the Second Republic, voters chose Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte. According to the constitution of the Second Republic, no president could serve more than one four-year term. Thus, after serving several years as president, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, who wished to maintain his position as leader of France, staged a coup of his own government in 1851. After some seventy politicians were arrested, Napoleon presented a new constitution and formulated a new government. The citizens of France immediately responded to Napoleon's actions by staging mass protests throughout Paris and the outlying provinces. In the course of several days of demonstrations, the police and military killed hundreds of protestors and arrested some 27,000 people. Although he was not harmed or arrested, Baudelaire is known to have participated in these demonstrations. After these events, Baudelaire gave up on political activism and focused his attentions on writing. In 1852, Louis-Napoleon had himself named Emperor Napoleon III of France, beginning an era of French government known as the Second Empire.

The advent of the Franco-German War (also known as the Franco-Prussian War), brought an end to the Second Empire of France. In 1870, France declared war on Germany, after which time German troops invaded France. When war broke out, Huysmans, not yet a published author, was called to military duty. However, he almost immediately contracted dysentery and spent most of the war in various military hospitals without seeing battle. Huysmans was eventually granted sick leave from the military, and returned home to Paris. Arriving home, he found himself in a Paris besieged by Prussian forces. Huysmans diligently kept notes on his experiences of the siege that he intended to use for a later novel (a project which he continued to work on after the war but never completed).

In the Battle of Sedan, French military forces, headed by the Emperor Napoleon, were surrounded and defeated by the Germans in 1870. The French surrendered and Napoleon, along with thousands of French troops, was taken as a prisoner of war. On the home front

in Paris, citizens disillusioned by the capture of Napoleon took to the streets to demand a new government. Thus, in 1870 a new government in France, known as the Third Republic, was formed without violent conflict. Early in 1871, France signed an armistice with Prussia. The Third Republic lasted until the German occupation of France during World War II.

Although the Third Republic endured until World War II, it was not without opposition. In 1871, a rebellion in France known as the Paris Commune lasted some two-and-a-half months. The Paris Commune began when a coalition of political activists in Paris, opposing a variety of Third Republic initiatives, organized an insurrection against the newly formed government. Soon, a municipal government, known as the Commune of Paris, was formed by the revolutionaries, who were known as the communards. Similar communes were formed in outlying cities, but were quickly put down by the French government. Huysmans, who held a low-level government post during and after the Franco-German war, fled with the French government to Versailles for the duration of the Paris Commune. Rimbaud, still a teenager and not yet published, ran away from home to participate in the Paris Commune. After three weeks, Rimbaud returned home, narrowly missing the bloody conflict that was to follow, when government troops violently crushed the rebellion during what became known as the "Bloody Week." The communards responded by executing hostages, among whom was the archbishop of Paris, and setting fire to major municipal buildings. Some 20,000 rebels and 750 government troops were killed during the "Bloody Week," and some 45,000 insurrectionists were arrested or deported. The defeat of the Paris Commune effectively squelched political resistance in France for years afterward. Rimbaud, disillusioned by this defeat, turned his focus from political activism to the pursuit of writing. Huysmans returned to Paris with other government officials after the insurrection was put down.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Critical response to the development of Symbolism was itself an important contribution to the symbolist movement, as many of the literary critics and leading theorists of Symbolism were

*Claude Debussy adapted symbolist works as musicals and operas* *(Time & Life Pictures | Mansell | Getty Images)*

Gustave Flaubert and Victor Hugo, offered high praise for *Flowers of Evil*, recognizing the value of Baudelaire's innovative poetry. Baudelaire himself, however, was greatly discouraged by the censorship and public notoriety of his work.

The founders of Symbolism—Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Rimbaud—developed their literary ideals against the dominance of Realism in nineteenth-century literature. The realist aesthetic in poetry was concentrated in the development of a group of writers known as the "Parnassians." The Parnassians strove to create accurate, precise, objective descriptions of external objects and events, and to resist the emotional outpouring associated with romantic poetry. Mallarmé and Verlaine were among the Parnassian poets until they broke away from these ideals to write poetry focusing on the subjective, irrational, internal states of mind of the individual that characterizes the symbolist ideal.

Before the term Symbolism was applied to this new development in French poetry, these 1880s poets were termed the "decadents," a term first applied by critics to poets Verlaine and Jules Laforgue as an insult. The poets took up the epithet with pride, however, founding the literary review *Le Decadent* (*The Decadent*) in 1886. The term Symbolism was coined in 1886 in an article by Jean Moreas that laid out the theoretical and aesthetic ideals of this literary movement. Moreas suggested that symbolist was a more apt label for these poets than decadent.

The symbolist novel developed in reaction against the realist fiction of the naturalists. The realists strove to accurately represent objective depictions of external reality in their fiction, based on close, detailed observations of the world. Emile Zola, the famous French novelist, was a leader of the naturalist movement in literature, an extension of Realism. Early in his writing career, Huysmans was associated with Zola's circle of naturalist writers. However, Huysmans became the foremost symbolist novelist when he broke away from Zola's circle and wrote *Against the Grain*, a novel that focuses almost exclusively on the internal states of mind of a hypersensitive protagonist isolated from human society. Because it so sharply broke with his own literary ideals, Zola's critical response to Huysmans's novel was predictably negative. Interestingly, although the symbolist poetry of Verlaine and Mallarmé preceded and inspired Huysmans's novel, it was Huysmans's discussion of these poets in *Against the Grain* that introduced many readers to symbolist poetry.

themselves symbolist writers. These critics contributed to the shaping, definition, and dissemination of the movement. A discussion of critical responses to Symbolism is thus also a historical narrative of the development of the movement.

If Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Rimbaud are the fathers of Symbolism, Baudelaire may be considered the grandfather. Baudelaire's first major publication was met with public controversy as well as critical acclaim. His poetry volume *Flowers of Evil*, the seminal text of the symbolist movement, was first published amidst great controversy. Of the one hundred poems in the first edition, thirteen were singled out by a government agency as violations of laws of decency and religious morality. These thirteen poems were judged in a court of law, as a result of which six were found illegal and extracted from the published volume. Baudelaire and his editors were also required to pay a fine. (The ban on publication of these six poems in France was not lifted until 1949.) Despite this public controversy, major critics as well as some of the most important French writers of the day, including

Thus, the popularity of *Against the Grain* helped expand the readership of symbolist poetry.

Although not all of their major works were published within their lifetimes, many of the major poets of the symbolist movement were, by the time of their deaths, recognized as some of the greatest and most influential writers of the nineteenth century. Writers and literary critics throughout the twentieth century agree that the symbolist movement exerted a profound and widespread influence on modern literature. Symbolism is regarded as the bridge between nineteenth-century Realism and twentieth-century Modernism in literature. Twentieth-century literary movements such as Imagism, Surrealism, and dadaism were directly influenced by Symbolism. In the early twenty first century, Symbolism continues to be widely regarded as one of the most important influences on international literature of the previous two centuries.

# CRITICISM

## *Liz Brent*

*Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture and works as a freelance writer. In this essay, Brent discusses the development of the modern prose poem in symbolist literature.*

### SYMBOLISM AND THE MODERN PROSE POEM

One of the many lasting influences of the symbolist movement on international literature can be seen in the development of the modern prose poem during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Prose poetry is written in the form of prose, yet maintains the lyrical language use, suggestive imagery, and thematic sensibilities of poetry. The formal properties of the prose poem are intended to liberate verse from traditional requirements of metrical form and line breaks. The prose poem also liberates prose from traditional requirements of story line and narrative closure. Prose poems are usually short, generally anywhere from one paragraph to several pages in length. One of the enduring literary issues raised by prose poetry is the question of how to define it as a literary form distinct from both poetry and prose. The very notion of prose poetry thus raises questions about the boundary between prose and poetry.

Although the symbolists did not invent prose poetry, they freed it from its traditional tone and themes and developed the form as a modern mode of expression. Baudelaire is credited as the inventor of the modern prose poem, producing the important volume *Little Poems in Prose* (1869; later published as *Paris Spleen*). Other important volumes of symbolist prose poetry include Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (1886) and *A Season in Hell* (1873). Mallarmé, one of the founders of Symbolism, also wrote a number of important prose poems.

### THE PROSE POEM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

French poets were first introduced to the prose poem, a relatively obscure genre of literature, in the mid-nineteenth century, through the French writer Louis Bertrand (1807–1841; also known as Aloysius Bertrand). Bertrand first began to publish his prose poetry in a newspaper in 1828. However, his collected volume of prose poetry *Gaspard de la Nuit* (*Gaspard of the Night*) was not published until 1842, a year after his death. With this publication, Bertrand was the first significant French writer to utilize the form of the prose poem.

The prose poems of *Gaspard of the Night* are based on Bertrand's fascination with the medieval history of the city of Dijon, France, and express a romanticized vision of the city's gothic past. Bertrand's prose poetry shows the influence of the romantic movement in literature, with which he was peripherally associated. His prose poetry, however, was entirely innovative in developing a French prose form that retains the lyrical qualities of poetry.

Baudelaire can be credited with bringing the prose poetry of Bertrand to the attention of the French literary world in 1869, when he mentioned the volume with high praise in his introduction to *Little Poems in Prose*. As Baudelaire explains in this introduction, he was first inspired to try his own hand at composing prose poetry through his reading of Bertrand's *Gaspard of the Night*. Baudelaire confesses his debt to Bertrand as his inspiration in attempting to expand the possibilities of the prose poem by applying it to expressions of life in the modern city. Baudelaire states that, while reading *Gaspard of the Night*:

> for at least the twentieth time . . . the idea came to me to try something similar, and to apply to the description of modern life, or rather *one* modern and more abstract life, the procedure [Bertrand] had applied to the depiction of ancient life, so strangely picturesque.

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* (1931), by Edmund Wilson, provides an important critical discussion of the symbolist movement and its influence on such twentieth-century writers as William Butler Yeats, Paul Valéry, T. S. Eliot, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein.

- *Six French Poets of the Nineteenth Century: Lamartine, Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé* (2000), edited by E. H. Blackmore and A. M. Blackmore, provides a bilingual edition of French symbolist poetry with an English translation on facing pages.

- *French Symbolist Poetry: An Anthology* (1980), edited by John Porter Houston and Mona Tobin Houston, provides English translations of major works of French symbolist poetry.

- *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (1990), by Laurence M. Porter, offers criticism and interpretation of the works of the major symbolist poets Mallarmé, Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud.

- *Four French Symbolists: A Sourcebook on Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, and Maurice Denis* (1996), by Russell T. Clement, offers a helpful guide to further sources on the major French symbolist painters.

- *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (1993), by Frantisek Deak, provides discussion of the development of symbolist theater in France.

- *Models of the Universe: An Anthology of the Prose Poem* (1995), edited by Stuart Friebert and David Young, provides an introduction to prose poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from a variety of writers.

- *Debussy in Performance* (1999), edited by James R. Briscoe, includes essays on Debussy and Symbolism as well as discussion of his musical adaptations of Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun* and Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande*.

- *Debussy and His World* (2001), edited by Jane F. Fulcher, includes an essay on Debussy's participation in the Tuesday salons held by Mallarmé.

- *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (1992), by Christopher Prendergast, provides historical analysis of nineteenth-century culture and politics in Paris, France.

- *Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism: Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, 1848–1914* (1968), edited by Roland N. Stromberg, offers discussion of major artistic and literary movements in Europe during the period in which the symbolist movement developed.

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Baudelaire further describes his "dream" of writing in a form that combined elements of poetry and prose:

> Which of us has not, in his ambitious days, dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and choppy enough to fit the soul's lyrical movements, the undulations of reverie, the jolts of consciousness?

Baudelaire first coined the term "prose poem" in reference to a group of his own poems published in 1861. He also describes his innovative style of prose poetry as "fables of modern life." Edward K. Kaplan, in an introduction to his 1989 volume of translations of *Little Poems in Prose*, observes that one of the modern elements of Baudelaire's fables is the fact that, unlike traditional fables that end with a clear moral prescription, they "undermine

> **[WHILE] THE FREE VERSE POEM, INVENTED BY THE SYMBOLISTS, BECAME THE DOMINANT FORM OF POETRY THROUGHOUT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THE MODERN PROSE POEM, ALSO DEVELOPED BY THE SYMBOLISTS, WAS, UNTIL RECENTLY, RELEGATED TO A RELATIVELY OBSCURE PLACE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE."**

any reassuring interpretations." Kaplan further describes this modern element of moral ambiguity in Baudelaire's prose poetry:

> Dismantling all forms of complacency and idealism, the Baudelarian "prose poem" amalgamates, in a dialogically open-ended literary unit, ambiguity and judgment, kindness and cruelty, anger and generosity, reveries and analysis. There are no definitive lessons—only responses.

Baudelaire's fifty prose poems were published posthumously in the 1869 volume *Little Poems in Prose*. Although Baudelaire did not invent the prose poem, the works in this volume represent his revolutionizing impact on the genre. Baudelaire modernized prose poetry and profoundly influenced the symbolist poets, many of whose greatest works are prose poems.

The prose poems of *Little Poems in Prose* treat the subject of modern urban life in Paris, a topic Baudelaire thought to be especially suited to the form of the prose poem. Baudelaire focused on the ugliness of urban existence, but regarded his subject with hopefulness and compassion. While the poems of *Flowers of Evil*, traditional in form, express the beauty of Paris, the prose poems of *Little Poems in Prose* focus on the urban squalor and human suffering of the modern city.

Following in Baudelaire's footsteps, Rimbaud published two major volumes of prose poetry. As in Baudelaire's *Little Poems in Prose*, Rimbaud in his volume *Illuminations* explored the cityscapes of Paris through the form of the prose poem. Unlike Baudelaire's Paris, Rimbaud's visions of the urban landscape are imbued with a sense of mystery beneath the squalid surface of modern city life. *A Season in Hell*, Rimbaud's second volume of prose poetry, represents an intensely personal delving into the poet's spiritual and artistic inner-anguish.

**PROSE POETRY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

During the early twentieth century many writers, influenced by the French symbolists, tried their hands at prose poetry. Following the lead of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, the later French symbolist writers Paul Valéry, Paul Fort, and Paul Claudel composed notable prose poems. Important writers outside of France, such as Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Sherwood Anderson, are also recognized for their outstanding prose poetry.

However, the prose poem throughout most of the twentieth century remained a relatively unpopular form among most readers and critics, as well as most writers. Thus, while the free verse poem, invented by the symbolists, became the dominant form of poetry throughout the twentieth century, the modern prose poem, also developed by the symbolists, was, until recently, relegated to a relatively obscure place in twentieth-century literature. The very form of the prose poem was not taken seriously by the majority of literary critics and many writers. As C. W. Truesdale observes in a preface to *The Party Train: A Collection of North American Prose Poetry* (1996), the prose poem "has never received its critical due despite the excitement the form has generated among poets themselves." Truesdale describes a general "critical neglect—even hostility" to the prose poem among literary critics throughout most of the twentieth century. Truesdale goes on to assert that the dominance of free verse "has forced the prose poem . . . to the sidelines, has marginalized it as a genre."

Beginning in the 1960s, however, prose poetry gained a renewed interest among writers, and small literary magazines began to publish prose poetry with increasing frequency. Influential American writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Robert Bly contributed to this renewed interest in the prose poem in the 1960s and 1970s. The volume *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology* (1976), edited by Michael Benedikt, helped to introduce English language readers to a broad range of prose poetry.

The 1980s and 1990s saw increased interest in the prose poem among English-language writers and editors of small literary journals. During

*Loaded gun carriages during the time of the Paris Commune* *(© Hulton-Deutsch Collection / Corbis)*

these final decades of the twentieth century, a number of anthologies of prose poetry, as well as volumes of literary criticism focused on the prose poem, saw publication. In the 1990s, journals devoted entirely to prose poetry, such as *The Prose Poem: An International Journal*, sprang up to accommodate this growing interest.

In the late twentieth century, a variety of terms came to designate prose poetry. Because of the brevity of the prose poem, its boundaries have also come to overlap with the emergence of a new form of very short fiction. Thus, the following terms have been applied to the prose poem form: "sudden fiction," "flash fiction," the "modern parable," the "modern fable," the "short short story," and "micro-fiction," among others.

In a 1996 essay entitled "The Poetry of Village Idiots," Charles Simic defines the prose poem as "an impossible amalgamation of lyric poetry, anecdote, fairy tale, allegory, joke, journal entry, and many other kinds of prose." However, the very definition of prose poetry remains a central topic of debate, and nearly all English-language anthologies of prose poetry during this period begin with an overview of the ongoing debate as to the question of whether or not the prose poem exists as a distinct literary form, and,

if so, how it might be defined and distinguished from both poetry and prose. Nonetheless, nearly all critics and writers acknowledge the debt of modern prose poetry to the innovations of the French symbolist poets in elevating the prose poem to the status of a high art particularly suited to expressions of modern life.

**Source:** Liz Brent, Critical Essay on Symbolism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

### William Franke

*In the following essay, Franke examines Baudelaire's manipulation of symbol, language, and meaning, which brought about the beginning of the French Symbolist literary movement.*

The process of symbolization begins when one thing is used to stand for something else. A stone thrown into a pit for the purpose of counting whatever sort of objects may be considered a primitive symbol. A link is thereby forged between items that have nothing to do with each other in the nature of things, simply by virtue of the one's being made to take the place of the other. Some such model as this generally informs the notion of the symbol current in linguistics and semiotics and in a broad spectrum of empirical disciplines where phenomena of

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signification are studied scientifically. The aspect of the symbol that is stressed in these fields is its arbitrariness or conventionality and the fact that it is *not* the object it symbolizes, but just some substitute for it in the object's absence.

For poets, and generally in aesthetic theory, the symbolic has quite a different meaning. The symbol distinguishes itself from other types of signs (or as against the sign altogether) by virtue of its making concretely present the thing it signifies. This function of presencing has consistently been described in the language of "participation," with the implication that the symbol is actually a part of the larger whole it represents—*pars pro toto*. In Coleridge's famous formulation, the symbol "always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative." Consequently, in aesthetics the idea of the symbol has tended to imply an intrinsic affinity with what is symbolized (to the point of *being* it, at least in part) and often the fundamental unity of all things—all things being reflected in the symbol as in a microcosm or monad. In addition to the monadology of Leibniz, Hegel's doctrine of the concrete universal and Kant's notion of an a priori intuition which is not "schematic" but rather "analogical" (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, sec. 59) supply some of the German idealistic underpinnings for this originally romantic conception of the symbol. Another important source can be found in magic and totemism, as is signaled by the interest of symbolist poets from Baudelaire to Yeats and beyond, for example, to James Merrill, in the occult. In occult tradition and lore, the symbol participates in reality to the extent of being able effectively to transform it, typically through the manipulation of tokens, rather than remaining just an external representation devoid of any real efficacy and power over what it represents (Lévi-Strauss, "L'efficacité").

That the symbol is a part of the whole it represents (and by universal analogy this expands to include the whole universe), that it thereby makes present what it signifies, presenting it, precisely, *in part*, means also that the symbol may be said to signify not merely by virtue of convention but by its "nature." What it actually is in itself and not just what it may be arbitrarily used to stand for determines what the symbol signifies. To say a "sail" was seen on the horizon in order to mean that a ship was seen (Coleridge's own example) is in some sense a natural mode of expression. There is something not entirely arbitrary about using a sail to represent a ship. A ship is indeed in a certain manner present in a sail; it is present in part. And a sail *is*, approximately, a ship: that is, it is a piece of a ship.

The goal of giving access to nature beneath the level of social conventions of signification has been fairly constantly in view throughout the history of symbolic expression in poetry: it is epitomized by the myth of Orpheus as the singer-poet whose music tames beasts and even moves the inanimate elements. His mastery over the natural world indicates that his poetry is the very language of nature (Bays). The endeavor to return to a state in which language would signify by virtue of its being and intrinsic nature rather than by conventions socially imposed was a program already of the romantics. Hölderlin's "Nun, nun, müssen die Worte dafür, wie Blumen, entstehen" [Now, now, must words therefore like flowers originate] in "Brot und Wein" can be taken as emblematic of the need for rediscovering language as a natural thing. This is the ideal of a poetic language that would be literally things, in which the breach between sign and referent that characterizes (and curses) postlapsarian language would be repaired. The symbolist tradition from Hölderlin to Rilke activates this Orphic claim for poetry in a particularly intense and self-conscious, even at times self-ironic, way. The notion often holds a powerful attraction still for contemporary poets—as witness the undiminished fascination with Orpheus—however far they may be from considering it possible to realize.

The art of the symbol, accordingly, at least from the romantic period on, was supposed to make beings speak, or to provide by the symbol a channel that would make their natural speech

audible. Baudelaire crystallized the idea that language should ideally be the natural speaking of things in some essential verses in "L'Invitation au voyage":

Tout y parlerait
À l'âme en secret
Sa douce langue natale.

These lapidary lines seem to envisage a language unmediated by arbitrary conventions and by meanings imposed by practical functions of communication, deaf to the things' own native voices. Things speaking to the soul in their own native language, attuned to its own inner being, communicate in virtue of what they are. What speaks in the symbol or in the space to which Baudelaire voyages in the poem is everything, *tout*, since by universal analogy any particular thing speaking its sweet native language—that is, the language of things—speaks for all beings and perhaps for being itself. Of course, Baudelaire is also, in decisive ways, fiercely negative on nature, loathing it as ugly and evil, yet his "*flowers* of evil" are nevertheless themselves produced by descent to precisely this soil in order to transform it into art. It is all the more necessary, therefore, to begin from these romantic doctrines in order to account for his transmutation, in effect a denaturalization, of the symbol.

In the symbolic universe, all things are interconnected, and all are immanent in each individual thing. This is to say that the world is composed of correspondences: its qualities "answer to one another," as Baudelaire puts it in "Correspondances" ("Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent"), just like the mutually defining elements of a language. Indeed, as the linguistic metaphor of "answering" suggests, the things that make up the world, at least as it is reflected in poetry, *are* the elements of a language. Baudelaire was fond of describing all nature as a vocabulary for the artist's use ("La nature n'est qu'un dictionnaire"). However, although he evokes the romantic topos of the language of things—as again in "Elévation": "le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes" [the language of flowers and of mute things]—Baudelaire turns out ultimately to be more interested in recreating the whole order of things as a language and therefore as *not* natural. The implication is less that language should return to a state of nature and more nearly the reverse—that even nature might be subsumed into language. Baudelaire's closed, symmetrical stanzaic forms and the interiorization of the world in the supposedly authentic dimension of "cœur" contribute to construing reality as a

language where everything is differentially defined, so that all elements are ordered by internal relations into a self-enclosed system. In "L'Invitation au voyage," "things" such as "les soleils mouillés" and "ces ciels brouillés" are not just kindred natural phenomena. They actually create each other in relation to one another—for example, by the reciprocity of their rhyming and the differential play of assonances and consonants—in the splendor in which they poetically exist, each as distilled out of the other and as fused together into one whole. The experience of reading a Baudelaire poem is (or at least can be) one of being carried away to a sphere where all things and sensations are transubstantiated by appearing within the structural wholes of the poem. The world is presented as essentially translated into a poetic idiom and as articulated in a harmony of purely formal, mutually defining values. Things sublated thus into a system of correspondences or relative differences have been turned essentially into language.

Romantics, and long before them writers of the Middle Ages, had conceived nature as language—that is, as a system of signs, or, metaphorically, a book. However, the creed that the experience of everything as one is a possibility engendered specifically by poetic language became operational first for the symbolists, and they recognized Baudelaire as having opened up this possibility. The sensuously symbolic power of his verse made it a superior, all-encompassing kind of "seeing" to which a veritable universe accrued. Hence Baudelaire could be hailed as *voyant* and a "vrai dieu" by Rimbaud. Baudelaire's essential achievement and legacy to symbolism is to have convincingly created the experience of how everything (at least as sensed and felt by an individual) can be known in and as language. Feelings and perceptions themselves become an alphabet to be used according to the grammar of poetic art. Even when it is strongly evocative of a specific historical epoch and milieu, Baudelaire's poetry refers to these external phenomena only as essentially transfigured by their representation in and as poetic language: "Tout devient allégorie" [All becomes allegory]—"Le Cygne." Baudelaire tended to use *allégorie* interchangeably with the term *symbole* (for example, at the end of "Un voyage à Cythère"), since both serve equally well to indicate the linguistic transfiguration of the real. In this perspective, which is the soul of symbolism, language is not just a reality but all reality, and perhaps suprareality as well.

Language tends to become identical with all it represents in Baudelaire's poetry: it is the part which concretely embodies and becomes symbolically identical with the whole. This is not to be confused with a metaphysical thesis that there is nothing but language. It is rather a poetic experience of everything becoming accessible to be known symbolically—that is, as identical, on the model of part and whole, with the concrete, sensuous instance of the poem itself. A symbol is the presence of a unity that is not completely given as such to the senses but is present in language through the partial, or rather participatory, identity of symbol and symbolized. The poem as symbol is, at least in part, what it represents. This results directly from the drive toward identity at work in language as symbol. The symbol annexes to itself everything with which it comes into contact. It makes everything it touches over into itself. By virtue of its intense sensuality and almost hallucinatory inebriation, Baudelaire's language becomes the palpable presentation or incarnation of a whole (symbolic) universe.

The symbol proposes to participate in a large reality, but for the symbolist this means, by a logic of supplementarity, that it ends up producing virtually, in the element of language, the reality it was supposed to symbolize. Its synthetic energy becomes the creative force that constitutes the world it symbolizes. For the symbol is invested with a force for becoming symbolically the whole that it is not literally, either by throwing things together into unity (*symballein*) or as the part of a token (*symbolon*) that represents, in the absence of the missing half, the whole of which it was originally part. The drive to identity at work in language as symbol is concentrated and heightened by the harmonious language of lyric based on symmetries and correspondences—that is, on various forms of repetition of the same; for example, rhythm and rhyme. All such devices of the lyric imagination serve in the production of varieties of identity.

Identity that is forged by the very symbolic nature of language, brought out and enhanced by the form as well as the intent and meaning of Baudelaire's verse, surfaces as a totally obsessive trope in a poem like "L'Invitation au voyage." The *incipit*—"Mon enfant, ma sœur" [My child, my sister]—creates identity immediately by its grammar of apposition. This already suggests some collapse of natural boundaries of difference, a promiscuous mix of distinct kinds of kinship.

All intimate relations seem to be embraced together in one, an incestuous intimacy disregarding essential differences between progeny and sibling and, implicitly, lover. The country to which the voyage is directed is itself at least partially or approximately identical with the beloved ("pays qui te ressemble"). The skyscapes and weather are for the poet-speaker but the reflection of the beloved's eyes and their stormy emotions. Even love and death collapse together in identity by conjunction: "Aimer à loisir, / Aimer et mourir" [To love at leisure, / To love and die], as loving here becomes at the same time a suspension of activity and a dying. This world of complete identity is expressed finally in the last stanza of the poem in that the ships traveling from the furthest limits of the earth nevertheless move wholly within the sphere of the beloved's desire: "C'est pour assouvir / Ton moindre désir / Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde" [It is to satisfy / Your least desire / That they come from the end of the world]. The external world here is totally at the service of, and has no determination or identity independently of, the innerness of desire. By thematizing the principle of identity in this way, the poem gives a lyric image of how language in fact operates in symbolist poetry—namely, by identifying itself concretely with what it represents and erasing the difference between representation and reality, the inner world and the outer.

The intrinsic relation of language and world in symbolism is grounded not only in the Neoplatonic trope of participation, but also, particularly for romantic theorists of the symbol like Coleridge, Goethe, and Hamann, in the language of revelation, *Offenbarung*, which intimates a prophetic precedent for symbolist poetics. In the biblical tradition of *Logos*, the Word of God creates all things and, consequently, all creatures are symbols bespeaking their Creator. Hence this paradigm, too, induces to construing language and world as communicating with, and indeed as intrinsic to one another, at the most originary level. Baudelaire explicitly alludes to the Creator Word's becoming flesh ("Et verbum caro factum est") in his preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Whether Neoplatonically or biblically backgrounded, whether conceived in terms of participation or of creation as revelation, symbolist poetics are predicated on a peculiarly privileged relation of language and world. Indeed the absorption of all reality into language as *poiesis* may be taken to be

the key premise of the entire symbolist vision. The consequences of this fundamental premise, however, turn out to be diverse and even contradictory. On the one hand, reality puts up no more resistance: all is simply fused into unity in an exquisite and unrestricted universal harmony forged in and by language. On the other hand, the collapse of all extralinguistic reality into language leaves language empty of real substance and consequently disoriented. Without being anchored to anything real beyond itself, language has trouble maintaining even its own unity and integrity.

The essential tension between these opposite sorts of consequences of its pan-linguisticism can, in fact, be detected in every aspect and dimension of symbolist art. Ineluctably, together with the presence of the object in and to the symbol, its immanence to language, comes also an emptying of all objective content. The symbol contains everything immediately within itself, but only at the price of becoming a pure ideality devoid of relation to anything beyond the purely linguistic sphere. Every supposedly external object of language collapses into just a linguistic artifact. This makes it possible ultimately to dissolve the presumed external sources of language, including subjectivity and all its attendant postulates, into material forces and drives conceived of as working and manifest immanently in language. And it is this direction in which symbolist poetry subsequent to Baudelaire and down to our own times decisively moves.

Baudelaire used his art of the symbol in order to discover the mysterious and profound unity ("une ténébreuse et profonde unité") of all things based on revelation by the word or on correspondences in a Neoplatonic order of being. But that this is peculiarly the poet's prerogative, a secret reserved for disclosure by the master of words, suggests that it is a unity that exists essentially in the order of language. As the purely linguistic status of the vision proclaimed in symbolist poetry becomes more overt, the synthesis Baudelaire's poetry celebrates shows itself to be not just a synthesis of what is supposed to be higher reality but equally, and paradoxically, an exclusion from and avoidance of the real. Hence the "double aspect" of symbolism individuated by Paul de Man in his homologous essay "The Double Aspect of Symbolism." It is because the poet in the solitude of his individual consciousness finds himself alienated from the world that he attempts, in vain according to de Man, to recover lost unity by means of his symbolic language.

Given this double aspect of symbolism, together with the aspiration toward an ideal life of unity goes a discomfiting and even shocking avowal of the ultimate truth of dissolution and death. It is only too clear that the ecstatic experiences so exuberantly enjoyed are dependent upon and even transpire within, wholly within, language. Language is the element in which the symbol lives and dies. It is a synthetic, unifying medium, but it is also in itself purely formal, empty of substance, a kind of dead artifact destined to be identified with the dead letter of writing. Consequently, its use to synthesize unity is inevitably artificial. The pure religion of art, practiced self-consciously as a calculated linguistic craft or alchemy, is constrained to exploit the very sorts of mechanical and material means that the symbolist artist otherwise affects to despise. Thus, to the extent that it is an act of faith, symbolism is almost inevitably in bad faith, for it is acutely aware of its own artifices and, in effect, of the contradiction of striving to *synthesize* unmediated experience of the whole harmonious unity of things.

This precarious posture of symbolist poetry is held intact by Baudelaire, buoyed up on the exuberance of his discovery of an almost all-powerful verbal magic. As the historical distance from this burst of creative inspiration lengthens, it becomes more difficult for the sheer passion of poetry to either make good or render irrelevant the self-deceptions that go into the making of the symbol. It is language that permits the total, unified knowledge sought by symbolists, yet language is also at the same time a false, or at least a fictive, element of such knowledge. What is "merely" linguistic is also in a sense nothing. The nothingness and death with which symbolist voices are so seductively obsessed has its remote motivations in this predicament. Irrepressibly, this sense of an encroaching emptying out and annihilation of reality by language asserts itself as a dominant mood throughout French symbolist poetry starting from Baudelaire's own poetry precipitated into the abyss (*le gouffre*) opened up by its own infinite expanse unlimited by any reality it cannot absorb. Indeed death comes to be figured as the very perfection sought, and the goal of knowledge by poetry's symbolic *gnosis* is represented as being reached precisely in death.

As Walter Benjamin perceived, Baudelaire's poetry presents a challenge to conceive language in its purity. In introducing his translation of *Tableaux parisiens*, he describes his attempt to translate the pure essence of language itself. Translation allows pure language "to shine upon the original more fully. It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another" (Benjamin 1969, 227). However, while insisting on the absoluteness of language, taking inspiration from Baudelaire's poetry, the last work of lyric poetry with European-wide significance ("Die 'Fleurs du mal' sind das letzte lyrische Werk gewesen, das eine europäische Wirkung getan hat"), Benjamin also encompasses the other, inseparable aspect of symbolism in analyzing Baudelaire's lyric art as a way of coping with shock, the most distinctive modern experience, as registered first in Baudelaire's poetry. Originally shocking experience can be confronted and digested by being assimilated into a total structure of meaning—that is, essentially as language, but a language scarred with the traces of trauma. Baudelaire's lyric production represents a highly conscious reworking in and as lyric language of lived stimuli that have left the psychic mechanism traumatized, and Benjamin deciphers beneath the smooth surface of the mellifluous verses the ruptures and impasses of Baudelaire's quintessential experience as inaugural of the modern. The apparent wholeness of language into which experience was lifted by symbolic lyric in fact shows through to another aspect of language, especially of prophetic or messianic language, as consisting essentially in raptures and abrasions. Still on the basis of its sublation of reality into language, symbolism's language thus reveals quite a different, unsuspected face marked by materiality and fragmentation. Baudelaire's language read profoundly translates the breakdown that the modern age was witnessing, whereby the aura of things that connects them with their context and past by involuntary memory disintegrates ("Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire").

Benjamin's reflections confirm the two aspects of symbolism and adduce a sort of historical, material account of their derivation. But it is also possible to interpret how the drive toward unity and presence inherent in the symbol converts into disunity and rupture with the real by its own internal logic, by the very fulfillment of its own impulse to total unity and the consequent cutting asunder of the tension between reality and symbol, language and world. The grand symbolic vision of the identity of All leads not only to a total structure or monism of the universe: it entails equally a shattering into autonomous fragments, since each individual element is wholly self-contained, indeed is in itself all-containing. The totally relational identity characteristic of language and therefore also of a linguistic universe turns into an equally total self-sufficiency of every particle, since each is endowed with an absolute identity already in itself, unconditioned by any external relations—all relations having become internal to it. In symbolism, everything has become language, but as a result language no longer mediates anything extra-linguistic. Without any real content, language becomes purely image or, as is suggested by other forms of symbolist art, purely musical incantation: it is unbounded, but is lacking in any rule or concept such as only an external limit could provide, and this leads eventually to language's being threatened even in its own internal cohesion.

The breakup of language and of everything in language was to be overtly pursued by Baudelaire's poetic successors, and it has been discovered retrospectively as subtext in Baudelaire himself by recent critics, especially in Benjamin's wake. It can be understood as resulting ineluctably from the logic and dynamic of the symbol itself, with its absolute exigencies of identity, presence and immediacy, achieved no longer just by means of, but actually in and as, language. For once language has totally penetrated nature, leaving no remainder, nature is turned wholly into artifice. Nature can no longer supply the paradigm of organic unity after which language models itself in romanticism. Rather, everything becomes subject to the nature of language as an artificial synthesis with no substance in itself and therefore in a constant state of dissolution. When the universal identity forged by the symbol turns into an identity of all with language itself, the symbolic order of things is poised to collapse in upon itself, to implode in an uncontrolled proliferation of pure form. Baudelaire's transmission of the romantic doctrine of the symbol radicalizes and in effect reverses it, resulting in its no longer effecting union with all that is, but rather causing an alienation from nature and the real. Although he at times embraces the idea of a harmoniously ordered universe of natural correspondences, he lays the groundwork for its undoing in and by the symbol, which

becomes the dynamite that explodes the universe eventually into Mallarmé's constellations of unmasterable chance. Precisely these disintegrative implications of the unrestricted identification of all with language have manifested themselves persistently in the course and direction of symbolist poetry in its development ever since Baudelaire. (For sometimes contrasting views on this descent, see Charles Altieri.)

Baudelaire was a believer in the identificatory power of the symbol, and he remained the undisputed master of this creative faculty for the symbolist poets that followed him. Yet he did not believe in the all-embracing, benevolent Nature in which symbols were supposed to be embedded, and into which they beckoned invitingly, binding all things, including whoever could interpret them, together into one whole. For Baudelaire, this romantic dream had become a nightmare and, consequently, the symbol, in significant ways, sinister. Indeed, he was haunted by the symbol and its solicitations to communion with a Nature that he loathed. In "Obsession," Baudelaire recoils from nature, from its great forests which frighten him, as do cathedrals with their windy organs ("Grands bois, vous m'effrayez comme des cathédrales; / Vous hurlez comme l'orgue"). He would like the night to be without stars, for their light speaks to him, and it is a known language, whereas he is in search rather of the empty, the black and naked, what is divested of signs and therefore devoid of significance:

> Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! sans ces étoiles
> Dont la lumière parle un langage connu!
> Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu!

This constitutes an anguished palinode that effectively retracts the soul's enchantment with the sweet native language of things in "L'Invitation au voyage." Here Baudelaire is horrified of nature and its language, indeed of nature as language, and not because it is strange but because it is all too familiar. The "regards familiers" of "Correspondances" reappear in order to become terrifying. The forest is experienced as a cathedral whose significance is frightfully overdetermined, rather than as the mysteriously alluring temple of "Correspondances." Nature now is already fully codified: the cries of the woods that reply to one another out of their depths ("Répondent les échos de vos *De profundis*") are already articulated as a church liturgy. They are natural rites in a manner reminiscent of "Correspondances," but now precisely their

symbolic force makes them a negative, indeed a nightmare experience.

Baudelaire is repelled not so directly by nature as by the significance of nature, which is a form of human culture, indeed a language. The ocean's waves, with their heaving and tumult, are execrable because they are already found by the mind within itself ("Je te hais, Océan! tes bonds et tes tumultes, / Mon esprit les retrouve en lui"), just as the defeated man's bitter laugh full of sobs and insults is found in the enormous laugh of the sea. Even night fails to be other, and darkness—"les ténèbres"—consists in canvasses ("des toiles") painted on, or to be painted on, by human signs. Nature offers no escape from the human, and the human has become just as abhorrent as the natural. The symbolic-linguistic mechanism that reduces everything to language is at the bottom of this viciously circular mirroring, since everything that can be reached through language is reduced to identity. All that is known is known through the identity of signs circulating in the linguistic system: it is all too familiar and too wretched, in effect a prison house of language from which there is no exit.

Of course, what Baudelaire loathes at bottom is himself, because that is what he sees at the bottom of Nature. He begins the desperate struggle to escape himself by crying out after the name of "the other" that is still the watchword of so much of French, left-bank culture today. What he is trying to escape is the viciously narcissistic self-reflexivity of the symbolist quest that is palpable in a poem like "La Chevelure," in which the poet imagines plunging his amorous head into the black ocean in which "the other" is enclosed:

> Je plongerai ma tête amoureuse d'ivresse
> Dans ce noir océan où l'autre est enfermé …

The "other" is sought in desperation in order to escape the self, but it is indeed already an other that is "enclosed" (*enfermé*). It risks being confounded with the blackness of the self's own spleen. In the universe of total identity there is really no escaping the self. The seeker necessarily voyages endlessly in quest of *le nouveau* and *l'inconnu*. The absolute identity of everything is the truth of the symbol that Baudelaire found himself imprisoned by and from which he chafes to escape. All this he bequeathed to his poetic posterity.

Baudelaire adopts the symbol as a basic strategy but denaturalizes and also denatures it in the process. The universal identification of

each with all that is characteristic of symbolic vision and the basis for the correspondences of things takes a peculiar turn when the identification of all things in the symbol is taken to be an identity of all with language. This is, in effect, what the symbolists explicitly do, rendering manifest the revolution in poetic language brought about *in nuce* by Baudelaire. It means that the identities of the symbolist vision, rather than being natural, indeed the deep structure or essence of nature, turn out to be purely artificial, indeed nothing but language. There is still an all-pervading logic of identity, but it takes on a very different significance, in important ways just the opposite of the significance it had in romanticism. The natural order of things is no longer reassuring and restorative, healing human breaches and diseases. The order of things is only linguistic and therefore only a reflection of the human world of cultural artifacts and in fact already infected with the sickness of the self.

Baudelaire pursues to its furthest limits the logic of identity inhering in the symbol. He identifies everything with everything else. But the result he obtains is not oneness with the mystery of nature and the universe (even though he leaves some traces of a suffering longing for an encounter with the Other or the Unknown), but rather an expansion of language so as to actually encompass everything, beyond simply serving as the instrument of establishing the symbolic identity of all being. It remains only for this linguistic mechanism to expose itself as such, and to collapse for lack of external support, in order to produce the brilliant artificial paradises and chance constellations of subsequent symbolism. Thus is set the program that symbolist poets, eminently Rimbaud and Mallarmé, were to follow. It is the linguistic turning and totalizing of the symbol achieved substantially by Baudelaire that constitutes the premise for the shattering even of language itself, no longer held intact by anything beyond it, that was to be pursued to its furthest extremes by later symbolist poets.

The identification of everything with language has remained an absolutely central preoccupation of French poetry and poetics in the twentieth century. It is at issue, for example, in the way Francis Ponge's *Le Parti pris des choses* hovers between treating words as natural things and then again ruthlessly unmasking this fiction and fighting against language in the name of "la

chose même," which escapes it. Yet, given the double aspect of the symbolism inaugurated by Baudelaire's poetry, whereby the breaking down of language, which collapses from within, belongs together with the absorption by language of the world of things and its becoming itself a thing (acquiring thereby also the thing's vulnerability to amorcelation, dismemberment, and dissolution), even this sort of resistance to the idealizations inherent in language suggests in indirect ways how subsequent poets continue to remain Baudelaire's heirs. For although Baudelaire stands as the great poet of mysterious and profound unity in the symbol, in which domain "Tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté / Luxe, calme et volupté" [All is but order and beauty / Luxury, calm and voluptuousness], it is nevertheless possible to see how this complete freedom from discord and all external constraint contains the seeds of its own destruction—of the shattering of language as total system into infinite disunity and limitless dis-semination. This is the decisive creative innovation that makes Baudelaire's poetry so seminal for symbolist poetry in its widest ramifications.

**Source:** William Franke, "The Linguistic Turning of the Symbol: Baudelaire and His French Symbolist Heirs," in *Baudelaire and the Poetics of Modernity*, edited by Patricia A. Ward, Vanderbilt University Press, 2001, pp. 15–28.

## René Wellek

*In the following essay, Wellek explores the idea of Symbolism as a literary period encompassing much post-Realism Western literature, and focuses on developing an accurate system of definition for it.*

The term and concept of symbolism (and symbol) is so vast a topic that it cannot even be sketched within the limits of this paper. The word goes back to ancient Greece and, there, had a complex history which has not, I suspect, been traced adequately in the only history of the term, Max Schlesinger's *Geschichte des Symbols*, published in 1912.

What I want to discuss is something much more specific: not even symbol and symbolism in literature but the term and concept of symbolism as a period in literary history. It can, I suggest, be conveniently used as a general term for the literature in all Western countries following the decline of nineteenth-century realism and naturalism and preceding the rise of the

THE SYMBOLIST CONCEPTION OF AMERICAN LITERATURE IS STILL PREVALENT TODAY. IT OWES ITS DOMINANCE TO THE ATTEMPT TO EXALT THE GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS TO MYTH-MAKERS AND PROVIDERS OF A SUBSTITUTE RELIGION."

new avant-garde movements: futurism, expressionism, surrealism, existentialism, or whatever else. How has it come about? Can such a use be justified?

We must distinguish among different problems: the history of the word need not be identical with the history of the concept as we might today formulate it. We must ask, on the one hand, what the contemporaries meant by it, who called himself a "symbolist," or who wanted to be included in a movement called "symbolism," and on the other hand, what modern scholarship might decide about who is to be included and what characteristics of the period seem decisive. In speaking of "symbolism" as a period-term located in history we must also think of its situation in space. Literary terms most frequently radiate from one center but do so unevenly; they seem to stop at the frontiers of some countries or cross them and languish there or, surprisingly, flourish more vigorously on a new soil. A geography of literary terms is needed which might attempt to account for the spread and distribution of terms by examining rival terms or accidents of biography or simply the total situation of a literature.

There seems to be a widespread agreement that the literary history of the centuries since the end of the Middle Ages can be divided into five successive periods: Renaissance, baroque, classicism, romanticism, and realism. Among these terms baroque is a comparative newcomer which has not been accepted everywhere, though there seems a clear need of a name for the style that reacted against the Renaissance but preceded classicism. There is, however, far less agreement as to what term should be applied to the literature that followed the end of the dominance of realism in the 1880s and 90s. The term "modernism" and its variants, such as the German "Die Moderne,"

have been used but have the obvious disadvantage that they can be applied to any contemporary art. Particularly in English, the term "modern" has preserved its early meaning of a contrast to classical antiquity or is used for everything that occurred since the Middle Ages. *The Cambridge Modern History* is an obvious example. The attempts to discriminate between the "modern" period now belonging to the past and the "contemporaneous" seem forced, at least terminologically. "Modo," after all, means "now." "Modernism" used so broadly as to include all avant-garde art obscures the break between the symbolist period and all post-symbolist movements such as futurism, surrealism, existentialism, etc. In the East it is used as a catchall for everything disapproved as decadent, formalistic, and alienated: it has become a pejorative term set against the glories of socialist realism.

The older terms were appealed to at the turn of the century by many theorists and slogan writers, who either believed that these terms are applicable to all literature or consciously thought of themselves as reviving the style of an older period. Some spoke of a new "classicism," particularly in France, assuming that all good art must be classical. Croce shares this view. Those who felt a kinship with the romantic age, mainly in Germany, spoke of "Neuromantik," appealing to Friedrich Schlegel's dictum that all poetry is romantic. Realism also asserted its claim, mainly in Marxist contexts, in which all art is considered "realistic" or at least "a reflection of reality." I need only allude to Georg Lukács' recent *Aesthetik*, in which this thesis is repeated with obsessive urgency. I have counted the phrase "Widerspiegelung der Wirklichkeit" in the first volume; it appears 1,032 times. I was too lazy or bored to count it in Volume Two. All these monisms endanger meaningful schemes of literary periodization. Nor can one be satisfied with a dichotomy such as Fritz Strich's "Klassik und Romantik," which leads away from period concepts into a universal typology, a simple division of the world into sheep and goats. For many years I have argued the advantage of a multiple scheme of periods, since it allows a variety of criteria. The one criterion "realism" would divide all art into realistic and nonrealistic art and thus would allow only one approving adjective: "real" or some variant such as "true" or "lifelike." A multiple scheme comes much closer to the actual variety of the process of history. Period must be conceived neither as some essence which has to be intuited as a Platonic

idea nor as a mere arbitrary linguistic label. It should be understood as a "regulative idea," as a system of norms, conventions, and values which can be traced in its rise, spread, and decline, in competition with preceding and following norms, conventions, and values.

"Symbolism" seems the obvious term for the dominant style which followed nineteenth-century realism. It was propounded in Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931) and is assumed as a matter of course in Maurice Bowra's *Heritage of Symbolism* (1943). We must beware, of course, of confusing this historical form with age-old symbolism or with the view that all art is symbolic, as language is a system of symbols. Symbolism in the sense of a use of symbols in literature is clearly omnipresent in literature of many styles, periods, and civilizations. Symbols are all-pervasive in medieval literature and even the classics of realism—Tolstoy and Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens—use symbols, often prominently. I myself am guilty of arguing for the crucial role of symbol in any definition of romanticism, and I have written at length on the long German debate from Goethe to Friedrich Theodor Vischer about the meaning of the term "symbol" and its contrast to the term "allegory."

For our purposes I want to focus on the fortunes of the concept as a term, first for a school, then as a movement, and finally as a period. The term "symbolisme" as the designation for a group of poets was first proposed by Jean Moréas, the French poet of Greek extraction. In 1885 he was disturbed by a journalistic attack on the decadents in which he was named together with Mallarmé. He protested: "the so-called decadents seek the pure Concept and the eternal Symbol in their art, before anything else." With some contempt for the mania of critics for labels, he suggested the term "Symbolistes" to replace the inappropriate "décadents." In 1886 Moréas started a review *Le Symboliste*, which perished after four issues. On September 18, 1886, he published a manifesto of "Symbolisme" in the *Figaro*. Moréas, however, soon deserted his own brainchild and founded another school he called the "école romane." On September 14, 1891, in another number of the *Figaro* Moréas blandly announced that "symbolisme" was dead. Thus "symbolisme" was an ephemeral name for a very small clique of French poets. The only name still remembered besides Moréas' is Gustave Kahn. It is easy to

collect pronouncements by the main contemporary poets repudiating the term for themselves. Verlaine, in particular, was vehemently resentful of this "Allemandisme" and even wrote a little poem beginning "À bas le symbolisme mythe/et termite."

In a way which would need detailed tracing, the term, however, caught on in the later 80s and early 90s as a blanket name for recent developments in French poetry and its anticipations. Before Moréas' manifesto, Anatole Baju, in *Décadent*, April 10, 1886, spoke of Mallarmé as "the master who was the first to formulate the symbolic doctrine." Two critics, Charles Morice, with *La Littérature de tout à l'heure* (1889) and Téodore de Wyzéwa, born in Poland, first in the essay "Le Symbolisme de M. Mallarmé" (1887), seemed to have been the main agents, though Morice spoke rather of "synthèse" than of symbol, and Wyzéwa thought that "symbol" was only a pretext and explained Mallarmé's poetry purely by its analogy to music. As early as 1894 Saint Antoine (pseudonym for Henri Mazel) prophesied that "undoubtedly, symbolism will be the label under which our period will be classed in the history of French literature."

It is still a matter of debate in French literary history when this movement came to an end. It was revived several times expressly—e.g. in 1905 around a review, *Vers et prose*. Its main critic, Robert de Souza, in a series of articles, "Où Nous en sommes" (also published separately, 1906), ridiculed the many attempts to bury symbolism as premature and proudly claimed that Gustave Kahn, Verhaeren, Vielé-Griffin, Maeterlinck, and Régnier were then as active as ever. Valéry professed so complete an allegiance to the ideals of Mallarmé that it is difficult not to think of him as a continuator of symbolism, though in 1938, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the symbolist manifesto, Valéry doubted the existence of symbolism and denied that there is a symbolist aesthetic. Marcel Proust, in the posthumously published last volume of his great series *Le Temps retrouvé* (1926), formulated an explicitly symbolist aesthetics. But his own attitude to symbolist contemporaries was often ambiguous or negative. In 1896 Proust had written an essay condemning obscurity in poetry. Proust admired Maeterlinck but disliked Péguy and Claudel. He even wrote a pastiche of Régnier, a mock-solemn description of a head cold. When *Le Temps retrouvé* (1926) was published

and when a few years later (1933) Valery Larbaud proclaimed Proust a symbolist, symbolism had, at least in French poetry, definitely been replaced by surrealism.

André Barre's book on symbolism (1911) and particularly Guy Michaud's *Message poétique du symbolisme* (1947), as well as many other books of French literary scholarship, have, with the hindsight of literary historians, traced the different phases of a vast French symbolist movement: the first phase, with Baudelaire (who died in 1867) as the precursor; the second, when Verlaine and Mallarmé were at the height of their powers, before the 1886 group; the third, when the name became established; and then, in the twentieth century, what Michaud calls "Néo-symbolisme," represented by "La Jeune Parque" of Valéry and *L'Annonce faite à Marie of Claudel*, both dating from 1915. It seems a coherent and convincing conception which needs to be extended to prose writers and dramatists: to Huysmans after *A Rebours* (1884), to the early Gide, to Proust in part, and among dramatists, at least to Maeterlinck, who, with his plays *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* (1890) and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892), assured a limited penetration of symbolism on the stage.

Knowledge of the French movement and admiration for it soon spread to the other European countries. We must, however, distinguish between reporting on French events and even admiration shown by translations, and a genuine transfer and assimilation of the French movement in another literature. This process varies considerably from country to country; and the variation needs to be explained by the different traditions which the French importation confronted.

In English, George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888) and his *Impressions and Opinions* (1891) gave sketchy and often poorly informed accounts of Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Laforgue. Mallarmé's poetry is dismissed as "aberrations of a refined mind," and symbolism is oddly defined as "saying the opposite of what you mean." The three essays on Mallarmé by Edmund Gosse, all dating from 1893, are hardly more perceptive. After the poet's death Gosse turned sharply against him. "Now that he is no longer here the truth must be said about Mallarmé. He was hardly a poet." Even Arthur Symons, whose book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) made the decisive breakthrough for England and Ireland, was very lukewarm at

first. While praising Verlaine (in *Academy*, 1891) he referred to the "brain-sick little school of *Symbolistes*" and "the noisy little school of *Décadents*," and even in later articles on Mallarmé he complained of "jargon and meaningless riddles." But then he turned around and produced the entirely favorable *Symbolist Movement*. It should not, however, be overrated as literary criticism or history. It is a rather lame impressionistic account of Nerval, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Laforgue, Mallarmé, Huysmans, and Maeterlinck, with emphasis on Verlaine. There is no chapter on Baudelaire. But most importantly, the book was dedicated to W. B. Yeats, proclaiming him "the chief representative of that movement in our country." Symons had made his first trip to Paris in 1889; he had visited Mallarmé, met Huysmans and Maeterlinck, and a year later met Verlaine, who in 1893 became his guest on his ill-fated visit to London. Symons knew Yeats vaguely since 1891, but they became close friends in 1895 only after Yeats had completed his study of Blake and had elaborated his own system of symbols from other sources: occultism, Blake, and Irish folklore. The edition of Blake Yeats had prepared with Edwin Ellis in 1893 was introduced by an essay on "The Necessity of Symbolism." In 1894 Yeats visited Paris in the company of Symons and there saw a performance of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axël*. The essay "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900) is then Yeats' first full statement of his symbolist creed. Symons' dedication to Yeats shows an awareness of symbolism as an international movement. "In Germany," he says, exaggerating greatly, "it seems to be permeating the whole of literature, its spirit is that which is deepest in Ibsen, it has absorbed the one new force in Italy, Gabriele D'Annunzio. I am told of a group of symbolists in Russian literature, there is another in Dutch literature, in Portugal it has a little school of its own under Eugenio de Castro. I even saw some faint stirrings that way in Spain."

Symons should have added the United States. Or could he in 1899? There were intelligent and sympathetic reports of the French movement very early. T. S. Perry wrote on "The Latest Literary Fashion in France" in *The Cosmopolitan* (1892), T. Child on "Literary Paris—The New Poetry" in *Harper's* (1896), and Aline Gorren on "The French Symbolists" in *Scribner's* (1893). The almost forgotten Vance Thompson, who, fresh from Paris, edited the oddly named review *M'lle New York*, wrote several perceptive essays, mainly on Mallarmé in

1895 (reprinted in *French Portraits*, 1900) which convey some accurate information on his theories and even attempt an explication of his poetry with some success. But only James Huneker became the main importer of recent French literature into the United States. In 1896 he defended the French symbolists against the slurs in Max Nordau's silly *Entartung* and began to write a long series of articles on Maeterlinck, Laforgue, and many others, not bothering to conceal his dependence on his French master, Remy de Gourmont, to whom he dedicated his book of essays *Visionaries* (1905). But the actual impact of French symbolist poetry on American writing was greatly delayed. René Taupin, in his *L'Influence du symoblisme français sur la poésie américaine* (1929), traced some echoes in forgotten American versifiers of the turn of the century, but only two Americans living then in England, Ezra Pound around 1908 and T. S. Eliot around 1914, reflect the French influence in significant poetry.

More recently and in retrospect one hears of a symbolist period in American literature: Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens are its main poets; Henry James, Faulkner, and O'Neill, in very different ways and in different stages of their career, show marked affinities with its techniques and outlook. Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931) was apparently the very first book which definitely conceived of symbolism as an international movement and singled out Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Valéry, Proust, and Thomas Mann as examples of a movement which, he believed, had come to an end at the time of his writing. Here we find the conception formulated which, very generally, is the thesis of this paper and the assumption of many historians since Wilson's sketch. Wilson's sources were the writings of Huneker, whom he admired greatly, and the instruction in French literature he received in Princeton from Christian Gauss. But the insight into the unity and continuity of the international movement and the selection of the great names was his own. We might only deplore the inclusion of Gertrude Stein. But I find it difficult to believe that Wilson's book could have had any influence outside the English-speaking world.

In the United States Wilson's reasonable and moderate plea for an international movement was soon displaced by attempts to make the whole of the American literary tradition symbolist. F. O. Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance* (1941) is based on a distinction between symbol and allegory very much in the terms of the distinction introduced by Goethe. Allegory appears as inferior to symbol: Hawthorne inferior to Melville. But in Charles Feidelson's *Symbolism and American Literature* (1956) the distinction between modern symbolism and the use of symbols by romantic authors is completely obliterated. Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and Whitman appear as pure symbolists *avant la lettre*, and their ancestry is traced back to the Puritans, who paradoxically appear as incomplete, frustrated symbolists. It can be rightly objected that the old Puritans were sharply inimical to images and symbols and that there is a gulf between the religious conception of signs of God's Providence and the aesthetic use of symbols in the novels of Hawthorne and Melville and even in the Platonizing aesthetics of Emerson.

The symbolist conception of American literature is still prevalent today. It owes its dominance to the attempt to exalt the great American writers to myth-makers and providers of a substitute religion. James Baird, in *Ishmael* (1956), puts it unabashedly. Melville is "the supreme example of the artistic creator engaged in the act of making new symbols to replace the 'lost' symbols of Protestant Christianity." A very active trend in American criticism expanded symbolist interpretation to all types and periods of literature, imposing it on writings which have no such meaning or have to be twisted to assume it. Harry Levin rightly complained in an address, " Symbolism and Fiction" (1956), that "every hero may seem to have a thousand faces; every heroine may be a white goddess *incognita;* every fishing trip turns out to be another quest for the Holy Grail." The impact of ideas from the Cambridge anthropologists and from Carl Jung is obvious. In the study of medieval texts a renewed interest in the fourfold levels of meaning in Dante's letter to Can Grande has persuaded a whole group of American scholars, mainly under the influence of D. W. Robertson, to interpret or misinterpret Chaucer, the *Pearl* poet, and Langland in these terms. They should bear in mind that Thomas Aquinas recognized only a literal sense in a work invented by human industry and that he reserved the other three senses for Scripture. The symbolist interpretation reaches heights of ingenuity in the writing of Northrop Frye, who began with a book on Blake and, in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), conceived of the whole of literature as a self-enclosed system of symbols and myths, "existing

in its own universe, no longer a commentary on life or reality, but containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationships." In this grandiose conception all distinctions between periods and styles are abolished: "the literary universe is a universe in which everything is potentially identical with everything else." Hence the old distinctions between myth, symbol, and allegory disappear. One of Frye's followers, Angus Fletcher, in his book on *Allegory* (1964), exalts allegory as the central procedure of art, while Frye still holds fast to symbolism, recognizing that "the critics are often prejudiced against allegory without knowing the real reason, which is that continuous allegory prescribes the direction of his commentary, and so restricts his freedom."

The story of the spread of symbolism is very different in other countries. The effect in Italy was ostensibly rather small. Soffici's pamphlet on Rimbaud in 1911 is usually considered the beginning of the French symbolist influence, but there was an early propagandist for Mallarmé, Vittorio Pica, who was heavily dependent on French sources, particularly Téodor de Wyzéwa. His articles, in the *Gazetta letteraria* (1885–86), on the French poets do not use the term; but in 1896 he replaced "decadent" and "Byzantine" by "symbolist." D'Annunzio, who knew and used some French symbolists, would be classed as "decadent" today, and the poets around Ungaretti and Montale as "hermetic." In a recent book by Mario Luzi, *L'Idea simbolista* (1959), Pascoli, Dino Campana, and Arturo Onofri are called symbolist poets, but Luzi uses the term so widely that he begins his anthology of symbolism with Hölderlin and Novalis, Coleridge and Wordsworth, and can include Poe, Browning, Patmore, Swinburne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson among its precursors. Still, his list of symbolist poets, French, Russian, English, German, Spanish, and Greek, is, on the whole, reasonable. Onofri was certainly strongly influenced by Mallarmé and later by Rudolf Steiner; Pascoli, however, seems to me no symbolist in his poetry, though he gave extremely symbolist interpretations of Dante. It might be wiser to think of "ermetismo" as the Italian name for symbolism: Montale and possibly Dino Campana are genuine symbolists.

While symbolism, at least as a definite school or movement, was absent in Italy, it is central in the history of Spanish poetry. The Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío initiated it after his short stay in Paris in 1892. He wrote poems under the symbolist influence and addressed, for instance, a fervent hymn to Verlaine. The influence of French symbolist poetry changed completely the oratorical or popular style of Spanish lyrical poetry. The closeness of Guillén to Mallarmé and Valéry seems too obvious to deny, and the Uruguayan poet Julio Herrera y Reissig (1873–1909) is clearly in the symbolist tradition, often of the obscurest manner. Still, the Spanish critics favor the term "Modernismo," which is used sometimes so inclusively that it covers all modern Spanish poetry and even the so-called "generation of 1898," the prose writers Azorín, Baroja, and Unamuno, whose associations with symbolism were quite tenuous. "Symbolism" can apply only to one trend in modern Spanish literature, as the romantic popular tradition was stronger there than elsewhere. García Lorca's poetry can serve as the best known example of the peculiar Spanish synthesis of the folksy and the symbolical, the gypsy song and the myth. Still, the continuity from Darío to Jiménez, Antonio Machado, Alberti, and then to Guillén seems to me evident. Jorge Guillén in his Harvard lectures, *Language and Poetry* (1961), finds "no label convincing." "A period look," he argues, does not signify a "group style." In Spain there were, he thinks, fewer "isms" than elsewhere and the break with the past was far less abrupt. He reflects that "any name seeking to give unity to a historical period is the invention of posterity." But while eschewing the term "symbolism," he characterizes himself and his contemporaries well enough by expounding their common creed: their belief in the marriage of Idea and music—in short, their belief in the ideal of Mallarmé. Following a vague suggestion made by Remy de Gourmont, the rediscovery of Góngora by Ortega y Gasset, Gerardo Diego, Dámaso Alonso, and Alfonso Reyes around 1927 fits into the picture: they couple Góngora and Mallarmé as the two poets who in the history of all poetry have gone furthest in the search for absolute poetry, for the quintessence of the poetic.

In Germany the spread of symbolism was far less complete than Symons assumed in 1899. Stefan George had come to Paris in 1889, had visited Mallarmé and met many poets, but after his return to Germany he avoided, I assume deliberately, the term "symbolism" for himself and his circle. He translated a selection from Baudelaire (1891) and smaller samples from Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Régnier (in *Zeitgenössische Dichter*,

1905), but his own poetry does not, I think, show very close parallels to the French masters. Oddly enough, the poems of Vielé-Griffin seem to have left the most clearly discernible traces on George's own writings. As early as 1892 one of George's adherents, Carl August Klein, protested in George's periodical, *Blätter für die Kunst*, against the view of George's dependence on the French. Wagner, Nietzsche, Böcklin, and Klinger, he says, show that there is an indigenous opposition to naturalism in Germany as everywhere in the West. George himself spoke later of the French poets as his "former allies," and in Gundolf's authoritative book on George the French influence is minimized, if not completely denied. Among the theorists of the George circle Friedrich Gundolf had the strongest symbolist leanings: *Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist* (1911) and *Goethe* (1916) are based on the distinction of symbol-allegory, with symbol always the higher term. Still, the term symbolism did not catch on in Germany as a name for any specific group, though Hofmannsthal—e.g. in "Das Gespräch über Gedichte" of 1903—proclaimed the symbol the one element necessary in poetry. Later, the influence of Rimbaud—apparently largely in German translation—Iron Georg Trakl has been demonstrated with certainty. But if we examine German books on twentieth-century literature, symbolism seems rarely used. I found a section so called in Willi Duwe's *Die Dichtung des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1936) which includes Hofmannsthal, Dauthendey, Calé, Rilke, and George, while E. H. Lüth's *Literatur als Geschichte (Deutsche Dichtung von 1885 bis 1947)*, published in 1947, treats the same poets under the label "Neuromantik und Impressionismus." Later, however, we find a section, "Parasymbolismus," which deals with Musil and Broch. Hugo Friedrich, in his *Struktur der modernen Lyrik* (1956), avoids the terms and argues that the quick succession of modernist styles—dadaism, surrealism, futurism, expressionism, unanimism hermetism, and so on—creates an optical illusion which hides the fact of a direct continuity through Mallarmé, Valéry, Guillén, Ungaretti, and Eliot. The little anthology in the back of the book adds St. John Perse, Jiménez, García Lorca, Alberti, and Montale to these names. Friedrich's list seems to me the list of the main symbolist poets, even though Friedrich objects to the name. Clearly, German literary scholarship has not been converted to the term, though Wolfgang Kayser's article "Der

europäische Symbolismus" (1953) had pleaded for a wide concept in which he included, in addition to the French poets, D'Annunzio, Yeats, Valéry, Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Faulkner.

In Russia we find the strongest symbolist group of poets who called themselves that. The close links with Paris at that time may help to explain this, or possibly also the strong consciousness of a tradition of symbolism in the Russian Church and in some of the Orthodox thinkers of the immediate past. Vladimir Solovëv was regarded as a precursor. In 1892 Zinaida Vengerova wrote a sympathetic account of the French symbolists for *Vestnik Evropy*, while in the following year Max Nordau's *Entartung* caused a sensation by its satirical account of recent French poetry which had repercussions on Tolstoy's *What is Art?*, as late as 1898. Bryusov emerged as the leading symbolist poet: he translated Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and wrote a poem "Iz Rimbaud" as early as 1892. In 1894 he published two little volumes under the title *Russkie simvolisty*. That year Bryusov wrote poems with titles such as "In the Spirit of the French Symbolists" and "In the Manner of Stéphane Mallarmé" (though these were not published till 1935) and brought out a translation of Verlaine's *Romances sans paroles*. Bryusov had later contacts with René Ghil, Mallarmé's pupil, and derived from him the idea of "instrumentation" in poetry which was to play such a great role in the theories of the Russian Formalists. In the meantime Dimitri Merezhkovsky had, in 1893, published a manifesto: *On the Causes of the Decline and the New Trends of Contemporary Russian Literature*, which recommended symbolism, though Merezhkovsky appealed to the Germans: to Goethe and the romantics rather than to the French. Merezhkovsky's pamphlet foreshadows the split in the Russian symbolist movement. The younger men, Blok and Vyacheslav Ivanov as well as Bely, distanced themselves from Bryusov and Balmont. Blok, in an early diary (1901–02), condemned Bryusov as decadent and opposed to his Parisian symbolism his own, Russian, rooted in the poetry of Tyutchev, Fet, Polonsky, and Solovëv. Vyacheslav Ivanov in 1910 shared Blok's view. The French influence seemed to him "adolescently unreasonable and, in fact, not very fertile," while his own symbolism appealed to Russian nationalism and to the general mystical tradition. Later Bely was to add occultism and Rudolf Steiner and his "anthroposophy." The group of poets who called themselves "Acmeists"

(Gulmilëv, Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelshtam) was a direct outgrowth of symbolism. The mere fact that they appealed to the early symbolist Innokenty Annensky shows the continuity with symbolism in spite of their distaste for the occult and their emphasis on what they thought of as classical clarity. Symbolism dominates Russian poetry between about 1892 and 1914, when Futurism emerged as a slogan and the Russian Formalists attacked the whole concept of poetry as imagery.

If we glance at the other Slavic countries we are struck by the diversity of their reactions. Poland was informed early on about the French movement, and Polish poetry was influenced by the French symbolist movement, but the term "Młasoda Polska" was preferred. In Wilhelm Feldmann's *Wspòłczesna literatura polska* (1905) contemporary poetry is discussed as "decadentism," but Wyspiański (a symbolist if ever there was one) appears under the chapter heading: "On the Heights of Romanticism." All the histories of Polish literature I have seen speak of "Modernism," "Decadentism," "Idealism," "Neo-romanticism," and occasionally call a poet such as Miriam (Zenon Przesmycki) a symbolist, but they never seem to use the term as a general name for a period in Polish literature.

In Czech literature the situation was more like that in Russia: Březina, Sova, and Hlaváček were called symbolists, and the idea of a school or at least a group of Czech symbolist poets is firmly established. The term "Moderna" (possibly because of the periodical *Moderní Revue*, founded in 1894) is definitely associated with decadentism, *fin de siècle*, a group represented by Arnošt Procházka. A hymnical, optimistic, even chiliastic poet such as Březina cannot and could not be classed with them. The great critic F. X. Šalda wrote of the "school of symbolists" as early as 1891, calling Verlaine, Villiers, and Mallarmé its masters but denied that there is a school of symbolists with dogmas, codices, and manifestoes. His very first important article, "Synthetism in the New Art" (1892), expounded the aesthetics of Morice and Hennequin for the benefit of the Czechs, then still mainly dependent on German models.

The unevenness of the penetration of both the influence of the French movement and very strikingly of the acceptance of the term raises the question whether we can account for these differences in causal terms. It sounds heretical or obscurantist in this age of scientific explanation to ascribe much to chance, to casual contacts, and to personal predilections. Why was the term so immensely successful in France, in the United States, and in Russia, less so in England and Spain, and hardly at all in Italy and Germany? In Germany there was even the tradition of the continuous debate about symbol since Goethe and Schelling; before the French movement Friedrich Theodor Vischer discussed the symbol elaborately and still the term did not catch on. One can think of all kinds of explanations: a deliberate decision by the poets to distance themselves from the French developments; or the success of the terms "Die Moderne" and "Neuromantik." Still, the very number of such explanations suggests that the variables are so great that we cannot account for these divergencies in any systematic manner.

If we, at long last, turn to the central question of what the exact content of the term is, we must obviously distinguish among the four concentric circles defining its scope. At its narrowest, "symbolism" refers to the French group which called itself "symbolist" in 1886. Its theory was rather rudimentary. These poets mainly wanted poetry to be non-rhetorical—i.e. they asked for a break with the tradition of Hugo and the *Parnassiens*. They wanted words not merely to state but to suggest; they wanted to use metaphors, allegories, and symbols not only as decorations but as organizing principles of their poems; they wanted their verse to be "musical," in practice to stop using the oratorical cadences of the French alexandrines, and in some cases to break completely with rhyme. Free verse—whose invention is usually ascribed to Gustave Kahn—was possibly the most enduring achievement which has survived all vicissitudes of style. Kahn himself in 1894 summed up the doctrine simply as "antinaturalism, antiprosaism in poetry, a search for freedom in the efforts in art, in reaction against the regimentation of the *Parnasse* and the naturalists." This sounds very meager today: freedom from restrictions has been, after all, the slogan of a great many movements in art.

It is better to think of "symbolism" in a wider sense: as the broad movement in France from Nerval and Baudelaire to Claudel and Valéry. We can restate the theories propounded and will be confronted by an enormous variety.

We can characterize it more concretely and say, for example, that in symbolist poetry the image becomes "thing." The relation of tenor and vehicle in the metaphor is reversed. The utterance is divorced, we may add, from the situation: time and place, history and society, are played down. The inner world, the *durée*, in the Bergsonian sense, is represented or often merely hinted at as "it," the thing or the person hidden. One could say that the grammatical predicate has become the subject. Clearly such poetry can easily be justified by an occult view of the world. But this is not necessary: it might imply a feeling for analogy, for a web of correspondences, a rhetoric of metamorphoses in which everything reflects everything else. Hence the great role of synesthesia, which, though rooted in physiological facts and found all over the history of poetry, became at that time merely a stylistic device, a mannerism easily imitated and transmitted. This characterization could be elaborated considerably if we bear in mind that style and world view go together and only together can define the character of a period or even of a single poet.

Let me try to show, at least, how diverse and even incompatible were the theories of two such related poets as Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Baudelaire's aesthetic is mainly "romantic," not in the sense of emotionalism, nature worship, and exaltation of the ego, central in French romanticism, but rather in the English and German tradition of a glorification of creative imagination, a rhetoric of metamorphoses and universal analogy. Though there are subsidiary strands in Baudelaire's aesthetics, at his finest he grasps the role of imagination, "constructive imagination," as he calls it in a term ultimately derived from Coleridge. It gives a metaphysical meaning, "a positive relation with the infinite." Art is another cosmos which transforms and hence humanizes nature. By his creation the artist abolishes the gulf between subject and object, man and nature. Art is "to create a suggestive magic containing at one and the same time the object and the subject, the external world and the artist himself."

Mallarmé says almost the opposite in spite of some superficial resemblances and the common attachment to Poe and Wagner. Mallarmé was the first poet radically discontent with the ordinary language of communication; he attempted to construe an entirely separate language of poetry far more consistently than older cultivators of "poetic diction" such as the practitioners of *trobar clus*, or Góngora, or Mallarmé's contemporary, Gerard Manley Hopkins. His aim of transforming language was, no doubt, in part negative: to exclude society, nature, and the person of the poet himself. But it was also positive: language was again to become "real," language was to be magic, words were to become things. But this is not, I think, sufficient reason to call Mallarmé a mystic. Even the depersonalization he requires is not mystical. Impersonality is rather objectivity, Truth. Art reaches for the Idea, which is ultimately inexpressible, because so abstract and general as to be devoid of any concrete traits. The term "flower" seems to him poetic because it suggests the "one, absent from all bouquets." Art thus can only hint and suggest, not transform as it should in Baudelaire. The "symbol" is only one device to achieve this effect. The so-called "negative" aesthetics of Mallarmé is thus nothing obscure. It had its psychological basis in a feeling of sterility, impotence, and final silence. He was a perfectionist who proposed something impossible of fulfillment: the book to end all books. "Everything on earth exists to be contained in a book." Like many poets before him, Mallarmé wants to express the mystery of the universe but feels that this mystery is not only insoluble and immensely dark but also hollow, empty, silent, Nothingness itself. There seems no need to appeal to Buddhism, Hegel, Schopenhauer, or Wagner to account for this. The atmosphere of nineteenth-century pessimism and the general Neoplatonic tradition in aesthetics suffice. Art searches for the Absolute but despairs of ever reaching it. The essence of the world is Nothingness, and the poet can only speak of this Nothingness. Art alone survives in the universe. Man's main vocation is to be an artist, a poet, who can save something from the general wreckage of time. The work or, in Mallarmé's terms, the Book is suspended over the Void, the silent godless Nothingness. Poetry is resolutely cut off from concrete reality, from the expression of the personality of the poet, from any rhetoric or emotion, and becomes only a Sign, signifying Nothing. In Baudelaire, on the other hand, poetry transforms nature, extracts flowers from evil, creates a new myth, reconciles man and nature.

But if we examine the actual verse of the symbolists of this period, we cannot be content with formulas either of creative imagination, of suggestion, or of pure or absolute poetry.

On the third wider circle of abstraction we can apply the term to the whole period on an international scale. Every such term is arbitrary, but symbolism can be defended as rooted in the concepts of the period, as distinct in meaning, and as clearly setting off the period from that preceding it: realism or naturalism. The difference from romanticism may be less certainly implied. Obviously there is a continuity with romanticism, and particularly German romanticism, also in France, as has been recently argued again by Werner Vordtriede in his *Novalis und die französischen Symbolisten* (1963). The direct contact of the French with the German romantics came late and should not be overrated. Jean Thorel, in "Les Romantiques allemandes et les symbolistes français," seems to have been the first to point out the relation. Maeterlinck's article on Novalis (1894) and his little anthology (1896) came late in the movement. But Wagner of course mediated between the symbolists and German mythology, though Mallarmé's attitude, admiring toward the music, was tinged with irony for Wagner's subject matter. Early in the century Heine, a *romantique défroqué* as he called himself, played the role of an intermediary which, to my mind, has been exaggerated in Kurt Weinberg's study, *Henri Heine: Héraut du symbolisme français* (1954). E. T. A. Hoffmann, we should not forget, was widely translated into French and could supply occult motifs, a transcendental view of music, and the theory and practice of synesthesia.

Possibly even more important were the indirect contacts through English writers: through Carlyle's chapter on symbolism in *Sartor Resartus* and his essay on Novalis; through Coleridge, from whom, through another intermediary, Mrs. Crowe, Baudelaire drew his definition of creative imagination; and through Emerson, who was translated by Edgar Quinet.

Also, French thinkers of the early nineteenth century knew the theory of symbolism at least, from the wide application to all the religions of the world made by Creuzer, whose *Symbolik* was translated into French in 1825. Pierre Leroux used the idea of "symbolic poetry" prominently in the early thirties. There was Edgar Allan Poe, who drew on Coleridge and A. W. Schlegel and seemed so closely to anticipate Baudelaire's views that Baudelaire quoted him as if he were Poe himself, sometimes dropping all quotations marks.

The enormous influence of Poe on the French demonstrates, however, most clearly the difference between romanticism and symbolism. Poe is far from being a representative of the romantic world-view or of the romantic aesthetic, in which the imagination is conceived as transforming nature. Poe has been aptly described as an "angel in a machine": he combines a faith in technique and even technology, a distrust of inspiration, a rationalistic eighteenth-century mind with a vague occult belief in "supernal" beauty. The distrust of inspiration, an enmity to nature, is the crucial point which sets off symbolism from romanticism. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry all share it; while Rilke, a symbolist in many of his procedures and views, appears as highly romantic in his reliance on moments of inspiration. This is why Hugo Friedrich excludes him from his book on the modern lyric and even disparages him in a harsh passage. This is why the attempt to make Mallarmé a spiritual descendant of Novalis, as Vordtriede tried, must fail. Mallarmé, one might grant, aims at transcendence, but it is an empty transcendence, while Novalis rapturously adores the unity of the mysterious universe. In short, the romantics were Rousseauists; the symbolists, beginning with Baudelaire, believe in the fall of man or, if they do not use the religious phraseology, know that man is limited and is not, as Novalis believed, the Messiah of nature. The end of the romantic period is clearly marked by the victory of positivism and scientism, which soon led to disillusionment and pessimism. Most symbolists were non-Christians and even atheists, even if they tried to find a new religion in occultism or flirted with Oriental religions. They were pessimists who need not have read Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann, as Laforgue did, to succumb to the mood of decadence, *fin de siècle*, *Götterdämmerung*, or the death of God prophesied by Nietzsche.

Symbolism is also clearly set off from the new avant-garde movements after 1914: futurism, cubism, surrealism, expressionism, and so on. There the faith in language has crumbled completely, while in Mallarmé and Valéry language preserves its cognitive and even magic power: Valéry's collection of poems is rightly called *Charmes*. Orpheus is the mythological hero of the poet, charming the animals, trees, and even stones. With more recent art the view of analogy disappears: Kafka has nothing of it. Postsymbolist art is abstract and allegorical

rather than symbolic. The image, in surrealism, has no beyond: it wells, at most, from the subconscious of the individual.

Finally, there is the highest abstraction, the wide largest circle: the use of "symbolism" in all literature, of all ages. But then the term, broken loose from its historical moorings, lacks concrete content and remains merely the name for a phenomenon almost universal in all art.

These reflections must lead to what only can be a recommendation, to use the third sense of our term, to call the period of European literature roughly between 1885 and 1914 "symbolism," to see it as an international movement which radiated originally from France but produced great writers and great poetry also elsewhere. In Ireland and England: Yeats and Eliot; in the United States: Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane; in Germany: George, Rilke, and Hofmannsthal; in Russia: Blok, Ivanov, and Bely; in Spain and South America: Darío, Machado, and Guillén. If we, as we should, extend the meaning of symbolism to prose, we can see it clearly in the late Henry James, in Joyce, in the later Thomas Mann, in Proust, in the early Gide and Faulkner, in D. H. Lawrence; and if we add the drama, we recognize it in the later stages of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Hauptmann, and in O'Neill. There is symbolist criticism of distinction: an aesthetics in Mallarmé and Valéry, a looser creed in Remy de Gourmont, in Eliot, and in Yeats, and a flourishing school of symbolist interpretation, particularly in the United States. Much of the French "new criticism" is frankly symbolist. Roland Barthes' new pamphlet, *Critique et vérité* (1966), pleads for a complete liberty of symbolist interpretation.

Still, we must not forget our initial reminder. A period concept can never exhaust its meaning. It is not a class concept of which the individual works are cases. It is a regulative idea: it struggles with preceding and following ideals of art. In the time under consideration the strength of the survivals was particularly great: Hauptmann's *Die Weber* was performed in the same year (1892) as *Blätter für die Kunst* began to appear; Blok's *Poems on the Beautiful Lady* were written in the same year (1901) as Gorky's *Lower Depths*. Within the same author and even within the same work of art the struggle was waged at times. Edmond Jaloux called Joyce "at the same time a realist and a symbolist." The same is true of Proust and Mann. *Ulysses*

combines symbolism and naturalism, as no other book of the time, into a synthesis of grand proportion and strong tension. In Trieste Joyce lectured on two English writers and on two English writers alone: they were characteristically Defoe and Blake.

As agreement on the main periods of European literature grows, so agreement to add the period term "symbolism" to the five periods now accepted should increase. But even were a different term to be victorious (though none I can think of seems to me even remotely preferable), we should always recognize that such a term has fulfilled its function as a tool of historiography if it has made us think not only about individual works and authors but about schools, trends, and movements and their international expansion. Symbolism is at least a literary term which will help us to counteract the dependence of much literary history on periodization derived from political and social history (such as the term " Imperialism" used in Marxist literary histories, which is perfectly meaningless applied to poetry at that time). Symbolism is a term (and I am quoting the words I applied to baroque in 1945) "which prepares for synthesis, draws our minds away from the mere accumulation of observations and facts, and paves the way for a future history of literature as a fine art."

**Source:** René Wellek, "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History," in *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism*, Yale University Press, 1970, pp. 90–121.

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# *Transcendentalism*

## MOVEMENT ORIGIN

## c. 1835

A religious, philosophical, and literary movement, Transcendentalism arose in New England in the middle of the nineteenth century. Critics generally cite 1836 to 1846 as the years when the movement flourished, although its influence continued to be felt in later decades, with some works considered part of the movement not being published until the 1850s. Transcendentalism began as a religious concept rooted in the ideas of American democracy. When a group of Boston ministers, one of whom was Ralph Waldo Emerson, decided that the Unitarian Church had become too conservative, they espoused a new religious philosophy, one which privileged the inherent wisdom in the human soul over church doctrine and law.

Among Transcendentalism's followers were writers Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Walt Whitman; educator Bronson Alcott; and social theorists and reformers Theodore Parker and William Ellery Channing. Authors Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, and Edgar Allen Poe also felt the influence of Transcendentalism. Important works from the movement include Emerson's essays *Nature*, "The American Scholar," and "Self Reliance"; Thoreau's *Walden; or Life in the Woods*; Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*; and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Novels such as Melville's *Moby Dick* and Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* also had transcendentalist leanings.
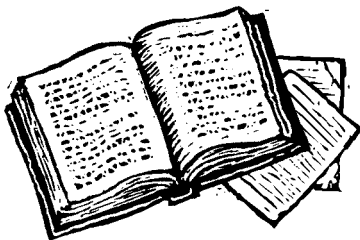
It is no coincidence that this movement took off just as the American literary tradition was beginning to blossom. Transcendentalism—though inspired by German and British Romanticism—was a distinctly American movement in that it intrinsically connected to beliefs about American individualism. In addition to the theme of American democracy, transcendentalist literature promotes the idea of nature as divine and the human soul as inherently wise. Transcendentalism also had a political dimension, and writers such as Thoreau put their transcendentalist beliefs into action through acts of civil disobedience against taxation and the Fugitive Slave Law, which they found immoral. The nineteenth century was a volatile one, beginning with the hope and promise of democracy and the development of an American identity and moving towards mass devastation and division by the middle of the century. Slavery and the Civil War, women's rights, growing industrialism and class division—all of these factors were influential and each had a role to play in the transcendentalist movement.
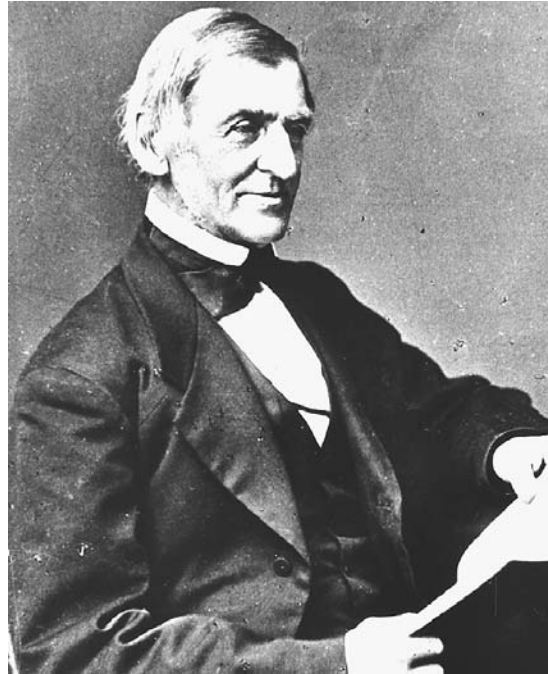


*Ralph Waldo Emerson* (© UPI / Bettmann / Corbis)

## REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORS

### Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888)

Louisa May Alcott was born November 29, 1832, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was the daughter of transcendentalist Amos Bronson Alcott, and her early life was profoundly influenced by Transcendentalism. Throughout her childhood, the family was quite poor but idealistic. In 1843, Alcott, her three sisters, and her parents joined the transcendentalist utopian commune Fruitlands, which she writes about in her essay "Transcendental Wild Oats" (1873). Alcott never left her liberal upbringing behind and, as an adult, supported the abolition of slavery and women's suffrage (right to vote). Still living in poverty, she took odd jobs writing, sewing, and teaching to earn money. Her bestselling novel, *Little Women*, appeared in 1868, which Alcott followed with many more books featuring the same beloved characters. Alcott never married. She died of mercury poisoning on March 6, 1888, two days after her father's death.

### Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

Writer and thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson was born May 25, 1803, in Boston, Massachusetts. Emerson is widely regarded as a key figure in transcendentalist thought and literature. After graduating from Harvard University in 1821, Emerson served as the pastor of the historic Old North Church (Second Unitarian) in Boston, but left after only three and a half years. In an introduction to Emerson's essays, literary critic Edward Ericson sums up Emerson's philosophy of religion: "His Transcendentalist philosophy was a religion of the spiritually emancipated mind and heart, unbounded by church or party." Emerson came to believe that human beings had inherent wisdom in their souls and that worship should not be constrained to church or religious convention. His religious ideas are connected to American democracy in so far as they assert an egalitarian spirituality available to every individual and a spiritual energy that emanates through the natural realm which serves as its metaphor.

After leaving his appointment as a pastor, Emerson traveled widely in Europe. He was influenced by European philosophy, particularly the writings of Immanuel Kant, who challenged Locke's idea that wisdom was gained only through experience. Kant and the transcendentalists believed that wisdom was inherent in the soul of each human being. In 1836, Emerson became a founding member of the Hedge Club,

later named the Transcendental Club by outsiders. Emerson biographer Robert D. Richardson Jr., explains: "The club was a forum for new ideas, a clearinghouse, full of yeast and ferment, informal, open-ended, far from the usual exclusive social clique conveyed by the word 'club.'" The formation of this club in 1836 in many ways marks the beginning of the transcendentalist movement. Later that same year Emerson wrote his seminal essay *Nature*. This was followed in 1837 by the essay "The American Scholar," which initially served as a commencement address at Harvard.

Emerson continued to write and travel to Europe long after the transcendentalist movement ended. He greatly influenced many writers, including one of his most famous disciples, Henry David Thoreau. Emerson died April 27, 1882, in Concord, Massachusetts.

### Margaret Fuller (1810–1850)

Born May 23, 1810, in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, Sarah Margaret Fuller was both an influential figure in Transcendentalism and an early feminist years ahead of her time in terms of her vision of a woman's place in society. Fuller wrote extensively about gender issues, incorporating Emersonian principles of self-reliance into her essays on women's struggles for social, economic, and intellectual equality. Critic Jamie S. Crouse argues that Fuller's feminism is based on the idea that women truly are equal in nature and essence to men, a culturally blind area her fellow male transcendentalists had trouble seeing past. Educated in the classics by her father, Fuller developed a keen intellect from an early age. Unlike her male contemporaries Emerson and Thoreau, Fuller was not able to attend Harvard. (Women were not allowed.) Instead, Fuller faced the social reality of having to support herself. She taught for several years, including a stint at fellow transcendentalist Alcott's experimental, coeducational Temple School. However, Fuller did not think of herself as a transcendentalist until she became good friends with Emerson and joined the Transcendental Club.

Fuller is perhaps best known for her groundbreaking book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1845. She was very much a radical of her time for her assertions about women. In an introduction to *The Portable Margaret Fuller*, critic Mary Kelley writes:

During a century in which America divided the world on the basis of gender and made marriage and motherhood a female's sole occupation, Fuller insisted that women be able to develop their potential, not only as wives and mothers whose lives were defined by domesticity, but as individuals, each of whom had particular inclinations, desires and talents.

Fuller's writings were embraced by female activists and suffragists of the day and helped propel the women's rights movement, acting as a major influence for such events as the first women's rights conference in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. Within the literary world, Fuller was also a major voice. She edited the transcendentalist publication *The Dial* for two years before turning it over to Emerson, at which time she became a columnist and correspondent for the *New York Daily Tribune*. She traveled extensively in Europe, meeting such literary greats as George Sand, William Wordsworth, and Elizabeth and Robert Browning. Fuller was only forty years old when she died on July 19, 1850, in a shipwreck during a hurricane off the coast of Fire Island near New York. She was returning to the United States from Italy with her husband and two-year-old son.

### Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864)

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts, and spent part of his childhood in Maine, a place that proved formative to the young author's career. His first published book was *Twice-Told Tales* (1837). In 1841, Hawthorne joined the Fruitlands utopian community to save money for his marriage to Sophia Peabody. He did not entirely agree with the transcendentalist ideals, but scholars later linked him with them. Hawthorne did not last a year at the commune, but the experience inspired his writing of satirical novel, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852). Hawthorne married Peabody in 1842, and they had three children. They moved around New England—Emerson, Thoreau, and the Alcotts were sometimes their neighbors—and occasionally lived in England. After a successful career as a novelist and also some years spent in civil service, Hawthorne died in his sleep on May 19, 1864, in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

### Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

Henry David Thoreau was born July 12, 1817, in Concord, Massachusetts. He spent most of his life in Concord, dying there on May 6, 1862, at

forty-four years of age. Though Thoreau had only two books published in his lifetime, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and *Walden* (1854), his influence was far-reaching, even through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. A follower of Emerson, Thoreau graduated from Harvard University in 1837. A prolific journal writer, Thoreau wrote daily about his observations of the natural world. In fact, Thoreau is considered one of America's great environmentalists. Like Emerson, he believed nature to be divine. He took Emerson's principles of self-reliance and put them into practice when, in 1845, he moved to Walden Pond (on Emerson's property) to live a rustic, simple life.

Thoreau stayed at Walden for two years and wrote the book *Walden* in 1854, after the transcendentalist movement had lost favor in many literary circles. Thoreau took Emerson's philosophy of nature as divine a step further; he believed that nature was infused with wildness, and he saw in nature the roots for his concept of "civil disobedience"—about which he wrote the essay "Resistance to Civil Government" (this essay is often called "Civil Disobedience") in 1849. Like other transcendentalist writers, Thoreau was a champion of American democracy, but he also grew frustrated by what he saw as the modern world's way of alienating people from nature. He was guided by his moral principles, which had political implications as well. In an essay introducing Thoreau in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, critic Wendell P. Glick summarizes:

> Thoreau's 'Transcendental' premises led him to take a negative view of the dominant values of pre-Civil-War-America. He wrote disparagingly of the destruction to the natural environment . . . he deplored the implications of the rise of industrialism . . . he condemned the institution of black slavery.

Thoreau's writings on civil disobedience continue to be widely read long after their original publication and are known to have directly influenced such civil rights leaders as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

### Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

Poet Walt Whitman was born May 13, 1819, in West Hills, New York. Unlike the other writers involved in the transcendentalist movement, Whitman was not a New Englander. He lived most of his life in and around New York City, a city that greatly affected his writing and view of humanity. Before writing the work he is best

known for, *Leaves of Grass*, he worked as a schoolteacher and journalist, writing for several New York newspapers.

Whitman did not begin as a transcendentalist, nor was the spirited free verse with which he is associated always his style. His writing style developed along with his political sense, and as the country became more and more divided with the approaching Civil War, Whitman used his poetry to extol democracy and American populism. In his introduction to *Walt Whitman: A Historical Guide*, nineteenth-century literary scholar David S. Reynolds explains:

> By the mid-1850s, [he] had become capable of writing all-encompassing poetry as a gesture of healing and togetherness to a nation he felt was on the verge of collapse. He had a messianic vision of his poems, as though by reading them, America would be magically healed.

With his poetry, Whitman also made a conscious decision to cast off the conventions of Victorian literature and society. In the volume *Leaves of Grass*, his language is openly sexual in places. It is reported that after Emerson and Whitman became friends, Emerson asked Whitman to tone down the sexuality in his poetry. Whitman, however, refused. He believed that the essence of humankind was wild and that sexuality was part of that essence and part of the soul. Though Whitman was opposed to slavery, he was not strong in the abolitionist movement. He did, however, love and admire Abraham Lincoln, and in 1865 he wrote the oft-recited poem "O Captain! My Captain!" and the even finer "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," after Lincoln was assassinated. At times, Whitman was on the periphery of the transcendentalist movement, and at other times he was very closely associated with it. Emerson and Thoreau were great admirers of his poetry. Whitman died on March 26, 1892, in Camden, New Jersey.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

### The Blithedale Romance

Hawthorne's novel *The Blithedale Romance*, published in 1852, came on the heels of the transcendentalist movement. A key American author, Hawthorne was on the periphery of Transcendentalism, but his work was informed by transcendentalist ideals, and he is often grouped with transcendentalist writers. *The Blithedale Romance*

## MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

- Robert D. Richardson, author of *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, discusses his book and Emerson's life on CSPAN's *Booknotes* series. The interview aired August 13, 1995. For tape, transcript, or real-audio clip, visit http://www.booknotes.org.

- Musician Ken Pederson produced a new-age CD entitled *Walden*, inspired by Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Pederson produced it himself and released it in 1997.

- Audio Partners Publishing Corporation released *Thoreau and Emerson: Nature and Spirit*, a double audiocassette, in 1997. The cassettes include passages from the authors' works relating to nature and spirituality.

- *The Spiritual Light of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, a double audiocassette, was released in 1992 by Audio Literature. The work contains passages from Emerson's writings.

- *Voices and Visions: Walt Whitman*, released by Winstar in 1999, is a VHS videocassette. It features poets of the twentieth century reading from Whitman's poems.

- Originally produced for PBS in 1998, the VHS videocassette *Walt Whitman and the Civil War* is available from Monterey Video. It includes Whitman's poetry set against the backdrop of the Civil War.



*Margaret Fuller* (Painting by John Plumbe. The Library of Congress)

is key to the transcendentalist movement in that it depicts—loosely perhaps—the story of Brook Farm, an experimental socialist community populated by various transcendentalist thinkers and writers. Hawthorne lived only briefly at Brook Farm, but he came away disillusioned. *The Blithedale Romance* fictionalizes his experiences there, embodied in characters such as intellectual feminist Xenobia (thought to represent Fuller), philanthropist Hollingsworth, and Miles Coverdale (the narrator). Coverdale explains:

> It was our purpose . . . to give up whatever we had heretofore attained, for the sake of

showing mankind the example of a life governed by other than the false and cruel principles, on which human society has all along been based.

By the end of the novel, however, the Blithedale experiment has failed because of betrayals and complications, and Xenobia ends up drowning (as Fuller drowned in a shipwreck). Critics at the time debated how accurate Hawthorne intended his fictionalized account to be and whether Coverdale was his stand-in; they also debated, and continue to debate, Hawthorne's judgment of socialism—whether he felt it to be a viable alternative to the growing industrialism and poverty of the nineteenth century.

### Leaves of Grass

When Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855, it was unlike any collection of poems published by an American poet in the history of the nation. Characterized by long, twisting sentences combined in a free, liberated poetic form, the poems of *Leaves of Grass* are bold statements about love, desire, nature, and poetics. Though Whitman is less central as a figure in the transcendentalist movement than, Emerson, there is no doubt that *Leaves of Grass* was inspired by,

and indeed born out of, the transcendentalist movement. In these poems, Whitman offers a celebration of nature and of the soul and the soul's innate connection to God through nature. The title *Leaves of Grass* reveals the central metaphor of the collection: that something as small as a single blade of grass contains the divinity of God and at the same time is a small part of the world at large. The title also refers to the leaves or pages of the book itself, making the grass blades equivalent the poems collected in it.

In poems such as "Song of Myself" and "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman takes Transcendentalism to an extreme in his discussion of the body and sexuality. In "Song of Myself," he proclaims, "I am the poet of the Body, / and I am the poet of the soul." "I Sing the Body Electric" begins with the bold statement, "The armies of those I love engirth me, and I engirth them." Whitman's language is physical, earthy, even sexually explicit in places, expressing both heterosexual and homosexual desire, and inclusive. Critic M. Jimmie Killingsworth in his essay "Whitman and the Gay American Ethos," explains:

> The centrality of sex in *Leaves of Grass* and Whitman's experimentation in language, above all his free verse . . . and his audacity in exploring metaphors and other tropes, earned him the contempt of many reviewers in his own time but also made him a hero among less conventional contemporaries and among later critics.

Emerson and Thoreau were fans of Whitman, as were radical social reformers and freethinkers with whom he involved himself. A poetic pioneer, Whitman inspired many modern poets, especially in the 1960s during the time of social protest and political reform.

## Nature

Emerson's essay *Nature* lays out the fundamental ideas of the transcendentalist movement in the United States. Published in 1836, *Nature* came at the beginning of the movement, sparking a literary outpouring over the next decade by various transcendentalist authors. The work is, as its title suggests, a study of nature and humankind's relationship to nature. Part philosophical treatise, part prose poem, *Nature* attempts to outline the pathway to spiritual enlightenment, which begins with not only the praise and appreciation of nature but also the belief that it is divine.

Emerson opens this essay with a call to develop an American intellectual tradition—something about which he was passionate. He writes:

> The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. . . . Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?

While Emerson and his fellow transcendentalists were very much influenced by British Romanticism and German philosophy, they were espousing a new kind of thinking, which they saw as distinctly American. They wanted to break free from any traditions that put up barriers between humans and God. Emerson preached a religion of democracy and connectedness, in which every human has equal access to spiritual enlightenment. He writes:

> Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.

Many critics have read the image of the transparent eyeball as a key symbol for Transcendentalism, which affirms the individual's ability to see the divine in all existence and to understand nature as metaphor for deity. Nature is the expression of what Emerson calls the Oversoul. It is a bridge of meaning between the material and transcendent spiritual. Nature is very much an active character in this essay. Emerson animates intangible concepts as love, truth, and freedom, naming them as if they were characters in an allegory. *Nature* is a challenging read in part because much of what Emerson writes depends on his figurative language, his use of metaphor, hyperbole, and simile. These troupes provide him with a way of transcending language itself in an effort to explain how spirituality is both expressed by and transcends nature. Thus nature itself is the perfect metaphor for deity. Soon after this essay was published, *Nature* became a cornerstone of the movement.

## "Transcendental Wild Oats"

"Transcendental Wild Oats" is Louisa May Alcott's satirical account of the year her family spent living at the Fruitlands utopian commune when she was eleven years old. Published in *The Independent* on December 18, 1873, the story concerns an unnamed idealistic family arriving at the new commune and learning all the rules of plain

living. They must be vegans, partaking of no ani-mal products for food or clothing. Most of the people who joined the commune were men, which seems to have not attracted notice, Alcott observes with amusement. She paints the men as dreamers, the women as overburdened with work, and the children as running wild. Although satir-ical, Alcott's account is not without affection. This essay was later collected in *Silver Pitchers* (1876).

## Walden

Thoreau's *Walden*, published in 1854, is one of the most cherished pieces of American litera-ture. Though published after the height of Tran-scendentalism, *Walden* was written during the twenty-six-month period when Thoreau lived at Walden Pond. A detailed record of Thoreau's life there, *Walden* takes Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance and puts it into practice.

While living at Walden, Thoreau built his own cabin from trees he lumbered himself, grew his own food, and generally lived a life of self-sufficiency. In addition to providing a detailed log of his expenses and budget for his time at Walden, he writes at great length in the first chap-ter, "Economy," about the state of labor in the United States. Thoreau recognized that industri-alization had a grip on the country and that peo-ple's labor was being exploited to feed the system. His answer was deliberate living, and *Walden* can be read as a manual for this type of living. Thor-eau explains his reasons for his Walden experi-ment in the following, oft-quoted lines:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

This type of simple, almost journalistic style characterizes much of *Walden*. Like Emerson's *Nature*, *Walden* is very much a document in cele-bration of nature and the spiritual answers nature provides. If *Nature* outlines the theory of such living, then *Walden* shows that theory in action.

## Woman in the Nineteenth Century

Published in 1845, Fuller's *Woman in the Nine-teenth Century* is a political and philosophical treatise that gives voice to women in history and envisions a new way of thinking about wom-en's place within society. The essay, according to literary critic Mary Kelley, proposed "an alter-native system of gender relations." Fuller wrote

*Woman in the Nineteenth Century* during a time when women could not yet vote, file for divorce, or be taken seriously if they entered the public sphere to earn a living alongside men. She was keenly aware of women's lack of economic and political power and aligned herself with the suf-fragists of the day, such as Elizabeth Cady Stan-ton, to secure the vote for women.

*Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is cer-tainly politically charged. It is also a philosoph-ical rethinking of gender relations. Fuller writes:

> We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man. Were this done . . . we should see crystallizations more pure and of more var-ious beauty. We believe the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the his-tory of former ages, and . . . a ravishing harmony of the spheres would ensue.

In this essay, Fuller advocates harmony and balance between the public and private, the mar-ketplace and the household, instead of strict sep-aration. Fuller's argument is filled with literary and classical allusions; she was writing to an educated audience, very much trying to appeal to the readership of works such as Emerson's *Nature*. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* was received positively among transcendentalists and women's rights advocates and is most cer-tainly a pillar of first-wave feminism.

## THEMES

### *Self-Wisdom*

Quite simply, Transcendentalism is based on the belief that human beings have self-wisdom and may gain this knowledge or wisdom by tuning in to the ebb and flow of nature. Transcendental-ism revolves around the self, specifically the bet-terment of the self. Emerson and his followers believed that human beings had innate knowl-edge and could connect with God directly rather than through an institution such as an organized religion. Transcendentalism celebrated the self, an important step in the construction of Ameri-can identity, better understood as the notion of American individualism—one of the corner-stones of American democracy.

Different writers conceived of the search for self-knowledge in different ways. Whitman's response was a grand celebration of the self in all its complexity and beauty and contradictions. He begins the poem "Song of Myself" with the bold

# TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- While Transcendentalism was aligned with democracy, its proponents were willing in theory and action to resist federal laws. Research Thoreau's position on taxation, slavery, and the advent of the railroad. Write a paper about how he put his beliefs into action, taking a minority stand against certain social and political issues of his time.

- Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement in many ways. Research the main differences between the theories of philosopher John Locke and the theories of philosopher Immanuel Kant, and write a speech discussing their philosophies and how Kant's ideas contributed to the transcendentalist ideals.

- Transcendentalism was a regional movement, located mostly in Boston and Concord, Massachusetts. Research the history of New England at the time the transcendentalists were writing. Explain the ways in which transcendentalists reflect New England culture of the time. How did New England culture differ from culture in the South?

line, "I celebrate myself." He offers up to his readers, "I loafe and invite my Soul, / I lean and loafe at my ease . . . observing a spear of summer grass." *Leaves of Grass* is filled with such celebration.

Thoreau took a slightly different path toward self-knowledge. *Walden* is a study of solitude. He says, "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. . . . I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude." For him, self-discovery comes as the result of intense reflection. Self-knowledge has political implications as well. Once the individual has established a moral code, it becomes his or her duty to peacefully protest and engage in civil disobedience against the government should governmental policies violate that code. Thoreau's opposition to slavery led to his refusal to pay a poll tax supporting the Mexican War,

an act that landed him in jail for a night. For Thoreau, self-discovery was not simply an intangible concept, it was a way of living.

## Nature and Its Meaning

Nature is the focal point for much transcendentalist thought and writing. As a theme, it is so central to the movement that Emerson's cornerstone essay is entitled *Nature* and serves as an investigation into nature and its relationship to the soul. For transcendentalists, nature and the soul were inextricably linked. In the rhythms and seasons of the natural world, transcendentalists found comfort and divinity. In the increasingly industrialized and fragmented world in which they lived, the search for meaning in nature was of great importance. Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, Fuller, Melville, and others saw possibility, liberation, and beauty in nature.

Emerson writes in *Nature*, "Let us interrogate the great apparition, that shines so peacefully around us. Let us inquire, to what end is nature?" For Emerson, nature is a direct line to God, and its "meaning" is directly linked to God's "meaning." His definition of God and meaning is clearly different than that of the conservative Unitarian Church from which he split.

A follower of Emerson, Thoreau took ideas from Emerson's work and put them into practice. He saw nature as not just an awe-inspiring force but a way of life. Thoreau offers up the following advice in *Walden*: "Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails." For Thoreau, nature is pure because it is free from commercialization and industrialization. It is both a respite and a teacher. The transcendentalists were not reactionary or opposed to the modernization of the world; they were, however, concerned that such modernization could lead to alienation. Nature provided a way to keep humans in touch with their souls and with their spiritual foundations.

## Social Reform

Regarding social issues, transcendentalists were considered visionaries in their attitudes toward such issues as social protest, elimination of slavery, women's rights, creative and participatory education for children, and labor reform. Transcendentalism became a venue for social reform because it revolved around the idea of liberation. Transcendentalist writers may have had as their

immediate goal the liberation of the soul, but that goal expanded to social liberation as more and more thinkers joined the transcendentalist school of thought.

Founded as an alternative to conservative, organized religion, Transcendentalism had counter-cultural tendencies from its inception. From the free flowing, free verse of Whitman to the civil disobedience of Thoreau to Fuller's radical notion that men and women were social and intellectual equals, the movement was engaged in many controversial social arenas.

As the editor of the transcendentalist publication *The Dial*, Fuller often published controversial pieces. As the author of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, she invited debate and controversy. Her essay is a call to action for women and men to change society. She laments:

> The lot of Woman is sad. She is constituted to expect and need happiness that cannot exist on earth. She must stifle such aspirations within her secret heart, and fit herself, as well as she can, for a life of resignations and consolations.

Clearly this is not an acceptable life to Fuller, just as slavery is unacceptable to Thoreau. In "Resistance to Civil Government," Thoreau states, "Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?" Thoreau's answer was to transgress, and go to jail if necessary, for as he says, "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison."

Along with slavery and gender issues, class issues also came to the forefront in the nineteenth century, revealing a new kind of slavery—wage slavery. Transcendentalists experimented with socialist communes, such as George Ripley's Brook Farm and Alcott's Fruitlands. These experiments were short lived. The legacy of civil disobedience served America and the world well, as it went on to inspire Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., to lead peaceful social protests. In addition, Fuller is often read as a precursor to modern feminism and is seen as a woman ahead of her time.

## STYLE

### Free Verse

Though many transcendentalist writers used the essay form to express their ideas, Whitman used

poetry, specifically free verse. Characterized by irregular line length and a lack of rhyme or regular rhythm, free verse breaks conventional rules of poetic rhyme and meter. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* builds its own rhythms with the repetition of words and phrases, sometimes called "cataloging." Lines, ideas, and images flow freely, unbroken by regular stanzas or set rules. Free verse was suitable for a transcendentalist poet such as Whitman because the content of his poems matched the freedom of the form. The themes Whitman embraced in poems such as "Song of Myself"—a celebration of the soul, of love, desire, sexuality, and pleasure—were better expressed in a more radical style versus a conventional style. Both the form and the content caught critics' and readers' attention (some for the better, some for the worse). Whitman's use of free verse at that time in the nation's history made him a lasting name in the American literary canon.

### Romanticism

An outgrowth of English Romanticism (1789–1832), yet still strong in its own right, American Romanticism is often called the American Renaissance because it marked a rebirth in American literature. Critics identify this period of American rebirth as beginning with the Jacksonian era in 1828 and lasting to the Civil War in 1865. This era produced authors such as Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorn, Fuller, Dickinson, and Poe, along with a host of popular writers of serialized fiction, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe. American literature was, for the first time, held in high esteem in this country and taken seriously in Europe. American Romanticism certainly had a European heritage, borrowing some key elements. First, the English romantics focused on nature, viewing it as a catalyst for thinking and deep reflection. American transcendentalists took this idea and built upon it. Secondly, English Romanticism was about overflowing, powerful emotions. The overflow of powerful emotions characterized such pieces as Emerson's *Nature* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Romanticism is also humanistic in its view of the world. Transcendentalists embraced humanity and the human spirit, believing strongly in democratic ideals and human potential.

### Tone

The tone of Transcendentalism is, in a word, exalted. The feelings expressed by transcendentalist writers are intense, the ideas serious, the reflection

deep and meaningful. Transcendentalism was an intellectual movement, led by highly educated people. It was not a movement of the masses, though it certainly had an effect on the masses in the long run. The tone of the writing might be best understood in comparison to other writing of the day. At the same time that transcendentalists were writing, popular fiction was gaining ground with the American reading public. Dime novels, serialized novels, sentimental fiction, tales of the city—there were literally dozens of different types of novels circulating and claiming large reading audiences. In fact, Hawthorne is famous for complaining in a letter to his publisher about the "damned mob of scribbling women" writing popular fiction and affecting his book sales. Transcendentalists wanted to create an intellectual tradition, rooted in spirituality and American democracy. The argument can certainly be made that popular fiction commanded an intellectual debate as well and tackled serious issues of the day. But transcendentalists were attempting to create an American aesthetic, and this is reflected in their language and tone.

## MOVEMENT VARIATIONS

### Education
Transcendentalism extended into many areas of social reform, including the educational system. When Alcott came to Boston in 1828, he had definite ideas about children's education. An idealist and visionary, he became involved in the transcendentalist movement, with a passion for educating young children. Alcott believed the key to a better society was education—an idea still dominant in the twenty-first century. Alcott's focus on very young children was ahead of its time in the nineteenth century, when the popular belief was that young children were simply tiny adults.

Alcott developed his educational model using the ideas of Plato. Plato held that before birth, a person's soul resided in a spiritual realm, together with all of the other souls waiting to be born. When a person was born, his/her soul was "called" to him/her. Hence, Alcott reasoned that children were closest to birth and therefore closest to that preexisting spiritual state. Young children had better intuition, he believed, and their minds were more open and less cluttered than those of adults. Paul F. Boller, in his book *American Transcendentalism, 1830–1860*, summarizes Alcott's philosophy thus: "Education, then, should be

directed to the very young, and it should be centered on drawing out of them the moral and spiritual truths latent in the intuitive Reason they all possess." In 1834, Alcott opened a school in the Masonic temple in Boston, which came to be known as Temple School. Fuller also taught there. Thirty preteen boys and girls attended the school. Alcott used the Socratic method of teaching, that is, asking questions to elicit answers he believed the children already held within them. They read stories and poems and had lively discussions. Alcott also believed in the importance of physical exercise for young children, and so part of their time was devoted to that as well.

The downfall of Temple School was the publication of a book of "conversations" held at the school. These conversations were religious in nature, and considered radical, even sacrilegious, because Alcott dared to speak of scripture and scriptural interpretation with young children. While many of his fellow transcendentalists supported him, he was attacked in the newspapers, and enrollment greatly suffered. By the late 1830s, the school had shut down, with the final straw being Alcott's acceptance of a black child into the school. While Alcott was certainly ahead of his time in his thinking, 1830s Boston was not fully prepared for him. He went on to establish an experimental community near Boston called Fruitlands; it was a very small community, never attracting more than a handful of people. Alcott's daughter, Louisa May Alcott, went on to write books for adults and young people, including *Little Women*.

### The Transcendental Club
Transcendentalism was an intellectual movement, characterized by lively philosophical and moral debates. The Transcendental Club was a loose gathering of intellectuals who discussed everything from truth, reason, and spirituality to social reform and slavery. The first meeting was in 1836 at George Ripley's home in Boston. Emerson, Alcott, Fuller, Thoreau, James Freeman Clarke, Parker, Orestes Brownson, Channing, and Frederic Hedge were some of the regular attendees. Critic Boller says, "Alcott, along with Ralph Waldo Emerson . . . described it as 'a company of earnest persons enjoying conversations on high themes and having much in common.'" The formation of the club marked the beginning of the transcendentalist movement. Though the meetings of the club declined after a few years and eventually ceased to exist,

# COMPARE & CONTRAST

- **Mid-Nineteenth Century:** Black Americans are still held in slavery. Several laws are passed in relation to slavery, which escalate the debate in the United States. Abolitionists in the North actively fight against slavery, while escaped slaves write narratives chronicling their experiences. The nation ultimately goes to war over the issue, resulting in the emancipation of all slaves.

  **Today:** Slavery has been abolished for over 150 years in the United States, though African Americans face continuing discrimination and are still fighting for equal access to economic resources.

- **Mid-Nineteenth Century:** The 1830s see the flowering of the American literary tradition. American literature has not been taken seriously abroad before this time. Emerson argues that the United States needs to develop an intellectual and philosophical tradition of its own in his essay "The American Scholar."

  **Today:** American literature is an established discipline in academia, and several Americans have won the Nobel Prize in Literature, including Ernest Hemingway (1954), John Steinbeck (1962), Saul Bellow (1976), and Toni Morrison (1993).

- **Mid-Nineteenth Century:** America is seeing a wave of technological innovations. Railroads are being built, the steam engine is developed, the printing press is improved—the world is changing. The country is making the transformation from a rural base to an urban one, with the population in cities rising rapidly and the population expanding westward.

  **Today:** The pace of technology has not slowed since the nineteenth century. The world is completely transformed in the twentieth century, with the development of the airplane, television, computer, and a whole host of other modern conveniences.

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the ideas discussed and debated in the meetings continued to shape the movement not just in literary ways but in philosophical and religious ways as well.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### The Rise of Industry

While critics generally assign Transcendentalism to the ten-year period between 1836 and 1846, the movement was tied to a much larger chunk of the middle part of that century, beginning with the election of Andrew Jackson to the United States presidency in 1829 and extending through the Civil War period (1860–1865). Jackson and his fellow Democrats claimed to represent the common person and fought against large corporations and excesses of wealth. Industry boomed

as the nineteenth century began, with many technological innovations coming to fruition. The century saw huge population gains, with an influx of immigrants from Europe and Asia; the expansion of territories westward, which led to the displacement of thousands of Native Americans; improvements to the printing press; the development of hundreds of miles of railroads; and the continual transformation from a nation of farmers to a nation of industry and urbanization. In cities, poverty and crime skyrocketed. Union organizers worked tirelessly against wage slavery, while many Americans made their fortunes. Textile mills were built in the Northeast, sparking controversy about whether they represented a way for women to earn a living or a pathway into wage slavery with no escape.

For a time, the economy seemed to boom, until 1837, when recession set in. The panic of

1837 is, in many ways, comparable to the Great Depression of the 1930s. The recession meant lean times for many Americans, and it led writers such as Thoreau to question industrialization. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," he wrote in *Walden*. Writers and thinkers debated meaning and material goods. Thoreau made his position clear: "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind." Although the recession certainly impacted the American economy, the middle class continued to grow and develop during the middle of the century.

## *Reform*

A lot was happening in the middle of the century that divided the country. The slavery issue was a major hotbed of debate, especially once the Fugitive Slave Law was passed in 1850, which stated that escaped slaves in the North could be caught and taken back to the South, and into slavery. The law sparked much controversy, a debate further fueled by publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. Stowe was one of many authors writing about slavery, with abolitionist literature prevalent in the North along with slave narratives by such authors as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Slavery was opposed on moral, philosophical, and economic grounds.

Transcendentalist writers had a curious position in relation to abolitionism. Whitman opposed slavery but never took a strong abolitionist stance. Writers like Emerson and Hawthorne were not focused strongly on the issue, though it certainly informs their work in both subtle and overt ways. Thoreau had the strongest sentiment against slavery and wrote about it in his essay "Resistance to Civil Government."

The antislavery movement and the women's rights movement overlapped in many ways. Women could not vote, or seek divorce from their husbands. Women's rights activists and antislavery activists saw parallels in their causes in that slavery added an extra burden for black women: not only were they considered property, their bodies were subject to sexual exploitation at the hands of their white masters. Antislavery activists such as Stowe appealed to white women of the North to see the horror of the situation. Women were becoming more and more vocal and rallying support for their cause. The 1848 Seneca Falls convention held in New York was the largest gathering of women's rights advocates the nation had seen. Frederick Douglass spoke, along with dozens of other women's rights advocates. Women's rights activists were fighting laws that held women back as well as fighting to change attitudes. Antebellum America (or pre-Civil War America) was separated into two distinct spheres: the public and the private. The marketplace (where men worked and made a living) was the public sphere, and the private sphere (the home) was relegated to women. The "cult of true womanhood" was the prevailing notion of the day, preaching that women should be pure, pious, domestic, and obedient to their husbands. Writers such as Fuller wrote against the notion of "true womanhood" and the strict separation of spheres. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Lydia Maria Child, and dozens of other women—some famous, some not—fought for women's rights long after the Seneca Falls convention and the Civil War.

## CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Critically speaking, Transcendentalism was not exactly a cohesive movement. In other words, it was a collection of varied ideas and aims that existed among various thinkers, writers, and philosophers. Emerson biographer Richardson writes:

> Whatever Transcendentalism was, it was not suited to institutionalizing. It gave birth to no academy; it flourished in no college or seminary. It had two collective expressions during its heyday (the club and the magazine called *The Dial*) but could only manage one at a time.

Emerson is regarded as the center of the movement, but he encouraged his followers to think for themselves. While the movement may not have been a cohesive whole, it was very influential for several American writers.

Critics have responded in varied ways to transcendentalist works. Perhaps Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* garnered the strongest responses. Critic Reynolds points out that while there were more positive than negative views of Whitman's poetry collection, the negative views were very strong:

> Some vigorously denounced its sexual explicitness and its egotistical tone. One reviewer blasted the volume as a "mass of filth," and

*Henry David Thoreau's Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts (© Bettmann / Corbis)*

another insisted that its author must be "some escaped lunatic raving in pitiable delusion."

Fuller's critics could also be harsh. She faced the dual challenge of being a woman and writing about controversial issues. Fuller scholar Donna Dickenson explains, "The best of Fuller's female defenders lacked all conviction, while the worst of her attackers—male and female alike—were full of passionate intensity."

It is not unusual that radical ideas would not be well received by the keepers of culture—the role that critics tend to play. Texts such as *Walden*, which did not seem as overtly radical as *Leaves of Grass*, tended to receive rave reviews.

Twenty-first-century literary critics are still writing about transcendentalist works and see continuing transcendentalist influence in modern literature.

## CRITICISM

### Judi Ketteler

*Ketteler has taught literature and composition. In this essay, Ketteler discusses the political dimension of the transcendentalist movement, particularly the way transcendentalist writers address race and gender issues.*

The literary, philosophical, and religious movement known as Transcendentalism sprung up in America in the mid-1830s, during a time when the country was headed towards a major political crisis. Transcendentalism is as much a literary movement as it is a political one, and some of the key players—Emerson, Fuller, Thoreau, and Whitman—interwove politics into their intellectual musings. To speak of race, gender, or class—issues which revolve around power relations or unequal distribution of power—as all of these writers did, is a political move. To say these writers were "liberals" by twenty-first century standards is not quite right; however, they were all ahead of their time in their ideas about liberation and equality for all people.

Perhaps the biggest divide in the early to mid-nineteenth century was the issue of slavery. An economic, social, and political issue, slavery was divisive from the very beginning. Slavery was never supposed to last. Scholar Paul Lauter explains in his introduction to early nineteenth-century literature in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*: "The Founders had mainly assumed that slavery would in the course of time

# WHAT DO I STUDY NEXT?

- The nineteenth century offers a rich variety in literature, much of it influenced by transcendentalist writers. The novels of Melville, including what critics have regarded as his greatest, *Moby Dick*, originally published in 1851, provide an example of transcendentalist influence.

- In poetry, Emily Dickinson is an interesting figure for study. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1997) contains all of her poems, which were originally published by Paul Johnson in a three-volume set in 1955. While Dickinson's short, concise lines stand in sharp contrast to Whitman's long inclusive ones, she was greatly influenced by transcendentalist thought, particularly in her focus on nature and desire.

- In terms of British Romanticism, reading the poetry of William Wordsworth can inform any understanding of American Transcendentalism, since the movements have marked similarities. His *Poems in Two Volumes* was originally published in 1807.

- Some of the bestselling "sentimental" novels of the day, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (first published serially in 1851 and 1852), provide a contrast to Transcendentalism in both style and content. However, this novel's depiction of slavery was intended to arouse public outcry against the practice and is considered by some the most influential work to do so in the pre-Civil War days.

- *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.* (1998), edited by Clayborne Carson, provides an opportunity to trace the development of civil disobedience in the United States, which began with Thoreau's essay.

atrophy and that slaveholders, Constitutionally prevented from importing additional slaves, would ultimately turn to other, free sources of labor." But the invention of the cotton gin changed this way of thinking, reinforcing the

**IF ONE OF THE TENETS OF TRANSCENDENTALISM IS TO SEE WITH THE EYES OF A CHILD, ANOTHER TENET IS THE QUEST FOR INDIVIDUALISM."**

institution of slavery and making the use of slaves to pick cotton highly lucrative. The tension mounted in America as several court cases and compromises came into being: the Missouri Compromise in 1820, which prohibited slavery in the new territories; the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, which made it legal for slave catchers to come to the North to reclaim escaped slaves; and the Dred Scott decision in 1857, which held that African Americans were not citizens of the United States and that slaveholding could not be excluded from any state or territory. At the same time there were slave revolts led by Nat Turner (1831) and John Brown (1859), as well as a huge abolitionist network of writers, activists, and Underground Railroad conductors. Slavery was on the minds of Americans, and the writers of the day were certainly not exempt.

So why, then, would a small, highly educated and liberal group of New England writers, philosophers, and ministers choose to turn to nature in this time of impending crisis? Transcendentalism represented a turning inward in many aspects; it focused on the individual, on the human spirit and the human soul. For Emerson, nature was divine; it contained the answers to all the mysteries of life. Everyone had access to nature, yet few could really grasp the divine potential of it. He says in *Nature*:

> To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. . . . At least they have a very superficial seeing. . . . The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of his infancy even into the era of manhood.

This passage suggests that to really "see" nature, one must think with the imagination of a child. Emerson and his fellow transcendentalists, especially educator Alcott, believed that children saw the world with fresher eyes and that since they were closer to birth, they were closer to their prebirth spiritual state. Children

are not full participants in the capitalist system because they are not yet driven by money; their minds are less "crowded" with worries of the modern world.

In this way, Transcendentalism advocates an almost regressive state. If one of the tenets of Transcendentalism is to see with the eyes of a child, another tenet is the quest for individualism. Emerson and Thoreau were very much proponents of American individualism; they eschewed conformity and convention. This forms the basis for Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance." In this essay, he explains:

> Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion.

The idea of self-reliance sets up an interesting paradox. The "joint-stock company" Emerson speaks of represents the backbone of American capitalism. No longer was America a nation of farmers; it was instead a nation of industry, of mills, factories, and stockholders. What does it mean then to be an individual? As an individual, can one still believe in the American system of capitalism? And how does one understand self-reliance in relation to slavery?

Thoreau has an answer for Emerson in his essay "Resistance to Civil Government". (The essay is often called "Civil Disobedience".) The philosophy of Transcendentalism and the institution of slavery are diametrically opposed. Transcendentalism is about liberation; slavery is about bondage. Transcendentalism is about rising above commodity and the commodification of nature; slavery is about buying and selling humans as commodities. Transcendentalism is about democracy; slavery is fundamentally antidemocratic. For Thoreau, to espouse an abolitionist philosophy in theory was not enough; he advocated action. He explains in "Resistance to Civil Government":

> I do not hesitate to say those that call themselves Abolitionists should at once effectually withdraw their support, both in person and property, from the government of Massachusetts, and not wait till they constitute a majority of one, before they suffer the right to prevail through them.

If the government is perpetrating crimes against humanity, as Thoreau thought slavery to be, then citizens have the right, the duty even, to disobey the laws that support such crimes. In Thoreau's case, he refused to pay a poll tax supporting the Mexican War (which he saw as an effort to extend slavery) and consequently spent a night in jail.

Like Thoreau and Emerson, Fuller actively opposed slavery. In addition to speaking out against slavery, she also spoke out against the subjugation of women, seeing this as another kind of slavery. She does not argue against marriage, she argues against a strict separation of the public and private spheres, envisioning marriage as a fruitful and intellectual partnership. Her view of gender is one of harmony and sharing, as described in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*:

> Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.

Fuller's theory of mutual dependence also applies to race relations. Instead of the strict separation of the public and private spheres, the institution of slavery was based on the strict separation of black and white. It was very important to be able to define who was black and who was white, because otherwise the system would crumble. Miscegenation, or the mixing of the races, was considered a crime in the South, yet white masters repeatedly raped their black female slaves, creating offspring whom they then disowned and immediately sold into slavery. The fluidity of transcendentalist thought was in itself a challenge to the rigid views of race and gender held by many Americans in the early to middle nineteenth century.

If fluidity was a challenge to the conventional thinking of the day, then poet Whitman was certainly radical. His free-verse poetry was not only radical in its form—breaking free from traditional rhyme schemes and poetic rhythms—but its content was groundbreaking as well. Whitman's poetry represented a fundamental challenge to Victorian notions of gender. In *Leaves of Grass*, he asks, "What is a man, anyhow? What am I? What are you? / All I mark as my own, you shall offset it with your own / Else it were time lost listening to me." He continues to question notions of American identity, particularly white American identity, in the poem "I Sing the Body Electric." In this

poem, Whitman imagines a slave on the auction block, and asks:

> How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his offspring through the centuries?
> Who might you find you have come from yourself if you could trace back through the centuries?

In a way, Whitman is echoing Emerson. In nature, all is fluid. The systems of power humans build around natural distinctions, such as race or gender, are all, in fact, unnatural and easily challenged.

Transcendentalism did represent a challenge to American thought. It might seem almost anti-political in the way it advocates a turning inward to examine the self. But for the transcendentalist writers, this inner examination represented a pathway to liberation, both personal liberation and political liberation. Before the Civil War, American democracy held a fundamental contradiction within itself. The ideals about equality set forth in the Declaration of Independence were not yet realized. Transcendentalists were strong supporters of American democracy, and in pointing out the flaws and contradictions, they helped to shape American intellectual and literary thought.

**Source:** Judi Ketteler, Critical Essay on Transcendentalism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## Donald N. Koster

*In the following essay, Koster examines the effect the transcendental movement had on American culture and on writers outside its milieu well after its heyday.*

No one can say with assurance just when the Transcendental Movement, that began with the publication of Emerson's *Nature* and the founding of the Transcendental Club in 1836, reached its high-water mark and started to ebb. The years of greatest excitement appear, however, to extend from 1836 through about 1843. By the latter date the meetings of the Club had ceased, Brook Farm came to the end of its purely Transcendental phase and began its transition to Fourierist Phalanx, Alcott's Fruitlands began and ended, *The Dial* was straining to continue publication, Brownson was on the verge of his conversion to Roman Catholicism, and other advocates of the movement were increasingly devoting themselves to particular reform causes
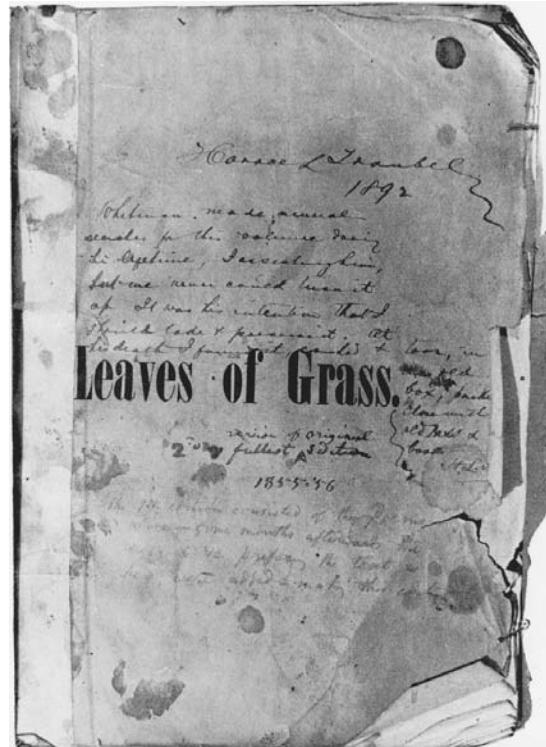


*Cover of American poet Walt Whitman's own copy of the first edition of his 1855 collection* Leaves of Grass *(Hulton Archive | Getty Images)*

such as Abolition and women's rights or to their own private ends. We may recall that Parker strove to rekindle the old enthusiasm in 1853 by calling for renewed meetings of the Transcendental Club but that his call went unanswered.

Although the movement as such may have been of relatively short duration, its influence has continued to be felt in a variety of ways down to the present day. And two of its three greatest literary statements—*Walden* and *Leaves of Grass*—were published after the crest, in 1854 and 1855 respectively.

In the present chapter we shall examine first the influence of Transcendentalism as it affected certain aspects of American civilization in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Then we shall look at its impact on particular American writers of distinction other than such widely recognized Transcendentalists as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. For, as Simon and Parsons have remarked, "A movement [Transcendental Movement] that resisted definition at the start has been pervasive

enough to have influenced subsequent movements as disjunct as Naturalism and Neo-Humanism and to have affected writers as opposed in their loyalties as Irving Babbitt and Eugene O'Neill."

There was, of course, a body of men who quite consciously thought of themselves as Transcendentalists and who tried to carry on the ideals and ideas of the earlier generation into post Civil War America. Samuel Johnson, John Weiss, Samuel Longfellow, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, David A. Wasson, Moncure Conway, Octavius B. Frothingham—these were among the best known. Worthy as they were, they seemed to lack the spark of those who had generated the movement. And some of the ancient sages lingered on, creating in Concord itself what Brooks has referred to as an "afterglow of Transcendentalism." For example, there was the Concord School of Philosophy that Alcott and William T. Harris of the St. Louis Hegelians founded in 1879 to combat the materialistic trend of scientific thinking. For nine summers young students, mostly from the West, where Alcott had indefatigably lectured, flocked there to take the courses on Emerson, Plato, Dante, Goethe, or Oriental religions, and to listen to William James lecture on psychology or Harrison Blake read from his friend Thoreau's unpublished journals.

Of far wider-ranging importance, however, was the gathering movement of mind cure through the power of positive thinking that resulted in such phenomena as New Thought and Christian Science. Phineas Parkhurst Quimby pioneered both in his search for a way to cure the sick. Born a year before Emerson, he came to manhood as the Transcendental Movement was just beginning to stir. No intellectual, he was nonetheless plainly touched by the basic idea of the movement, for he came to consider himself as an agent "revealing that the power of curing was the divine wisdom in all of us accessible through intuition."

Quimby died in 1866, and following his death a split in the religious faith-healing movement occurred, with Mary Baker Eddy establishing the Christian Science Church and Warren F. Evans, a Swedenborgian minister, combining New Thought with the Hegelian idea that thought is the greatest creative force in the world.

Huber distinguishes Christian Science from New Thought thus:

> Christian Science is closely organized and rigidly centralized with a unified doctrine and an absolute discipline over its practitioners. In matters of faith, the absolute idealism of Christian Science denies the existence of matter and the reality of suffering. The New Thought movement consists of independent sects loosely organized . . . and centering authority in no book or person . . . it does not deny the existence of sickness, sin and poverty, but asserts that these evils can be overcome by right thinking.

Donald Meyer opines that "mind cure conventionalized lyric transcendentalism into a prosy pragmatism. . . ." Indeed, the mind cure theologists made the inevitable connection with Emerson and the Transcendentalists. With no real philosophers among them, they had a tendency to plunder Emerson's works in particular for those ideas that fitted nicely into their theories of health, wealth, and power through mind, which is God. It was doubtless the metaphysics of practical idealism that they taught which fascinated William James, who saw that "the heart of mind cure was its psychology, and the heart of that psychology was its displacement of consciousness. Consciousness could not be trusted." In developing his theory of the subconscious and its importance to human behavior, James seems to have credited it with almost magical powers that needed only to be obeyed. As Meyer remarks, "Much of his description of the subconscious amounted to no more than a new label for the famous faculty of transcendental reason or intuition celebrated in New England sixty years earlier." Meyer goes on to point out that in its poetic-philosophic form the transcendental idea of intuition was not acceptable to scientific psychologists, but that essentially the same idea

wearing the cloak of the "subconscious" was acceptable because it appeared to be more open to study and explanation. Nonetheless it was characterized by traits associated with the religious faculty, traits that facilitated the individual's spiritual experience most directly in its best and fullest form.

The connection between Emerson's doctrines and the new mind-cure religion quite plainly existed, even though it might be somewhat tenuous. After all, Transcendental doctrine seemed to deny the reality of matter and stressed the power of mind. And Emerson had contended that sickness should not be named; for it was a kind of evil which, being negative, could scarcely be said to exist. Robert Peel has shown the warm reception accorded Mary Baker Glover Eddy's *Science and Health* in 1876 on its publication, and surely her refusal to accept disease, pain, old age, and death as realities, because such notions are applicable to matter rather than to spirit, which is the true reality, suggest at least a dim reflection of Emersonian attitudes. That Mrs. Eddy's ideas attracted at least some of the Transcendentalists is shown, for example, by Alcott's active interest in her book, which led him to visit her classes in Lynn and lecture to them. What made her new church particularly attractive to many members of the upper middle class was its tight discipline and its apparent rejection of New Thought's religious pragmatism that "guaranteed sick people health, poor people riches, and troubled people happiness." Unlike New Thought it did not embrace the "success" idea.

It is, of course, not only through religious or mental healing movements that American Transcendentalism has continued to exert an influence in the United States, and in other parts of the world as well. Carpenter, for example, has suggested that its influence in India, through Gandhi's extensive reading of Emerson and Thoreau, is considerable. He has also produced evidence of the practical impact of their thought on the leaders of modern India. And Lyons has advanced the view that the Austrian educator and social philosopher Rudolf Steiner and his Waldorf Schools—of which there are eight in the United States and some eighty in seventeen countries—show an affinity with Alcott's experiments in education and also with the basic ideals of Transcendentalism. For Steiner's Anthroposophy was to be "a way of knowledge that would lead the spiritual in man to the spiritual in the universe."

In the United States the New Humanism of the scholars Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More was at least partly traceable to the Transcendental influence. Babbitt's studies of Indian philosophy would have been unlikely without the initial inspiration of the Orientalism of the American Transcendentalists, including Emerson, of whom Babbitt was, according to René Wellek, at times a conscious disciple. He disapproved, however, of Emerson's undue optimism and of the romantic enterprise of reconciling man and nature. Nevertheless he felt the need of the "pure supernatural light" that he saw in Transcendentalism.

In the first half of the present century the influence of Transcendentalism in America, with the exception of its effect on a number of writers whom we shall discuss shortly, appeared largely dissipated. With the almost total triumph of materialism in an increasingly mechanized society, the Transcendental ideals seemed to have no place. The cumulative experience of two World Wars, a Great Depression, a Korean war and a Southeast Asian war has, however, brought about a resurgence of those ideals from about 1950 to the present. In the 50s the emergence of the "Beat" protest was a first straw in the wind. With its rebellion against the tyranny of possessions, of highly organized social structure, of the encroachments of the police state mentality, it was, despite the leftist radicalism of many of its members, an essentially apolitical movement, "a last-ditch stand for individualism and against conformity."

By the 1960s and early 1970s many young Americans whom Huber calls the New Romantics were engaged in a spontaneous movement of dissent from the success creed that had motivated their parents. Rebelling against the work ethic that had led the Puritans to embrace work rather than leisure in the name of God's will and that had led their parents to prefer work over leisure in behalf of the God of national security proclaimed by their government, they "turned their backs," in Huber's words, "on the American goals of mobility and crass achievement." Clad in the unisex uniform of blue jeans, they wore their hair long and smoked their marijuana joints short. Again to quote Huber, they "were social evolutionists engaged in a peaceful, nonpolitical protest against the competitive ethic of success. Dropouts from the traditional values of steady work, competition, and status-seeking (with its anxieties), they proclaimed a life of

meditation, cooperation, sensory gratification, and pleasure now."

Some of them involved themselves in "transcendental meditation" as taught by gurus oriental and occidental; many went to live in communes where cooperation and doing one's own thing went hand in hand; and all were concerned about what they viewed as the rapidly deteriorating quality of life in America. In these ways they were logical descendants of the Transcendentalists; however, they seemed largely to lack the urge to reform that was so much a part of the earlier movement. And they were, by and large, far less philosophically or intellectually inclined. But the Thoreauvian advice to simplify one's life and to live in harmony with nature rather than as nature's adversary appeared to be at the root of their concept.

Turning now to the influence of Transcendentalism on American writers, we shall observe that it has been fairly constant since the early days of the movement. Of course, it is more difficult to discern in some than in others, but it would be scarcely an exaggeration to say that few of our foremost literary figures have been untouched by it.

In the preceding chapter attention was paid to the criticism of Transcendentalism by Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville at a time when the movement was at or near its peak. Despite the predominantly adverse attitude that we examined there, each one of them may also be seen as reflective in one way or another of at least certain aspects of the Transcendentalist rationale.

Poe, for example, has been viewed by more than one astute critic as adopting the Transcendentalist position particularly in his *Eureka*, where he bridges the gap between truth and poetry (beauty) he had so frequently insisted on. Arnold Smithline sees him as advocating in this poem the intuitive over the rational approach:

> Thus we see that Poe's ideas in *Eureka* are very close indeed to Transcendentalism. . . In his assertion of the unity of man and the cosmos, and of reliance upon intuition as the best means of realizing that ultimate Truth, Poe is following the main tenets of the Transcendentalists. His final vision is not a descent into the maelstrom of nothingness but a positive assertion of man's divinity.

Conner agrees that *Eureka* has a transcendental conclusion although he does not see the entire work in that light. For Conner, Poe pushed his mechanistic attitude "to the conclusion that God is all, and in so doing pushed himself at least part way into the camp of the scorned transcendentalists." In like manner Conner views Longfellow as distrustful of all transcendentalism but accepting and molding some transcendental doctrines to his conservative Unitarian Christianity.

Marjorie Elder has devoted an entire volume to establishing with voluminous documentation Hawthorne's debt to the Transcendentalists' aesthetic theories, which she also sees as influencing many other critics of Transcendentalism, such as Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, and Melville. Tellingly, she quotes Longfellow: "The highest exercise of imagination is not to devise what has no existence, but rather to perceive what really exists, though unseen by the outward eye,—not creation, but insight." Here he is surely at one with Emerson.

Hawthorne speaks specifically in such works as "The Hall of Fantasy," "The Old Manse," and the preface to "Rappaccini's Daughter" of the influence of the Transcendentalist aesthetic theories as carefully formulated and written by Emerson. Indeed Elder believes that "Hawthorne, like Emerson, saw Reality shadowed in the Actual; the Perfect in the Imperfect—in Nature and Man. Hawthorne's Artist, like Emerson's, was the last best touch of the Creator, enabled by Faith, Intuition, the pursuit of Beauty and by Nature's revelations to him to create an image of the Ideal." In fact she sees Hawthorne as carrying out the Transcendentalist aesthetic by mingling the Actual and the Imaginative throughout his tales. He is, she holds, using Transcendental symbolism by doing so in his assertion of Truth as well as by arranging scenes in correspondence with Nature. In like manner, she believes that "Melville's symbolic method of striking through the mask was thoroughly Transcendental."

That Melville was opposed to Emersonian Transcendentalism as a philosophy we have already remarked, but that there are echoes of that philosophy too numerous to mention in such books as *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick* the most casual reader may discern. Indeed in his last work, *Billy Budd*, written long after the movement was at its height, Melville seems to accept an essential tenet of the Transcendentalists, and most certainly of Emerson, namely, that society everywhere is conspiring against the manhood of its members. For Captain Vere, who condemns the Christ-like Billy, is the very symbol of that

conformity that makes of the human being not a man but a uniformed robot. Vere's tragedy is that he is sensitive enough to know it.

Even the "Genteel Poets" of the latter part of the nineteenth century were touched by the Transcendental concepts. As Conner has shown, the broker-poet E.C. Stedman in *Nature and Elements* and in such a poem as "Fin de Siècle" displays his interpretation of the divine immanence as the private soul universalized, a distinctly Transcendental concept. And Richard Watson Gilder thought of the material universe after the Transcendental fashion as simply an expression or manifestation of God! "His God both was and was not the universe, was transcendent as well as immanent."

As for the greatest American poet of the latter half of the nineteenth century other than Whitman, Dickinson, there is ample evidence that she absorbed Transcendental ideas as well as the Emersonian spirit and thus became, in the words of Clark Griffith, a "post-Emersonian, or, still more accurately perhaps, a sort of Emersonian-in-reverse."

Such poems as 632, "The Brain is Wider than the Sky," composed perhaps in 1862, and 1510, "How happy is the little Stone," written perhaps in 1881, suggest quite clearly the Transcendental inspiration. The first, stating the unlimited measurements of the human mind—"wider than the sky," "deeper than the sea," and "just the weight of God"—implies the divinity of man and his identification with the universal being, a fundamental Transcendental tenet. And the second, about the happy little stone "That rambles in the Road alone," not concerned with fashioning a career or with fearsome exigencies, created by universal force to be "independent as the Sun," and "Fulfilling absolute Decree in casual simplicity" reflects the Transcendental ideals of individual freedom, closeness to nature, simplicity in living, and the divinely ordered universe.

Still other poems with a distinct Transcendental thrust are 501, "This World is not Conclusion"; 668, "'Nature' is what we see"; 669, "No Romance sold unto"; 1176, "We never know how high we are"; 1354, "The Heart is the Capital of the Mind"; and 1355, "The Mind lives on the Heart."

As Cambon has pointed out, Dickinson was, however, ambivalent in her transcendentalism, apparently feeling at times, as in 280, that she has no over-soul to rely on in her existential plight. The poem describes the funeral in her brain as she realizes her desperate isolation as an earthbound member of the human race. "And then a Plank in Reason [the Transcendentalist intuitive wisdom], broke, she says, letting her drop terrifyingly from world to world until, ambiguously, she "Finished knowing—then—" as the poem ends.

Even such a relatively sophisticated literary practitioner as William Dean Howells, author of almost forty novels, esteemed critic, and editor of such influential journals as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harpers*, is seen to have a kinship with the New England Transcendentalists because of his Swedenborgian background, a kinship most marked during his period of Utopian social reform. It may be discerned in such novels as *The World of Chance* (1893) in which we meet an old socialist, David Hughes, who had once been a member of the Brook Farm community and who serves as Howells's spokesman in suggesting that society is not to be reformed by individuals who are simply interested in improving themselves, but by those who will work together to reconstruct its institutions. *A Traveller from Altruria* (1894) and its sequel, *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907), present Howells's social idealism by contrasting the growing inequities of American life and its laissez-faire economic system to his utopian view that reiterates the Transcendental vision of the potential value of each man and the perfectibility of human society.

The Transcendental influence extends into the present century in the thought of such eminent poets as Frost and Stevens, such a dramatist as O'Neill, and such voices of the "Beat Generation" as those of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder.

That Robert Frost had a lifelong interest in Emerson is attested not only by much of his poetry but also by his biographer, Lawrance Thompson. William Chamberlain in his essay "The Emersonianism of Robert Frost" sees it as "central to an understanding of the core of Frost's philosophy of poetry, the concept of a 'momentary stay against confusion.'" Chamberlain presents such poems as "West-Running Brook" and "Directive" as prime evidence. The former poem contains a conversation between husband and wife about the brook that runs west contrary to all the other country brooks that run east to reach the ocean. The husband explains toward the end of the poem:

It is this backward motion toward the source,
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves
   in,
the tribute of the current to the source.
It is from this in nature we are from.
It is most us.

This seeming identification of the human being's origin with a common natural source, a universal being, is thoroughly transcendental as is the somewhat more obscure admonition in "Directive" in which the poet directs us back to a hidden brook that once provided water for a farm house long gone and tells us to "drink and be whole again beyond confusion." Nor should we overlook the thoroughly Transcendental rejection of thoughtless adherence to tradition that forms the basis of one of Frost's best-known poems, "Mending Wall."

Frost, brought up in a Swedenborgian household, was a self-proclaimed mystic who believed in symbols and who, through their use, suggests again and again in his poems the Emersonian, Thoreauvian requirement that man must establish a primary contact with nature in order to give any meaning to his life. It is scarcely surprising, then, to find him listing Emerson's *Essays* and *Poems* and Thoreau's *Walden* among the ten books he believed should be in every public library.

Although a transcendental influence may seem far from surprising in a "country" poet like Frost, its presence in a poet so urbane and sophisticated as Wallace Stevens may be unexpected. But, as Nina Baym has fully demonstrated, it is there in full measure. Contrary to the frequently expressed idea that Stevens rejected Transcendentalism, she finds that "line by line. . .his kinship manifests itself." Noting that the Transcendentalists, despite their insistence on a universal mind, recognized that each human being continued to apprehend, conceive, and perceive through his own mind, she observes that Stevens, however he may insist "that each man's perception is discrete and cannot be related back to an overarching unity, believes very strongly that the experience of any one mind is common to all minds." Thus she finds in Stevens' poetry a modern version of Transcendentalism.

Baym further notes that Stevens' poetry may be interpreted as a modern attempt to articulate the Transcendental moment of ecstasy proclaimed so strikingly by Emerson. She finds, however, that it is Thoreau more than Emerson or any other Transcendentalist that Stevens resembles. The reason is their sharing of "an overwhelming love for landscape, which leads them both to dedicate themselves to nature in poetry with the same sort of novitiate intensity." Beyond sharing this love of nature, she sees Thoreau and Stevens formulating their principal emotions—joy and despair—in much the same way. Both are also seen as preoccupied with change as an immutable fact of the universe (perhaps the Platonic doctrine of flux?). "From 'Sunday Morning' on through all his works," she says, "Stevens asserted that although we *think* we love stability, in fact everything in the world that we love, and even love itself, originates from change. 'Death is the mother of beauty'. . . *Walden*, as much as 'Sunday Morning,' is an attempt to show the world enduring through change . . ."

Many examples can be found among Stevens' poems to illustrate his transcendental point of view. For example, in "The Planet on the Table" he writes of the poet:

His self and the sun were one
And his poems, although makings of his self,
Were no less makings of the sun.

Here we see the identification of the self with divinity (the Sun) and the Emersonian notion of poetry all existing in nature before time was.

In what is perhaps Stevens' most famous poem, "Sunday Morning," we observe the modern woman unable to devote herself to the conventional worship of dead gods. The poet asks

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of
   heaven?
Divinity must live within herself. . .

Here Stevens has brilliantly encapsulated three main tenets of Transcendentalist doctrine: that the God of the established churches is a dead, historical God who can no longer inspire faith; that religious ecstasy is to be found through contact with nature; and that the living God can be found only within the self. The poem further emphasizes Stevens' rejection of the sterile, changeless, conventionalized Heaven in favor of the ever-changing beauties of the earthly here and now.

Or again, in such a poem as "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" we see the suggestion of the individual mind being one with a central

mind (like the Transcendental over-soul) as part of a dimly divined order that we know through feeling or intuition. The final three stanzas say it best:

> Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves,
> We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,
> A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous.
>
> Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
> We say God and the imagination are one. . .
> How high that highest candle lights the dark.
>
> Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
> We make a dwelling in the evening air,
> In which being there together is enough.

In American drama Eugene O'Neill, currently undergoing a great revival of interest, is the only significant playwright to have reflected something of the Transcendental attitude. As he once wrote to the drama critic George Jean Nathan, "The playwright of today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it—the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive, religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with." This is indeed what the Transcendentalists of a hundred years before had felt that they must do. The difference between them and an O'Neill lies in their belief that they had discovered a cure for the pervasive sickness.

O'Neill is seen by Carpenter as ambivalent in his feelings toward the Transcendentalists. Like him they had been "rebels against the materialism of their times, but their idealism had also been the product of a Yankee and Puritan society," a society that O'Neill scorned for its narrow hypocrisies (in, e.g., *Beyond the Horizon* and *Desire Under the Elms*). Emerson and Thoreau, says Carpenter, never scorned material things but sought go ameliorate the actual situation, and appealed to the future. O'Neill, on the other hand, had no belief in the future or any hope for it. Tragedy he considered essential to the nature of things. Thus, in a sense, Carpenter finds him even more transcendental than the optimistic Emerson.

"Historic Transcendentalism," Carpenter comments, "has, in fact, divided into two streams. The first has become active, scientific, and pragmatic. The second has become passive, mystical, and psychological. Emerson's thought flowed largely in the first stream, toward modern pragmatism. O'Neill's thought tended towards modern, nonrational psychology." Thus O'Neill's marked interest in, and use of, Freudian probings into the less accessible reaches of the human psyche as a means of comprehending the mysterious behavior of his fellow travelers on the planet Earth.

Turning to the more immediate scene, we find such poets as Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder carrying on, each in his own way, the tradition of Whitman and Thoreau. Ginsberg quite plainly accepts Whitman's concept of the poet as teacher, prophet, and seer. And he writes his verse in the same free and irregular lines, with a vocabulary geared to the colloquial diction of his own time and place. Although his view of America lacks the optimistic note of the author of *Leaves of Grass*, he shares the Transcendental will to protest against an established majority that is leveling the nation into a deadly mediocrity.

As Ginsberg was the Beat Generation's approximation of Whitman, so has Snyder been its latter-day version of Thoreau. Intensely interested, as was Thoreau, in the literature and philosophy of the Orient, he learned Chinese and Japanese and even lived for a time in a Buddhist monastery. And like Thoreau he has been intensely concerned with the physical environment of America. Nor can the preoccupation in his verse with the need to be free and on the move be overlooked, so much is it in the tradition of Thoreau.

In conclusion, it is impossible not to agree with Edwin Gittleman's view that "contrary to the commonplace assertion that the Civil War effectively destroyed the transcendental ambiance in America, the magical Circle of Concord has never really been broken. Rather, it has been expanded to where now it seems to touch (if not embrace) a perplexing demi-world consisting of Allen Ginsberg, the Beatles, S.D.S., Abbie Hoffman, sexual freedoms, Black Power, lysergic acid diethylamide, and miscellaneous esoterica and erotica." Even though Gay Wilson Allen may be right in remarking that the main difficulty for one today trying to teach the Transcendentalists is that their goal of a deeper spiritual life has become "an almost meaningless abstraction," his further observation that they were trying to find a more satisfying life here and now on this lovely earth is perhaps equally true of many of those mentioned in Gittleman's catalogue of the

contemporary underground that cannot accept the values of the American establishment.

To close this book on American Transcendentalism without giving the last word to its foremost spokesman, Emerson, would seem almost an act of heresy. In his journal for 1841 he said of it, "That it has a necessary place in history is a fact not to be overlooked, not possibly to be prevented, and however discredited to the heedless & to the moderate & conservative persons by the foibles or inadequacy of those who partake the movement yet is it the pledge & the herald of all that is dear to the human heart, grand & inspiring to human faith."

**Source:** Donald N. Koster, "Influences of Transcendentalism on American Life and Literature," in *Transcendentalism in America*, Twayne Publishers, 1975, pp. 84–98.

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This work includes *Walden*, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, eighteen poems, and several essays and journal entries. Bode presents Thoreau's work, as well as the controversies of Thoreau's life in this comprehensive collection.

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This work discusses the influence of Transcendentalism on the reform movements of the nineteenth century, including an in-depth historical background on the movement.

# Smaller Movements and Schools

For each of the major literary movements with which readers are familiar, the huge sweeping epochs such as the Renaissance, Romanticism, and Modernism, there are innumerable smaller movements. New movements continue to spring up, as they always have. Sometimes they emerge when like-minded individuals find each other and determine that they have similar aesthetic principles. Sometimes the writers themselves never actually find each other, and it is up to some third person, likely a discerning literary critic, to recognize similarities and define a movement in the making.

Of these lesser movements, there seem to be two general types. First, there are those historically that occurred as they splintered from major literary movements, forming in reaction to or as an offshoot of the dominant movement. Another type emerged toward the end of the twentieth century, smaller movements that evolved with or in response to new technologies, especially the Internet.

Through the ages, new literary movements have sprung up out of dissatisfaction. Romanticism can be seen as a reaction to the Enlightenment, and Postmodernism can be considered a response to ideas associated with Modernism. Similarly, Postmodernism splintered into smaller movements: some, such as Existentialism, gained broad international recognition, whereas others such as the *New York School* or *Oulipo,* remained small, localized phenomena.
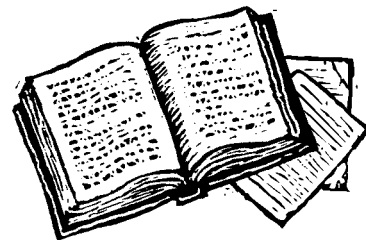
Moreover, larger movements subdivide into ethnic categories. A writer's worldview is reflected by the literary movement with which that writer is connected, but that worldview also reflects some aspect of the writer's ethnic identity. Major ethnic movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance and the Irish Literary Renaissance, developed out of a rejection of the dominant white American and British cultures, respectively, and the same pattern follows in minor movements, for example, the *Créolités* who fought for literature in their own language, the *Nuyorican* writers who celebrated the experiences of Puerto Ricans who resettled in New York, and the *New Poets,* who grew out of the 1960s' Black Pride movement and left Rap music in their wake. In each of these cases, writers found that dominant literary tenets did not allow them to say what they had to say, so they created a new style that provided a better fit with their subjects and perspectives.

Beginning roughly in the 1990s and escalating sharply, the Internet has had a profound effect on literary composition and productions, perhaps comparable only to the effect the fifteenth-century invention of the printing press had on writing and book making and dissemination. Of course, technology has traditionally affected literary thought: advances in boat, train, and air travel made writers see that previously unimagined distances were accessible in a few mere months, then days, then hours; the Industrial Revolution showed that people could become alienated from and by their labor; the development and U.S. use of the atomic bomb in World War II and subsequent 1950s and 1960s nuclear proliferation affirmed that human civilization and life worldwide could actually be destroyed within a few moments. Whereas these technological changes affected writers' beliefs, worldviews, and approaches to their craft and thus the literature they produced, the Internet has profoundly altered the ways in which literature is created and distributed.

The conventional publication process for books and magazines has engaged writers, editors, and publishers for at least four centuries and continues into the twenty-first century. Even in cases in which literature was self-published and self-distributed, factors connected to the cost of paper and ink still made authors think selectively about which written works were worth printing, weighing one piece against another. However, in the 1990s and as the twenty-first century began, the Internet promised seemingly limitless capacity, an expansive, free venue. It provided a democratic setting for sharing work with room for everyone: Blogs and message boards offered a welcoming forum for individuals to say what they wanted and to respond to what others had to say.

The Internet also made it easy for writers to find like-minded readers. Small niche movements such as *Bizarro Fiction* or *Fan Fiction* could quickly locate empathetic readers within a local area; nationwide, American fans of Japanese *Manga* could learn the history and critical reception of the movement from the other side of the globe. At once both a local and global tool, the Internet provided a page, a site, and an avenue of exchange that transformed the nature of literary movements. They may begin as reactions to an author's particular place and time, but via the Internet they spread quickly to new cultures and then mutate to new forms at previously unimagined speeds.

Liberated from the printed page, literature has come to be and to signify more than the written words it contains. Multi-media projects have existed for centuries—drama, for one, which even in Ancient Greece was written before it is performed—have generally relied on the collaboration of two or more artists. The Internet and the personal computer, however, have provided the burgeoning technology that makes it possible for one person to merge sounds, images, and organization in one place, to be performed for audiences within minutes. There has never been so much freedom of expression available to individuals or so many individuals engaged in cultural exchange. One might say, individuals can produce their own literary movements, quickly hatched and ubiquitously available.

# A

## ACTO

A one-act Chicano theater piece developed out of collective improvisation. Developed by the Teatro Campesino, which became a cultural outreach project of the United Farm Workers in Delano, California, in 1965, *Actos* use stock characters and humor to raise social consciousness of the political

state of affairs facing Chicanos. The founder of Teatro Campesino, Luis Valdez, is the author most frequently associated with this movement.

## AESTHETICISM

A literary and artistic movement of the nineteenth century. Followers of the movement believed that art should not be mixed with social, political, or moral teaching. The statement "art for art's sake," which originated with the philosopher Victor Cousin and was promoted by Tháophile Gautier, summarizes the main value of Aestheticism. The movement had its roots in France, but it gained widespread importance in England in the last half of the nineteenth century, where it helped change the Victorian practice of including moral lessons in literature. Oscar Wilde is one of the best-known aesthetes of the late nineteenth century, along with the poets Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

## AGE OF JOHNSON

The period in English literature between 1750 and 1798, named after the most prominent literary figure of the age, Samuel Johnson. Works written during this transitional period between Neoclassicism and Romanticism are noted for their emphasis on sensibility, or emotional quality. These works mark a shift from the rational works of the Age of Reason, or neoclassical period, toward the emphasis on individual feelings and subjective responses so notable in the Romantic period. Significant writers during the Age of Johnson include the novelists Ann Radcliffe and Henry Mackenzie, dramatists Richard Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith, and poets William Collins and Thomas Gray. Also known as Age of Sensibility.

## AGRARIANS

A group of southern American writers of the 1930s and 1940s who fostered an economic and cultural program for the South based on agriculture, in opposition to the industrial society of the North. Other names for this group are the Vanderbilt Agrarians or Nashville Agrarians, since they were based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Some Agrarian writers are John Crowe Ransom, Alan Tate, and John Gould Fletcher. The group's 1930 manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* explains its basic principles. The term "agrarian" can also refer generally to any group that promotes the value of farm life and agricultural society.

## B

## BAROQUE AGE

A period in Western European literature, beginning in the late sixteenth century and ending about one hundred years later. Works of this period typically express tension, anxiety, and violent emotion and sometimes feature elaborate conceits, or ingenious notions conveyed oftentimes in extended metaphors. In Germany, the influence of the Thirty Years War from 1618 to 1648 led to a period of intensity in writing that makes the German Baroque period one of the most vibrant of all German literature. Examples of Baroque works include John Lyly's 1578 *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*; Luis de Gongora's *Soledads* from 1613; William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* written in 1599 or 1600; and *Simplicius Simplicissimus,* by Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, from 1668.

## BIZARRO FICTION

A contemporary literary genre that focuses on shock value and the ability to present readers with the unexpected. The category has some relationship to science fiction and horror, as well as Surrealism and Absurdism, with little pretense of artistic merit. Though the movement grew over the course of the 1990s, the term only came into common usage after the publication of *The Bizarro Starter Kit,* by Eraserhead Press in 2006. Some works associated with this movement are *Foop!* published by Chris Geno in 2005; Steve Aylett's 1998 *Slaughtermatic*; and Jeremy Robert Johnson's 2005 novel *Angel Dust Apocalypse.*

## BLACK MOUNTAIN POETS

Writers associated with Black Mountain College, a small liberal arts school that existed in rural North Carolina from 1933 to 1956. Though Black Mountain College only lasted a short time, its influence on American arts was immense. Faculty at Black Mountain College included some of the most influential avant-garde thinkers of the time, such as Buckminster Fuller, John Cage, Willem de Kooning, Francine du Plessix Gray, and Paul Goodman. The poetry program at the college published important and emerging writers in the *Black Mountain Review*. The college became

known for a distinctive poetic style, outlined by Charles Olson in his 1950 essay *Black Projective Verse*. This style focuses on the line as the most significant segment of a poem, as opposed to focus on individual words or whole stanzas, and called for poetry that had a sense of urgency and immediacy. Olson's theories were influential with other poets who taught at Black Mountain, including Ed Dorn, Paul Blackburn, Hilda Morley, Denise Levertov, and Robert Creeley. When Creeley became editor of *Black Mountain Review* in 1955, he published the works of some of the poets of the Beat Movement, and soon the two movements became intertwined.

### BLOG

A form of journal or diary that is posted on the Internet with regular updates. Blogs are often personal, used to convey the writer's view of life in general, but many blogs are done by professional writers who specialize in one particular field, such as politics, sports, literature, or medicine. The quick rise of blogging in the 1990s and the early 2000s and the freedom that bloggers have from the constraints of traditional publishing mark it as a unique and popular form of literature. Personal blogs are written mainly for friends but can also be used to present the writer to the world at large and, therefore, communicate with a casual, chatty style. Professional blogs maintain some of that same conversational informality, even if individual writers are writing as part of their job. Because of the form's popularity, corporations have started using blogs as inexpensive advertising devices: among the techniques used are imitation blogs made to look like the writings of average people who praise the corporation's product or blogs that claim to be the work of fictional characters, which carry the character's existence beyond its original novel, movie, or television show. Of the roughly 100 million blogs posted on the Internet as of 2008, the significance of any particular one is a matter of taste, although Wendy Atterberry and Sarah Hatter attempted to make some claims of quality in their 2006 collection *The Very Best Weblog Writing Ever by Anyone Anywhere in the Whole Wide World*. The word "blog" became so prevalent that the word from which it derives, "weblog," fell out of use.

## C

### CHICA LIT
See *Chick Lit*

### CHICK LIT

A genre of fiction that targets young women as its audience. Chick Lit usually takes the form of novels and short stories, but sometimes personal memoirs are included. Works in this category usually focus on the escapades of single women in their twenties and thirties working in high-profile jobs in urban settings. Fashionable clothes and turgid romances are common elements. The term Chick Lit was coined in 1995, in the title of Cris Mazza and Jeffrey DeShell's anthology *Chick Lit: Postfeminist Fiction*. After that it was used by publishers to identify their products for readers interested in this subject matter and by critics who found the term sexist and belittling and used it derogatorily to dismiss some works as superficial. Notable examples of Chick Lit are *Bridget Jones's Diary,* published in 1996 by Helen Fielding; 1997's *Sex and the City* by Candice Bushnell; *The Devil Wears Prada* by Lauren Weisberger (2003); and Sophia Kinsella's 2001 *Confessions of a Shopaholic*. The popularity of the term Chick Lit has led to the coining of a number of variations, including Chica Lit for Latina women, Ladki Lit for Indian women, and Lad Lit for young urban men.

### CONCRETE POETRY

Poetry in which visual elements play a large part in the poetic effect. Punctuation marks, letters, or words are arranged on a page to form a visual design: a cross, for example, or a bumblebee. The term Concrete Poetry came into existence in different parts of the world simultaneously in 1952: While writers such as Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari used it to describe their work in Brazil, the poet, playwright, and artist Oyvind Fahlström, apparently without former knowledge, used the same expression for his work in Sweden. Max Bill and Eugene Gomringer were among the early practitioners of this form.

### CONFESSIONAL POETRY

A form of poetry in which individual poets reveal intimate, sometimes shocking information about themselves. Confessional poetry has its roots in the early nineteenth century, in such poems as William Wordsworth's "Nutting" (1800), although the movement that is defined as

Concrete Poetry did not take hold until the mid-twentieth century. The term was coined by critic M. L. Rosenthal, who used it in a review of Robert Lowell's 1959 collection *Life Studies*. Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, W. D. Snodgrass, and John Berryman wrote poetry in the confessional vein.

## COSMICISM

A sub-genre of science fiction, based on the ideas of author H. P. Lovecraft. Cosmicism asserts the principle that the universe operates on purely mechanical principles, without the controlling hand of a supreme being, and that humanity is just one small, barely significant element in this system. Lovecraft named and developed this system in such writings as the novella *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath,* which he wrote in 1927, and 1928's "The Call of Cthulhu," one of his well-known short stories. Cosmicism is not generally associated with other writers.

## CREATIVE NONFICTION

The popular form of nonfiction writing, based in truth but using dramatic stylistic techniques, such as evocative description and dialogue, that are generally associated with fiction writing. This style evolved gradually and its exact definition is elusive and debated: some critics, for instance, are inclined to place George Orwell's 1933 memoir *Down and Out in Paris and London* and Ernest Hemingway's report on Spanish bullfighting, 1932's *Death in the Afternoon,* in this category, whereas others only use it to define works from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. There are clear, direct connections between this style of writing and the "New Journalism" style popularized by Gay Talese, Truman Capote, and Tom Wolfe in the 1960s. The term Creative Nonfiction was used casually for years before the National Endowment officially recognized it in 1983. Near the end of the twentieth century, popular interest in creative nonfiction surged. Notable examples are *House,* published in 1985 by Tracy Kidder; *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* by Dave Eggers, published in 2000; Mary Karr's 1995 bestseller *The Liars' Club*; Laura Hillenbrand's 2001 book *Seabiscuit: An American Legend*; and the works of John McPhee.

## CRÉOLITÉ

A movement that began in the 1990s and developed a unified view of West Indies literature. Créolité developed from the manifesto *Eloge de la créolité* (*In Praise of Creoleness*), published in 1989 by Martinican writers Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, and Raphaël Confiant. Créolité draws attention to the unique character of Caribbean life and the ways that the literary developments in the area distinguish it from its historical African past. Creole language was no longer rejected as a corrupt form of French but was embraced as the legitimate language of the people of the Caribbean. In addition to the authors mentioned, novelist Edouard Glissant is usually mentioned in association with this movement.

## CYBERPUNK

A form of science fiction that emerged in the 1980s, mixing elements taken from hard-boiled detective fiction and current events with traditional science fiction themes and the emergence of the Internet. Settings for Cyberpunk works tend to be in the near future, with principled loners battling against corporate entities bent on controlling people's thoughts and ideas. The phrase was coined by a short story titled "Cyberpunk," which was published by Bruce Bethke in 1983, and was popularized by *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology,* published in 1986. The work most often identified as cyberpunk is William Gibson's 1986 novel *Neuromancer,* but the visual emphasis of the genre lends itself to adaptation to movies (*Blade Runner,The Matrix Trilogy*) and Japanese anime (*Akira,Ghost in the Shell*). Other authors frequently associated with this movement are Bruce Sterling, Neal Stephenson, and John Shirley.

# D

## DIGITAL POETRY
See *E-Poetry*

## DUB POETRY

An oral form of poetry, similar to jazz poetry, that became popular among British immigrants in the 1980s. Practitioners of Dub Poetry seldom wrote their lyrics, but instead performed them with musical accompaniments before live audiences and in person, often reciting in the Creole language. Subject matter was often political, expressing the frustrations of British citizens who came from the West Indies. Notable Dub poets are Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah.

# E

## E-POETRY

Poetry that is written specifically to be published and read on the Internet, beginning in the 1990s and continuing into the twenty-first century. Such works have several aspects that set them apart from poetry that is disseminated in other formats. For example, the space on an Internet page is virtually unlimited, allowing publishers to post more submissions than they could in print or on a sound recording: criteria that might have been used to determine what works are acceptable are relaxed, allowing inclusion of a wider range of talents. Another defining trait of E-poetry is that works can be augmented with hyperlinks that give readers the option to read a poem from beginning to end or to divert to related subjects before going on. Poets are given more freedom to alter a poem's look on the page (see *Concrete Poetry* than they had with previous media. Some notable E-poets are Augusto de Campos, Caterina Davinio, and Dave Awl. Also known as digital poetry.

## EDWARDIAN

Cultural conventions identified with the reign of Edward VII of England from 1901 to 1910. Writers of the Edwardian Age typically were active during the reign of Queen Victoria, though their works written after the turn of the century displayed an emphatic reaction of the propriety and conservatism associated with the previous decades. Writings characterized as Edwardian often exhibit distrust of authority in religion, politics, and art and express serious doubts about the merit of conventional values. This term applies to both Irish and British authors and is often understood to include works written after Edward's death, up to the start of World War I in 1914. Writers of this era include Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness,* 1902); Henry James (*The Golden Bowl,* 1904); George Bernard Shaw (*Major Barbara,* 1905); and Ford Madox Ford (whose most noted work, *The Good Soldier,* was written during the Edwardian period and published in 1915).

## EDWARDIAN AGE

See *Edwardian*

## EPIC THEATER

A theory of theatrical presentation developed by twentieth-century German playwright Bertolt Brecht and outlined in his 1930 essay "The Modern Theater Is the Epic Theater." Brecht created a type of drama that the audience could view with complete detachment. He used what he termed "alienation effects" to create an emotional distance between the audience and the action on stage. Among these effects are: short, self-contained scenes that keep the play from building to a cathartic climax; songs that comment on the action; and techniques of acting that prevent the actor from developing an emotional identity with his role. Besides the plays of Bertolt Brecht, such as *A Man Is a Man* in 1926 and *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928, other plays that use epic theater conventions include those of Georg Buchner, Frank Wedekind, Erwin Piscator, and Leopold Jessner.

## EPISCHES THEATER

See *Epic Theater*

# F

## FALSE MEMOIR

A book that is presented as the record of the actual events of a person's life which is proven later to be a work of imagination, also referred to as fake memoir. At the end of the twentieth century and onward, several memoirs appeared which were later proven to be false, such as *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years,* a 1997 bestseller written by Monique de Wael under the name Misha Defonseca, and James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces,* published in 2003. The false memoir as a form is actually almost as old as the novel; it includes Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* published as an autobiography in 1719, and the alleged memoir of frontiersman Davy Crocket, published in 1836, which was actually written by Richard Penn Smith and Charles T. Beale. Such critics say that any apparent surge in fiction passed off as nonfiction might simply reflect contemporary interest in so-called true stories. Examples of this movement include *Love and Consequences,* which was written by Margaret Seltzer and published under the name Margaret B. Jones in 2006; *The Honored Society,* allegedly written by the son of an organized crime leader but actually written by author Michael Gambino and published in 2001; and the autobiographical novels and articles published between 1999 and 2005 under the name J. T. LeRoy, an alleged drug addict and prostitute who was actually Laura Albert.

## FAN FICTION

Fiction created by fans of a work, using characters and situations from the original piece. It is sometimes viewed as a homage to the original author and is sometimes viewed as a criminal act of stealing copyrighted intellectual material. The practice began in the 1960s, when devotees of the original *Star Trek* submitted stories to science fiction magazines such as *Spockanalia,* telling of further adventures of the television series' characters. The trend was particularly popular in science fiction and fantasy writing thereafter. The advent of the Internet in the 1990s gave amateur authors a way to make their writings directly available to others, without the involvement of publishing houses, which generally ignored their work under threat of lawsuit. Characters from Japanese anime are among the most popular subjects of fan fiction, followed by characters from television and from movies.

## G

### GENEVA SCHOOL

See *Phenomenology*

### GRAPHIC NOVEL

A combination of the artwork traditionally associated with comic books with the book-length form of the novel, developed at the end of the twentieth century. Visually, the graphic novel follows the style of comic books, with stories told in multiple panels per page, often with word balloons containing dialogue and narrative added in caption boxes. Comic books are published in magazine format, however. Though a story might continue for several contiguous issues, it is still part of the larger narrative of the comic book's history. Even in cases in which the graphic novel might be about characters from a continuing series or is a compilation of several issues of a regular series, it is designed to stand alone. Gil Kane and Archie Goodwin's 1971 book *Blackmark* is often considered the first graphic novel. Other notable examples include Will Eisner's *A Contract with God, and Other Tenement Stories* from 1978; Art Spiegelman's *Maus,* which was published in 1986 and awarded a special Pulitzer Prize in 1992; and the works of Alan Moore and Frank Miller.

## H

### HIP-HOP POETRY

See *Spoken Word Poetry*

## HOLOCAUST

See *Holocaust Literature*

## HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

Literature influenced by or written about the Holocaust of World War II. Such literature includes true stories of survival in concentration camps, of escape, and of life after the war, as well as fictional works and poetry. Representative works of Holocaust literature range from auto-biographies, including Anne Frank's 1952 *The Diary of a Young Girl* and Elie Wiesel's 1958 *Night* to novels such as Jerzy Kosinski's 1965 novel *The Painted Bird*; Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet,* from 1970; William Styron's 1979 novel *Sophie's Choice*; and Arthur Miller's 1964 play *Incident at Vichy*. Other examples of Holocaust literature are the poetry of artists such as Czeslaw Milosz and the 1986 graphic novel *Maus,* by Art Spiegelman.

## I

### IRISH LITERARY RENAISSANCE

A late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movement in Irish literature. The Irish literary renaissance developed after the death of Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891, as artists and others sought to establish a distinctly Irish identity distinct from the British culture that dominated the island. Lost manuscripts of Irish literature were found and reissued, and interest in Gaelic, the native language of Ireland, grew. William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, George Moore, and Sean O'Casey are among the best-known figures of this movement. Though the literary aspect of the Irish renaissance lost much of its momentum during the Irish civil war of the 1920s, writers such as James Joyce, Sean O'Faoláin, and Brendan Behan carried on the interest in Irish nationalism for decades to come.

## J

### JAZZ POETRY

A form of poetry that emerged in the United States during the 1950s and moved on to become a predominantly British form. It began in San Francisco with poets of the Beat Movement, including Kenneth Rexroth, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Jack Kerouac. They attempted to give new urgency to poetry by reading it along with an accompaniment of jazz music, which was at the height of its popularity at the time. In 1958, British poet Christopher Logue popularized the

form in Great Britain with broadcasts performed on BBC Radio. Poets Michael Horovitz, Bob Cobbing, and Roy Fisher were among those who became known for performing before live audiences. The jazz poetry movement spawned a later, similar movement, called Dub Poetry.

# K

### KNICKERBOCKER GROUP

A somewhat indistinct group of New York writers of the first half of the nineteenth century. The only real connection between the writers associated with this group was their residence in New York State. The group's name derives from Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker's History of New York*. Writers associated with the group were often published in *The Knickerbocker Magazine,* a monthly literary journal published in New York from 1833 to 1865. Writers frequently associated with the Knickerbocker group include Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, James Kirk Paulding, and Lydia M. Child. The Knickerbocker writers were given an unfavorable critical examination in Edgar Allan Poe's famous 1846 essay "The Literati of New York City."

# L

### LAD LIT

See *Chick Lit*

### LADKI LIT

See *Chick Lit*

### LAST POETS

Poets and musicians of the late civil rights era in the United States who expressed frustration with U.S. political inequities through their use of black nationalist themes and language and violent imagery. The group was founded by Felipe Luciano, Gylan Kain, and David Nelson in Harlem, New York, in 1968, soon after the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and went on to record several albums that combined Afrocentric lyrics over instrumental jazz-based background. Poets of this group have at various times included Omar Bin Hassan, Alafia Pudim, Jalaluddin Mansur Nuriddin, and Abiodun Oyewole. The group produced several recordings, including *This Is Madness* in 1971, *Freedom Express* in 1988, and *Science Friction* in 2004. The Last Poets are frequently cited as a direct influence in the development of Rap music.

### LOST GENERATION

American writers who emigrated to Paris in the 1920s, having found themselves disillusioned with their own country after serving in World War I and who found that the favorable exchange rate allowed them to live cheaply in France. Gertrude Stein coined the label "Lost Generation" in a letter to Ernest Hemingway, and it became widely recognized after Hemingway used it in the epigraph of his 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises,* which is considered one of the defining texts of the movement. In addition to Hemingway, the term is commonly applied to Hart Crane, John Dos Passos, F. Scott Fitzgerald, e. e. cummings, Archibald Macleish, and others.

# M

### MANGA

Popular illustrated books that began in Japan and spread to world-wide acceptance. Manga developed during the U.S. occupation of Japan after World War II, during which Western cartoon styles became fused with the Japanese artistic traditions. While Manga are popular with a broad age range in Japan, Western readers, who assume that books illustrated with cartoons are only for children, are often surprised at their graphic depictions of violence and sexuality. An early example of Manga, *Astro Boy,* created in 1952 by Osamu Tezuka, continued as a long-running series. Important examples of this style include Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen* from 1973, *Golgo 13* from 1969, and *Ghost in the Shell,* created by Masamune Shirow in 1989. Naoko Takeuchi's *Sailor Moon,* begun in 1991, is a well-known example of "shōjo manga," which are written by women and usually read by girls.

### METAPHYSICAL POETRY

The poetry produced by a group of seventeenth-century English writers who were later called the Metaphysical Poets, after Samuel Johnson used label over a century later. Distinguishing characteristics include an emphasis on the relationship between oneself and God and a willingness to find a new, plain-speaking style for expressing this relationship poetically. The Metaphysical Poets made use of everyday speech, intellectual analysis, and unusual imagery. They aimed to portray the ordinary conflicts and contradictions of human experience. Their poems often take the form of an argument, and many

of them emphasize physical and religious love as well as the fleeting nature of human experience. Elaborate conceits are typical in Metaphysical Poetry. The group includes John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, and Thomas Traherne. Marvell's 1681 poem "To His Coy Mistress" is a well-known example of metaphysical poetry.

## METAPHYSICAL POETS

See *Metaphysical Poetry*

## MISERY LIT

Memoirs with protagonists who have overcome harrowing circumstances such as drug addiction and pedophilia. This movement began in the United States in the late twentieth century and spread to other countries, becoming especially popular in Great Britain. Misery Lit titles range from books that received critical praise, such as Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes,* the winner of a 1997 Pulitzer Prize, and Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*, the 1994 British Book of the Year, to inexpensive, titillating books meant to grab the attention of supermarket shoppers. The commercial interest in Misery Lit titles has led to many of the events they claim to depict being challenged. Disputes range from the lawsuit filed by members of Augusten Burroughs's adopted family over his lurid memories of his childhood in 2002's *Running with Scissors* to charges of the complete fabrication of an identity whose experiences are nothing like those actually lived by the author, as occurred after the 2008 publication of *Love and Consequences: A Memoir of Hope and Survival,* which claimed to be an autobiography of urban gang member Margaret B. Jones but was actually written by affluent suburbanite Margaret Seltzer. See *False Memoir.*

## MUCKRAKERS

An early twentieth-century group of American journalists, known for writings that exposed the excesses of big business and government at the height of the Robber Barons. The word was coined in 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) is a conspicuous example of the muckraker style, even though this book, and other Sinclair books such as *The Machine* (1911) and *Oil* (1927) were actually novels, not factual reports. More typical of the muckraker style was Ida Mae Tarbell's serial exposé that was published in book form as *The History of the Standard Oil Company* in 1904. At its best, the writing of the Muckrakers incited public anger to such an extent that new regulations and laws were passed to rein in corporate excesses. After the stock market crash of 1929, corporate America was so damaged that Muckrakers became irrelevant.

# N

## NEGRITUDE

A literary movement based on the concept of a shared cultural bond among black Africans, wherever they may live in the world. Negritude traces its origins to the former French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. Negritude poets, novelists, and essayists generally stress four points in their writings: black alienation from traditional African culture can lead to feelings of inferiority; European colonialism and Western education should be resisted; black Africans should seek to affirm and define their own identity; and African culture can and should be reclaimed. Many Negritude writers also claim that blacks can make unique contributions because of their heightened appreciation of nature, rhythm, and human emotions—aspects of life they say are not so highly valued in the materialistic and rationalistic West. The group was founded in the early 1930s by the poets Aimé-Fernand Césaire of Martinique, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, who in 1960 became the first president of the Republic of Senegal. Examples of Negritude literature are Senghor's poetry in his 1948 collection *Hosties noires (Black Eucharist)* and Césaire's poems in 1939's *Return to My Native Land.*

## NEW CRITICISM

A movement in British and American literary criticism, dating from the late 1920s to the 1960s. New Criticism stressed close textual analysis in the interpretation of works of literature. The name comes from the 1941 book *The New Criticism* by poet and critic John Crowe Ransom, in which Ransom described emerging trends in English and U.S. literary criticism. The New Critics devalued the context in which literature is created, such as the historical period or the author's biography. Rather, they sought to examine the text alone, free from the question of how external events—biographical or otherwise—may have helped shape it. Beside Ransom, other important New Critics include Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks.

**NEW JOURNALISM**

A type of prose in which the journalist presents factual information in a form usually reserved for fiction. New Journalism arose in the 1960s, after the 1965 publication of both Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Tom Wolfe's *Kandy Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*. Wolfe further defined this type of writing in his 1973 treatise *The New Journalism*. New Journalism emphasizes description, narration, and character development to bring readers closer to the human element of the story; it is often used in personality profiles and in-depth feature articles. It is not compatible with so-called straight or hard news writing, which is generally stated in expository prose with compressed fact-based style. Significant examples of this style are works by Norman Mailer (particularly *The Armies of the Night* in 1969 and *The Executioner's Song* in 1979); Hunter S. Thompson (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas,* 1971); Joan Didion (1968's *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* and 1979's *The White Album*); and Michael Herr (*Dispatches,* in 1977).

**NEW JOURNALISTS**

See *New Journalism*

**NEW YORK SCHOOL**

A literary movement begun in New York City in the 1950s, focusing on visual imagery in poetry. The inspirations for the New York School included modernist writers of the 1920s, writers in the French surrealist movement, and the abstract expressionist painters who were also based in New York at about the same time. The New York School is seen as a reaction to the confessional style in poetry that began in the 1940s. Writings of New York School poets tended to be unformed, ironic, spontaneous, and vigorous, mirroring the kinetic art styles of painters such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. The original members of this movement, several of whom had worked as art critics themselves, were John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, and James Schuyler. Later writers associated with this school include Bernadette Mayer, Alice Notley, and Ron Padgett.

**NUYORICAN LITERATURE**

Literature that concerns itself with the experiences and worldviews of people who have left Puerto Rico to settle in or around New York City. The Nuyorican movement is traced to the writings of author Jesús Colón, whose 1961 book *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* is considered a classic of the genre. In the early 2000s, the non-profit Nuyorican Poets Café in New York City was host to Slam and Hip Hop poetry events. Some significant writers of Nuyorican literature are Piri Thomas, Esmeralda Santiago, Nicholasa Mohr, and Pedro Pietri.

# O

**OULIPO**

A literary group dedicated to examining new theories of artistic form in fiction and poetry. Oulipo is an abbreviation for "Ouvroir de littérature potentielle," a French phrase meaning "workshop of potential literature." The group was founded in 1960 in order to examine ways in which writers could express themselves freely while still staying within proscribed forms, to combine freedom of expression with the constraints of recognizable structure. Their studies included critiques of various literary works, such as Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby-Dick,* in order to develop new forms. The names most frequently associated with this movement are its founders: Raymond Queneau, François Le Lionnais, Jacques Bens, Jean Lescure, and Jean Queval. Novelist Italo Calvino later became a practitioner. One of the most famous works to come out of the Oulipo group's theories was Georges Perac's 1969 novel *La Disparition,* written entirely without the use of the letter "e," which he followed in 1972 with *Les Revenentes,* in which "e," is the only vowel used.

# P

**PARNASSIANISM**

A nineteenth-century movement in French literature that sought to define new standards in lyric poetry, reaching its peak between the 1860s and the 1890s. Followers of the movement stressed adherence to well-defined artistic forms as a reaction against the often unrestrained expression of the artist's ego that dominated the work of the Romantics. The Parnassians also rejected the moral, ethical, and social themes exhibited in the works of French Romantics such as Victor Hugo. The aesthetic doctrines of the Parnassians influenced the later symbolist and decadent movements. Members of the Parnassian school include Leconte de Lisle, who was considered a leader of the movement, along with Sully Prudhomme, Albert Glatigny,

Francois Coppee, and Theodore de Banville. The 1866 anthology *La Parnasse contemporain* is a collection of their works that expresses their concerns.

## PHENOMENOLOGY

A method of literary criticism based on the philosophical movement of the same name. Both the philosophy and the criticism share the belief that things have no existence outside human consciousness or awareness. Proponents of this theory believe that art is not a quality of the object itself but rather a process that takes place in the minds of observers as they contemplate the object. The philosophical movement developed in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, following the writings of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Literary phenomenology is expressed in the Geneva School, a group of critics associated with the University of Geneva, Switzerland, from the 1940s on. George Poulet, Marcel Raymond, Roman Ingarden, and the American critic J. Hillis Miller are considered practitioners of phenomenological literary criticism.

## PLATONISM

Embracing of the doctrines of the philosopher Plato, popular among the poets of the Renaissance and the Romantic period. Platonism emphasizes the ideal and the supernatural. While Plato seemed to believe that poetry was an unnatural representation of the real world, his work does share with Aristotle's *Poetics* the view that the world is a manifestation of an enduring ideal. Platonism is expressed in the love poetry of the Renaissance, for example, the fourth book of Baldassare Castiglione's 1528 *The Book of the Courtier,* and it appears in the Romantic period in some poetry of William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Other poets adhering to Platonic literary tenets are Friedrich Holderlin, William Butler Yeats, and Wallace Stevens.

## R

### REVENGE TRAGEDY

A dramatic form begun during the Elizabethan period that reached its peak from the 1590s to the 1630s, following the success of Thomas Kyd's 1589 play *Spanish Tragedy*. Typically, the protagonist of such plays, directed by the ghost of his murdered father or son, retaliates against the villain. Notable features of the revenge tragedy include violence, bizarre criminal acts, intrigue, insanity, a hesitant protagonist, and the use of soliloquy. Perhaps the best known example is William Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* written between 1599 and 1601. Extreme examples of revenge tragedy, such as John Webster's 1614 play *The Duchess of Malfi,* are labeled Tragedies of Blood.

## S

### SHŌJO MANGA

See *Manga*

### SLAM POETRY

Spoken-word poetry performed in competition with other poets in a cabaret setting. Slam poetry began in a Chicago nightclub in the 1980s and gradually spread to include poetry slam competitions in other countries. The rules of a poetry slam are flexible but generally include a panel of judges who rate each poet's performance by gauging the reactions that the poet draws from the audience. The populist nature of the form, which allows a poem's merits to be chosen by untrained audience members, has brought criticism from some literary critics. Notable slam poets are Marc Smith who is often credited with inventing the genre, Michael Warr, Taylor Mali, and Sarah Jones.

### SLAVE NARRATIVE

Autobiographical accounts of American slave life as told by escaped slaves. These accounts gained much popularity during the abolition movement of the late nineteenth century and were instrumental in publicizing the realities of slavery to people who did not know of it firsthand. Olaudah Equiano's 1789 autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African* and Harriet Ann Jacobs's 1861 book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* are examples of the slave narrative. A well-known slave narrative is the autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* published in 1845.

### SPOKEN WORD POETRY

A form of poetry that is created to be performed, not written, that is, to be heard rather than read. Spoken word poetry is directly descended from the *Jazz Poetry,* which was popularized in the 1950s, and it similarly often combines music with poetic rhythm as part of

the poet's performance. It became popular in the 1990s with rap music: one sub-category, *Hip-Hop Poetry,* specifically includes rap musical themes and styles to support the poet's words. Its popularity was boosted with the mid-1990s television series "Spoken Word Unplugged" on MTV and the success of the two-volume anthology *The Spoken Word Revolution,* published in 2005, and *The Spoken Word Revolution Redux,* published in 2007, both edited by Mark Eleveld. Some notable poets in the spoken word movement are Patricia Smith, Kevin Coval, Tara Betts, and Henry Rollins.

## STRUCTURALISM

A twentieth-century movement in literary criticism popularized by the theories of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who used similar principles to examine the mythologies of various cultures. Structuralism reached the height of its popularity in France in the 1960s. It examines the ways in which literary texts arrive at their meanings, rather than the actual meanings of the texts themselves. There are two major types of structuralist analysis. One examines the ways that patterns of linguistic structures both unify a specific text and emphasize certain elements of it. The other focuses on literary forms and conventions, interpreting the ways they affect the meaning of language itself. Roman Jakobson, the Russian linguistic who worked in Prague in the 1920s and 1930s, was a major influence on Lévi-Strauss and on the structuralist movement. Prominent structuralist texts are Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things,* published in France in 1966, and Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) and *Mythologies* (1957).

## STURM UND DRANG

A German term meaning "storm and stress." Sturm und Drang is the name of a German literary movement of the 1770s and 1780s that reacted with overt hostility toward the sense of order and rationalism that prevailed during the Enlightenment and French Neoclassicism. While the previous movements concerned themselves with intellectual processes, writers of the Sturm und Drang period focused on the intense emotional experience of extraordinary individuals. These works are highly romantic and are considered a precursor of the Romantic period. Realism, rebelliousness, and intense emotionalism are the mainstays of works associated with this movement. The term Sturm und Drang comes from the title

of a 1776 play by F. M. Klinger, but the writer most closely associated with this movement is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose novels, particularly *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), typify the Sturm und Drang worldview. Other writers associated with this movement are J. G. Herder and Friedrich Schiller.

# T

## TALL TALE

A humorous tale told in a straightforward, credible manner but relating absolutely impossible events or feats. Historically, such tales can be traced to Germany in the 1780s, with the exaggerations in R. F. Raspe's *Baron Munchausen's Narratives of His Marvelous Travels and Campaigns in Russia.* In the nineteenth century, such tales were part of the American oral tradition, commonly describing frontier adventures during the settlement of the West in the United States. Tall tales have been spun about such legendary heroes as Mike Fink, Paul Bunyan, and Captain Stormalong, and such historical persons as Johnny Appleseed (John Chapman), Davy Crockett, William F. Cody, and Annie Oakley. Literary use of tall tales can be found in Washington Irving's 1809 collection *A History of New York,* Mark Twain's 1883 *Life on the Mississippi,* and in the *Sut Lovingood* yarns, which George Washington Harris published in the 1850s and 1860s.

## THEATER OF CRUELTY

A term used to denote a group of theatrical techniques that are meant to eliminate the psychological and emotional distance between actors and audience. This concept, introduced in the 1930s in France, was intended to inspire a more intense theatrical experience than conventional theater allowed. The cruelty to which the movement name refers is not aggression or violence, but rather the heightened actor/audience involvement in the dramatic event. The Theater of Cruelty was theorized by Antonin Artaud, in his 1932 manifesto *Le Theatre et son double* (*The Theatre and Its Double*). Artaud, who had previously been aligned with the surrealist movement, conceived of a theater so radical in its departure from established conventions that it would rewrite the rules for what theater is thought to be. His movement was short-lived, considered by some to be an attempt to accomplish the impossible. Ataud's experimental play

*Les Cenci,* produced in 1932, is considered a fine example of the Theater of Cruelty, though the influence of his theories also clearly shows in the plays of Jerzy Grotowski, Jean Genet, Jean Vilar, and Arthur Adamov, among others.

**TRAGEDY OF BLOOD**
   See *Revenge Tragedy*

# *W*

**WEBLOG**
   See *Blog*

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# Glossary of Literary Terms

## A

**Abstract:** Used as a noun, the term refers to a short summary or outline of a longer work. As an adjective applied to writing or literary works, abstract refers to words or phrases that name things not knowable through the five senses. Examples of abstracts include the *Cliffs Notes* summaries of major literary works. Examples of abstract terms or concepts include "idea," "guilt" "honesty," and "loyalty."

**Absurd, Theater of the:** See *Theater of the Absurd*

**Absurdism:** See *Theater of the Absurd*

**Act:** A major section of a play. Acts are divided into varying numbers of shorter scenes. From ancient times to the nineteenth century plays were generally constructed of five acts, but modern works typically consist of one, two, or three acts. Examples of five-act plays include the works of Sophocles and Shakespeare, while the plays of Arthur Miller commonly have a three-act structure.

**Alexandrine Meter:** See *Meter*

**Allegory:** A narrative technique in which characters representing things or abstract ideas are used to convey a message or teach a lesson. Allegory is typically used to teach moral, ethical, or religious lessons but is sometimes used for satiric or political purposes. Examples of allegorical works include Edmund

Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress.*

**Allusion:** A reference to a familiar literary or historical person or event, used to make an idea more easily understood. For example, describing someone as a "Romeo" makes an allusion to William Shakespeare's famous young lover in *Romeo and Juliet.*

**Analogy:** A comparison of two things made to explain something unfamiliar through its similarities to something familiar, or to prove one point based on the acceptedness of another. Similes and metaphors are types of analogies. Analogies often take the form of an extended simile, as in William Blake's aphorism: "As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys."

**Angry Young Men:** A group of British writers of the 1950s whose work expressed bitterness and disillusionment with society. Common to their work is an anti-hero who rebels against a corrupt social order and strives for personal integrity. The term has been used to describe Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, Colin Wilson, John Wain, and others.

**Antagonist:** The major character in a narrative or drama who works against the hero or protagonist. An example of an evil antagonist is Richard Lovelace in Samuel Richardson's

*Clarissa,* while a virtuous antagonist is Macduff in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth.*

**Anthropomorphism:** The presentation of animals or objects in human shape or with human characteristics. The term is derived from the Greek word for "human form." The fables of Aesop, the animated films of Walt Disney, and Richard Adams's *Watership Down* feature anthropomorphic characters.

**Anti-hero:** A central character in a work of literature who lacks traditional heroic qualities such as courage, physical prowess, and fortitude. Anti-heros typically distrust conventional values and are unable to commit themselves to any ideals. They generally feel helpless in a world over which they have no control. Anti-heroes usually accept, and often celebrate, their positions as social outcasts. A well-known anti-hero is Yossarian in Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22.*

**Antimasque:** See *Masque*

**Anti-novel:** A term coined by French critic Jean-Paul Sartre. It refers to any experimental work of fiction that avoids the familiar conventions of the novel. The anti-novel usually fragments and distorts the experience of its characters, forcing the reader to construct the reality of the story from a disordered narrative.

**Antithesis:** The antithesis of something is its direct opposite. In literature, the use of antithesis as a figure of speech results in two statements that show a contrast through the balancing of two opposite ideas. Technically, it is the second portion of the statement that is defined as the "antithesis"; the first portion is the "thesis." An example of antithesis is found in the following portion of Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address"; notice the opposition between the verbs "remember" and "forget" and the phrases "what we say" and "what they did": "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."

**Apocrypha:** Writings tentatively attributed to an author but not proven or universally accepted to be their works. The term was originally applied to certain books of the Bible that were not considered inspired and so were not included in the "sacred canon." Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Middleton, and John Marston all have apocrypha. Apocryphal books of the Bible include the Old Testament's Book of Enoch and New Testament's Gospel of Peter.

**Apollonian and Dionysian:** The two impulses believed to guide authors of dramatic tragedy. The Apollonian impulse is named after Apollo, the Greek god of light and beauty and the symbol of intellectual order. The Dionysian impulse is named after Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and the symbol of the unrestrained forces of nature. The Apollonian impulse is to create a rational, harmonious world, while the Dionysian is to express the irrational forces of personality. Friedrich Nietzche uses these terms in *The Birth of Tragedy* to designate contrasting elements in Greek tragedy.

**Apostrophe:** A statement, question, or request addressed to an inanimate object or concept or to a nonexistent or absent person. Requests for inspiration from the muses in poetry are examples of apostrophe, as is Marc Antony's address to Caesar's corpse in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth, That I am meek and gentle with these butchers! . . . Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood! . . ."

**Archetype:** The word archetype is commonly used to describe an original pattern or model from which all other things of the same kind are made. This term was introduced to literary criticism from the psychology of Carl Jung. It expresses Jung's theory that behind every person's "unconscious," or repressed memories of the past, lies the "collective unconscious" of the human race: memories of the countless typical experiences of our ancestors. These memories are said to prompt illogical associations that trigger powerful emotions in the reader. Often, the emotional process is primitive, even primordial. Archetypes are the literary images that grow out of the "collective unconscious." They appear in literature as incidents and plots that repeat basic patterns of life. They may also appear as stereotyped characters. Examples of literary archetypes include themes such as birth and death and characters such as the Earth Mother.

**Argument:** The argument of a work is the author's subject matter or principal idea. Examples of defined "argument" portions of works include John Milton's *Arguments* to each of the books of *Paradise Lost* and

the "Argument" to Robert Herrick's *Hesperides.*

**Aristotelian Criticism:** Specifically, the method of evaluating and analyzing tragedy formulated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle in his *Poetics.* More generally, the term indicates any form of criticism that follows Aristotle's views. Aristotelian criticism focuses on the form and logical structure of a work, apart from its historical or social context, in contrast to "Platonic Criticism," which stresses the usefulness of art. Adherents of New Criticism including John Crowe Ransom and Cleanth Brooks utilize and value the basic ideas of Aristotelian criticism for textual analysis.

**Aside:** A comment made by a stage performer that is intended to be heard by the audience but supposedly not by other characters. Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* is an extended use of the aside in modern theater.

**Audience:** The people for whom a piece of literature is written. Authors usually write with a certain audience in mind, for example, children, members of a religious or ethnic group, or colleagues in a professional field. The term "audience" also applies to the people who gather to see or hear any performance, including plays, poetry readings, speeches, and concerts. Jane Austen's parody of the gothic novel, *Northanger Abbey,* was originally intended for (and also pokes fun at) an audience of young and avid female gothic novel readers.

**Autobiography:** A connected narrative in which an individual tells his or her life story.

**Automatic Writing:** Writing carried out without a preconceived plan in an effort to capture every random thought. Authors who engage in automatic writing typically do not revise their work, preferring instead to preserve the revealed truth and beauty of spontaneous expression.

**Avant-garde:** A French term meaning "vanguard." It is used in literary criticism to describe new writing that rejects traditional approaches to literature in favor of innovations in style or content. Twentieth-century examples of the literary *avant-garde* include the Black Mountain School of poets, the Bloomsbury Group, and the Beat Movement.

# B

**Ballad:** A short poem that tells a simple story and has a repeated refrain. Ballads were originally intended to be sung. Early ballads, known as folk ballads, were passed down through generations, so their authors are often unknown. Later ballads composed by known authors are called literary ballads. An example of an anonymous folk ballad is "Edward," which dates from the Middle Ages. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and John Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci" are examples of literary ballads.

**Baroque:** A term used in literary criticism to describe literature that is complex or ornate in style or diction. Baroque works typically express tension, anxiety, and violent emotion. The term "Baroque Age" designates a period in Western European literature beginning in the late sixteenth century and ending about one hundred years later. Works of this period often mirror the qualities of works more generally associated with the label "baroque" and sometimes feature elaborate conceits. Examples of Baroque works include John Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit,* Luis de Gongora's *Soledads,* and William Shakespeare's *As You Like It.*

**Beat Generation:** See *Beat Movement*

**Beat Movement:** A period featuring a group of American poets and novelists of the 1950s and 1960s—including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, William S. Burroughs, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti—who rejected established social and literary values. Using such techniques as stream of consciousness writing and jazz-influenced free verse and focusing on unusual or abnormal states of mind—generated by religious ecstasy or the use of drugs—the Beat writers aimed to create works that were unconventional in both form and subject matter. Kerouac's *On the Road* is perhaps the best-known example of a Beat Generation novel, and Ginsberg's *Howl* is a famous collection of Beat poetry.

**Belles-lettres:** A French term meaning "fine letters" or "beautiful writing." It is often used as a synonym for literature, typically referring to imaginative and artistic rather than scientific or expository writing. Current usage sometimes restricts the meaning to light or

humorous writing and appreciative essays about literature.

**Bildungsroman:** A German word meaning "novel of development." The *bildungsroman* is a study of the maturation of a youthful character, typically brought about through a series of social or sexual encounters that lead to self-awareness. *Bildungsroman* is used interchangeably with *erziehungsroman,* a novel of initiation and education. When a *bildungsroman* is concerned with the development of an artist (as in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), it is often termed a *kunstlerroman*.

**Biography:** A connected narrative that tells a person's life story. Biographies typically aim to be objective and closely detailed.

**Black Comedy:** See *Black Humor*

**Black Humor:** Writing that places grotesque elements side by side with humorous ones in an attempt to shock the reader, forcing him or her to laugh at the horrifying reality of a disordered world. Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* is considered a superb example of the use of black humor. Other well-known authors who use black humor include Kurt Vonnegut, Edward Albee, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter. Also known as Black Comedy.

**Blank Verse:** Loosely, any unrhymed poetry, but more generally, unrhymed iambic pentameter verse (composed of lines of five two-syllable feet with the first syllable accented, the second unaccented). Blank verse has been used by poets since the Renaissance for its flexibility and its graceful, dignified tone. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is in blank verse, as are most of William Shakespeare's plays.

**Bon Mot:** A French term meaning "good word." A *bon mot* is a witty remark or clever observation. Charles Lamb and Oscar Wilde are celebrated for their witty *bon mots*. Two examples by Oscar Wilde stand out: (1) "All women become their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his." (2) "A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies."

**Breath Verse:** See *Projective Verse*

**Burlesque:** Any literary work that uses exaggeration to make its subject appear ridiculous, either by treating a trivial subject with profound seriousness or by treating a dignified subject frivolously. The word "burlesque" may also be used as an adjective, as in "burlesque show," to mean "striptease act." Examples of literary burlesque include the comedies of Aristophanes, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote,,* Samuel Butler's poem "Hudibras," and John Gay's play *The Beggar's Opera*.

## C

**Cadence:** The natural rhythm of language caused by the alternation of accented and unaccented syllables. Much modern poetry—notably free verse—deliberately manipulates cadence to create complex rhythmic effects. James Macpherson's "Ossian poems" are richly cadenced, as is the poetry of the Symbolists, Walt Whitman, and Amy Lowell.

**Caesura:** A pause in a line of poetry, usually occurring near the middle. It typically corresponds to a break in the natural rhythm or sense of the line but is sometimes shifted to create special meanings or rhythmic effects. The opening line of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" contains a caesura following "dreary": "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary . . . ."

**Canzone:** A short Italian or Provencal lyric poem, commonly about love and often set to music. The *canzone* has no set form but typically contains five or six stanzas made up of seven to twenty lines of eleven syllables each. A shorter, five-to ten-line "envoy," or concluding stanza, completes the poem. Masters of the *canzone* form include Petrarch, Dante Alighieri, Torquato Tasso, and Guido Cavalcanti.

**Carpe Diem:** A Latin term meaning "seize the day." This is a traditional theme of poetry, especially lyrics. A *carpe diem* poem advises the reader or the person it addresses to live for today and enjoy the pleasures of the moment. Two celebrated *carpe diem* poems are Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and Robert Herrick's poem beginning "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may . . . ."

**Catharsis:** The release or purging of unwanted emotions—specifically fear and pity—brought about by exposure to art. The term was first used by the Greek philosopher Aristotle in his *Poetics* to refer to the desired

effect of tragedy on spectators. A famous example of catharsis is realized in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* when Oedipus discovers that his wife, Jacosta, is his own mother and that the stranger he killed on the road was his own father.

**Character:** Broadly speaking, a person in a literary work. The actions of characters are what constitute the plot of a story, novel, or poem. There are numerous types of characters, ranging from simple, stereotypical figures to intricate, multifaceted ones. In the techniques of anthropomorphism and personification, animals—and even places or things—can assume aspects of character. "Characterization" is the process by which an author creates vivid, believable characters in a work of art. This may be done in a variety of ways, including (1) direct description of the character by the narrator; (2) the direct presentation of the speech, thoughts, or actions of the character; and (3) the responses of other characters to the character. The term "character" also refers to a form originated by the ancient Greek writer Theophrastus that later became popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is a short essay or sketch of a person who prominently displays a specific attribute or quality, such as miserliness or ambition. Notable characters in literature include Oedipus Rex, Don Quixote de la Mancha, Macbeth, Candide, Hester Prynne, Ebenezer Scrooge, Huckleberry Finn, Jay Gatsby, Scarlett O'Hara, James Bond, and Kunta Kinte.

**Characterization:** See *Character*

**Chorus:** In ancient Greek drama, a group of actors who commented on and interpreted the unfolding action on the stage. Initially the chorus was a major component of the presentation, but over time it became less significant, with its numbers reduced and its role eventually limited to commentary between acts. By the sixteenth century the chorus—if employed at all—was typically a single person who provided a prologue and an epilogue and occasionally appeared between acts to introduce or underscore an important event. The chorus in William Shakespeare's *Henry V* functions in this way. Modern dramas rarely feature a chorus, but T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and

Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* are notable exceptions. The Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* performs a role similar to that of the chorus.

**Chronicle:** A record of events presented in chronological order. Although the scope and level of detail provided varies greatly among the chronicles surviving from ancient times, some, such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* feature vivid descriptions and a lively recounting of events. During the Elizabethan Age, many dramas—appropriately called "chronicle plays"—were based on material from chronicles. Many of William Shakespeare's dramas of English history as well as Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* are based in part on Raphael Holinshead's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland.*

**Classical:** In its strictest definition in literary criticism, classicism refers to works of ancient Greek or Roman literature. The term may also be used to describe a literary work of recognized importance (a "classic") from any time period or literature that exhibits the traits of classicism. Classical authors from ancient Greek and Roman times include Juvenal and Homer. Examples of later works and authors now described as classical include French literature of the seventeenth century, Western novels of the nineteenth century, and American fiction of the mid-nineteenth century such as that written by James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain.

**Classicism:** A term used in literary criticism to describe critical doctrines that have their roots in ancient Greek and Roman literature, philosophy, and art. Works associated with classicism typically exhibit restraint on the part of the author, unity of design and purpose, clarity, simplicity, logical organization, and respect for tradition. Examples of literary classicism include Cicero's prose, the dramas of Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine, the poetry of John Dryden and Alexander Pope, and the writings of J. W. von Goethe, G. E. Lessing, and T. S. Eliot.

**Climax:** The turning point in a narrative, the moment when the conflict is at its most intense. Typically, the structure of stories, novels, and plays is one of rising action, in which tension builds to the climax, followed by falling action, in which tension lessens as the story moves to its conclusion. The climax

in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* occurs when Magua and his captive Cora are pursued to the edge of a cliff by Uncas. Magua kills Uncas but is subsequently killed by Hawkeye.

**Colloquialism:** A word, phrase, or form of pronunciation that is acceptable in casual conversation but not in formal, written communication. It is considered more acceptable than slang. An example of colloquialism can be found in Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack-room Ballads:* When 'Omer smote 'is bloomin' lyre He'd 'eard men sing by land and sea; An' what he thought 'e might require 'E went an' took—the same as me!

**Colonialism:** The literature of several ages reflects concerns about Colonialism in depictions of encounters with native peoples and foreign landscapes and in vague allusions to distant plantations. Rough boundaries for the literary movement of Colonialism begin c. 1875, when historians date the start of a "New Imperialism," through the waning empires of World War I and up to the beginning of World War II, around 1939. Colonialism is primarily a feature of British literature, given that the British dominated the imperial age. The literature of Colonialism is characterized by a strong sense of ambiguity: uncertainty about the morality of imperialism, about the nature of humanity, and about the continuing viability of European civilization. Colonial literature is also full of high adventure, romance, and excitement. Examples of colonial literature are Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, the adventure tales of H. Rider Haggard, and Isak Dinesen's memoirs, including *Out of Africa*.

**Comedy:** One of two major types of drama, the other being tragedy. Its aim is to amuse, and it typically ends happily. Comedy assumes many forms, such as farce and burlesque, and uses a variety of techniques, from parody to satire. In a restricted sense the term comedy refers only to dramatic presentations, but in general usage it is commonly applied to nondramatic works as well. Examples of comedies range from the plays of Aristophanes, Terrence, and Plautus, Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy,*

Francois Rabelais's *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua,* and some of Geoffrey Chaucer's tales and William Shakespeare's plays to Noel Coward's play *Private Lives* and James Thurber's short story "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty."

**Comic Relief:** The use of humor to lighten the mood of a serious or tragic story, especially in plays. The technique is very common in Elizabethan works, and can be an integral part of the plot or simply a brief event designed to break the tension of the scene. The Gravediggers' scene in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a frequently cited example of comic relief.

**Complaint:** A lyric poem, popular in the Renaissance, in which the speaker expresses sorrow about his or her condition. Typically, the speaker's sadness is caused by an unresponsive lover, but some complaints cite other sources of unhappiness, such as poverty or fate. A commonly cited example is "A Complaint by Night of the Lover Not Beloved" by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. Thomas Sackville's "Complaint of Henry, Duke of Buckingham" traces the duke's unhappiness to his ruthless ambition.

**Conceit:** A clever and fanciful metaphor, usually expressed through elaborate and extended comparison, that presents a striking parallel between two seemingly dissimilar things— for example, elaborately comparing a beautiful woman to an object like a garden or the sun. The conceit was a popular device throughout the Elizabethan Age and Baroque Age and was the principal technique of the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets. This usage of the word conceit is unrelated to the best-known definition of conceit as an arrogant attitude or behavior. The conceit figures prominently in the works of John Donne, Emily Dickinson, and T. S. Eliot.

**Concrete:** Concrete is the opposite of abstract, and refers to a thing that actually exists or a description that allows the reader to experience an object or concept with the senses. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* contains much concrete description of nature and wildlife.

**Concrete Poetry:** Poetry in which visual elements play a large part in the poetic effect. Punctuation marks, letters, or words are arranged

on a page to form a visual design: a cross, for example, or a bumblebee. Max Bill and Eugene Gomringer were among the early practitioners of concrete poetry; Haroldo de Campos and Augusto de Campos are among contemporary authors of concrete poetry.

**Confessional Poetry:** A form of poetry in which the poet reveals very personal, intimate, sometimes shocking information about himself or herself. Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, and John Berryman wrote poetry in the confessional vein.

**Conflict:** The conflict in a work of fiction is the issue to be resolved in the story. It usually occurs between two characters, the protagonist and the antagonist, or between the protagonist and society or the protagonist and himself or herself. Conflict in Theodore Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie* comes as a result of urban society, while Jack London's short story "To Build a Fire" concerns the protagonist's battle against the cold and himself.

**Connotation:** The impression that a word gives beyond its defined meaning. Connotations may be universally understood or may be significant only to a certain group. Both "horse" and "steed" denote the same animal, but "steed" has a different connotation, deriving from the chivalrous or romantic narratives in which the word was once often used.

**Consonance:** Consonance occurs in poetry when words appearing at the ends of two or more verses have similar final consonant sounds but have final vowel sounds that differ, as with "stuff" and "off." Consonance is found in "The curfew tolls the knells of parting day" from Thomas Grey's "An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard." Also known as Half Rhyme or Slant Rhyme.

**Convention:** Any widely accepted literary device, style, or form. A soliloquy, in which a character reveals to the audience his or her private thoughts, is an example of a dramatic convention.

**Corrido:** A Mexican ballad. Examples of *corridos* include "Muerte del afamado Bilito," "La voz de mi conciencia," "Lucio Perez," "La juida," and "Los presos."

**Couplet:** Two lines of poetry with the same rhyme and meter, often expressing a complete and self-contained thought. The following couplet is from Alexander Pope's "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady": 'Tis Use alone that sanctifies Expense, And Splendour borrows all her rays from Sense.

**Crime Literature:** A genre of fiction that focuses on the environment, behavior, and psychology of criminals.

**Criticism:** The systematic study and evaluation of literary works, usually based on a specific method or set of principles. An important part of literary studies since ancient times, the practice of criticism has given rise to numerous theories, methods, and "schools," sometimes producing conflicting, even contradictory, interpretations of literature in general as well as of individual works. Even such basic issues as what constitutes a poem or a novel have been the subject of much criticism over the centuries. Seminal texts of literary criticism include Plato's *Republic,* Aristotle's *Poetics,* Sir Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie,* John Dryden's *Of Dramatic Poesie,* and William Wordsworth's "Preface" to the second edition of his *Lyrical Ballads.* Contemporary schools of criticism include deconstruction, feminist, psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, new historicist, postcolonialist, and reader-response.

## D

**Dactyl:** See *Foot*

**Deconstruction:** A method of literary criticism developed by Jacques Derrida and characterized by multiple conflicting interpretations of a given work. Deconstructionists consider the impact of the language of a work and suggest that the true meaning of the work is not necessarily the meaning that the author intended. Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* is the seminal text on deconstructive strategies; among American practitioners of this method of criticism are Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller.

**Deduction:** The process of reaching a conclusion through reasoning from general premises to a specific premise. An example of deduction is present in the following syllogism: Premise: All mammals are animals. Premise: All whales are mammals. Conclusion: Therefore, all whales are animals.

**Denotation:** The definition of a word, apart from the impressions or feelings it creates in the reader. The word "apartheid" denotes a political and economic policy of segregation by race, but its connotations—oppression, slavery, inequality—are numerous.

**Denouement:** A French word meaning "the unknotting." In literary criticism, it denotes the resolution of conflict in fiction or drama. The *denouement* follows the climax and provides an outcome to the primary plot situation as well as an explanation of secondary plot complications. The *denouement* often involves a character's recognition of his or her state of mind or moral condition. A well-known example of *denouement* is the last scene of the play *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, in which couples are married, an evildoer repents, the identities of two disguised characters are revealed, and a ruler is restored to power. Also known as Falling Action.

**Description:** Descriptive writing is intended to allow a reader to picture the scene or setting in which the action of a story takes place. The form this description takes often evokes an intended emotional response—a dark, spooky graveyard will evoke fear, and a peaceful, sunny meadow will evoke calmness. An example of a descriptive story is Edgar Allan Poe's *Landor's Cottage,* which offers a detailed depiction of a New York country estate.

**Deus ex machina:** A Latin term meaning "god out of a machine." In Greek drama, a god was often lowered onto the stage by a mechanism of some kind to rescue the hero or untangle the plot. By extension, the term refers to any artificial device or coincidence used to bring about a convenient and simple solution to a plot. This is a common device in melodramas and includes such fortunate circumstances as the sudden receipt of a legacy to save the family farm or a last-minute stay of execution. The *deus ex machina* invariably rewards the virtuous and punishes evildoers. Examples of *deus ex machina* include King Louis XIV in Jean-Baptiste Moliere's *Tartuffe* and Queen Victoria in *The Pirates of Penzance* by William Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. Bertolt Brecht parodies the abuse of such devices in the conclusion of his *Threepenny Opera.*

**Dialogue:** In its widest sense, dialogue is simply conversation between people in a literary work; in its most restricted sense, it refers specifically to the speech of characters in a drama. As a specific literary genre, a "dialogue" is a composition in which characters debate an issue or idea. The Greek philosopher Plato frequently expounded his theories in the form of dialogues.

**Diary:** A personal written record of daily events and thoughts. As private documents, diaries are supposedly not intended for an audience, but some, such as those of Samuel Pepys and Anais Nin, are known for their high literary quality.

**Diction:** The selection and arrangement of words in a literary work. Either or both may vary depending on the desired effect. There are four general types of diction: "formal," used in scholarly or lofty writing; "informal," used in relaxed but educated conversation; "colloquial," used in everyday speech; and "slang," containing newly coined words and other terms not accepted in formal usage.

**Didactic:** A term used to describe works of literature that aim to teach some moral, religious, political, or practical lesson. Although didactic elements are often found in artistically pleasing works, the term "didactic" usually refers to literature in which the message is more important than the form. The term may also be used to criticize a work that the critic finds "overly didactic," that is, heavy-handed in its delivery of a lesson. Examples of didactic literature include John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism,* Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile,* and Elizabeth Inchbald's *Simple Story.*

**Dimeter:** See *Meter*

**Dionysian:** See *Apollonian and Dionysian*

**Discordia concours:** A Latin phrase meaning "discord in harmony." The term was coined by the eighteenth-century English writer Samuel Johnson to describe "a combination of dissimilar images or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." Johnson created the expression by reversing a phrase by the Latin poet Horace. The metaphysical poetry of John Donne, Richard Crashaw, Abraham Cowley, George Herbert, and Edward Taylor among others, contains many examples of *discordia concours.* In

Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," the poet compares the union of himself with his lover to a draftsman's compass: If they be two, they are two so, As stiff twin compasses are two: Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show To move, but doth, if the other do; And though it in the center sit, Yet when the other far doth roam, It leans, and hearkens after it, And grows erect, as that comes home.

**Dissonance:** A combination of harsh or jarring sounds, especially in poetry. Although such combinations may be accidental, poets sometimes intentionally make them to achieve particular effects. Dissonance is also sometimes used to refer to close but not identical rhymes. When this is the case, the word functions as a synonym for consonance. Robert Browning, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and many other poets have made deliberate use of dissonance.

**Doppelganger:** A literary technique by which a character is duplicated (usually in the form of an alter ego, though sometimes as a ghostly counterpart) or divided into two distinct, usually opposite personalities. The use of this character device is widespread in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, and indicates a growing awareness among authors that the "self" is really a composite of many "selves." A well-known story containing a *doppelganger* character is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* which dramatizes an internal struggle between good and evil. Also known as The Double.

**Double Entendre:** A corruption of a French phrase meaning "double meaning." The term is used to indicate a word or phrase that is deliberately ambiguous, especially when one of the meanings is risque or improper. An example of a *double entendre* is the Elizabethan usage of the verb "die," which refers both to death and to orgasm.

**Double, The:** See *Doppelganger*

**Draft:** Any preliminary version of a written work. An author may write dozens of drafts which are revised to form the final work, or he or she may write only one, with few or no revisions. Dorothy Parker's observation that "I can't write five words but that I change seven" humorously indicates the purpose of the draft.

**Drama:** In its widest sense, a drama is any work designed to be presented by actors on a stage. Similarly, "drama" denotes a broad literary genre that includes a variety of forms, from pageant and spectacle to tragedy and comedy, as well as countless types and subtypes. More commonly in modern usage, however, a drama is a work that treats serious subjects and themes but does not aim at the grandeur of tragedy. This use of the term originated with the eighteenth-century French writer Denis Diderot, who used the word *drame* to designate his plays about middle-class life; thus "drama" typically features characters of a less exalted stature than those of tragedy. Examples of classical dramas include Menander's comedy *Dyscolus* and Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex.* Contemporary dramas include Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh,* Lillian Hellman's *Little Foxes,* and August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom.*

**Dramatic Irony:** Occurs when the audience of a play or the reader of a work of literature knows something that a character in the work itself does not know. The irony is in the contrast between the intended meaning of the statements or actions of a character and the additional information understood by the audience. A celebrated example of dramatic irony is in Act V of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* where two young lovers meet their end as a result of a tragic misunderstanding. Here, the audience has full knowledge that Juliet's apparent "death" is merely temporary; she will regain her senses when the mysterious "sleeping potion" she has taken wears off. But Romeo, mistaking Juliet's drug-induced trance for true death, kills himself in grief. Upon awakening, Juliet discovers Romeo's corpse and, in despair, slays herself.

**Dramatic Monologue:** See *Monologue*

**Dramatic Poetry:** Any lyric work that employs elements of drama such as dialogue, conflict, or characterization, but excluding works that are intended for stage presentation. A monologue is a form of dramatic poetry.

**Dramatis Personae:** The characters in a work of literature, particularly a drama. The list of characters printed before the main text of a play or in the program is the *dramatis personae.*

**Dream Allegory:** See *Dream Vision*

**Dream Vision:** A literary convention, chiefly of the Middle Ages. In a dream vision a story is presented as a literal dream of the narrator. This device was commonly used to teach moral and religious lessons. Important works of this type are *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, *Piers Plowman* by William Langland, and *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. Also known as Dream Allegory.

**Dystopia:** An imaginary place in a work of fiction where the characters lead dehumanized, fearful lives. Jack London's *The Iron Heel,* Yevgeny Zamyatin's *My,* Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four,* and Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* portray versions of dystopia.

# E

**Eclogue:** In classical literature, a poem featuring rural themes and structured as a dialogue among shepherds. Eclogues often took specific poetic forms, such as elegies or love poems. Some were written as the soliloquy of a shepherd. In later centuries, "eclogue" came to refer to any poem that was in the pastoral tradition or that had a dialogue or monologue structure. A classical example of an eclogue is Virgil's *Eclogues,* also known as *Bucolics.* Giovanni Boccaccio, Edmund Spenser, Andrew Marvell, Jonathan Swift, and Louis MacNeice also wrote eclogues.

**Electra Complex:** A daughter's amorous obsession with her father. The term Electra complex comes from the plays of Euripides and Sophocles entitled *Electra,* in which the character Electra drives her brother Orestes to kill their mother and her lover in revenge for the murder of their father.

**Elegy:** A lyric poem that laments the death of a person or the eventual death of all people. In a conventional elegy, set in a classical world, the poet and subject are spoken of as shepherds. In modern criticism, the word elegy is often used to refer to a poem that is melancholy or mournfully contemplative. John Milton's "Lycidas" and Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Adonais" are two examples of this form.

**Elizabethan Age:** A period of great economic growth, religious controversy, and nationalism closely associated with the reign of Elizabeth I of England (1558-1603). The Elizabethan Age is considered a part of the general renaissance—that is, the flowering of arts and literature—that took place in Europe during the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. The era is considered the golden age of English literature. The most important dramas in English and a great deal of lyric poetry were produced during this period, and modern English criticism began around this time. The notable authors of the period—Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Francis Bacon, and John Donne—are among the best in all of English literature.

**Elizabethan Drama:** English comic and tragic plays produced during the Renaissance, or more narrowly, those plays written during the last years of and few years after Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558–1603). William Shakespeare is considered an Elizabethan dramatist in the broader sense, although most of his work was produced during the reign of James I. Examples of Elizabethan comedies include John Lyly's *The Woman in the Moone,* Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl, or, Moll Cut Purse,* and William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night.* Examples of Elizabethan tragedies include William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy,* and John Webster's *The Tragedy of the Duchess of Malfi.*

**Empathy:** A sense of shared experience, including emotional and physical feelings, with someone or something other than oneself. Empathy is often used to describe the response of a reader to a literary character. An example of an empathic passage is William Shakespeare's description in his narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* of: the snail, whose tender horns being hit, Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain. Readers of Gerard Manley Hopkins's *The Windhover* may experience some of the physical sensations evoked in the description of the movement of the falcon.

**English Sonnet:** See *Sonnet*

**Enjambment:** The running over of the sense and structure of a line of verse or a couplet into the following verse or couplet. Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" is structured as a series of enjambments, as in lines 11-12: "My

vegetable love should grow/Vaster than empires and more slow."

**Enlightenment, The:** An eighteenth-century philosophical movement. It began in France but had a wide impact throughout Europe and America. Thinkers of the Enlightenment valued reason and believed that both the individual and society could achieve a state of perfection. Corresponding to this essentially humanist vision was a resistance to religious authority. Important figures of the Enlightenment were Denis Diderot and Voltaire in France, Edward Gibbon and David Hume in England, and Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson in the United States.

**Epic:** A long narrative poem about the adventures of a hero of great historic or legendary importance. The setting is vast and the action is often given cosmic significance through the intervention of supernatural forces such as gods, angels, or demons. Epics are typically written in a classical style of grand simplicity with elaborate metaphors and allusions that enhance the symbolic importance of a hero's adventures. Some well-known epics are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* Virgil's *Aeneid,* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

**Epic Simile:** See *Homeric Simile*

**Epigram:** A saying that makes the speaker's point quickly and concisely. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote an epigram that neatly sums up the form: What is an Epigram? A Dwarfish whole, Its body brevity, and wit its soul.

**Epilogue:** A concluding statement or section of a literary work. In dramas, particularly those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the epilogue is a closing speech, often in verse, delivered by an actor at the end of a play and spoken directly to the audience. A famous epilogue is Puck's speech at the end of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

**Epiphany:** A sudden revelation of truth inspired by a seemingly trivial incident. The term was widely used by James Joyce in his critical writings, and the stories in Joyce's *Dubliners* are commonly called "epiphanies."

**Episode:** An incident that forms part of a story and is significantly related to it. Episodes may be either self-contained narratives or events that depend on a larger context for their sense and importance. Examples of episodes include the founding of Wilmington, Delaware in Charles Reade's *The Disinherited Heir* and the individual events comprising the picaresque novels and medieval romances.

**Episodic Plot:** See *Plot*

**Epistolary Novel:** A novel in the form of letters. The form was particularly popular in the eighteenth century.

**Epitaph:** An inscription on a tomb or tombstone, or a verse written on the occasion of a person's death. Epitaphs may be serious or humorous. Dorothy Parker's epitaph reads, "I told you I was sick."

**Epithalamion:** A song or poem written to honor and commemorate a marriage ceremony. Famous examples include Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion" and e. e. cummings's "Epithalamion." Also spelled Epithalamium.

**Epithalamium:** See *Epithalamion*

**Epithet:** A word or phrase, often disparaging or abusive, that expresses a character trait of someone or something. "The Napoleon of crime" is an epithet applied to Professor Moriarty, arch-rival of Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle's series of detective stories.

**Erziehungsroman:** See *Bildungsroman*

**Essay:** A prose composition with a focused subject of discussion. The term was coined by Michel de Montaigne to describe his 1580 collection of brief, informal reflections on himself and on various topics relating to human nature. An essay can also be a long, systematic discourse.

**Exempla:** See *Exemplum*

**Exemplum:** A tale with a moral message. This form of literary sermonizing flourished during the Middle Ages, when *exempla* appeared in collections known as "example-books." The works of Geoffrey Chaucer are full of *exempla.*

**Existentialism:** A predominantly twentieth-century philosophy concerned with the nature and perception of human existence. There are two major strains of existentialist thought: atheistic and Christian. Followers of atheistic existentialism believe that the individual is alone in a godless universe

and that the basic human condition is one of suffering and loneliness. Nevertheless, because there are no fixed values, individuals can create their own characters—indeed, they can shape themselves—through the exercise of free will. The atheistic strain culminates in and is popularly associated with the works of Jean-Paul Sartre. The Christian existentialists, on the other hand, believe that only in God may people find freedom from life's anguish. The two strains hold certain beliefs in common: that existence cannot be fully understood or described through empirical effort; that anguish is a universal element of life; that individuals must bear responsibility for their actions; and that there is no common standard of behavior or perception for religious and ethical matters. Existentialist thought figures prominently in the works of such authors as Eugene Ionesco, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Simone de Beauvoir, Samuel Beckett, and Albert Camus.

**Expatriates:** See *Expatriatism*

**Expatriatism:** The practice of leaving one's country to live for an extended period in another country. Literary expatriates include English poets Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats in Italy, Polish novelist Joseph Conrad in England, American writers Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Gertrude Stein, and Ernest Hemingway in France, and Trinidadian author Neil Bissondath in Canada.

**Exposition:** Writing intended to explain the nature of an idea, thing, or theme. Expository writing is often combined with description, narration, or argument. In dramatic writing, the exposition is the introductory material which presents the characters, setting, and tone of the play. An example of dramatic exposition occurs in many nineteenth-century drawing-room comedies in which the butler and the maid open the play with relevant talk about their master and mistress; in composition, exposition relays factual information, as in encyclopedia entries.

**Expressionism:** An indistinct literary term, originally used to describe an early twentieth-century school of German painting. The term applies to almost any mode of unconventional, highly subjective writing that distorts reality in some way. Advocates of Expressionism include dramatists George Kaiser, Ernst Toller, Luigi Pirandello, Federico Garcia Lorca, Eugene O'Neill, and Elmer Rice; poets George Heym, Ernst Stadler, August Stramm, Gottfried Benn, and Georg Trakl; and novelists Franz Kafka and James Joyce.

**Extended Monologue:** See *Monologue*

# F

**Fable:** A prose or verse narrative intended to convey a moral. Animals or inanimate objects with human characteristics often serve as characters in fables. A famous fable is Aesop's "The Tortoise and the Hare."

**Fairy Tales:** Short narratives featuring mythical beings such as fairies, elves, and sprites. These tales originally belonged to the folklore of a particular nation or region, such as those collected in Germany by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Two other celebrated writers of fairy tales are Hans Christian Andersen and Rudyard Kipling.

**Falling Action:** See *Denouement*

**Fantasy:** A literary form related to mythology and folklore. Fantasy literature is typically set in non-existent realms and features supernatural beings. Notable examples of fantasy literature are *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien and the Gormenghast trilogy by Mervyn Peake.

**Farce:** A type of comedy characterized by broad humor, outlandish incidents, and often vulgar subject matter. Much of the "comedy" in film and television could more accurately be described as farce.

**Feet:** See *Foot*

**Feminine Rhyme:** See *Rhyme*

**Femme fatale:** A French phrase with the literal translation "fatal woman." A *femme fatale* is a sensuous, alluring woman who often leads men into danger or trouble. A classic example of the *femme fatale* is the nameless character in Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch,* portrayed by Marilyn Monroe in the film adaptation.

**Festschrift:** A collection of essays written in honor of a distinguished scholar and presented to him or her to mark some special occasion.

**Fiction:** Any story that is the product of imagination rather than a documentation of fact. characters and events in such narratives may be based in real life but their ultimate form and configuration is a creation of the author. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy,* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* are examples of fiction.

**Figurative Language:** A technique in writing in which the author temporarily interrupts the order, construction, or meaning of the writing for a particular effect. This interruption takes the form of one or more figures of speech such as hyperbole, irony, or simile. Figurative language is the opposite of literal language, in which every word is truthful, accurate, and free of exaggeration or embellishment. Examples of figurative language are tropes such as metaphor and rhetorical figures such as apostrophe.

**Figures of Speech:** Writing that differs from customary conventions for construction, meaning, order, or significance for the purpose of a special meaning or effect. There are two major types of figures of speech: rhetorical figures, which do not make changes in the meaning of the words, and tropes, which do. Types of figures of speech include simile, hyperbole, alliteration, and pun, among many others.

**First Person:** See *Point of View*

**Flashback:** A device used in literature to present action that occurred before the beginning of the story. Flashbacks are often introduced as the dreams or recollections of one or more characters. Flashback techniques are often used in films, where they are typically set off by a gradual changing of one picture to another.

**Foil:** A character in a work of literature whose physical or psychological qualities contrast strongly with, and therefore highlight, the corresponding qualities of another character. In his Sherlock Holmes stories, Arthur Conan Doyle portrayed Dr. Watson as a man of normal habits and intelligence, making him a foil for the eccentric and wonderfully perceptive Sherlock Holmes.

**Folk Ballad:** See *Ballad*

**Folklore:** Traditions and myths preserved in a culture or group of people. Typically, these are passed on by word of mouth in various forms—such as legends, songs, and proverbs—or preserved in customs and ceremonies. This term was first used by W. J. Thoms in 1846. Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* is the record of English folklore; myths about the frontier and the Old South exemplify American folklore.

**Folktale:** A story originating in oral tradition. Folktales fall into a variety of categories, including legends, ghost stories, fairy tales, fables, and anecdotes based on historical figures and events. Examples of folktales include Giambattista Basile's *The Pentamerone,* which contains the tales of Puss in Boots, Rapunzel, Cinderella, and Beauty and the Beast, and Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories, which represent transplanted African folktales and American tales about the characters Mike Fink, Johnny Appleseed, Paul Bunyan, and Pecos Bill.

**Foot:** The smallest unit of rhythm in a line of poetry. In English-language poetry, a foot is typically one accented syllable combined with one or two unaccented syllables. There are many different types of feet. When the accent is on the second syllable of a two syllable word (con- *tort*), the foot is an "iamb"; the reverse accentual pattern (*tor* -ture) is a "trochee." Other feet that commonly occur in poetry in English are "anapest", two unaccented syllables followed by an accented syllable as in in-ter-*cept*, and "dactyl", an accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables as in *su*-i- cide.

**Foreshadowing:** A device used in literature to create expectation or to set up an explanation of later developments. In Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations,* the graveyard encounter at the beginning of the novel between Pip and the escaped convict Magwitch foreshadows the baleful atmosphere and events that comprise much of the narrative.

**Form:** The pattern or construction of a work which identifies its genre and distinguishes it from other genres. Examples of forms include the different genres, such as the lyric form or the short story form, and various patterns for poetry, such as the verse form or the stanza form.

**Formalism:** In literary criticism, the belief that literature should follow prescribed rules of construction, such as those that govern the

sonnet form. Examples of formalism are found in the work of the New Critics and structuralists.

**Fourteener Meter:** See *Meter*

**Free Verse:** Poetry that lacks regular metrical and rhyme patterns but that tries to capture the cadences of everyday speech. The form allows a poet to exploit a variety of rhythmical effects within a single poem. Free-verse techniques have been widely used in the twentieth century by such writers as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Carl Sandburg, and William Carlos Williams. Also known as *Vers libre*.

## G

**Genre:** A category of literary work. In critical theory, genre may refer to both the content of a given work—tragedy, comedy, pastoral—and to its form, such as poetry, novel, or drama. This term also refers to types of popular literature, as in the genres of science fiction or the detective story.

**Genteel Tradition:** A term coined by critic George Santayana to describe the literary practice of certain late nineteenth-century American writers, especially New Englanders. Followers of the Genteel Tradition emphasized conventionality in social, religious, moral, and literary standards. Some of the best-known writers of the Genteel Tradition are R. H. Stoddard and Bayard Taylor.

**Gilded Age:** A period in American history during the 1870s characterized by political corruption and materialism. A number of important novels of social and political criticism were written during this time. Examples of Gilded Age literature include Henry Adams's *Democracy* and F. Marion Crawford's *An American Politician*.

**Gothic:** See *Gothicism*

**Gothic Literature:** See *Gothicism*

**Gothic Novel:** See *Gothicism*

**Gothicism:** In literary criticism, works characterized by a taste for the medieval or morbidly attractive. A gothic novel prominently features elements of horror, the supernatural, gloom, and violence: clanking chains, terror, charnel houses, ghosts, medieval castles, and mysteriously slamming doors. The term "gothic novel" is also applied to novels that lack elements of the traditional Gothic setting but that create a similar atmosphere of terror or dread. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is perhaps the best-known English work of this kind.

**Great Chain of Being:** The belief that all things and creatures in nature are organized in a hierarchy from inanimate objects at the bottom to God at the top. This system of belief was popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A summary of the concept of the great chain of being can be found in the first epistle of Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man,* and more recently in Arthur O. Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea.*

**Greek Drama:** Greek drama consists primarily of the surviving texts of four major playwrights from the fifth century B.C.. Three of these—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—were tragedians. The early works focused on the good and evil that existed simultaneously in the world as well as the other contradictory forces of human nature and the outside world. All three tragic playwrights drew their material from Greek myths and legends; they each brought new developments to the art form. Examples of Greek tragedies include the *Oresteia* trilogy of Aeschylus, *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles, and the *Medea* of Euripides. Comedy most likely also developed out of the same religious rituals as tragedy. Aristophanes was the greatest writer of comedies in the early period known as Old Comedy, using biting satire in plays such as *Birds* and *Lysistrata* to ridicule prominent Athenian figures and current events. Later comedy relied less on satire and mythology and more on human relations among the Greek common people.

**Grotesque:** In literary criticism, the subject matter of a work or a style of expression characterized by exaggeration, deformity, freakishness, and disorder. The grotesque often includes an element of comic absurdity. Early examples of literary grotesque include Francois Rabelais's *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* and Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller,* while more recent examples can be found in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Evelyn Waugh, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Eugene Ionesco, Gunter Grass, Thomas Mann, Mervyn Peake, and Joseph Heller, among many others.

# H

**Haiku:** The shortest form of Japanese poetry, constructed in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively. The message of a *haiku* poem usually centers on some aspect of spirituality and provokes an emotional response in the reader. Early masters of *haiku* include Basho, Buson, Kobayashi Issa, and Masaoka Shiki. English writers of *haiku* include the Imagists, notably Ezra Pound, H. D., Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, and William Carlos Williams. Also known as *Hokku.*

**Half Rhyme:** See *Consonance*

**Hamartia:** In tragedy, the event or act that leads to the hero's or heroine's downfall. This term is often incorrectly used as a synonym for tragic flaw. In Richard Wright's *Native Son,* the act that seals Bigger Thomas's fate is his first impulsive murder.

**Harlem Renaissance:** The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s is generally considered the first significant movement of black writers and artists in the United States. During this period, new and established black writers published more fiction and poetry than ever before, the first influential black literary journals were established, and black authors and artists received their first widespread recognition and serious critical appraisal. Among the major writers associated with this period are Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston. Works representative of the Harlem Renaissance include Arna Bontemps's poems "The Return" and "Golgotha Is a Mountain," Claude McKay's novel *Home to Harlem,* Nella Larsen's novel *Passing,* Langston Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," and the journals *Crisis* and *Opportunity,* both founded during this period. Also known as Negro Renaissance and New Negro Movement.

**Harlequin:** A stock character of the *commedia dell'arte* who occasionally interrupted the action with silly antics. Harlequin first appeared on the English stage in John Day's *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers.* The San Francisco Mime Troupe is one of the few modern groups to adapt Harlequin to the needs of contemporary satire.

**Hellenism:** Imitation of ancient Greek thought or styles. Also, an approach to life that focuses on the growth and development of the intellect. "Hellenism" is sometimes used to refer to the belief that reason can be applied to examine all human experience. A cogent discussion of Hellenism can be found in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy.*

**Heptameter:** See *Meter*

**Hero/Heroine:** The principal sympathetic character (male or female) in a literary work. Heroes and heroines typically exhibit admirable traits: idealism, courage, and integrity, for example. Famous heroes and heroines include Pip in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations,* the anonymous narrator in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* and Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*

**Heroic Couplet:** A rhyming couplet written in iambic pentameter (a verse with five iambic feet). The following lines by Alexander Pope are an example: "Truth guards the Poet, sanctifies the line,/ And makes Immortal, Verse as mean as mine."

**Heroic Line:** The meter and length of a line of verse in epic or heroic poetry. This varies by language and time period. For example, in English poetry, the heroic line is iambic pentameter (a verse with five iambic feet); in French, the alexandrine (a verse with six iambic feet); in classical literature, dactylic hexameter (a verse with six dactylic feet).

**Heroine:** See *Hero/Heroine*

**Hexameter:** See *Meter*

**Historical Criticism:** The study of a work based on its impact on the world of the time period in which it was written. Examples of postmodern historical criticism can be found in the work of Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Stephen Greenblatt, and Jonathan Goldberg.

**Hokku:** See *Haiku*

**Homeric Simile:** An elaborate, detailed comparison written as a simile many lines in length. An example of an epic simile from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* follows: Angel Forms, who lay entranced Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades High overarched embower; or scattered sedge Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion armed Hath

vexed the Red-Sea coast, whose waves o'erthrew Busiris and his Memphian chivalry, While with perfidious hatred they pursued The sojourners of Goshen, who beheld From the safe shore their floating carcasses And broken chariot-wheels. Also known as Epic Simile.

**Horatian Satire:** See *Satire*

**Humanism:** A philosophy that places faith in the dignity of humankind and rejects the medieval perception of the individual as a weak, fallen creature. "Humanists" typically believe in the perfectibility of human nature and view reason and education as the means to that end. Humanist thought is represented in the works of Marsilio Ficino, Ludovico Castelvetro, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, Dean John Colet, Desiderius Erasmus, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Matthew Arnold, and Irving Babbitt.

**Humors:** Mentions of the humors refer to the ancient Greek theory that a person's health and personality were determined by the balance of four basic fluids in the body: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. A dominance of any fluid would cause extremes in behavior. An excess of blood created a sanguine person who was joyful, aggressive, and passionate; a phlegmatic person was shy, fearful, and sluggish; too much yellow bile led to a choleric temperament characterized by impatience, anger, bitterness, and stubbornness; and excessive black bile created melancholy, a state of laziness, gluttony, and lack of motivation. Literary treatment of the humors is exemplified by several characters in Ben Jonson's plays *Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man out of His Humour*. Also spelled Humours.

**Humours:** See *Humors*

**Hyperbole:** In literary criticism, deliberate exaggeration used to achieve an effect. In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* Lady Macbeth hyperbolizes when she says, "All the perfumes of Arabia could not sweeten this little hand."

# I

**Iamb:** See *Foot*

**Idiom:** A word construction or verbal expression closely associated with a given language. For example, in colloquial English the construction "how come" can be used instead of "why" to introduce a question. Similarly, "a piece of cake" is sometimes used to describe a task that is easily done.

**Image:** A concrete representation of an object or sensory experience. Typically, such a representation helps evoke the feelings associated with the object or experience itself. Images are either "literal" or "figurative." Literal images are especially concrete and involve little or no extension of the obvious meaning of the words used to express them. Figurative images do not follow the literal meaning of the words exactly. Images in literature are usually visual, but the term "image" can also refer to the representation of any sensory experience. In his poem "The Shepherd's Hour," Paul Verlaine presents the following image: "The Moon is red through horizon's fog;/ In a dancing mist the hazy meadow sleeps." The first line is broadly literal, while the second line involves turns of meaning associated with dancing and sleeping.

**Imagery:** The array of images in a literary work. Also, figurative language. William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming" offers a powerful image of encroaching anarchy: Turning and turning in the widening gyre The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart . . . .

**Imagism:** An English and American poetry movement that flourished between 1908 and 1917. The Imagists used precise, clearly presented images in their works. They also used common, everyday speech and aimed for conciseness, concrete imagery, and the creation of new rhythms. Participants in the Imagist movement included Ezra Pound, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Amy Lowell, among others.

**In medias res:** A Latin term meaning "in the middle of things." It refers to the technique of beginning a story at its midpoint and then using various flashback devices to reveal previous action. This technique originated in such epics as Virgil's *Aeneid.*

**Induction:** The process of reaching a conclusion by reasoning from specific premises to form a general premise. Also, an introductory portion of a work of literature, especially a play. Geoffrey Chaucer's "Prologue" to the *Canterbury Tales,* Thomas Sackville's "Induction" to *The Mirror of Magistrates,* and the

opening scene in William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* are examples of inductions to literary works.

**Intentional Fallacy:** The belief that judgments of a literary work based solely on an author's stated or implied intentions are false and misleading. Critics who believe in the concept of the intentional fallacy typically argue that the work itself is sufficient matter for interpretation, even though they may concede that an author's statement of purpose can be useful. Analysis of William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* based on the observations about poetry he makes in his "Preface" to the second edition of that work is an example of the intentional fallacy.

**Interior Monologue:** A narrative technique in which characters' thoughts are revealed in a way that appears to be uncontrolled by the author. The interior monologue typically aims to reveal the inner self of a character. It portrays emotional experiences as they occur at both a conscious and unconscious level. images are often used to represent sensations or emotions. One of the best-known interior monologues in English is the Molly Bloom section at the close of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The interior monologue is also common in the works of Virginia Woolf.

**Internal Rhyme:** Rhyme that occurs within a single line of verse. An example is in the opening line of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven": "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary." Here, "dreary" and "weary" make an internal rhyme.

**Irony:** In literary criticism, the effect of language in which the intended meaning is the opposite of what is stated. The title of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" is ironic because what Swift proposes in this essay is cannibalism—hardly "modest."

**Italian Sonnet:** See *Sonnet*

## J

**Jargon:** Language that is used or understood only by a select group of people. Jargon may refer to terminology used in a certain profession, such as computer jargon, or it may refer to any nonsensical language that is not understood by most people. Literary examples of jargon are Francois Villon's *Ballades en jargon,* which is composed in the secret language of the *coquillards,* and Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange,* narrated in the fictional characters' language of "Nadsat."

**Journalism:** Writing intended for publication in a newspaper or magazine, or for broadcast on a radio or television program featuring news, sports, entertainment, or other timely material.

**Juvenalian Satire:** See *Satire*

## K
**Kunstlerroman:** See *Bildungsroman*

## L
**Lais:** See *Lay*

**Lay:** A song or simple narrative poem. The form originated in medieval France. Early French *lais* were often based on the Celtic legends and other tales sung by Breton minstrels—thus the name of the "Breton lay." In fourteenth-century England, the term "lay" was used to describe short narratives written in imitation of the Breton lays. The most notable of these is Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Minstrel's Tale."

**Leitmotiv:** See *Motif*

**Literal Language:** An author uses literal language when he or she writes without exaggerating or embellishing the subject matter and without any tools of figurative language. To say "He ran very quickly down the street" is to use literal language, whereas to say "He ran like a hare down the street" would be using figurative language.

**Literary Ballad:** See *Ballad*

**Literature:** Literature is broadly defined as any written or spoken material, but the term most often refers to creative works. Literature includes poetry, drama, fiction, and many kinds of nonfiction writing, as well as oral, dramatic, and broadcast compositions not necessarily preserved in a written format, such as films and television programs.

**Lyric Poetry:** A poem expressing the subjective feelings and personal emotions of the poet. Such poetry is melodic, since it was originally accompanied by a lyre in recitals. Most Western poetry in the twentieth century may be classified as lyrical. Examples of lyric

poetry include A. E. Housman's elegy "To an Athlete Dying Young," the odes of Pindar and Horace, Thomas Gray and William Collins, the sonnets of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Sir Philip Sidney, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Rainer Maria Rilke, and a host of other forms in the poetry of William Blake and Christina Rossetti, among many others.

# M

**Magic Realism:** A form of literature that incorporates fantasy elements or supernatural occurrences into the narrative and accepts them as truth. Gabriel García Márquez and Laura Esquivel are two writers known for their works of magic realism.

**Mannerism:** Exaggerated, artificial adherence to a literary manner or style. Also, a popular style of the visual arts of late sixteenth-century Europe that was marked by elongation of the human form and by intentional spatial distortion. Literary works that are self-consciously high-toned and artistic are often said to be "mannered." Authors of such works include Henry James and Gertrude Stein.

**Masculine Rhyme:** See *Rhyme*

**Masque:** A lavish and elaborate form of entertainment, often performed in royal courts, that emphasizes song, dance, and costumery. The Renaissance form of the masque grew out of the spectacles of masked figures common in medieval England and Europe. The masque reached its peak of popularity and development in seventeenth-century England, during the reigns of James I and, especially, of Charles I. Ben Jonson, the most significant masque writer, also created the "antimasque," which incorporates elements of humor and the grotesque into the traditional masque and achieved greater dramatic quality. Masque-like interludes appear in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. One of the best-known English masques is John Milton's *Comus*.

**Measure:** The foot, verse, or time sequence used in a literary work, especially a poem. Measure is often used somewhat incorrectly as a synonym for meter.

**Medieval Mystics:** Mysticism flourished in many parts of Europe, including Germany, Italy, the Low Countries, and England, from the middle of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fifteenth. The greatest figures in Germany were Meister Eckhart, a Dominican friar of formidable intellectual gifts, and his pupils, also Dominicans, Johannes Tauler and Henry Suso. In the Low Countries, John Ruusbroec developed a Trinitarian mysticism that owed much to Eckhart, despite his apparent disagreement with the earlier teacher. In Italy, the Franciscan scholar Bonaventure, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Catherine of Genoa upheld the mystical flame, and there was also a mystical outpouring in England, associated with the names Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Many of the continental mystics were members of the Friends of God, a movement that worked for the spiritual revival of people at a time when the worldliness of the Church, the ravages of the Black Death, and the cracks in the traditional social order created a desire in many to develop a deeper spirituality. Although some of the mystics were hermits, like Rolle, others combined their mysticism with practical concerns such as preaching, administrative duties, and caring for the poor and the sick.

**Melodrama:** A play in which the typical plot is a conflict between characters who personify extreme good and evil. Melodramas usually end happily and emphasize sensationalism. Other literary forms that use the same techniques are often labeled "melodramatic." The term was formerly used to describe a combination of drama and music; as such, it was synonymous with "opera." Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* and Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon, The Colleen Bawn,* and *The Poor of New York* are examples of melodramas. The most popular media for twentieth-century melodramas are motion pictures and television.

**Metaphor:** A figure of speech that expresses an idea through the image of another object. Metaphors suggest the essence of the first object by identifying it with certain qualities of the second object. An example is "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?/ It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Here, Juliet,

the first object, is identified with qualities of the second object, the sun.

**Metaphysical Conceit:** See *Conceit*

**Meter:** In literary criticism, the repetition of sound patterns that creates a rhythm in poetry. The patterns are based on the number of syllables and the presence and absence of accents. The unit of rhythm in a line is called a foot. Types of meter are classified according to the number of feet in a line. These are the standard English lines: Monometer, one foot; Dimeter, two feet; Trimeter, three feet; Tetrameter, four feet; Pentameter, five feet; Hexameter, six feet (also called the Alexandrine); Heptameter, seven feet (also called the "Fourteener" when the feet are iambic). The most common English meter is the iambic pentameter, in which each line contains ten syllables, or five iambic feet, which individually are composed of an unstressed syllable followed by an accented syllable. Both of the following lines from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" are written in iambic pentameter: Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

**Mise en scene:** The costumes, scenery, and other properties of a drama. Herbert Beerbohm Tree was renowned for the elaborate *mises en scene* of his lavish Shakespearean productions at His Majesty's Theatre between 1897 and 1915.

**Modernism:** Modern literary practices. Also, the principles of a literary school that lasted from roughly the beginning of the twentieth century until the end of World War II. Modernism is defined by its rejection of the literary conventions of the nineteenth century and by its opposition to conventional morality, taste, traditions, and economic values. Many writers are associated with the concepts of Modernism, including Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, D. H. Lawrence, W. H. Auden, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, William Butler Yeats, Thomas Mann, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and James Joyce.

**Monologue:** A composition, written or oral, by a single individual. More specifically, a speech given by a single individual in a drama or other public entertainment. It has no set length, although it is usually several or more lines long. An example of an "extended monologue"—that is, a monologue of great length and seriousness—occurs in the one-act, one-character play *The Stronger* by August Strindberg.

**Monometer:** See *Meter*

**Mood:** The prevailing emotions of a work or of the author in his or her creation of the work. The mood of a work is not always what might be expected based on its subject matter. The poem "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold offers examples of two different moods originating from the same experience: watching the ocean at night. The mood of the first three lines—The sea is calm tonight The tide is full, the moon lies fair Upon the straights . . . . is in sharp contrast to the mood of the last three lines—And we are here as on a darkling plain Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, Where ignorant armies clash by night.

**Motif:** A theme, character type, image, metaphor, or other verbal element that recurs throughout a single work of literature or occurs in a number of different works over a period of time. For example, the various manifestations of the color white in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is a "specific" *motif,* while the trials of star-crossed lovers is a "conventional" *motif* from the literature of all periods. Also known as *Motiv* or *Leitmotiv.*

**Motiv:** See *Motif*

**Muses:** Nine Greek mythological goddesses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory). Each muse patronized a specific area of the liberal arts and sciences. Calliope presided over epic poetry, Clio over history, Erato over love poetry, Euterpe over music or lyric poetry, Melpomene over tragedy, Polyhymnia over hymns to the gods, Terpsichore over dance, Thalia over comedy, and Urania over astronomy. Poets and writers traditionally made appeals to the Muses for inspiration in their work. John Milton invokes the aid of a muse at the beginning of the first book of his *Paradise Lost*: "Of Man's First disobedience, and the Fruit of the Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste Brought Death into the World, and all our woe, With loss of Eden, till one greater Man Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat, Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed, In the

Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth Rose out of Chaos . . . ."

**Mystery:** See *Suspense*

**Myth:** An anonymous tale emerging from the traditional beliefs of a culture or social unit. Myths use supernatural explanations for natural phenomena. They may also explain cosmic issues like creation and death. Collections of myths, known as mythologies, are common to all cultures and nations, but the best-known myths belong to the Norse, Roman, and Greek mythologies. A famous myth is the story of Arachne, an arrogant young girl who challenged a goddess, Athena, to a weaving contest; when the girl won, Athena was enraged and turned Arachne into a spider, thus explaining the existence of spiders.

## N

**Narration:** The telling of a series of events, real or invented. A narration may be either a simple narrative, in which the events are recounted chronologically, or a narrative with a plot, in which the account is given in a style reflecting the author's artistic concept of the story. Narration is sometimes used as a synonym for "storyline." The recounting of scary stories around a campfire is a form of narration.

**Narrative:** A verse or prose accounting of an event or sequence of events, real or invented. The term is also used as an adjective in the sense "method of narration." For example, in literary criticism, the expression "narrative technique" usually refers to the way the author structures and presents his or her story. Narratives range from the shortest accounts of events, as in Julius Caesar's remark, "I came, I saw, I conquered," to the longest historical or biographical works, as in Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* as well as diaries, travelogues, novels, ballads, epics, short stories, and other fictional forms.

**Narrative Poetry:** A nondramatic poem in which the author tells a story. Such poems may be of any length or level of complexity. Epics such as *Beowulf* and ballads are forms of narrative poetry.

**Narrator:** The teller of a story. The narrator may be the author or a character in the story through whom the author speaks. Huckleberry Finn is the narrator of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

**Naturalism:** A literary movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The movement's major theorist, French novelist Emile Zola, envisioned a type of fiction that would examine human life with the objectivity of scientific inquiry. The Naturalists typically viewed human beings as either the products of "biological determinism," ruled by hereditary instincts and engaged in an endless struggle for survival, or as the products of "socioeconomic determinism," ruled by social and economic forces beyond their control. In their works, the Naturalists generally ignored the highest levels of society and focused on degradation: poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, insanity, and disease. Naturalism influenced authors throughout the world, including Henrik Ibsen and Thomas Hardy. In the United States, in particular, Naturalism had a profound impact. Among the authors who embraced its principles are Theodore Dreiser, Eugene O'Neill, Stephen Crane, Jack London, and Frank Norris.

**Negro Renaissance:** See *Harlem Renaissance*

**Neoclassical Period:** See *Neoclassicism*

**Neoclassicism:** In literary criticism, this term refers to the revival of the attitudes and styles of expression of classical literature. It is generally used to describe a period in European history beginning in the late seventeenth century and lasting until about 1800. In its purest form, Neoclassicism marked a return to order, proportion, restraint, logic, accuracy, and decorum. In England, where Neoclassicism perhaps was most popular, it reflected the influence of seventeenth-century French writers, especially dramatists. Neoclassical writers typically reacted against the intensity and enthusiasm of the Renaissance period. They wrote works that appealed to the intellect, using elevated language and classical literary forms such as satire and the ode. Neoclassical works were often governed by the classical goal of instruction. English neoclassicists included Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, Sir Richard Steele, John Gay, and Matthew Prior; French neoclassicists included Pierre Corneille and Jean-Baptiste Moliere. Also known as Age of Reason.

**Neoclassicists:** See *Neoclassicism*

**New Negro Movement:** See *Harlem Renaissance*

**Noble Savage:** The idea that primitive man is noble and good but becomes evil and corrupted as he becomes civilized. The concept of the noble savage originated in the Renaissance period but is more closely identified with such later writers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Aphra Behn. First described in John Dryden's play *The Conquest of Granada,* the noble savage is portrayed by the various Native Americans in James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales," by Queequeg, Daggoo, and Tashtego in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick,* and by John the Savage in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World.*

**Novel:** A long fictional narrative written in prose, which developed from the novella and other early forms of narrative. A novel is usually organized under a plot or theme with a focus on character development and action.

**Novella:** An Italian term meaning "story." This term has been especially used to describe fourteenth-century Italian tales, but it also refers to modern short novels.

**Novel of Ideas:** A novel in which the examination of intellectual issues and concepts takes precedence over characterization or a traditional storyline.

**Novel of Manners:** A novel that examines the customs and mores of a cultural group.

# O

**Objective Correlative:** An outward set of objects, a situation, or a chain of events corresponding to an inward experience and evoking this experience in the reader. The term frequently appears in modern criticism in discussions of authors' intended effects on the emotional responses of readers. This term was originally used by T. S. Eliot in his 1919 essay "Hamlet."

**Objectivity:** A quality in writing characterized by the absence of the author's opinion or feeling about the subject matter. Objectivity is an important factor in criticism. The novels of Henry James and, to a certain extent, the poems of John Larkin demonstrate objectivity, and it is central to John Keats's concept of "negative capability." Critical and journalistic writing usually are or attempt to be objective.

**Occasional Verse:** poetry written on the occasion of a significant historical or personal event. *Vers de societe* is sometimes called occasional verse although it is of a less serious nature. Famous examples of occasional verse include Andrew Marvell's "Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from England," Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"—written upon the death of Abraham Lincoln—and Edmund Spenser's commemoration of his wedding, "Epithalamion."

**Octave:** A poem or stanza composed of eight lines. The term octave most often represents the first eight lines of a Petrarchan sonnet. An example of an octave is taken from a translation of a Petrarchan sonnet by Sir Thomas Wyatt: The pillar perisht is whereto I leant, The strongest stay of mine unquiet mind; The like of it no man again can find, From East to West Still seeking though he went. To mind unhap! for hap away hath rent Of all my joy the very bark and rind; And I, alas, by chance am thus assigned Daily to mourn till death do it relent.

**Ode:** Name given to an extended lyric poem characterized by exalted emotion and dignified style. An ode usually concerns a single, serious theme. Most odes, but not all, are addressed to an object or individual. Odes are distinguished from other lyric poetic forms by their complex rhythmic and stanzaic patterns. An example of this form is John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale."

**Oedipus Complex:** A son's amorous obsession with his mother. The phrase is derived from the story of the ancient Theban hero Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. Literary occurrences of the Oedipus complex include Andre Gide's *Oedipe* and Jean Cocteau's *La Machine infernale,* as well as the most famous, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.*

**Omniscience:** See *Point of View*

**Onomatopoeia:** The use of words whose sounds express or suggest their meaning. In its simplest sense, onomatopoeia may be represented by words that mimic the sounds they denote such as "hiss" or "meow." At a more subtle level, the pattern and rhythm of

sounds and rhymes of a line or poem may be onomatopoeic. A celebrated example of onomatopoeia is the repetition of the word "bells" in Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Bells."

**Opera:** A type of stage performance, usually a drama, in which the dialogue is sung. Classic examples of opera include Giuseppi Verdi's *La traviata,* Giacomo Puccini's *La Boheme,* and Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde.* Major twentieth-century contributors to the form include Richard Strauss and Alban Berg.

**Operetta:** A usually romantic comic opera. John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera,* Richard Sheridan's *The Duenna,* and numerous works by William Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan are examples of operettas.

**Oral Tradition:** See *Oral Transmission*

**Oral Transmission:** A process by which songs, ballads, folklore, and other material are transmitted by word of mouth. The tradition of oral transmission predates the written record systems of literate society. Oral transmission preserves material sometimes over generations, although often with variations. Memory plays a large part in the recitation and preservation of orally transmitted material. Breton lays, French *fabliaux,* national epics (including the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf,* the Spanish *El Cid,* and the Finnish *Kalevala*), Native American myths and legends, and African folktales told by plantation slaves are examples of orally transmitted literature.

**Oration:** Formal speaking intended to motivate the listeners to some action or feeling. Such public speaking was much more common before the development of timely printed communication such as newspapers. Famous examples of oration include Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

**Ottava Rima:** An eight-line stanza of poetry composed in iambic pentameter (a five-foot line in which each foot consists of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable), following the abababcc rhyme scheme. This form has been prominently used by such important English writers as Lord Byron, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and W. B. Yeats.

**Oxymoron:** A phrase combining two contradictory terms. Oxymorons may be intentional or unintentional. The following speech from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* uses several oxymorons: Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate! O anything, of nothing first create! O heavy lightness! serious vanity! Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms! Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health! This love feel I, that feel no love in this.

## P

**Pantheism:** The idea that all things are both a manifestation or revelation of God and a part of God at the same time. Pantheism was a common attitude in the early societies of Egypt, India, and Greece—the term derives from the Greek *pan* meaning "all" and *theos* meaning "deity." It later became a significant part of the Christian faith. William Wordsworth and Ralph Waldo Emerson are among the many writers who have expressed the pantheistic attitude in their works.

**Parable:** A story intended to teach a moral lesson or answer an ethical question. In the West, the best examples of parables are those of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, notably "The Prodigal Son," but parables also are used in Sufism, rabbinic literature, Hasidism, and Zen Buddhism.

**Paradox:** A statement that appears illogical or contradictory at first, but may actually point to an underlying truth. "Less is more" is an example of a paradox. Literary examples include Francis Bacon's statement, "The most corrected copies are commonly the least correct," and "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

**Parallelism:** A method of comparison of two ideas in which each is developed in the same grammatical structure. Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Civilization" contains this example of parallelism: Raphael paints wisdom; Handel sings it, Phidias carves it, Shakespeare writes it, Wren builds it, Columbus sails it, Luther preaches it, Washington arms it, Watt mechanizes it.

**Parody:** In literary criticism, this term refers to an imitation of a serious literary work or the

signature style of a particular author in a ridiculous manner. A typical parody adopts the style of the original and applies it to an inappropriate subject for humorous effect. Parody is a form of satire and could be considered the literary equivalent of a caricature or cartoon. Henry Fielding's *Shamela* is a parody of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*.

**Pastoral:** A term derived from the Latin word "pastor," meaning shepherd. A pastoral is a literary composition on a rural theme. The conventions of the pastoral were originated by the third-century Greek poet Theocritus, who wrote about the experiences, love affairs, and pastimes of Sicilian shepherds. In a pastoral, characters and language of a courtly nature are often placed in a simple setting. The term pastoral is also used to classify dramas, elegies, and lyrics that exhibit the use of country settings and shepherd characters. Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Adonais" and John Milton's "Lycidas" are two famous examples of pastorals.

**Pastorela:** The Spanish name for the shepherds play, a folk drama reenacted during the Christmas season. Examples of *pastorelas* include Gomez Manrique's *Representacion del nacimiento* and the dramas of Lucas Fernandez and Juan del Encina.

**Pathetic Fallacy:** A term coined by English critic John Ruskin to identify writing that falsely endows nonhuman things with human intentions and feelings, such as "angry clouds" and "sad trees." The pathetic fallacy is a required convention in the classical poetic form of the pastoral elegy, and it is used in the modern poetry of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and the Imagists. Also known as Poetic Fallacy.

**Pelado:** Literally the "skinned one" or shirtless one, he was the stock underdog, sharp-witted picaresque character of Mexican vaudeville and tent shows. The *pelado* is found in such works as Don Catarino's *Los effectos de la crisis* and *Regreso a mi tierra*.

**Pen Name:** See *Pseudonym*

**Pentameter:** See *Meter*

**Persona:** A Latin term meaning "mask." *Personae* are the characters in a fictional work of literature. The *persona* generally functions as a mask through which the author tells a story in a voice other than his or her own. A *persona* is usually either a character in a story who acts as a narrator or an "implied author," a voice created by the author to act as the narrator for himself or herself. *Personae* include the narrator of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Marlow in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

**Personae:** See *Persona*

**Personal Point of View:** See *Point of View*

**Personification:** A figure of speech that gives human qualities to abstract ideas, animals, and inanimate objects. William Shakespeare used personification in *Romeo and Juliet* in the lines "Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,/ Who is already sick and pale with grief." Here, the moon is portrayed as being envious, sick, and pale with grief—all markedly human qualities. Also known as *Prosopopoeia*.

**Petrarchan Sonnet:** See *Sonnet*

**Picaresque Novel:** Episodic fiction depicting the adventures of a roguish central character ("picaro" is Spanish for "rogue"). The picaresque hero is commonly a low-born but clever individual who wanders into and out of various affairs of love, danger, and farcical intrigue. These involvements may take place at all social levels and typically present a humorous and wide-ranging satire of a given society. Prominent examples of the picaresque novel are *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding, and *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe.

**Plagiarism:** Claiming another person's written material as one's own. Plagiarism can take the form of direct, word-for-word copying or the theft of the substance or idea of the work. A student who copies an encyclopedia entry and turns it in as a report for school is guilty of plagiarism.

**Platonic Criticism:** A form of criticism that stresses an artistic work's usefulness as an agent of social engineering rather than any quality or value of the work itself. Platonic criticism takes as its starting point the ancient Greek philosopher Plato's comments on art in his *Republic*.

**Play:** See *Drama*

**Plot:** In literary criticism, this term refers to the pattern of events in a narrative or drama. In its simplest sense, the plot guides the author

in composing the work and helps the reader follow the work. Typically, plots exhibit causality and unity and have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Sometimes, however, a plot may consist of a series of disconnected events, in which case it is known as an "episodic plot." In his *Aspects of the Novel,* E. M. Forster distinguishes between a story, defined as a "narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence," and plot, which organizes the events to a "sense of causality." This definition closely mirrors Aristotle's discussion of plot in his *Poetics*.

**Poem:** In its broadest sense, a composition utilizing rhyme, meter, concrete detail, and expressive language to create a literary experience with emotional and aesthetic appeal. Typical poems include sonnets, odes, elegies, *haiku,* ballads, and free verse.

**Poet:** An author who writes poetry or verse. The term is also used to refer to an artist or writer who has an exceptional gift for expression, imagination, and energy in the making of art in any form. Well-known poets include Horace, Basho, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Edmund Spenser, John Donne, Andrew Marvell, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, George Gordon, Lord Byron, John Keats, Christina Rossetti, W. H. Auden, Stevie Smith, and Sylvia Plath.

**Poetic Fallacy:** See *Pathetic Fallacy*

**Poetic Justice:** An outcome in a literary work, not necessarily a poem, in which the good are rewarded and the evil are punished, especially in ways that particularly fit their virtues or crimes. For example, a murderer may himself be murdered, or a thief will find himself penniless.

**Poetic License:** Distortions of fact and literary convention made by a writer—not always a poet—for the sake of the effect gained. Poetic license is closely related to the concept of "artistic freedom." An author exercises poetic license by saying that a pile of money "reaches as high as a mountain" when the pile is actually only a foot or two high.

**Poetics:** This term has two closely related meanings. It denotes (1) an aesthetic theory in literary criticism about the essence of poetry or (2) rules prescribing the proper methods, content, style, or diction of poetry. The term

poetics may also refer to theories about literature in general, not just poetry.

**Poetry:** In its broadest sense, writing that aims to present ideas and evoke an emotional experience in the reader through the use of meter, imagery, connotative and concrete words, and a carefully constructed structure based on rhythmic patterns. Poetry typically relies on words and expressions that have several layers of meaning. It also makes use of the effects of regular rhythm on the ear and may make a strong appeal to the senses through the use of imagery. Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* are famous examples of poetry.

**Point of View:** The narrative perspective from which a literary work is presented to the reader. There are four traditional points of view. The "third person omniscient" gives the reader a "godlike" perspective, unrestricted by time or place, from which to see actions and look into the minds of characters. This allows the author to comment openly on characters and events in the work. The "third person" point of view presents the events of the story from outside of any single character's perception, much like the omniscient point of view, but the reader must understand the action as it takes place and without any special insight into characters' minds or motivations. The "first person" or "personal" point of view relates events as they are perceived by a single character. The main character "tells" the story and may offer opinions about the action and characters which differ from those of the author. Much less common than omniscient, third person, and first person is the "second person" point of view, wherein the author tells the story as if it is happening to the reader. James Thurber employs the omniscient point of view in his short story "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is a short story told from the third person point of view. Mark Twain's novel *Huck Finn* is presented from the first person viewpoint. Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* is an example of a novel which uses the second person point of view.

**Polemic:** A work in which the author takes a stand on a controversial subject, such as abortion or religion. Such works are often

extremely argumentative or provocative. Classic examples of polemics include John Milton's *Aeropagitica* and Thomas Paine's *The American Crisis.*

**Pornography:** Writing intended to provoke feelings of lust in the reader. Such works are often condemned by critics and teachers, but those which can be shown to have literary value are viewed less harshly. Literary works that have been described as pornographic include Ovid's *The Art of Love,* Margaret of Angouleme's *Heptameron,* John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure; or, the Life of Fanny Hill,* the anonymous *My Secret Life,* D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita.*

**Postcolonialism:** The term "Postcolonialism" refers broadly to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture, and human identity itself are represented in the modern era, after many colonized countries gained their independence. However, some critics use the term to refer to *all* culture and cultural products influenced by imperialism from the moment of colonization until today. Postcolonial literature seeks to describe the interactions between European nations and the peoples they colonized. By the middle of the twentieth century, the vast majority of the world was under the control of European countries. At one time, Great Britain, for example, ruled almost 50 percent of the world. During the twentieth century, countries such as India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Canada, and Australia won independence from their European colonizers. Examples of Postcolonial writings include Edward Said's *Orientalism,* Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient,* Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth,* Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place,* Isabelle Allende's *The House of the Spirits,* J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace,* Derek Walcott's *Omeros,* and Eavan Boland's *Outside History: Selected Poems, 1980–1990.*

**Postmodernism:** Writing from the 1960s forward characterized by experimentation and continuing to apply some of the fundamentals of modernism, which included existentialism and alienation. Postmodernists have gone a step further in the rejection of tradition begun with the modernists by also rejecting traditional forms, preferring the anti-novel over the novel and the anti-hero over the hero. Postmodern writers include Alain Robbe-Grillet, Thomas Pynchon, Margaret Drabble, John Fowles, Adolfo Bioy-Casares, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

**Primitivism:** The belief that primitive peoples were nobler and less flawed than civilized peoples because they had not been subjected to the tainting influence of society. Examples of literature espousing primitivism include Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko: Or, The History of the Royal Slave,* Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Heloise,* Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village,* the poems of Robert Burns, Herman Melville's stories *Typee, Omoo,* and *Mardi,* many poems of William Butler Yeats and Robert Frost, and William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies.*

**Projective Verse:** A form of free verse in which the poet's breathing pattern determines the lines of the poem. Poets who advocate projective verse are against all formal structures in writing, including meter and form. Besides its creators, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Charles Olson, two other well-known projective verse poets are Denise Levertov and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka). Also known as Breath Verse.

**Prologue:** An introductory section of a literary work. It often contains information establishing the situation of the characters or presents information about the setting, time period, or action. In drama, the prologue is spoken by a chorus or by one of the principal characters. In the "General Prologue" of *The Canterbury Tales,* Geoffrey Chaucer describes the main characters and establishes the setting and purpose of the work.

**Prose:** A literary medium that attempts to mirror the language of everyday speech. It is distinguished from poetry by its use of unmetered, unrhymed language consisting of logically related sentences. Prose is usually grouped into paragraphs that form a cohesive whole such as an essay or a novel. Recognized masters of English prose writing include Sir Thomas Malory, William Caxton, Raphael Holinshed, Joseph Addison, Mark Twain, and Ernest Hemingway.

**Prosopopoeia:** See *Personification*

**Protagonist:** The central character of a story who serves as a focus for its themes and incidents and as the principal rationale for its development. The protagonist is sometimes referred to in discussions of modern literature as the hero or anti-hero. Well-known protagonists are Hamlet in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

**Protest Fiction:** Protest fiction has as its primary purpose the protesting of some social injustice, such as racism or discrimination. One example of protest fiction is a series of five novels by Chester Himes, beginning in 1945 with *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and ending in 1955 with *The Primitive*. These works depict the destructive effects of race and gender stereotyping in the context of interracial relationships. Another African American author whose works often revolve around themes of social protest is John Oliver Killens. James Baldwin's essay "Everybody's Protest Novel" generated controversy by attacking the authors of protest fiction.

**Proverb:** A brief, sage saying that expresses a truth about life in a striking manner. "They are not all cooks who carry long knives" is an example of a proverb.

**Pseudonym:** A name assumed by a writer, most often intended to prevent his or her identification as the author of a work. Two or more authors may work together under one pseudonym, or an author may use a different name for each genre he or she publishes in. Some publishing companies maintain "house pseudonyms," under which any number of authors may write installments in a series. Some authors also choose a pseudonym over their real names the way an actor may use a stage name. Examples of pseudonyms (with the author's real name in parentheses) include Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet), Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), Currer Bell (Charlotte Bronte), Ellis Bell (Emily Bronte), George Eliot (Maryann Evans), Honorio Bustos Donmecq (Adolfo Bioy-Casares and Jorge Luis Borges), and Richard Bachman (Stephen King).

**Pun:** A play on words that have similar sounds but different meanings. A serious example of the pun is from John Donne's "A Hymne to God the Father": Sweare by thyself, that at my death thy sonne Shall shine as he shines now, and hereto fore; And, having done that, Thou haste done; I fear no more.

**Pure Poetry:** poetry written without instructional intent or moral purpose that aims only to please a reader by its imagery or musical flow. The term pure poetry is used as the antonym of the term "didacticism." The poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, Stephane Mallarme, Paul Verlaine, Paul Valery, Juan Ramoz Jimenez, and Jorge Guillen offer examples of pure poetry.

## Q

**Quatrain:** A four-line stanza of a poem or an entire poem consisting of four lines. The following quatrain is from Robert Herrick's "To Live Merrily, and to Trust to Good Verses": Round, round, the root do's run; And being ravisht thus, Come, I will drink a Tun To my *Propertius*.

## R

**Raisonneur:** A character in a drama who functions as a spokesperson for the dramatist's views. The *raisonneur* typically observes the play without becoming central to its action. *Raisonneurs* were very common in plays of the nineteenth century.

**Realism:** A nineteenth-century European literary movement that sought to portray familiar characters, situations, and settings in a realistic manner. This was done primarily by using an objective narrative point of view and through the buildup of accurate detail. The standard for success of any realistic work depends on how faithfully it transfers common experience into fictional forms. The realistic method may be altered or extended, as in stream of consciousness writing, to record highly subjective experience. Seminal authors in the tradition of Realism include Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, and Henry James.

**Refrain:** A phrase repeated at intervals throughout a poem. A refrain may appear at the end of each stanza or at less regular intervals. It may be altered slightly at each appearance. Some refrains are nonsense expressions—as with "Nevermore" in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"—that seem to take on a different significance with each use.

**Renaissance:** The period in European history that marked the end of the Middle Ages. It began in Italy in the late fourteenth century. In broad terms, it is usually seen as spanning the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, although it did not reach Great Britain, for example, until the 1480s or so. The Renaissance saw an awakening in almost every sphere of human activity, especially science, philosophy, and the arts. The period is best defined by the emergence of a general philosophy that emphasized the importance of the intellect, the individual, and world affairs. It contrasts strongly with the medieval worldview, characterized by the dominant concerns of faith, the social collective, and spiritual salvation. Prominent writers during the Renaissance include Niccolo Machiavelli and Baldassare Castiglione in Italy, Miguel de Cervantes and Lope de Vega in Spain, Jean Froissart and Francois Rabelais in France, Sir Thomas More and Sir Philip Sidney in England, and Desiderius Erasmus in Holland.

**Renaissance Literature:** See *Renaissance*

**Repartee:** Conversation featuring snappy retorts and witticisms. Masters of *repartee* include Sydney Smith, Charles Lamb, and Oscar Wilde. An example is recorded in the meeting of "Beau" Nash and John Wesley: Nash said, "I never make way for a fool," to which Wesley responded, "Don't you? I always do," and stepped aside.

**Resolution:** The portion of a story following the climax, in which the conflict is resolved. The resolution of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is neatly summed up in the following sentence: "Henry and Catherine were married, the bells rang and every body smiled."

**Revista:** The Spanish term for a vaudeville musical revue. Examples of *revistas* include Antonio Guzman Aguilera's *Mexico para los mexicanos,* Daniel Vanegas's *Maldito jazz,* and Don Catarino's *Whiskey, morfina y marihuana* and *El desterrado.*

**Rhetoric:** In literary criticism, this term denotes the art of ethical persuasion. In its strictest sense, rhetoric adheres to various principles developed since classical times for arranging facts and ideas in a clear, persuasive, appealing manner. The term is also used to refer to effective prose in general and theories of or methods for composing effective prose.

Classical examples of rhetorics include *The Rhetoric of Aristotle,* Quintillian's *Institutio Oratoria,* and Cicero's *Ad Herennium.*

**Rhetorical Question:** A question intended to provoke thought, but not an expressed answer, in the reader. It is most commonly used in oratory and other persuasive genres. The following lines from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" ask rhetorical questions: Can storied urn or animated bust Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath? Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust, Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

**Rhyme:** When used as a noun in literary criticism, this term generally refers to a poem in which words sound identical or very similar and appear in parallel positions in two or more lines. Rhymes are classified into different types according to where they fall in a line or stanza or according to the degree of similarity they exhibit in their spellings and sounds. Some major types of rhyme are "masculine" rhyme, "feminine" rhyme, and "triple" rhyme. In a masculine rhyme, the rhyming sound falls in a single accented syllable, as with "heat" and "eat." Feminine rhyme is a rhyme of two syllables, one stressed and one unstressed, as with "merry" and "tarry." Triple rhyme matches the sound of the accented syllable and the two unaccented syllables that follow: "narrative" and "declarative." Robert Browning alternates feminine and masculine rhymes in his "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister": Gr-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorrence! Water your damned flower-pots, do! If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence, God's blood, would not mine kill you! What? Your myrtle-bush wants trimming? Oh, that rose has prior claims—Needs its leaden vase filled brimming? Hell dry you up with flames! Triple rhymes can be found in Thomas Hood's "Bridge of Sighs," George Gordon Byron's satirical verse, and Ogden Nash's comic poems.

**Rhyme Royal:** A stanza of seven lines composed in iambic pentameter and rhymed *ababbcc.* The name is said to be a tribute to King James I of Scotland, who made much use of the form in his poetry. Examples of rhyme royal include Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Parlement of Foules,* William Shakespeare's *The*

*Rape of Lucrece,* William Morris's *The Early Paradise,* and John Masefield's *The Widow in the Bye Street.*

**Rhyme Scheme:** See *Rhyme*

**Rhythm:** A regular pattern of sound, time intervals, or events occurring in writing, most often and most discernably in poetry. Regular, reliable rhythm is known to be soothing to humans, while interrupted, unpredictable, or rapidly changing rhythm is disturbing. These effects are known to authors, who use them to produce a desired reaction in the reader. An example of a form of irregular rhythm is sprung rhythm poetry; quantitative verse, on the other hand, is very regular in its rhythm.

**Rising Action:** The part of a drama where the plot becomes increasingly complicated. Rising action leads up to the climax, or turning point, of a drama. The final "chase scene" of an action film is generally the rising action which culminates in the film's climax.

**Rococo:** A style of European architecture that flourished in the eighteenth century, especially in France. The most notable features of *rococo* are its extensive use of ornamentation and its themes of lightness, gaiety, and intimacy. In literary criticism, the term is often used disparagingly to refer to a decadent or over-ornamental style. Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" is an example of literary *rococo*.

**Roman à clef:** A French phrase meaning "novel with a key." It refers to a narrative in which real persons are portrayed under fictitious names. Jack Kerouac, for example, portrayed various real-life beat generation figures under fictitious names in his *On the Road*.

**Romance:** A broad term, usually denoting a narrative with exotic, exaggerated, often idealized characters, scenes, and themes. Nathaniel Hawthorne called his *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Marble Faun* romances in order to distinguish them from clearly realistic works.

**Romantic Age:** See *Romanticism*

**Romanticism:** This term has two widely accepted meanings. In historical criticism, it refers to a European intellectual and artistic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that sought greater freedom of personal expression than that allowed by the strict rules of literary form and logic of the eighteenth-century neoclassicists. The Romantics preferred emotional and imaginative expression to rational analysis. They considered the individual to be at the center of all experience and so placed him or her at the center of their art. The Romantics believed that the creative imagination reveals nobler truths—unique feelings and attitudes—than those that could be discovered by logic or by scientific examination. Both the natural world and the state of childhood were important sources for revelations of "eternal truths." "Romanticism" is also used as a general term to refer to a type of sensibility found in all periods of literary history and usually considered to be in opposition to the principles of classicism. In this sense, Romanticism signifies any work or philosophy in which the exotic or dreamlike figure strongly, or that is devoted to individualistic expression, self-analysis, or a pursuit of a higher realm of knowledge than can be discovered by human reason. Prominent Romantics include Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

**Romantics:** See *Romanticism*

## S

**Satire:** A work that uses ridicule, humor, and wit to criticize and provoke change in human nature and institutions. There are two major types of satire: "formal" or "direct" satire speaks directly to the reader or to a character in the work; "indirect" satire relies upon the ridiculous behavior of its characters to make its point. Formal satire is further divided into two manners: the "Horatian," which ridicules gently, and the "Juvenalian," which derides its subjects harshly and bitterly. Voltaire's novella *Candide* is an indirect satire. Jonathan Swift's essay "A Modest Proposal" is a Juvenalian satire.

**Scansion:** The analysis or "scanning" of a poem to determine its meter and often its rhyme scheme. The most common system of scansion uses accents (slanted lines drawn above syllables) to show stressed syllables, breves (curved lines drawn above syllables) to show unstressed syllables, and vertical lines to

separate each foot. In the first line of John Keats's *Endymion,* "A thing of beauty is a joy forever:" the word "thing," the first syllable of "beauty," the word "joy," and the second syllable of "forever" are stressed, while the words "A" and "of," the second syllable of "beauty," the word "a," and the first and third syllables of "forever" are unstressed. In the second line: "Its loveliness increases; it will never" a pair of vertical lines separate the foot ending with "increases" and the one beginning with "it."

**Scene:** A subdivision of an act of a drama, consisting of continuous action taking place at a single time and in a single location. The beginnings and endings of scenes may be indicated by clearing the stage of actors and props or by the entrances and exits of important characters. The first act of William Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* is comprised of two scenes.

**Science Fiction:** A type of narrative about or based upon real or imagined scientific theories and technology. Science fiction is often peopled with alien creatures and set on other planets or in different dimensions. Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* is a major work of science fiction.

**Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature:** See *Science Fiction* and *Fantasy*

**Second Person:** See *Point of View*

**Semiotics:** The study of how literary forms and conventions affect the meaning of language. Semioticians include Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Pierce, Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva.

**Sestet:** Any six-line poem or stanza. Examples of the sestet include the last six lines of the Petrarchan sonnet form, the stanza form of Robert Burns's "A Poet's Welcome to his love-begotten Daughter," and the sestina form in W. H. Auden's "Paysage Moralise."

**Setting:** The time, place, and culture in which the action of a narrative takes place. The elements of setting may include geographic location, characters' physical and mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action takes place. Examples of settings include the romanticized Scotland in Sir Walter Scott's "Waverley" novels, the French provincial setting in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary,* the fictional Wessex country of Thomas Hardy's novels, and the small towns of southern Ontario in Alice Munro's short stories.

**Shakespearean Sonnet:** See *Sonnet*

**Short Story:** A fictional prose narrative shorter and more focused than a novella. The short story usually deals with a single episode and often a single character. The "tone," the author's attitude toward his or her subject and audience, is uniform throughout. The short story frequently also lacks *denouement*, ending instead at its climax.

**Signifying Monkey:** A popular trickster figure in black folklore, with hundreds of tales about this character documented since the 19th century. Henry Louis Gates Jr. examines the history of the signifying monkey in *The Signifying Monkey: Towards a Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism,* published in 1988.

**Simile:** A comparison, usually using "like" or "as", of two essentially dissimilar things, as in "coffee as cold as ice" or "He sounded like a broken record." The title of Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" contains a simile.

**Slang:** A type of informal verbal communication that is generally unacceptable for formal writing. Slang words and phrases are often colorful exaggerations used to emphasize the speaker's point; they may also be shortened versions of an often-used word or phrase. Examples of American slang from the 1990s include "yuppie" (an acronym for Young Urban Professional), "awesome" (for "excellent"), wired (for "nervous" or "excited"), and "chill out" (for relax).

**Slant Rhyme:** See *Consonance*

**Soliloquy:** A monologue in a drama used to give the audience information and to develop the speaker's character. It is typically a projection of the speaker's innermost thoughts. Usually delivered while the speaker is alone on stage, a soliloquy is intended to present an illusion of unspoken reflection. A celebrated soliloquy is Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

**Sonnet:** A fourteen-line poem, usually composed in iambic pentameter, employing one of several rhyme schemes. There are three major types of sonnets, upon which all other variations of the form are based: the "Petrarchan" or "Italian" sonnet, the "Shakespearean" or "English" sonnet, and the "Spenserian" sonnet. A Petrarchan sonnet consists of an octave rhymed *abbaabba* and a "sestet" rhymed either *cdecde, cdccdc,* or *cdedce.* The octave poses a question or problem, relates a narrative, or puts forth a proposition; the sestet presents a solution to the problem, comments upon the narrative, or applies the proposition put forth in the octave. The Shakespearean sonnet is divided into three quatrains and a couplet rhymed *abab cdcd efef gg.* The couplet provides an epigrammatic comment on the narrative or problem put forth in the quatrains. The Spenserian sonnet uses three quatrains and a couplet like the Shakespearean, but links their three rhyme schemes in this way: *abab bcbc cdcd ee.* The Spenserian sonnet develops its theme in two parts like the Petrarchan, its final six lines resolving a problem, analyzing a narrative, or applying a proposition put forth in its first eight lines. Examples of sonnets can be found in Petrarch's *Canzoniere,* Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti,* Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese,* Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus,* and Adrienne Rich's poem "The Insusceptibles."

**Spenserian Sonnet:** See *Sonnet*

**Spenserian Stanza:** A nine-line stanza having eight verses in iambic pentameter, its ninth verse in iambic hexameter, and the rhyme scheme ababbcbcc. This stanza form was first used by Edmund Spenser in his allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene.*

**Spondee:** In poetry meter, a foot consisting of two long or stressed syllables occurring together. This form is quite rare in English verse, and is usually composed of two monosyllabic words. The first foot in the following line from Robert Burns's "Green Grow the Rashes" is an example of a spondee: Green grow the rashes, O

**Sprung Rhythm:** Versification using a specific number of accented syllables per line but disregarding the number of unaccented syllables that fall in each line, producing an irregular rhythm in the poem. Gerard Manley Hopkins, who coined the term "sprung rhythm," is the most notable practitioner of this technique.

**Stanza:** A subdivision of a poem consisting of lines grouped together, often in recurring patterns of rhyme, line length, and meter. Stanzas may also serve as units of thought in a poem much like paragraphs in prose. Examples of stanza forms include the quatrain, *terza rima, ottava rima,* Spenserian, and the so-called *In Memoriam* stanza from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem by that title. The following is an example of the latter form: Love is and was my lord and king, And in his presence I attend To hear the tidings of my friend, Which every hour his couriers bring.

**Stereotype:** A stereotype was originally the name for a duplication made during the printing process; this led to its modern definition as a person or thing that is (or is assumed to be) the same as all others of its type. Common stereotypical characters include the absent-minded professor, the nagging wife, the troublemaking teenager, and the kind-hearted grandmother.

**Stream of Consciousness:** A narrative technique for rendering the inward experience of a character. This technique is designed to give the impression of an ever-changing series of thoughts, emotions, images, and memories in the spontaneous and seemingly illogical order that they occur in life. The textbook example of stream of consciousness is the last section of James Joyce's *Ulysses.*

**Structure:** The form taken by a piece of literature. The structure may be made obvious for ease of understanding, as in nonfiction works, or may obscured for artistic purposes, as in some poetry or seemingly "unstructured" prose. Examples of common literary structures include the plot of a narrative, the acts and scenes of a drama, and such poetic forms as the Shakespearean sonnet and the Pindaric ode.

**Style:** A writer's distinctive manner of arranging words to suit his or her ideas and purpose in writing. The unique imprint of the author's personality upon his or her writing, style is the product of an author's way of arranging ideas and his or her use of diction, different sentence structures, rhythm, figures of

speech, rhetorical principles, and other elements of composition. Styles may be classified according to period (Metaphysical, Augustan, Georgian), individual authors (Chaucerian, Miltonic, Jamesian), level (grand, middle, low, plain), or language (scientific, expository, poetic, journalistic).

**Subject:** The person, event, or theme at the center of a work of literature. A work may have one or more subjects of each type, with shorter works tending to have fewer and longer works tending to have more. The subjects of James Baldwin's novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* include the themes of father-son relationships, religious conversion, black life, and sexuality. The subjects of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* include Anne and her family members as well as World War II, the Holocaust, and the themes of war, isolation, injustice, and racism.

**Subjectivity:** Writing that expresses the author's personal feelings about his subject, and which may or may not include factual information about the subject. Subjectivity is demonstrated in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh,* and Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel.*

**Subplot:** A secondary story in a narrative. A subplot may serve as a motivating or complicating force for the main plot of the work, or it may provide emphasis for, or relief from, the main plot. The conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is an example of a subplot.

**Surrealism:** A term introduced to criticism by Guillaume Apollinaire and later adopted by Andre Breton. It refers to a French literary and artistic movement founded in the 1920s. The Surrealists sought to express unconscious thoughts and feelings in their works. The best-known technique used for achieving this aim was automatic writing—transcriptions of spontaneous outpourings from the unconscious. The Surrealists proposed to unify the contrary levels of conscious and unconscious, dream and reality, objectivity and subjectivity into a new level of "super-realism." Surrealism can be found in the poetry of Paul Eluard, Pierre Reverdy, and Louis Aragon, among others.

**Suspense:** A literary device in which the author maintains the audience's attention through the buildup of events, the outcome of which will soon be revealed. Suspense in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is sustained throughout by the question of whether or not the Prince will achieve what he has been instructed to do and of what he intends to do.

**Syllogism:** A method of presenting a logical argument. In its most basic form, the syllogism consists of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. An example of a syllogism is: Major premise: When it snows, the streets get wet. Minor premise: It is snowing. Conclusion: The streets are wet.

**Symbol:** Something that suggests or stands for something else without losing its original identity. In literature, symbols combine their literal meaning with the suggestion of an abstract concept. Literary symbols are of two types: those that carry complex associations of meaning no matter what their contexts, and those that derive their suggestive meaning from their functions in specific literary works. Examples of symbols are sunshine suggesting happiness, rain suggesting sorrow, and storm clouds suggesting despair.

**Symbolism:** This term has two widely accepted meanings. In historical criticism, it denotes an early modernist literary movement initiated in France during the nineteenth century that reacted against the prevailing standards of realism. Writers in this movement aimed to evoke, indirectly and symbolically, an order of being beyond the material world of the five senses. Poetic expression of personal emotion figured strongly in the movement, typically by means of a private set of symbols uniquely identifiable with the individual poet. The principal aim of the Symbolists was to express in words the highly complex feelings that grew out of everyday contact with the world. In a broader sense, the term "symbolism" refers to the use of one object to represent another. Early members of the Symbolist movement included the French authors Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud; William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot were influenced as the movement moved to Ireland, England, and the United States. Examples of

the concept of symbolism include a flag that stands for a nation or movement, or an empty cupboard used to suggest hopelessness, poverty, and despair.

**Symbolist:** See *Symbolism*

**Symbolist Movement:** See *Symbolism*

**Sympathetic Fallacy:** See *Affective Fallacy*

# T

**Tale:** A story told by a narrator with a simple plot and little character development. Tales are usually relatively short and often carry a simple message. Examples of tales can be found in the work of Rudyard Kipling, Somerset Maugham, Saki, Anton Chekhov, Guy de Maupassant, and Armistead Maupin.

**Tanka:** A form of Japanese poetry similar to *haiku*. A *tanka* is five lines long, with the lines containing five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables respectively. Skilled *tanka* authors include Ishikawa Takuboku, Masaoka Shiki, Amy Lowell, and Adelaide Crapsey.

**Terza Rima:** A three-line stanza form in poetry in which the rhymes are made on the last word of each line in the following manner: the first and third lines of the first stanza, then the second line of the first stanza and the first and third lines of the second stanza, and so on with the middle line of any stanza rhyming with the first and third lines of the following stanza. An example of *terza rima* is Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Triumph of Love": As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay This was the tenour of my waking dream. Methought I sate beside a public way Thick strewn with summer dust, and a great stream Of people there was hurrying to and fro Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam, . . .

**Tetrameter:** See *Meter*

**Textual Criticism:** A branch of literary criticism that seeks to establish the authoritative text of a literary work. Textual critics typically compare all known manuscripts or printings of a single work in order to assess the meanings of differences and revisions. This procedure allows them to arrive at a definitive version that (supposedly) corresponds to the author's original intention. Textual criticism was applied during the Renaissance to salvage the classical texts of Greece and Rome, and

modern works have been studied, for instance, to undo deliberate correction or censorship, as in the case of novels by Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser.

**Theater of the Absurd:** A post-World War II dramatic trend characterized by radical theatrical innovations. In works influenced by the Theater of the absurd, nontraditional, sometimes grotesque characterizations, plots, and stage sets reveal a meaningless universe in which human values are irrelevant. Existentialist themes of estrangement, absurdity, and futility link many of the works of this movement. The principal writers of the Theater of the Absurd are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter.

**Theme:** The main point of a work of literature. The term is used interchangeably with thesis. The theme of William Shakespeare's *Othello*—jealousy—is a common one.

**Thesis:** A thesis is both an essay and the point argued in the essay. Thesis novels and thesis plays share the quality of containing a thesis which is supported through the action of the story. A master's thesis and a doctoral dissertation are two theses required of graduate students.

**Thesis Novel:** See *Thesis*

**Thesis Play:** See *Thesis*

**Third Person:** See *Point of View*

**Three Unities:** See *Unities*

**Tone:** The author's attitude toward his or her audience may be deduced from the tone of the work. A formal tone may create distance or convey politeness, while an informal tone may encourage a friendly, intimate, or intrusive feeling in the reader. The author's attitude toward his or her subject matter may also be deduced from the tone of the words he or she uses in discussing it. The tone of John F. Kennedy's speech which included the appeal to "ask not what your country can do for you" was intended to instill feelings of camaraderie and national pride in listeners.

**Tragedy:** A drama in prose or poetry about a noble, courageous hero of excellent character who, because of some tragic character flaw or *hamartia*, brings ruin upon him- or herself. Tragedy treats its subjects in a dignified and serious manner, using poetic

language to help evoke pity and fear and bring about catharsis, a purging of these emotions. The tragic form was practiced extensively by the ancient Greeks. In the Middle Ages, when classical works were virtually unknown, tragedy came to denote any works about the fall of persons from exalted to low conditions due to any reason: fate, vice, weakness, etc. According to the classical definition of tragedy, such works present the "pathetic"—that which evokes pity—rather than the tragic. The classical form of tragedy was revived in the sixteenth century; it flourished especially on the Elizabethan stage. In modern times, dramatists have attempted to adapt the form to the needs of modern society by drawing their heroes from the ranks of ordinary men and women and defining the nobility of these heroes in terms of spirit rather than exalted social standing. The greatest classical example of tragedy is Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The "pathetic" derivation is exemplified in "The Monk's Tale" in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Notable works produced during the sixteenth century revival include William Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Othello,* and *King Lear*. Modern dramatists working in the tragic tradition include Henrik Ibsen, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O'Neill.

**Tragic Flaw:** In a tragedy, the quality within the hero or heroine which leads to his or her downfall. Examples of the tragic flaw include Othello's jealousy and Hamlet's indecisiveness, although most great tragedies defy such simple interpretation.

**Transcendentalism:** An American philosophical and religious movement, based in New England from around 1835 until the Civil War. Transcendentalism was a form of American romanticism that had its roots abroad in the works of Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Coleridge, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The Transcendentalists stressed the importance of intuition and subjective experience in communication with God. They rejected religious dogma and texts in favor of mysticism and scientific naturalism. They pursued truths that lie beyond the "colorless" realms perceived by reason and the senses and were active social reformers in public education, women's rights, and the abolition of slavery. Prominent members of the group include Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

**Trickster:** A character or figure common in Native American and African literature who uses his ingenuity to defeat enemies and escape difficult situations. Tricksters are most often animals, such as the spider, hare, or coyote, although they may take the form of humans as well. Examples of trickster tales include Thomas King's *A Coyote Columbus Story,* Ashley F. Bryan's *The Dancing Granny* and Ishmael Reed's *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*.

**Trimeter:** See *Meter*

**Triple Rhyme:** See *Rhyme*

**Trochee:** See *Foot*

# U

**Understatement:** See *Irony*

**Unities:** Strict rules of dramatic structure, formulated by Italian and French critics of the Renaissance and based loosely on the principles of drama discussed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Foremost among these rules were the three unities of action, time, and place that compelled a dramatist to: (1) construct a single plot with a beginning, middle, and end that details the causal relationships of action and character; (2) restrict the action to the events of a single day; and (3) limit the scene to a single place or city. The unities were observed faithfully by continental European writers until the Romantic Age, but they were never regularly observed in English drama. Modern dramatists are typically more concerned with a unity of impression or emotional effect than with any of the classical unities. The unities are observed in Pierre Corneille's tragedy *Polyeuctes* and Jean-Baptiste Racine's *Phedre*. Also known as Three Unities.

**Utopia:** A fictional perfect place, such as "paradise" or "heaven." Early literary utopias were included in Plato's *Republic* and Sir Thomas More's *Utopia,* while more modern utopias can be found in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon,* Theodor Herzka's *A Visit to Freeland,* and H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia*.

**Utopian:** See *Utopia*

**Utopianism:** See *Utopia*

# V

**Verisimilitude:** Literally, the appearance of truth. In literary criticism, the term refers to aspects of a work of literature that seem true to the reader. Verisimilitude is achieved in the work of Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, and Henry James, among other late nineteenth-century realist writers.

**Vers de societe:** See *Occasional Verse*

**Vers libre:** See *Free Verse*

**Verse:** A line of metered language, a line of a poem, or any work written in verse. The following line of verse is from the epic poem *Don Juan* by Lord Byron: "My way is to begin with the beginning."

**Versification:** The writing of verse. Versification may also refer to the meter, rhyme, and other mechanical components of a poem. Composition of a "Roses are red, violets are blue" poem to suit an occasion is a common form of versification practiced by students.

**Victorian:** Refers broadly to the reign of Queen Victoria of England (1837-1901) and to anything with qualities typical of that era. For example, the qualities of smug narrowmindedness, bourgeois materialism, faith in social progress, and priggish morality are often considered Victorian. This stereotype is contradicted by such dramatic intellectual developments as the theories of Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud (which stirred strong debates in England) and the critical attitudes of serious Victorian writers like Charles Dickens and George Eliot. In literature, the Victorian Period was the great age of the English novel, and the latter part of the era saw the rise of movements such as decadence and symbolism. Works of Victorian literature include the poetry of Robert Browning and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the criticism of Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin, and the novels of Emily Bronte, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Thomas Hardy. Also known as Victorian Age and Victorian Period.

**Victorian Age:** See *Victorian*

**Victorian Period:** See *Victorian*

# W

**Weltanschauung:** A German term referring to a person's worldview or philosophy. Examples of *weltanschauung* include Thomas Hardy's view of the human being as the victim of fate, destiny, or impersonal forces and circumstances, and the disillusioned and laconic cynicism expressed by such poets of the 1930s as W. H. Auden, Sir Stephen Spender, and Sir William Empson.

**Weltschmerz:** A German term meaning "world pain." It describes a sense of anguish about the nature of existence, usually associated with a melancholy, pessimistic attitude. *Weltschmerz* was expressed in England by George Gordon, Lord Byron in his *Manfred* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* in France by Viscount de Chateaubriand, Alfred de Vigny, and Alfred de Musset, in Russia by Aleksandr Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, in Poland by Juliusz Slowacki, and in America by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

# Z

**Zarzuela:** A type of Spanish operetta. Writers of *zarzuelas* include Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderon.

**Zeitgeist:** A German term meaning "spirit of the time." It refers to the moral and intellectual trends of a given era. Examples of *zeitgeist* include the preoccupation with the more morbid aspects of dying and death in some Jacobean literature, especially in the works of dramatists Cyril Tourneur and John Webster, and the decadence of the French Symbolists.

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